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Pope Francis, in his homily during the Holy Mass for the closing of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (25 October 2015), challenged every Christian in his/her capacity to make time for another brother/sister in need. And he used the metaphor of temptation in describing the different attitudes manifested during Jesus' healing of the blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-51), when the people wanted to stop him from crying out to Jesus. The second temptation he described was that of falling into a "scheduled faith". We are able to walk with the People of God, but we already have our schedule for the journey, everything is planned. We know where to go and how long it will take; we expect everyone to respect our rhythm and so every problem is a bother. "We run the risk of becoming like the "many" of the Gospel who lost their patience and rebuked Bartimaeus".

This issue concentrates on the capacity for dialogue. In today's world every Christian is called to be ready to listen to, and answer, the cry of the poor. There are different categories of poor people and nowadays, one of the main challenges is to make space, find time, for another and enter into the dialogue of life.

On 5 May, Dr. Mary McAleese gave a very dynamic talk to the Congregations gathered for the Seminar in Nemi, near Rome, entitled: **"Women in the Church and Society"**. Dr. McAleese clearly captivated her audience during her short interview as she rapidly reviewed various situations in which women are at a disadvantage in today's frenetic world. She advocated that women adopt a new approach to the traditional organization of society, and that, men and women recognize their God-given gifts and make them shine in complementarity. She recommended that women speak up: make their voice heard in a disciplined self-confident way in the decision-making spheres of the Church and society, and that they coordinate their traditional responsibilities at home with work.

In the context of inter-faith marriages: **"Report of Meeting of Women in Inter-faith Families"**. A group of eight women met in the Department of Inter-Religious Studies, at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, India, to share their stories and reflect on their experience as members, partners and nurturers of inter-faith families. Two Jesuits monitored the meeting. The participants included an adult offspring of a Catholic-Muslim union, one woman married to a Muslim, another to a Parsee, and five to Hindus. In their opinion "Interfaith marriages are here to stay (in India), and no amount of censure or preventative measures will reverse this trend that has its roots in our changing society. They are a sign of the times".

On 25 October 2015, the Church commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions", *Nostra Aetate* (NA), published by the Second Vatican Council on 25 October 1965. *The origins of Nostra Aetate* (NA): "It is well known that NA was a surprise result of Vatican II. It had not been foreseen in the preparatory work for the Council but was introduced into the Agenda at the specific request of Pope John XXIII. The French Rabbi, Jules Isaac, who obtained a private audience with John XXIII, asked him for a statement on the relations of the Church with Jews which would reverse the "teaching of contempt" current in the Church at the time. Pope John, who had direct experience of relations with Jews, while Nuncio in Bulgaria and particularly in Turkey, readily accepted the request and he entrusted the drafting of a statement to Cardinal Augustine Bea whom he had appointed head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity" (by Msgr. Michael L. Fitzgerald, M.Afr.).

We are pleased to offer our SEDOS Readers three wonderful reflections on Inter-religious dialogue; each article has a special flavour.

Michael Amaladoss, SJ, presents two texts: in which he describes the journey of: **"Interreligious Dialogue 50 Years after Vatican II — Challenges and Opportunities"**. He is well aware of the difficulty of engaging in inter-religious dialogue given the widespread persecution of Christians in many parts of the world and especially in Asia. Nevertheless, Fr. Amaladoss affirms that for dialogue to take place the first, and indispensable, element for interreligious dialogue must be the dignity of the human person.

Another Jesuit, Fr. David Neuhaus, offers us a beautiful meditation: **"Pope Francis in Israel: 'Tear down the walls of enmity'"**, on how Pope Francis was embraced by his friends at the Western Wall: "A Pope, a Rabbi and a Muslim embracing at this holy site.... There were no words, but simply an icon of an alternative: fraternity, genuine and emotional".

Saint John Paul II, "the missionary pope" was convinced that missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith, the Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to another" (RM, n. 2). Fr. James Kroeger, MM, transmits in a special way the missionary heritage of a Pope who travelled through many countries of the world. This is a systematic and thorough study which helps us capture the highlights of **Saint John Paul II and Redemptoris Missio - Mission Insights**. The **"Trinity Inspired Eco-spirituality Based on Biblical Sources"** by Shyny Joseph, SSPS, is a topic of actuality. Sister Joseph reminds us that continual dialogue should evolve between the human person and Creation; and that the logical outcome of such a relationship, pertaining to Eco-spirituality, takes its origin from the Trinity. At present we are experiencing the result of an obvious lack of genuine eco-spiritual practice. There is a need for this "Trinity Inspired Eco-spirituality Practice" to be deepened, but we do not hear much about it. The author concludes that Christians today have to learn, recognize and acknowledge the biblical sources of the Trinitarian communion in Creation.

Dr. Mary McAleese
Women in the Church and Society:
Interview

I had just come from working in the United States and now I have come from Mauritius, from Notre-Dame du Lac, and there again with a very sophisticated Western democracy you know, still discussing whether or not a woman could *possibly* become the President? Is it *unthinkable*? We heard the Pope speaking last week about the huge differential in pay between men and women, *even* in the most sophisticated jurisdictions. So, for most women, no matter where you are in the world, we women are somehow on the curve and we are behind the development curve in terms of equality. I think for most mothers, no matter where you are in the world, — that what you worry about is the safety of your children, the health of your children, children having food on the table, about being able to sustain them physically and emotionally. You worry, as I did for many years living in a conflict zone, about their safety on the streets. I think of the mothers today in parts of the world who are afraid of IFO, which may descend on them like an avalanche and wreck their lives; maybe take their children. We think of Boko Haram. We think of all the dangers that face mothers and families in the world today, from poverty to wealth they all present their own difficulties. One of the biggest issues facing women is simply that of not being taken seriously; that of having our voices heard; having places and spaces that are dedicated to listening respectfully to the voices of women. That is true for our Church as well as for many societies.



Mary McAleese

I often think back to my own early childhood. I grew up in a very ordinary home in Belfast. My father worked in a bar. My mother and father both left school at the ages of 14 and 15. They did not have a great education and for them what they wanted, what mothers and fathers wanted, very typical of many of their generation, was the chance for their child's life to be an improvement on their own life. That it would be better.

The only way that this can happen is for people to listen when women talk about their experience, when women tell people what we need for our children, what we need for our world. I think back to the times when the voices of women in Northern Ireland, where I came from with a very *macho* para-military culture, were routinely ignored in the decision-making process, routinely ignored. Eventually, when the Peace Process began to gain some momentum a small number of women formed a political party called the *Women's Party* and they stood for Parliament. Two of them were successful and the male members of Parliament, not all, but a number of men, as the women came in, made the sound of mooing cows.

Two months ago, before I went to America, I attended a conference in Rome, at the Gregorian University as it happened. The conference was dedicated to: *The Creation of A Healing Church, A Listening Church, A Discerning Church* and another Church, but I have now forgotten which — there were four kinds of Church. There were 20 Speakers over the two days. One was a woman. We had 12 moderators, two of whom were women. The first of the moderators was a wonderful Dominican nun who, very gently as she assumed the role of moderator, remarked: "if you want a Listening Church and a Healing Church, you really need to listen to the people with the wounds. Many women are the people with the wounds, either on their own behalf or that of their children". The women in the audience clapped, a number of men in the audience booed, *in the year 2015*, in the Gregorian, at the conference designed to heal, to listen to them!

So, listening. We are not good at creating spaces for listening. However, we are very, very good at creating the illusion of listening, but **not** the actual respectful space. And I think often that when women are listened to, it is with ears and with minds that are already, if you like, discounting the full impact of their voice.

Question: — Sister Pat: Thank you. What you have said is most edifying and you have covered many issues there, but could we go back to that last point about response, about the way women respond to things? We have seen this in the churches in the United States, women religious responding in a non-violent, very determined way to speak their part. Women, all over the world, in violent situations often just be there. Is this growing in the world today, do you think?

Answer: — I think sometimes, regrettably, that we women are our own worst enemy: that we were very often culturally educated, indoctrinated almost, to believe that we were not worthy; to believe that we were second class; to believe that the voices of others were more important than ours. So it is easier just to do nothing, to accept. There is a great line in a poem by Seamus Heaney, the late Irish Nobel Laureate. In the *Canton of Expectation* he described the Catholics living in Northern Ireland, — who were oppressed, literally by centuries of oppression, and who almost came to believe themselves to be second-class by nature, — as “living under” what he called the “high banked clouds of resignation”: utterly resigned to their situation, with no fight in them.

One of the great things the Leadership Conference of the American Nuns taught us was that there are ways to fight: not to be resigned to one’s situation but actually to deal with the situation strongly; not in a way that is stoical, accepting, and often utterly forgiving of, in many cases, unfair allegations, but to deal with it in a professional way, in a charitable way — but in a firm way. And it is very interesting how this process ended which was initiated, in my view quiet maliciously, a number of years ago against the American Congregations, against the American Religious, and against the Leadership Conference. Now thankfully, under Pope Francis, both of those investigations have been brought to a close. And they have been brought to a close in a way that confers dignity on the Nuns and lets the Curia off the hook that it got itself onto, unnecessarily. A friend of mine, an American Archbishop, who was involved in the first investigation into the nuns, said that, “A very foolish man fights with one nun. A really stupid man fights with 57 thousand of them!”. And his view was that “they were doing a good job: let them be”. And, thankfully, I think in the end, his view prevailed.

I am not sure that we women help each other enough, show enough solidarity, nor that we stand our ground when wronged. I think in the Church we have a culture — regrettably, an embedded culture of cowardice — in the face of 2,000 years essentially, of sexism, of misogamy even being expressed in all sorts of ways that are completely unacceptable. We had a rant recently from Cardinal Burke. If any of you do not know who Cardinal Burke is, he is the man who wears the 150 ft. vestment called the *cappa magna*, because it is such an obvious token of Christ’s poverty in the world. He is the man who seems to lay a lot of the blame for the Church’s woes on women. Now, that’s fine if Cardinal Burke were not Cardinal Burke. That would be fine if five minutes ago he had not been the single most important legal adviser to the Curia; that is fine if he had not been for many years, including during the investigations into the American Nuns, one of the most influential members of the Curia. So, it is **not** fine, it is not fine, and it is not laughable. We need to take people like that on. And it is wonderful to see Pope Francis promoting people like him, giving them new jobs, where I hope they will be very happy!

Question: — Sister Mary Ann: We have noticed that in some countries the method is different regarding jobs. There are cases when women are more qualified than men. Could you give some concrete examples of how to fight this difference in salary in the name of justice?

Answer: — Yes. This is the problem that Pope Francis actually spoke about last week. He said it is a scandal, an absolute scandal, that a man and a woman doing the same work should not be paid the same wage. He used the word “scandal” and from the Pope that is a very powerful expression — now going right around the universal Church. Let me just take the example of Ireland or better the example of the European Union — when the Pope says, “this is a scandal”, this does not mean that the scandal ends tomorrow, because, in order for the scandal to end tomorrow, practices have to change. How do you make practices change? So, if two individual employers want to make a profit, you have to exert pressure and you have to create a culture that makes it very difficult to put the profit before people. So, what we have done in Ireland, as in the rest of Europe, is to make rules. We have rules. We have laws, which say that people have to be paid the same wage for work of equal value. That is what our laws say. Do they translate into everyday reality? No, they do not. Those laws have been in place for quite some time now, quite some time. Yet, still in Europe; still in the United States, one of the most sophisticated jurisdictions

in the world, women are routinely paid 25% less than men for the same job — 25% less. That is in the best of countries! You can imagine that it would be worse all down the line.

We have legislation and we need vigilance: with legislation you also need to have mechanisms for accountability, for enforcement. Let me go back to — the issue of the employment of women. Would a woman get a job for which she was underqualified? However an underqualified man gets the job that should have been given to a woman. The Church is a classic example of that. But let us not take the Church for the moment. Let us just take society generally.

I shall give you an example. In 1987 I was appointed to work at Queen's University in Belfast at the Institute of Legal Studies. I had only recently taken up my post when there were two Government investigations into the university: two outside, independent investigations — the first, looking into the number of women employed and, the second, looking into the number of Catholics employed. The university was atrocious on both accounts. But I'll explain how I got the job: when I applied I sort of ticked two boxes and that probably put the statistics up by 50% in both! The Report was clear. It said that bigotry was keeping Catholics out of jobs and that misogamy was keeping women out of jobs.

Now it is many years later. The university then, as a result, did a number of things — first of all, in all its advertising, it stated at the bottom of the every advert for a new job: "we particularly welcome applications from Catholics and women". Right, yea! So, how can we make that real? Because people look at that and say, "yah — you do! ... hem!" and so, what was needed was to change the culture of those who make the decisions. We had 3.000 on the staff, many of whom were involved in holding the interviews for jobs. We took all the people involved in the job interviews and then set up a team of trainers, of whom I was one. We started to train people, part of which involved stripping away our own baggage: the baggage that we unconsciously bring to decision-making. I go into an interview as an interviewer. I meet a candidate. "Oh, he comes from my school. He is wearing my old school tie. He is quiet like me. He is my religion. I am culturally very comfortable with that guy". He gets my top marks. But we had to teach people not to do that, because that is *clientelism*, that is unfair, and that is what leads to prejudiced outcomes. And there is an un-learning process, there is a training process, there is an evaluation, there is a constant monitoring to make sure that the outcomes begin to change. For example at Queen's University, every single year, the Equality Authority, which deals with women and men in the workplace, with fairness between women and men in the workplace, and the Fair Employment Authority, which looks at the statistics between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, issue a report annually. And, the facts tell the story.

If Catholics start to get more jobs, that is indicative of the changes happening culturally. The breaking-down of prejudice is very interesting. Over a period of the time, the university has very successfully dealt with the issue of the under-representation of Catholics. It has not been so successful in relation to women. What that tells me is very simple: that the problems in relation to women are much more deeply embedded and much less threatening to the university's reputation than the issue of Catholics and Protestants. So, you need to fight on so many fronts to break down all kinds of prejudice, in order to create a fair playing-field for women.

I am very relieved that Pope Francis has been so out-spoken on the issue of equal pay for women and I am hoping that the idea of equal roles for women might also be something that the Church will eventually deal with. Pope Francis has spoken quite a number of times now, as indeed did Popes Benedict XVI, John Paul II, Paul VI and John XXIII, about the need for women to have scope for decision-making in the Church. And here we are in 2015 and has anything changed? I just ask the question. I know the answer — and so do you.

- Moderator: Let us reflect for a moment on what we have heard about the challenges facing women in terms of family and work and the many concerns involved.
- We heard about how women might respond in a very determined and non-violent way to the various forms of prejudice they may have experienced, and how women might address this.

Questions from the floor:

Question: — Father: In relation to the last issue of evil today. Some companies in the States are very credible NGOs. Have they been any more successful in breaking the culture?

Answer: — I do not know the answer to your question. There are firms that give very, very good leadership. In fact, there are quite a number of firms that give really good leadership. There are firms that would not get away with doing anything less, because they have international

reputations to protect. And the truth of the matter is that the logic, the logic of equal pay which seems so obvious, doesn't it, — the logic, the justice — that one wonders how anyone could fail to comply and get away with it? And the answer very often is that one is dealing with industries that are by and large poorly organized. For example, one is dealing with organizations that do not have a good Trade Union organization. Very often you could be dealing with a smaller or older type of firm or industry; particularly those structures that came out of the old smoke-stack tradition that was very, very misogynistic — and it is a world, that is — as a general rule — under pressure to defend itself. But on the other hand, and one would like to think that where there is an executive CEO (Chief Executive Officer) who is a woman, that that would make a difference.

Here is the point. I believe in women's equality. I do not believe that there should be jobs for which women are told: "you cannot do that because you are a woman", as I was. When I first decided I wanted to be a lawyer that is what I was told: "you *cannot do that because* you are a woman", that was patently nonsense! On the other hand, I have to accept that if women are to be whatever they want to be, then, they may end up being just as much a son of a bitch, excuse my language, as anybody else.

I think of Margaret Thatcher, as an obvious example.

Here was a woman who was a very tough political leader but she held views that created all sorts of problems in my part of the world in Northern Ireland. I disagreed with her profoundly on just about everything, yet I would have to acknowledge her right to be the woman she wanted to be. Was she a champion of women? No, she was not. Was she a champion of equal pay? Are you kidding? Was she a champion of Trade Unions? Are you joking? No. So, I do not really operate from an expectation that women who get into positions of power and authority will necessarily be champions of justice and equality for other women. So, I think we have to accept this reality.

There are many men out there who are CEOs, who are first-class advocates of women in the workplace. I think for example of the Head of Qantas Airlines. He is an Irishman, a wonderful man, who is one of the outstanding champions in Australia of the Rights of Women.

Question: — Sister: Are there women who are their own worst enemy?

Speaker: — Sometimes.

Question: — Sister: Can you give us some concrete examples, in your experience, of how we could change the situation to some extent?

Answer. I think that is more difficult. Let me quote a little section from a poem that in a sense answers this. One of Ireland's leading young poets – woman poet — today, is a girl called Colette Bryce, from Derry. I like her poetry. She, like me, is one of nine children born into a rather typical Irish Catholic home. Colette is gay. This girl's mother has never accepted her sexuality. She loves her mother, you can tell that from the poetry.

But here is her experience of family life: "I saw blue bruises on my mother's arms when her



sleeves fell back while filling the kettle, for tea. My bed, against the door, I pushed the volume of the music up as loud as it would go and curled up on the floor to shut the angry voices out". That was her experience of family life, of a mother who did eventually put the father out of the house. But it was, and is, stressful for many women that there should be nine children. They are living with violence. Indeed, my Aunt, who had a similar situation, used to say, "who wants you with nine children?". And so, we have to look at what kind of forces, what kind of gravitational forces pull women back and make them unhelpful to other women. Here is a mother who

suffered from a violent, brutal husband but who kept up the illusion of the happy Catholic family so strongly, that when her daughter told her she was gay, her mother could not accept the daughter she has, the daughter God has given her. Maybe, the mother's faith had kept her going, maybe it was her faith that gave her the strength to get through? She cannot become a champion of her daughter's right to be who she wants to be. That is a reality in many, many families.

And, regrettably I think, we also come in the Catholic Church, in Irish terms, from a culture that: in the event that a girl should get pregnant outside of marriage, it is bound to end in disaster. As happened in this family — it ended in disaster with the girl pushed out of the family, not wanted — why? And here is a woman who is being battered, bruised by a violent husband, but she can keep that covered up. But what one cannot cover up is the pregnancy. So the daughter was thrown out and that young girl has had very serious mental health issues, very serious. And this is part of our narrative of exclusion of certain kinds of problem. And women, we played a role in that. Mothers played a role in that. There is no getting away from it. Was that role the role of the maternal Mary? Was that the role of Mary the Mother of Christ? Was it the role of a loving mother? Is it the role? I do not think so. I think we are in a state of flux today as we begin to understand how we should express God's love as mothers, as wives, as children.

In the old days of ticking boxes and excluding: that child has been excluded because he was illegitimate; that girl was pushed into a mother and baby home because she had a child out of wedlock; that woman, who had four children by four different men and is unmarried, is an excluded person. These are all people made in God's image and likeness. These are the people on the peripheries of our love. We have sent them to the peripheries of our love. And I think that what we are learning to do now is to understand this process — how we women have helped to push people to the periphery, and we keep telling them: "God loves you". Do they feel that? No, they don't, no, they do not! They see the distance that we put between them and us.

There will be a Referendum in about two weeks in Ireland on Gay Marriage and I have a very strong view. I am the mother of a gay son and the sister of a gay brother. I will stand with them, because I know them. I have learned about God's revelation through Nature, from them. They have taught me and I shall stand with them. Will my mother stand with them? No, she belongs to a different generation. And she says to me, "Ah, I love my son, I love my grandson. It is such a sin that my son has nobody in his life. He is so lonely". When my brother was told, my 60-year-old brother living a celibate life for 60 years, a very lonely life; when he heard that my son was gay he started to cry and he said, "God help him! It is a lonely life". And I said to my mother, an 84-year-old woman, "Stand behind your son. Stand behind your grandson, if you do not want them to have lonely lives". God did not intend this loneliness. I do not believe it. I have had to learn that the hard way; as many of us have.

- Moderator: Thank you, that response takes us back to Pope Francis' challenge to really share in the pain of others.
- Speaker: — How do people end up on the periphery? *How* do you end up on the periphery of love? How is that possible? *How* is it possible?
- Sister: — Mary, you have often spoken about religious being able to minister from quiet places, appearing apparently small and weak but actually being able to be effectively efficient: fruitful.
- Speaker: — Absolutely.

Question: — a) Given your experience over the years dealing with conflict in Northern Ireland, politics, diplomacy, etc., how, in terms of the Church, in practical ways can we somehow be more effective in our communication; particularly as women?

- b) The Pontiff in many ways has put himself out on a limb. Pope Francis is really trying, thanks to his background experience. How can we support him in his efforts? Are there ways? You already took the example of the SVWR. How can we somehow assume responsibility for generating an atmosphere of respectful listening, even in areas of war...?

Answer: Yes, I agree that Pope Francis is trying, trying in a way that no other Pope in my lifetime has. I very much like the kind of things he says, but I am also very conscious that in saying the things he does, like for example: that women must be more involved in an organized way, in decision-making in the Church. Then I wait, because I do not have the power to make that happen. The Pope has the power to make that happen, and then he does not make it happen. What bothers me is that things do not happen, and yet we are led to believe that they might. For example, it goes back to the question of urgency and where our priorities lie.

Francis came into Vatican City where there were problems. He proceeded to deal with the problem of the Curia, and the problem of the Vatican Bank. Boy, did they get organized! The Vatican Bank — every five minutes there was a new committee, new people appointed, commissions, reports, things happening. The Curia: he has his team of eight, now nine, on the

Council of Cardinals working on that issue, they have a plan apparently, and all sorts of things are happening with a new Secretariat for the Economy (*Consilium per l'Economia*). Now, here is the point, I do not believe that Christ came on earth to create the Vatican Bank or the Curia. Quite honestly I have no interest in either of them. The Vatican Bank — what do we need a bank for? I do not understand that. It is of relatively recent origin and of dubious origin. The Curia is the engine-room of a civil service. It is a civil service, probably quite dysfunctional according to Francis; but actually that is just internal organizational stuff, that any CEO sorts out. But what about the product the CEO is selling? If, for example, I were the Head of *Apple* (the computer company), I would want to be sure that the product I am selling is the right price, the right quality, has the right back-up, is attractive in the market-place, etc. If, in my headquarters, there is a bunch of people behaving badly, the person who buys the Apple Computer could not care less. That is my problem. I have to sort it out. So, frankly all this stuff about the Curia/Vatican Bank does not mean much to me. It is so much distraction.

What I really need to be prioritized is the issue of this question: “where do women fit in in the Church?”, because where they fit in in the Church is not where they are currently fitting into society generally.

In many of the advanced democracies of the world, the onward march of women is unstoppable. It is relatively new in the history of the Church. It is only in the last 100 years in most places that women even got the vote. So, we are dealing with something of relatively recent origin. At the same time, women are becoming more and more educated, becoming more and more CEOs of companies, breaking through more and more *glass ceilings*, becoming the things they could never have been 10, 15, 20 years ago. In the Church the power structures, and the decision-making structures predicated, as they are, on Holy Orders are always and inevitably exclusive of women. Women do not have access to the place where their voices could make a difference in terms of decision-making. Now, I think it is time to get a little bit impatient, just a little bit impatient! I do think we have been too patient, because the Popes have said: “Ah, we must *do* something”, but we have not said, “OK, tell us what you are going to do. Name it. Name it”.

I was at a conference last week in the United States entitled: *The Divided American Church*. And the sub-heading was: *Naming the Wounds, Healing the Wounds*. There were five Speakers — 4 men and 1 woman — the usual! Not one single man, I mean not one, mentioned the wound of women in the Church. Not one. Not one. I sat there. No, not one actually named a wound that was recognizable to me. In fact, none of them mentioned wounds at all! One woman stood up and she named the wounds and she started with the place of women. You could feel the tension in the room because of the naming of the wound. We have to have the courage to say it. I like what Francis says, I would like it even better if he did something.

We have now got five women on the Theological Commission, out of thirty. O.K., it is better than two, which is what we had before. What is unacceptable is that in welcoming those five women on to the Theological Commission the Pope described them as the strawberries on the cake! — really, seriously, — the *strawberries on the cake*! Well, sorry, but “no”, that language is not acceptable, it is patronizing, it is patriarchal. We want to be the *leaven* in the cake, the leaven, like everybody else, **not** some blessed adornment, like a strawberry, on the top. And this is the kind of stuff that we get. On the one hand, is it not wonderful, that we now have five women on the Theological Commission? *Yea, Great!* — Strawberries on the cake, not so great! So, we are dealing with a very significant time warp here.

Francis has a problem, and with the greatest respect to all our Cardinals and Bishops and our priests, they have not got a wife to nag them. Tom Reece, the Jesuit, said: “the problem with celibacy is not the absence of sex; that is not what makes men unable to understand women. It is not having a wife to tell him when he is being an idiot; of not having a daughter to say: “*Dad*, you cannot do that! You know! Grow up!””. You see, in the ordinary ups and downs of everyday life it is that rubbing together that kind of makes most men livable with, eventually! I am speaking after 40 years of marriage. And that is the situation you are dealing with. I think Francis is well-meaning and I think he is well disposed. And what I love about Francis is, that he does not mind if you talk back. There were Popes who reminded you not to talk back, and he does not.

Do you remember at the start of the Synod, the time when 150 celibate men advised him on family life? Right! Because they are such experts obviously on family life! And it is not that I have anything against celibate men. It is not that I have anything against celibacy, bishops or

cardinals. It is just that: — were I to set up a committee to advise *me* on religious life. Would I ask *me* to be on it? Now, *would I*? No. What do *I* know about religious life? What do I know about it? So there are pockets of expertise — and ironically in the case of family life there is a great big pocket of expertise. We are 1.2 billion Catholics. One billion of us are living as married people in families: there is a lot of wisdom there, a lot of experience there, you know. Ask the right people, get the right information, feed it to the right people. So, this is the kind of thing that we need to do: talk back to Francis, say to him, we really welcomed that statement. We did not like that one; the one about strawberries we did not like that, but the other one we liked. Now, what are you going to do?

I think this is where organizations like yours can set a really valid example. We really have to stand our ground now, because if we do not, the ground is being taken from beneath us.... Why? Because — I have two daughters and they say to me:— “yea, hem, Church – Faith – hum! Well, you see, if Pope Francis gets around to doing something about women, he can come back and talk to us then”. And that is what many young women are saying.

I am looking at this, and saying: “Help me here!”. You know, I tried to raise three children in the faith: the Catholic school, the Catholic home, the Mass, the Rosary. We have tried to teach them to be good Catholics, we have tried to teach them to be good Christians — and then they grow up. And then they hear things, then they observe things, then they use their reason and then they use their conscience and they feel excluded. And as my children say: they have grown up in a world of Women’s Rights, of Gay Rights, and where has the Church been on Women’s Rights? — At the back of the class!

In fact, if you think of Women’s Rights as a huge, massive vehicle with big head-lights, well, way down at the back of the convoy is the Catholic Church with the break-lights on. We are the ones with the brake-lights. And that is tragic, that is tragic because I think that is not how the God I believe in, intended this world to be. As I think he wanted women and men to shine in complementarity, he wanted them to respect each other’s gifts and to create ways in which each other’s gifts would shine in the world and be fully used, fully utilized, not repressed, suppressed, oppressed. I do not think that was ever God’s plan for the world. The Church has got now to get its act together with women, or it will lose young women. It is losing them hand over fist.

I cannot speak of Africa or Asia or China. I can only speak of one of the most advanced Christian jurisdictions on the planet: Ireland: — fifteen hundred years dealing with Christianity and many, many centuries before with spirituality. And they are figuring things out for themselves as they always do.

I have just come back from the United States. I shall explode if I meet one more person in the United States who says to me: “Oh, the Irish brought the faith to America, but now we really need to take the faith back to Ireland, because you have lost it”. Seriously, seriously! Just think about that for a moment. What is happening in Ireland is not loss of faith; it is a loss of trust. It is a different thing altogether — loss of trust is a different thing altogether, and that has been lost by human beings, that has not been lost by God. Faith in God is still strong I believe. I listened to my daughters talking about God. I listened to my daughter teaching her little son beautiful prayers and my heart lifts. — Knowing that if Pope Francis came through the door he wouldn’t get a prayer, you know! He might get a question and a cup of tea, but he would get the other side of the prayer, and it would be: “what are you doing? Come on. Move. Do something!”. Because, all over the world, all over the world, the fact that the Catholic Church takes this view of women, this view that renders them essentially second class, underpins the oppression of women all over the world. *It may not be the intention, it is the consequence.* And just think what the Church could do if it followed through on Francis, if he followed through, just think of the impact that it could have globally on women, on girls. It could be quiet extraordinary. What makes me stay on is the power of this Church: the faith, the belief, that this is God’s will for us, that we are a family connected to each other on every continent. And the messages that we send out from Rome, from Francis, have an impact: — they have an impact in Ireland, they have an impact in Kazakhstan, they have an impact in Burundi. They have an impact all over the world. And so those of us who have voices, those of us who have access, those of us who have power, I think we have to use it to put Francis on the spot: to help him to do for women what he has done for the Vatican Bank and the Curia, basically.

Question: — Sister: I see that women are crucial to the Church and to society. Normally society decides a woman's future: what she will become in the future, through education, etc. I think a woman is somewhat isolated when she tries to reconcile family and work; when she tries to become the woman she wants to be through study, etc., in order to understand and fulfill herself. She lacks support and self-confidence and is afraid of forfeiting her gracious feminine profile. At this point, I wonder whether it is necessarily up to the woman to understand how to fulfil herself, or whether society should be organized to permit this development from the start? Is there a new approach?

Answer —: I agree. I think that all over the world women are both in very similar situations and in very different situations. Similar: in the sense that there are as yet very few societies, possibly with the exception of the Nordic societies, where women have achieved full equality, and the argument is over. Everywhere else is on a journey towards that kind of equality, but at different points along the development curve. And there are things that we can learn from those countries which have made the advances rather rapidly and have achieved relative equality. I think the Nordic countries are probably the best without a shadow of doubt. They are the best exemplars. There are things that we can learn from them. For example, many of these countries in the early days of promoting women happily used quotas, they used gender quotas, and in Ireland currently for the next election, our political parties are obliged to use gender quotas to try to push women forward. The truth is that very often, as we said earlier, women tend to sit back, stoical, quiet, almost afraid to enter the structures that were not created for them or by them, and which were very often created to exclude them. In the case of political life; I do not know what it is like outside of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Political life for example is extraordinarily difficult for anybody, but very difficult for women: particularly for women with children. Why? Because women with children, what I am going to say is going to sound sexist the other way, but very often all a child who is sick wants is its mummy. And all mummy wants is to be with her child. So there are things that pull on women as mothers, there is the running of the house. It stands to reason that raising a family takes priority. Political life, working life — these are secondary issues — and politicians very often work seven days a week, around the clock, and the 'phone is always ringing. You always have to be available to people with problems. These things make political life very difficult for women.

So to go back to your question, I think that society needs to look very analytically, very, very analytically at the kind of obstacles that prevent women from offering their genius fully to those areas in which they are under-represented. And I also think that women really need to engage seriously in those processes of analyses and to push for them and to insist on them in the Church. For example, when Pope Francis said we need a new theology for women. The first thing we should have said was: *this is great*: because the theology of women that we have is not very good. And Francis seems to be saying that. Right?

How are we going to go from the bad one to the new one? What is the process? It is not enough to say: "we should have...", "it would be nice if...". We now need a process, we need structure, we need to know that there is a committee meeting to discuss this, and that it will report in a year's time to —..., and the Report will go to —..., whoever it will go to..., like, for example, the Synod. We know the Synod will meet in October. We know what it will discuss. We know that after the Synod there will be a Post-Synodal Exhortation probably based on the documents that go from the Pope to the Synod, from the Synod to the Pope. We know all that. Why? Because there is a structure. We do not know what is going to happen with the theology of women, because there is no structure. All we have is a bunch of words. It would be nice if.... We need women — we need a new theology of women — we need women to be more involved in decision-making. But nobody has made a structure, so how are we going to get there? Nobody knows, including Francis. — And that I think is where our voices need to be heard — not just in the Church but in society generally. It is not enough to say women are equal. We need to prove it, we need to prove it. Sure we have.

Ref.: Informal conversation and interview given at the SEDOS Residential Seminar (May 2015). Text firstly transcribed, from the vocal registration, by Sr Celine Kokkat, JMJ and then corrected by Ms. Philippa Wooldridge (SEDOS English proof-reader).

Report of Meeting of Women in Interfaith Families*

In preparation for the extraordinary Synod on the Family a group of women in interfaith marriages and a couple of Jesuits came together to identify challenges faced and posed by inter faith families to the Church, articulate the spiritual and theological insights gained from their inter-religious context, and make recommendation for an apostolate.

Introduction

Interfaith marriages are on the increase in India, in some parts constituting more than 50% of the marriages celebrated in Church. The reasons for these are many, but the most obvious is the tiny minority that Catholics form in a population of 1.25 billion people. According to the 2011 census, Christians of all denominations represent only 2.3 per cent (24 million) of the Indian population, amidst 80.5% (over 827 million) Hindus and 13.4% (138 million) Muslims. Catholics account for a mere 17 million of the population. A similar demographic in terms of Catholic minority status is prevalent in most Asian countries. Given these statistics, interfaith marriages are not surprising. The Japanese bishops have cited a figure as high as 76%.

In major cities the increase in interfaith marriages is linked in large part to the education of women and their entry into the workforce across all economic strata. Universities and workplaces provide multi-religious spaces that offer opportunities for intimate relationships across traditional boundaries. With the confidence that comes from their earning power, women, irrespective of their social status, are making their own decisions. Added to this is the overall distancing from religion and the porosity of today's families to social networks and the media which have opened youth up to the "other".

While this phenomenon is currently most noticeable in Asia because of its multi-religious milieu, globalisation and increased mobility across geographic borders will result in similar increases in other parts of the world. Already, thanks to the European Union, the religious profile of many predominantly Christian countries is slowly changing.

Interfaith marriages are here to stay, and no amount of censure or preventive measures will reverse this trend that has its roots in our changing society. They are a sign of the times.

Unfortunately, since Asians form a miniscule percentage of the universal Church (the recently published Statistical Yearbook of the Church puts them at 3.2 percent) the concerns of interfaith marriage partners have not yet been sufficiently recognized and taken up for discussion. The forthcoming Synod on the Family provides an excellent opening to not only bring to the fore the challenges faced and posed by interfaith families and their expectations of the Church, but also to make known the opportunities they embody, and to offer to the Church their insights and learning from their intimate interfaith dialogue.

In lieu of the above, on the 27th July 2014, a group of 8 women (since in our patriarchal societies women tend to be more affected than men) came together in the Department of Inter-Religious Studies, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, to share their stories and reflect on their experience as members, partners and nurturers of interfaith families. They were accompanied by two Jesuits. The women included an adult offspring of a Catholic-Muslim union, one woman married to a Muslim, another to a Parsee, and five to Hindus. The married women were in stable, committed marriages ranging from 20 to 46 years. All the women were practising Catholics, some extremely active in the Church.

ISSUES RAISED

1. The Faith of the Child in an Interfaith Marriage

Context

The Church's insistence on the baptism of the offspring of the union was the biggest stumbling block in most of the marriages, threatening the very marriage, jeopardising the practice of the Catholic partner's faith because of the resentment of the spouse, and alienating

generations. Prior to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, inability to make such a promise resulted in painful ostracism from the Church and often, the Church-going extended family, It also meant denial of the sacraments.

§ *The price we have to pay for the Church's insistence on a promise to baptise children is a sword dividing the family. My mother was Catholic and father, Muslim. Both were disowned by their families. We were five children and all were baptised. Each time my mother had to ask my father about baptising us it was a struggle for my father. However, being a man of his word (he had to promise in writing that the children would be baptised) he never came in the way. He was a staunch Muslim. To stay rooted my mother took pains to personalize and deepen her faiths. Her family accepted us back when they saw we were being brought up as Catholics. My father's family disowned him to the end; consequently I never knew my father's family.*

§ *I came from a devout Catholic family. I went to a Catholic school and college. My Hindu husband refused to promise to baptise our children because, being a man of honour, he did not want to make a promise he knew he could not keep. It was highly traumatic for me because of the norms of the Church. It left deep scars on me and even my children.*

Even after the revised Code which required a Catholic entering into, an inter-faith marriage only "to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church", women are sometimes deliberately misguided by some parish priests, and made to believe that baptism of the children was a mandatory requirement of the Church.

I got married in 1988. My parish priest was very cordial. However, he said I had to make a promise to baptise my children if I wanted to get married in Church. When I asked why I was being made to make such a promise when the 1983 Code of Canon Law did not require it, I was told that this was the policy laid down by the bishops of India in the hope that it would dissuade Catholics from entering into interfaith marriages.

§ *I know if I had to push for baptism the marriage would suffer. I am stronger than my husband, I decided I would just pray.*

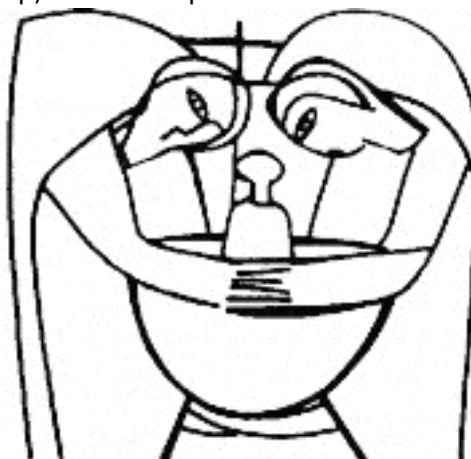
Among the 8 women in the group, only one came from an interfaith family where all the children were baptised to the total exclusion of the "other" faith member. The result was an estranged extended family and a hurting marital relationship, but a deep Catholic faith. All the other inter-religious families had variations of "double belonging" - children who were baptised and practising Catholics, or of another faith but Catholic in spirit and practice, or baptised but non-practising Catholics, or Catholic in their upbringing but open to the "other" faith too with the possibility of making a choice as an adult about baptism, or practising another religion. In one instance, despite the children being baptised, the women and her children were registered as "Hindus" in the 2011 Census, purportedly for their own safety in a climate of growing intolerant religious politics.

For the women whose children were not baptised what was clear, was that their decision not to baptise their children was not indicative of indifference towards the Christian faith or the Church. They did not *chose* not to baptise their children; they chose to love and respect their spouse, and this would not have been possible if they had excluded him from the religious upbringing of his children or alienated his children from him by giving them a different "label".

The group also questioned whether following a general rule of the Church to baptise children is the sole means of nurturing the Christian faith of children in these extraordinary circumstances.

§ *Despite what people say, our children are not confused. A lot depends on what we teach them. They are more open to people of other faiths.*

§ *My daughters decided to get baptised as mature adults even though both of them are married to Hindus.*



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Reflection

Unlike in single religion families, in interfaith families the religion of offspring involves a choice between two existing options. Mostly, it is the Church authorities and the interfaith marriage partners who decide on the children's faith. However, neither can presume to know how the children will react as adults, and whether they will object to being brought up practising the religious faith of one parent while being denied access to the other, or whether they would in fact have preferred this option to not having any religious identity, or having the option to choose as adults. Dogmatic *a-priories* — whether from the side of the Church or from interfaith couples — therefore need to be examined and scrutinized.

It was observed that living in a multi-religious environment can be unsettling, and children torn between two dissenting parents and two religions often end up abandoning, religion altogether. However, when parents themselves reconciled their differences and learnt to live in harmony and develop an inclusive spirituality their children would be more likely to own their "double belonging" comfortably. There is however, no adequate and reliable data available to understand how children in inter-religious families come to terms with their religious identity.

Some of the women whose children were not baptised had experienced marginalisation in the Church, and one of the reasons was the perception that not baptizing their children meant that they had rejected the Church or decided against inculcating Christian values and ethical stances in their children. This was not true especially since living out religious and ethical values is not inextricably linked to a person's being baptized. It only meant that they had made a decision for the unity of the marriage and family.

- a. Is there any special guidance that can be provided to interfaith couples so that they are better able to engage in inter-religious dialogue in the home and reconcile worship and the practice of their two religions, so that there is neither conflict nor confusion?
- b. Can the Church undertake a comprehensive global study of the feelings/perceptions/concerns of children in interfaith marriages so that we can address their needs appropriately?
- c. Can the Church accompany and support children of interfaith marriages?

2. Community Norms, Rules and Regulations

Context

The law covering the baptism of the children was discussed. While some felt that the Church should stay silent on this and leave it up to the couple to decide, others felt that the Church's insistence to at least do all in one's power to baptise one's children added weight to their demands and served as a welcome support when making the decision. However, it was generally felt that there should be more sensitivity to the rights and feelings of the partner of another faith.

The rules concerning the celebration of the marriage were another area of discussion. The general view was that both partners had a right to celebrate the marriage according to their individual rites. While these were religious celebrations they were also family celebrations. All the married women had got married under the Special Marriage Act. Some were advised to do so by Church authorities. A few had had more than one religious ceremony.

One woman felt that the marriage liturgy could be made more inclusive, especially the vows.

§ *My husband had agreed to the Catholic upbringing of our children (attend Mass, Sunday School, Catechism class etc.) but requested that they be allowed to choose baptism as adults. I was granted dispensation on these grounds. So it came as a bit of a shock to him when during, the marriage ceremony he was asked: "Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?" Also currently the partner of another faith, when placing the ring on the Catholic partner's finger, is made to recite: "Take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This makes little sense for someone who is not a Catholic.*

There was some confusion in the group about which law was applicable for divorce, inheritance and other civil effects, when there was more than one marriage celebration — The Special Marriage Act, Christian Personal Law or the Hindu/ Muslim Marriage Laws.

Reflection

All agreed that norms, rules and regulations observed in a community like the Church govern the lives of its members and are meant to serve the common good. Their observance is meant to safeguard the faith and freedom of the Catholic partner as she or he makes a solemn commitment in an interfaith marriage. Further, a community needs to articulate clearly the requirements one must fulfil to be considered a member of it. At the same time however, there is need for a responsible interpretation of the norms, rules, and regulations so that their real end is realized in changed situations. Thus it must be acknowledged that the revisions in the 1983 Code of Canon Law with regard to Mixed Marriages (Chapter VI) reflect an evolution in the Church's understanding of the sacrament of marriage. Interfaith marriages are no longer seen as antagonistic to the Christian experience of faith. Further, the constraints of the Catholic partner with regard to the religious upbringing of the offspring are recognised. The Code therefore, while upholding the rights of the Church, respects the individual circumstances of the Catholic partner and seeks to be a support rather than a burden.

Questions and issues arising from interfaith marriages need to be considered not merely subjectively (emic) but also objectively (etic). Such considerations will pose legitimate questions to any religion that assumes that it alone is willed by God and therefore lays down laws and regulations with little regard for persons of other faiths or beliefs. Laws and regulations must therefore be framed considering the interfaith couple as a unit, one that God has brought together. The interests of the Catholic partner cannot be seen in isolation.

This would also apply to the celebration of the marriage. While the Church sees only the religious aspect of these celebrations, such celebrations are also a fundamental part of bringing together two families, and cannot, perhaps should not, be done away with easily. They are an essential part of building community. An inclusive approach is much needed in today's climate of divisive and antagonistic politics.

Understanding the application of civil laws is important especially if there is a breakdown in the marriage, and with regard to death and inheritance. This is particularly so for women since many personal laws are biased against women.

- a. Can some of the key elements of canon law, the rules and regulations and the conditions for granting a dispensation for mixed marriages be made available and easily accessible to all in the Church?
- b. Can the explanation of these laws and regulations by competent persons be made a compulsory part of the pre-marital counselling of inter-faith couples?
- c. Can the laws and regulations be framed keeping in mind that the inter-faith couple is a unit whose union must be supported and protected, and that both partners have equal rights and obligations?
- d. Can there be more clarity about the different civil laws and their application in the case of interfaith marriages particularly if there is marriage under the Special Marriage Act along with other marriage ceremonies?

3. The Need for an Informed and Educated Clergy and Religious

Context

Most of the women had had unpleasant experiences with their parish priests when informing them of their decision to marry a person of another faith. In some cases the parish priest put the baptism of the children as a necessary precondition to getting married in Church. Sometimes they were made to run around to comply with various formalities. This was often the first exposure of the partner of another faith to the Church, and it was frequently negative.

§ I was told that interfaith marriages frequently broke down, and it was advisable to get married under the Special Marriage Act as it was easier to get divorced under this Act.

§ Dispensation was not a comfortable process.

- § *It seemed to me that the Church was trying to make the best of what it has: "The only way I can trap these Catholics is to make, these rules. " My husband and I were made to run around like rabbits.*

A few in the group however, also shared experiences of understanding and respectful parish priests who made the person of another faith feel welcome.

- § *I had no problems with getting a dispensation even though I made it very clear that I would not be able to baptise my children.*
- § *My parish priest was extremely respectful of my Hindu partner and always spoke to him courteously even defending him sometimes. Twelve priests concelebrated at my wedding and my husband and I feel truly blessed. My husband's parents were permitted to participate in the offertory procession and the Eucharist was celebrated partly in Gujarati to make my husband's family feel welcome.*

Most of the women wanted a Catholic education for their children. However, a few mentioned unpleasant experiences with Principals who were nuns or priests.

- § *During the admissions' interview the nun asked me, "what kind of a Christian are you? Why haven't you converted your husband?" At one point my husband got up and walked out.*
- § *When my children were small I had requested one of the nuns to provide lunch for them because I was having some domestic help problems. She readily agreed. But then the Principal told her that she could not do that because my children were not baptised.*
- § *The funny thing is I wanted to put my daughters in a "non-Catholic" school because it was a better school. It was my husband who wanted a Catholic school.*
- § *My children were not baptised but went to a Catholic school. They got in on the general quota and the nun was very welcoming. I insisted that they attend Catechism class because I wanted them to have a Catholic upbringing. My Hindu husband had no objections. I believe they benefitted even though when they were younger I sometimes had to answer questions because of something the religion teacher would say, like: "you have to be baptised to go to heaven ". I think many Catholics in interfaith marriages want their children to have Catholic values and Catholic schools and colleges can be a good support system. Unfortunately Catholic schools and colleges are much sought after these days. I know couples who baptised their children just so that they could get admission into them. So no one will believe you if you say you want admission because you are interested in giving your child a Christian education.*

All the women expressed a desire to know more about the religion of their spouse so that they could find a meeting ground and enrich their relationship. Some shared the ways in which they worshipped together and evolved a common spirituality, While others talked of how they worshipped separately but with a consciousness of the spouse's religious affiliation.

- § *I am ashamed to call myself a Catholic in the background of my husband's faith. One day I saw him meditating. Later I asked him, "Whom do you pray to?" He answered, "I pray to God and I also pray to Christ".*
- § *Sometimes I feel my Hindu husband is more "Christian" in his values and way of life than I.*

Reflection

The Catholic priest is called to be more than a cultic minister or bureaucrat in his functioning. Vatican Council II clearly sees the calling of the priest as one who proclaims the Word of God, celebrates the sacraments and pastorally administers to the needs of persons. His years of priestly formation should make him competent in his calling so that he can instruct persons correctly about the Church's rules and regulations. He should also feel confident to adapt these in such a way that their true purpose is served. Sometimes, in matters concerning interfaith marriages, there is a lack of awareness of what is substantial and what is peripheral in the Church's teaching about these marriages. In addition, some priests insist, without proper justification, on requirements over and above those mandated by the official Church.

There is a need for parish priests to be made aware of their role as witnesses and bearers of the Good News of unity and communion, reconciliation and love, and the need to embody the gospel imperative: "By this will all know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John

13:34-35). It is they who will serve as the public face of the Church, and the entry point for people of other faiths into the Catholic community. They lose a great opportunity to dialogue across religions and to build the human community when they turn off/away people who are well disposed to the Church. Respect, openness and warmth towards the person of another faith is also a starting point for the "evangelisation of today's world" that Pope Francis speaks of (*Evangelii Gaudium*), especially given that in India, priests of all religions, are treated with great respect. Further it is well to remember that if the parish priest is welcoming, it becomes easier for the Catholic partner to practise her faith and bring up the children in the Catholic faith. The Code of Canon Law in fact makes it mandatory for pastors to provide spiritual help to the Catholic spouse and her children and to help to foster the unity of conjugal and family life (Canon 1128).

There is need to know more about the faith and practices of the spouse who is of another faith persuasion so that one can honestly show reverence for his/her religious practices. In this process of learning, a person comes to appreciate, the religious faith of others rather than demonize them. More, one also gains valuable insights into the person of Christ when viewed through a different religious lens. Approaches that are theocentric can make for more inclusiveness than those that are narrowly Christocentric.

- a. Can we build a greater level of sensitivity in the interpretation of Canon Law among the clergy, in keeping with current Church teaching, in the light of the challenges and opportunities posed by inter-religious marriages, and with respect for the adult decision of the couple?
- b. Can the clergy be made aware of, and trained to fulfill, their role as witnesses of the gospel, and supporters of the Catholic partner in the practice of the faith and fulfillment of obligations?
- c. Is knowledge of other religions part of the education of clergy? If not, can this be included in their curriculum? This knowledge would help our priests to reduce the sometimes bigoted views they may carry about other religions.
Knowledgeable priests could also provide pastoral care and guidance to the inter-faith couple in their journey together.
- d. Are there opportunities for interfaith dialogue and relationship in which our clergy can participate in a spirit of understanding?

4. Protecting All the Parties in the Event of an Interfaith Marriage

Context

While some of the women felt there were too many formalities surrounding a marriage in Church, others appreciated certain formalities like the affidavit required from the partner of another faith stating that there was no other existing / previous marriage, as bans were not read, and this served as a welcome protection of the Catholic partner.

Reflection

There was general appreciation for the Catholic Church's effort to ensure the freedom of the partners in an interfaith marriage even though obtaining official certificates and documents often contributes to stress, and, at times, frustration.

- a. This protection is a value addition provided by the Church and needs to be positioned as such when requests for documents are made. If the context is understood, the interfaith couple will appreciate the requirement.
- b. Marriage preparation courses must include information on the application of canon law and civil laws with regard to annulment and divorce particularly in the case of interfaith marriages.

5. Religious Conversion in the Context of an Interfaith Marriage

Context

All the women, shared about how conscious they were of being the face of Christ and the Church, not just in their immediate families, but also in their extended families of another faith. The women talked of how close they were to their families and communities of their spouse, even though they were a minority. Each one felt called to be in an inter-religious way of life and took evangelisation through example very seriously.

§ I sincerely feel that we are chosen to be in interfaith marriages. We have unique opportunities to spread the love of Christ. From our example people accept Christ.

§ Before marriage I was an indifferent Catholic. My knowledge was so limited. After marriage my husband would ask me questions about the Catholic faith and practice. It drove me to learn more. Ironically I became closer to the Church. I came to the realisation that to know Jesus is to love Him. This would not have happened if I had married a Catholic.

§ My husband is not religious. He does not enter a fire temple but he will enter Churches, and my young adult son who is not baptized is more Christian than me. He carries a rosary and cross, and accompanies me for Church services out of choice.

§ Just before she died my mother said to my Hindu husband, "You're not my son-in-law. You're my son". Years later I discovered he had my mother's rosary and I asked him how he got it. He replied, "Your mother gave it to me before she died, but I never told you". He still has it and refuses to part with it.



Reflection

By itself, the occasion for celebrating an interfaith marriage should not be the moment to persuade a person to become a Catholic. Since the Catholic Church believes that it is God who brings about conversion, a *quid pro quo* should never be entertained. Personal freedom to convert must be observed, and

seen to be observed by the authorities in the Catholic Church.

The Church's doctrine concerning Baptism admits of both, Baptism by water that results in a visible relationship — the sacramental character — to the Catholic Church, and Baptism by desire which does not effect a visible relationship to the Church since it does not include the canonical baptismal ritual. More attention should be paid to the theological implications of Baptism of desire especially in the light of *Lumen Gentium* 16 and *Gaudium et Spes* 22. There is need to explore how a person lives a God-fearing life and practises true humanism in the midst of pluralism and of individuals belonging to different faith persuasions.

The Christian partner is called to be the face of Christ and the Church to the other partner, the children and the in-laws. Influenced by the witness value provided by the Christian partner the Hindu/ Muslim/other faith family members should feel welcome to celebrate Christian festivals and join in common prayer. This experience offers them occasions to know at first hand the Christian way of life so as to be positively disposed towards Christ/Church. Such openness however, is only possible if it is matched with a similar openness on the part of the Christian partner towards her partner's religious tradition.

- a. The Church needs to learn from the insights and wisdom of Catholics in interfaith marriages particularly with regard to their experience of God and witness to the faith.
- b. More education is required of both the clergy and the faithful on the meaning of "baptism by desire."

6. Is an Interfaith Marriage Sacramental?

Context

The women were shocked to learn that their marriages were not sacraments in the eyes of the Church and questioned this understanding.

- § *Why is our marriage not a sacrament? Is not God present in all human activity? When we made our marriage vows in Church my husband and I too invited God to be present, so how is it possible that the grace of God who created all humanity, is denied to us just because my husband and I belong to different religions?*

Reflection

In general, God is seen to have a special place in all human activity and this is expressed through signs or symbols drawn from created reality. Such activity on the part of God is referred to as sacramental — God present in all of human evolution and offering all persons fulfilment in their lives. At different periods in the Catholic Church's history, the authorities in the Church have found it necessary to describe the term sacrament so that it becomes significant or meaningful in a particular context for Catholics, e.g. referring to the sacrament as "mystery" in NT times or in the 16th century in its Tridentate form. But because the Church describes sacrament in a context-specific way in the Christian community, it does not mean that the sacramental presence of God is not to be recognized elsewhere. When the Catholic Church describes a validly performed marriage between two Catholics as sacramental, it has in mind the following understanding of sacrament: faith in God, actions of the Risen Christ, and the satisfying of the requirements laid down by the legitimate Catholic Church authority. (The definition of sacrament in the 16th century that identified the Catholic understanding in contrast to the Protestant one — in Counter-reformation times — is still most popularly known.) But the sacramental aspect of marriage can be predicated even when one of the two parties does not belong to the Catholic Church as would be the case in an interfaith marriage for, as noted already, God has a special place in all human activity.

a. Can we redefine marriage between interfaith couples as sacramental? Would that involve a change in canon law? Who is the authority that would decide this? Who can present the pros and cons? Can we at least add it to the agenda of things we need to change?

7. The Development of Doctrine and Theology

Context

The lived experience of interfaith couples raises many theological issues, among them, the sacramental nature of their marriage, the questioning of baptism as key to Christian living, new insights into the mystery and *Immensity* of God, and the understanding of evangelisation in their multi-religious context.

- § *Why does the Church ban a marriage ceremony of another religion? I had a Hindu ceremony too because it meant as much to my husband as the Nuptial Service meant to me. He and his family had cooperated with everything I had asked for. How could I then say "No" to them?*
- § *We need rules because everyone would otherwise do their own thing. But bending rules to obey the greater law of love is also important. It is part of showing respect for the individual.*
- § *Do not all religions have their source in the same God?*

- § *Is it really possible for one religious tradition to know all about the immensity of God? We have so much to learn from other religions. My experience of Jesus is expanded when I see him through the eyes of my Hindu husband.*
- § *Even the Church talks of "New" evangelisation. Pope Francis asks us to go out of our secure zones and bear fruit and transform the world. God has placed us in these unique situations where we are actually engaged in inter-religious dialogue at the most intimate level. We are making Christ present outside the walls of the Church. We need the support of the Church.*

Reflection

To theologize is to consider the praxis (intuitions, ideas, suppositions that are operational in a person's life and behaviour) that is manifested in a person's or community's life, to reflect on this praxis in the light of revelation (e.g. the Church's scripture and tradition) and to follow a programme of action that is the outcome of such reflection. Anselm (1033-1109) understood theology as 'faith seeking understanding'. Christian theologizing is at the service of witnessing to the Risen Christ and has taken different forms in keeping with changing contexts. Witnessing to the Risen Christ in the early church meant being a martyr. Later it meant elaborating the doctrines about God, and still later proclaiming the word to those who did not profess the Christian faith. At the time of the 11th and 12th centuries, such witnessing took the form of the Crusades and from the 15th century till very recently, witnessing was seen in the missionary who was part of colonizing expeditions.

Vatican Council II was a crucial milestone in the march of Catholic theology. When Pope John XXIII announced that an ecumenical council was to be held he had in mind the updating (aggiornamento) of the Church which would include a renewal of its theology. He realized that much of the theologizing from the past was context specific and possibly irrelevant for succeeding generations. After the Council (1962-65) it was found necessary to revise the rites for the celebration of the sacraments and to bring out a new edition of the Code of Canon Law (1983) to incorporate the findings and decisions of the Council. This was the process of the "reception" of the Council by the whole Church. In this process, the Church comes to a new awareness of its identity; the Church progresses in its self-understanding and discovers new ways of interpreting God's sacramental presence in the world.

One concludes that theology is not a static reality. The context suggests how it is to be conceived. Hence we now speak of theology that must be adapted, made contextual. Today's theologizing has as its watchword 'interfaith dialogue'. Such dialogue was not part of the Church's theological vocabulary before but today it is and this means that whereas before the Christian functioned with regard to others as a "donor" (I will give you the truth, you have nothing to offer), now he or she must function as a dialogue partner acknowledging that God's truth is also present in the other. Dialogue then becomes an activity through which/two persons/parties journey in this world and encounter God ever more.

To do theology today is to introspect, examine *a-priori* premises and function as a theologian in and with a community — the Christian community. If the Christian community can begin to see itself as a world church, the theologizing community would include not only Christians but those of other faith persuasions. This will mean developing new attitudes and understanding towards those of different faith persuasions and being faithful to the message of Jesus in a creative way. Interfaith marriages would be a suitable setting for such theologizing to begin and mature.

- a. Can we re-look at theology in the light of questions raised by inter-faith families?
- b. Can the Church PROCLAIM THE WORD through DIALOGUE i.e. preach/live the gospel while being open to the voice of God in other religious traditions and experiences?

Conclusion

The Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops being held in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014, on the theme "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation", brings much hope. As this group looks to the Synod, what they ask most is for the bishops to listen to them with an open mind; to re-examine and revise Doctrine and Theology in the light of the challenges they face and pose to the Church; to frame laws and regulations keeping both partners in mind as an indivisible unit brought together by God; to provide support and guidance in their journey into communion; and to learn from the spiritual insights and experiences of interfaith families.

Towards this end:

1. *Episcopal Conferences in India should dialogue with other faiths about Norms/Rules/Regulations so that:*
 - (a) *the free state of parties is ensured;*
 - (b) *the transparency of both parties is assured;*
 - (c) *both partners can grow in knowledge and understanding of each other's religious celebrations;*
 - (d) *both partners can grow in knowledge and understanding of each other's religious tradition.*
2. *More comprehensive instruction is required on inter-faith marriages i.e. marriage in other religious traditions and the application of personal laws.*
3. *Baptism of children should not be insisted on as a sine qua non for interfaith marriages.*
4. *The marriage liturgy and particularly the marriage vows must be revised to be more inclusive.*
5. *Pastoral practice must include the accompanying of interfaith families in a spirit of respect and acceptance, without judgment, censure, triumphalism or attempts at conversion.*
6. *Doctrine and Theology must be re-examined and revised in the light of questions raised by interfaith families.*

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him.
Give my heart.

[From the poem
"In The Bleak Midwinter" (1904)
By Christina Rossetti]

Ref.: * Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Errol D'Lima, SJ, Prashant Olalekar, SJ, Anita Guha Patsy Khan, DHM, Shirley Sharma, Corinne Idnani & Others.
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Michael Amaladoss, SJ
Interreligious Dialogue 50 Years After Vatican II
Challenges and Opportunities

Fr. Michael Amaladoss, SJ <michamal@gmail.com> and his writings are familiar to our readers. In this article he writes about the theology of dialogue as it has developed during the 50 years after Vatican II. especially by Pope St. John Paul II.

It is nearly 50 years ago, on October 28, 1965, that the Second Vatican Council published its "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions", *Nostra Aetate* (NA). Many developments in the field of interreligious dialogue have taken place since then. In the context of the thrust towards New Evangelization, it may be helpful to look at the past in order to look at and plan for the future of the Church's mission in the world, especially in South Asia. The Synod on New Evangelization said, in its proposition 53:

The dialogue with all believers is a part of the New Evangelization.... Faithful to the teaching of Vatican II, the Church respects the other religions and their adherents and is happy to collaborate with them in the defense and promotion of the inviolable dignity of every person.

There was also concern for religious freedom. In the context of increasing interreligious violence in many parts of the world and, especially, of the widespread persecution of the Christians in many parts of the globe, protecting such religious freedom based on the dignity of the human person and dialogue between religions seems to be an urgent task for the promotion of peace in the world. At the same time, precisely because of the interreligious tensions, interest and involvement in dialogue and collaboration seem to be lessening. This may be a moment to look back at our recent past, with its inspirations as well as tensions, so that we can plan better for our mission in the future.

The Inspiration: the Second Vatican Council

At the Council, the Pastoral Constitution on *The Church in the Modern World — Gaudium et Spes* — affirmed the availability of salvation as a participation in the paschal mystery of Christ:

to all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery. (GS,22)

The same Pastoral Constitution also indicates the possible way in which the grace of salvation is available to the humans:

It is by the gift of the Holy Spirit that man, through faith, comes to contemplate and savour the mystery of God's design. Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. His voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged (15-16. Cf. also the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church — *Lumen Gentium*, 16).

Here we see the Holy Spirit linked to God's voice in conscience. The Decree on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae* gives conscience a social dimension. Suggesting that the humans must not be prevented from acting according to their conscience in religious matters, since the practice of religion consists of those voluntary and free internal acts by which the humans direct themselves to God, it goes on to say:

His own social nature requires that man give external expression to these internal acts of religion, that he communicate with others on religious matters, and profess his religion in community (DH, 3).

A communitarian dimension is also affirmed in the Declaration on Other Religions:

All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His

providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men (cf. Wis 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom 2:6-7; 1 Tim 2:4). (NA, 1)

Referring to the 'unsolved riddles of human existence', the same Declaration continues:

The religions which are found in more advanced civilizations endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact language to answer these questions... The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life. The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. (NA, 2. Cf. also AG 9,11,15,18; GS 92, OT 16)

The Council, in this way, lays the foundation for interreligious dialogue.

The Practice and Teaching of St. John Paul II

In the spirit of Vatican II, St. John Paul II invited the leaders of other religions to come together to Assisi to pray for world peace in October 1986. (He did something similar also later during the conflict in Bosnia and the jubilee year 2000.) Explaining this initiative, he declared, in a discourse to the Roman Curia on December 22, 1986, that all authentic prayer is from the Holy Spirit, (cf. No. 11).

Developing this further, in 1991, he said in *The Mission of the Redeemer — Redemptoris Missio* (RM):

The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time (DEV 53).... The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.... Thus the Spirit, who "blows where he wills" (cf. Jn 3:8), who "was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified" (AG 4), and who "has filled the world ... holds all things together (and) knows what is said (Wis 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place (DEV 53)... The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: "Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man (RM, 28-29).

St. John Paul II, however, clarifies that the action of the Spirit in the history of peoples, cultures and religions "serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit 'so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things'" (GS 45; DEV 54). It is the same Spirit that impels the Church to proclaim Christ and also guides it to discover its gifts to other peoples, to foster them and receive them in dialogue. (RM 29) It is in this context that St. John Paul goes on to affirm:

Dialogue is based on hope and love, and will bear fruit in the Spirit. Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church; they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all. (RM 56)

Some Theological Tensions

Such an openness to other religions and to dialogue with them has given rise to much theological reflection regarding the significance of religions with regard to salvific divine-human encounter and their relationship to the Church. Given a wide variety of such reflections, some theologians group them under various paradigms like "Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism" and "Ecclesiocentrism, Christocentrism and Theocentrism". Such paradigms are not very helpful. They are not faith based, but abstract and rational-philosophical classifications. Besides, they are inadequate and mistaken. For example, if we believe that Christ is God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the opposition between Christo centrism and Theocentrism

is meaningless. Such a distinction downgrades Christ, humanizing him and making him one mediator among others between God and the humans. This is obviously not acceptable to us.

Similarly, pluralism is affirmed by philosophers like John Hick according to the Kantian principle that God or 'Absolute Truth' in itself is unknown and unknowable: we have only various claimed personal perceptions, relative to the perceivers and their contexts, without any objective validity. This is pure relativism and not acceptable. God has manifested Himself to us in history through various prophets and finally through his Son, Jesus, who, we believe, is the fullness of Truth. (cf. Heb 1:1-2) Such divine manifestations experienced by the humans are not merely humanistic, relative, pluralistic perceptions in the sense of John Hick.¹

The Church and the Kingdom

Such paradigms, however, bring up the question of how to relate the Church to the other religions. St. John Paul II suggests a solution in *The Mission of the Redeemer*. God has only one plan for the salvation of the universe, which he has manifested in Jesus Christ. St. Paul says:

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time; to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1:8-10)

St. John Paul II echoes this:

Salvation consists in believing and accepting the mystery of the Father and of his love, made manifest and freely given in Jesus through the Spirit. In this way the Kingdom of God comes to be fulfilled: the Kingdom prepared for in the Old Testament, brought about by Christ and in Christ, and proclaimed to all peoples by the church, which works and prays for its perfect and definitive realization. (RM 12)

The Kingdom of God is proclaimed, inaugurated and realized by Jesus (cf. Mark 1:14-15). By his preaching and miracles Jesus communicates to us an experience of the loving and forgiving Father (cf. Lk 15) who wants to share God's life with us (cf. Jn 6) and makes it possible by his own passion, death and resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. This Kingdom is for all people, and all are called to become its members. This call goes out particularly to the poor and the oppressed of the world, (cf. Lk 4:18-20). It is an eschatological project, not in the sense that it will happen only at the end of the world, but in the sense that it has started now but will find its final fulfillment at the end of times, so that we live in a period of 'already-not yet', (cf. RM 13).

The Kingdom is the concern of every one: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. (RM 15)

This Kingdom is not merely an earthly reality, though it is being realized in history. The church is ordered to the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the church is indissolubly united to both.... The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role. (RM 18)

What is this special role? The Church is at the service of the Kingdom. It serves it by proclaiming Jesus Christ and witnessing to the Kingdom and by establishing 'new particular churches'. It also serves the Kingdom "by spreading throughout the world the 'Gospel values' which are an expression of the Kingdom" (RM 20). In so far as the people live 'Gospel values' and are open to the working of the Spirit, "the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the church among peoples everywhere" (RM 20). It is in this context that we have to say that the church has the fullness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, while it may be found in an inchoate way among other peoples. The church also serves the Kingdom by her intercession because it is God's gift and work.

Earlier in the Encyclical St. John Paul II had explained that, though salvation is meant for and 'made concretely available to all', often social and cultural conditions do not allow people to become part of the church, and they are members of other religious traditions.

For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the church, does not make them formally part of the church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material condition (RM 10).

This is possible because the Church is not merely the visible, institutional body, but is also the mystical body of Christ ordained to the Kingdom of God. It is in this context that St. John Paul II affirms: "The Church contributes to humanity's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace; education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children" (RM 20).

In his Apostolic letter *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999), after warning that salvation by Christ apart from the ordinary means of salvation, namely the Church, "does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people" (31),² he adds: "interreligious relations are best developed in a context of openness to other believers, a willingness to listen and the desire to respect and understand others in their differences.... This should result in collaboration, harmony and mutual enrichment" (31).³ Pope Francis also emphasizes this:

An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides.... In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must always be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with non-Christians. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 250-51)

The Indian Tradition

India is a multi-religious country. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism had their origin here. Christianity has been present in India from the time of St. Thomas the Apostle, according to a strong tradition. Islam has also been present from about the 8th century. Interreligious tensions and conflicts were not totally absent. But there was an atmosphere of tolerance. Already in the 3rd century B.C. the Buddhist emperor Ashoka declared in one of his rock-cut edicts:

King Priyadarsi honours men of all faiths, members of religious orders and laymen alike, with gifts and various marks of esteem.... The faiths of others all deserve to be honoured for one reason or another. By honouring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others. By acting otherwise, one injures one's own faith and also does disservice to that of others. For if a man extols his own faith and disparages another because of devotion to his own and because he wants to glorify it, he seriously injures his own faith. Therefore concord alone is commendable, for through concord men may learn and respect the conception of Dharma accepted by others.⁴

In the 16th century the Muslim emperor Akbar invited scholars of different religions for a conversation. Jesuits from Goa went to take part in them.⁵ Akbar himself tried to found a new religion, taking whatever he considered good in the other religions. When the British came, some of the educated Indians responded positively to the message of Jesus in the gospels. They recognized Jesus as an Oriental guru and declared themselves his disciples, though they did not wish to join his Church, which was seen by them as a European organization. Mahatma Gandhi was inspired by Jesus' teachings, and by his suffering on the cross, to develop his own policy of non-violent resistance to injustice. He successfully led India to its independence from British colonialism through a non-violent struggle.

When the Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan along religious lines, India chose to be a secular country, not only treating all religions equally, but even offering special rights to the minority religions (and cultures) to practice and propagate their religion.

On the Christian side, already in the early 20th century, there was an openness towards Hinduism as a preparation for the Gospel. J.N. Farquahar, a Christian missionary, wrote a book *Christianity the Crown of Hinduism*⁶, and Pierre Johannes, a Belgian Jesuit, published a series of pamphlets *To Christ through the Vedanta*⁷, trying to show that the questions of Hindu Vedantic philosophy were answered by the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. In 1950, two French priests, Abbe Jules Monchanin and Dom Henri Le Saux, founded a Christian ashram, hoping that the mystical tradition of Christianity, centred on the Trinity, lived in such ashrams will attract the Hindus who also had a mystical tradition.⁸ Similar efforts to reach out to Hinduism were also found elsewhere in the country like, Pune, Kolkata, etc.

These and similar efforts received a boost, so to speak, with the encouragement of the Second Vatican Council to dialogue with other religions. Dialogue groups, in which members of different religions came together for an intellectual exchange were founded in different parts of the country. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India had an active Secretariat that organized "live-ins", in which members of different religions came to live together for a few days, sharing their thoughts and their scriptures and even meditating together on common themes. Christian ashrams were founded, though many closed down afterwards.

Challenges of Interreligious Dialogue Today

But the situation has been changing in recent years. At the political level, India still remains a secular country and the rights of the minorities are still upheld by the law courts, but there are many attempts by the State to encroach on them, and tensions on the field seem to be growing. Though there have been Hindu-Muslim tensions, sometimes leading to violence, for over a century, now they have taken new forms inspired by terrorist tendencies. Christians had been targeted by anti-conversion bills in some states. In the last fifteen years there has been anti-Christian violence in some parts of the country. The Hindu majority is becoming restive. There are increasing attempts to assert its identity for social and political gains. One problem is that, after incidents of interreligious violence, 'peace' is restored through political (police) power, but no serious effort is made towards reconciliation and peace, respecting truth and justice — as happened, for instance, with the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu — although enquiry commissions, largely fruitless without proper follow-up, are generally appointed.

At the level of the Church itself, the ashrams are no longer as alive and active as before, after their pioneers have passed to the Lord. Many dialogue groups have disappeared. Formal meetings of various religious leaders are held occasionally. Dialogues at an intellectual level are rare, and if they continue it is normally in academic or secular settings, like departments of sociology in Universities. Given the tense atmosphere in the country in the area of interreligious relations — especially after the recent elections — the programme of interreligious dialogue needs to be re-invented and encouraged. We can think of it at four levels: peace-making; living together; coming together for prayer and comparative theologizing.

Four Levels of Dialogue

The situation in the country today is not one of peaceful living between the religious groups. Even where there is no active, ongoing conflict, there are memories of hurts, suspicions and prejudices. In the age of the mass media, one tends to identify with the suffering of the other even at a distance. Conflicts between religious groups are triggered not so much for strictly religious reasons, but for economic and political reasons, religious identity being used to weld a group together. It may not be possible for the Church and other religious groups to get directly involved in peace making. But we can operate at two levels. On the one hand, we can join other Non-Governmental Organizations in trying to bring out the truth and to obtain justice through the courts of law. On the other hand, we can prepare the people of different religious groups to understand and accept each other, getting rid of their ignorance of and prejudice against others. We can especially focus on the youth in our educational institutions through programmes of interreligious and peace education, in which they are introduced to the different religious groups both in theory and practice and are also taught the values of reconciliation and forgiveness, dialogue and peace in the process of building up human communities who live happy and fulfilled lives. The fact that these groups tend to be interreligious is an advantage. Special text books and training programmes can be devised. This has started to happen in some places.

Religious ghettos in which people belonging to the same religion live together in the same geographical area seem to be disappearing in urban areas. But Christian leaders can take the initiative in constituting a group of leaders belonging to all religions (and ethnic groups) to discuss and act upon common civic issues. There can also be participation in each other's social festivals to create a sense of community.

A third level of dialogue will be to follow the example of St. John Paul II and to come together to pray for peace and prosperity. This need not be a regular event, but is needed in moments of social crisis. When there has been interreligious violence or some big accidents or natural catastrophes, people can come together to implore God's protection and help. Even if

they do not pray together, being together before God the Creator in a time of need can be a unifying experience.

Another level of dialogue consists in what is known today as 'comparative theology'. In the past, scholars claimed to study the various religions with scientific objectivity. It was known as a comparative study of religions. Even a non-believer could do this. Today religions are studied and compared, taking into account the point of view of the believers. This is known as comparative theology. This has not been done much in India. We can go even a step further, by trying to do such a comparative study as a group of scholars, who believe in the different religions, engaging in dialogue.

By engaging in such dialogue we are not abandoning our duty to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God and to be witnesses to Jesus in our lives. When we are relating to the religious 'other' in dialogue in the ways evoked above, we do not bracket our faith convictions, but are actually witnessing to our faith and promoting Gospel values. A positive proclamation can occur when there is an opportunity. We can recall here the advice of Pope Francis: "It is not by proselytizing that the church grows, 'by attraction'. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 14)

Recognition of the religious 'other' does not mean that we subscribe to sweeping statements like "All religions are the same", "All religions are true", etc. While we recognize that the other religions may facilitate the salvific divine-human encounter for their believers, this does not excuse us from the task of discerning and even judging them in the light of the revelation we have received from God, while we need also to be open to a similar judgment on the way that we live our own faith commitment. Though the Church is the mystical body of Christ, in its visible, institutional manifestation it remains a pilgrim that needs reformation and growth, (cf. LG, 14; 48).

While we recognize the other religions as facilitating the salvific divine-human encounter, we believe that God's salvific plan for the universe has been manifested fully and in a unique manner in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:3-10; Col 1:15-20). If we use terms like inspiration and revelation to refer to God's definitive self-manifestation in Jesus Christ, we do not use the words *in the same sense* to refer to other religions. Of course Muslims and Hindus speak about their 'scriptures'. But all these cannot be equated, from the point of view of our faith, to the 'public revelation' that God has granted to us in Jesus Christ. As the International Theological Commission said, "Although one cannot explicitly exclude any divine illumination in the composition of those books (in the religions which have them), it is much more fitting to reserve the qualification of "inspired" to books of the canon (cf. DV, 11)."⁹ While we have to avoid such comparative statements, we can listen to Popes Francis and St John Paul II. Pope Francis says:

The same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which help people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony. As Christians, we can also benefit from these treasures built up over many centuries, which can help us better to live our own beliefs (EG, 254).

Similarly, St. John Paul II challenges us, Indians:

In preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the church in the first centuries. My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems. (*Fides et Ratio*, 72).

Conclusion

India certainly shares in the global situation which seems to be ruled by individualism and consumerism, profit motivation and corruption in public life, and widely prevalent economic and sociopolitical inequalities. Only religions can offer a sense of values and motivation and inspiration for personal and social transformation. In a multi-religious country like India, the religions are called to provide this help to society together. St. John Paul II, in a talk to other religious leaders in Chennai in February 1986, said:

By dialogue we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God.... As followers of different religions we should join together in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood, education, culture, social welfare and civic order.¹⁰

One element of the religious context that we have to take into account is that, while India is not secularized in the sense that the people have become anti-religious or atheist, as in some European countries, religions may remain an otherworldly concern, without playing a transformative role in society. In addition, religions may be becoming indicators of a socio-political identity in a conflictual multi-religious community. The first task of dialogue in such a situation would be to free religions from such a socio-political baggage and highlight the values that they stand for. Then we should seek, through dialogue and collaboration, to make them relevant to individual and social life.

What can be the Christian contribution to this common effort? The Hindus and others in India have always been attracted by the ethical teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Beyond that, the teachings and actions of Jesus show us God as a Father who loves and forgives. Jesus gives us a new commandment to love one another as he has loved us. He has shown this love in service (washing of the feet of the disciples), sharing (the Eucharist) and total self-gift unto death on a cross. His resurrection gives us an assurance that we are destined for life, not death, and that the risen Christ is sharing God's life with us and leading us to all fullness. It is this message of forgiveness of sins and salvation, love and hope that we are called to share with the people with whom we are in dialogue. But this should not simply be a message that we share, but a project of action that we live in community.

Interreligious dialogue is therefore a challenge, but a necessary one, because we are collaborating with God in Jesus who is gathering all things together (cf. Eph 1:8-10), reconciling all of us with each other and with God Himself (cf. Col 1:15-20), so that God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

Pope in Sri Lanka: On Interreligious and Ecumenical Cooperation

Such positive developments in interreligious and ecumenical relations take on a particular significance and urgency in Sri Lanka. For too many years the men and women of this country have been victims of civil strife and violence. What is needed now is healing and unity, not further conflict and division. Surely the fostering of healing and unity is a noble task which is incumbent upon all who have at heart the good of the nation, and indeed the whole human family. It is my hope that interreligious and ecumenical cooperation will demonstrate that men and women do not have to forsake their identity, whether ethnic or religious, in order to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters.

Address of Pope Francis during the Interreligious and Ecumenical Gathering, Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Colombo, 13 January 2015

End Notes

¹ Cf. *Dominus Iesus*, 5.

² This quotation is from a letter which he wrote to the FABC at its V assembly in 1991. AAS 83 (1991), 101.

³ This is a quotation from *Propositio* 41 of the Synod for Asia.

⁴ Rock edict XII, in N.A. Nikam and Richard McKeon (eds), *The Edicts of Ashoka*. Mumbai, 1962, 49-50.

⁵ Cf. John Correia-Afonso, *letters from the Mughal Court*. Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1980.

⁶ Oxford, 1913.

⁷ Ranchi, 1944; in French, Louvain, 1932.

⁸ A. Monchanin and Henri Le Saux, *A Benedictine Ashram*. Douglas: Isle of Man, 1964.

⁹ International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the World Religions* (1997), No. 92; Cf. Also *Dominus Iesus*, 8.

¹⁰ *Origins* 15 (1986) 598.

James H. Kroeger, MM
Saint John Paul II and *Redemptoris Missio*
Mission Insights

This year (2015) marks the anniversaries of two significant mission documents of the Church: it is the fiftieth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, the mission decree of the Second Vatican Council (December 7, 1965-2015); it is also the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Redemptoris Missio*, the mission encyclical of Saint John Paul II (December 7, 1900-2015). These two documents, along with Blessed Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975) have had a pivotal effect on the "mission consciousness" of the contemporary Church. Recently, Pope Francis made another significant contribution with his masterpiece, *Evangelii Gaudium*, issued on November 24, 2013, the feast of Christ the King.

This modest reflection focuses on the one mission document written by a recently canonized saint: John Paul II. It is an attempt to capture the highlights of *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) in a medium length presentation (in the Vatican-issued text the original document runs to 153 pages). In addition, this piece seeks to manifest the enduring importance of RM for the Church's commitment to missionary evangelization in the contemporary world.

"[...] This coming December 7, 2015 is the 25th anniversary of the pivotal mission encyclical of Saint John Paul II (it is also the 50th anniversary of the Vatican II Decree AD GENTES).

So, I decided that people might find it helpful to have an "overview synthesis" of John Paul's REDEMPTORIS MISSIO (especially since Pope Francis is urging the Church to become "a Church of Missionary Disciples" and Francis quotes John Paul quite extensively)".

Introduction of the Author. Karol Józef Wojtyła was elected pope on October 16, 1978 and took the name John Paul II. Under his leadership the papal ministry became focused on evangelization and global mission, as he traveled to numerous countries, strengthened local Christian communities, encountered the followers of other religions, spoke on the social teachings of the Church, canonized saints and honored blessed, met with youth and government leaders. Remarkable, indeed, are the contributions of this 264th pope of the Catholic Church whose pontificate extended over 26 years (1978-2005).

When John Paul II died on April 2, 2005 the Reuters News fact sheet noted some remarkable statistics regarding his pontificate. He traveled a total of 775,231 miles around the world; this is 3.24 times the distance from the earth to the moon. John Paul II read aloud, before audiences in the millions, more than 20,000 addresses. As pope he issued more than 100 major documents, including 14 encyclicals, 45 apostolic letters, 14 apostolic exhortations, and 11 apostolic constitutions. John Paul II beatified 1,338 and canonized 482 people, more than all of his predecessors in the last four centuries combined.

Pope John Paul II asserted that the Second Vatican Council set the direction for his papacy. In 2000 he noted: "The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council has been a gift of the Spirit to his Church. For this reason it remains a fundamental event, not only for understanding the Church's history at this end of the century, but first and foremost for exploring the abiding presence of the risen Christ beside his Bride in ... world events." In 2002, the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the Council, John Paul II observed: "I had the grace of participating in that event and in my heart I hold valuable and unforgettable memories.... The Council documents ... have not lost their value nor their brilliance.... In the Council we have received a sure compass to guide us on the path of the century that is beginning."

The date of his beatification (May 1, 2011) and canonization (April 27, 2014) was the Feast of Divine Mercy. John Paul II had a deep commitment to this devotion as it was propagated by Sister Faustina Kowalska, a fellow Pole. One can also note its intimate link with mission. Is not missionary evangelization all about proclaiming God's abundant love, compassion, and mercy? Mission is grounded in being so filled with God's loving mercy that one wishes to proclaim it to the world. Mission makes God's merciful love present and contagious.

Undoubtedly, one of the major emphases of John Paul II was his focus on the renewal of the Church in her missionary identity and commitment. When his mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer: RM) was published on December 7, 1990 [25th anniversary of the mission document of Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*] Cardinal Daneels of Brussels wrote: "this document best exemplifies who this pope is; it is the fruit of his mission in every continent. There is nothing better to define his pontificate than to say: he is a missionary pope."

Saint John Paul II did everything in his power to renew mission, asserting that mission is at the heart of the Church: "the Church here on earth is missionary by her very nature" (AG 2). He was deeply convinced that "missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. *Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!*" (RM 2).

Earlier in this essay, some "statistics" of John Paul II were noted — and one could add many more. But, the "statistics" have a much deeper significance: they reflect the extraordinary mission commitment of John Paul II. He used *every opportunity* to spread the message and person of Jesus. "JP2" was an extraordinary apostle of Jesus Christ.

This presentation now turns to sketching a synthetic overview of Saint John Paul II's mission encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, commemorating, as has already been noted, its twenty-fifth anniversary (1990-2015) as well as the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II's *Ad Gentes* (1965-2015).

Gift of a Mission Encyclical. John Paul II's eighth encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) was issued on December 7, 1990 in the thirteenth year of the pope's pontificate. In RM, the pope sounds a clarion and urgent call to all Church sectors to renew their enthusiasm and commitment to evangelize the world. Composed of eight chapters plus an introduction (1-3) and conclusion (92), RM has a "doctrinal" section (4-30) and a "pastoral" section (31-91), respectively treating the "Why" and "How" of contemporary missionary evangelization.

John Paul II begins by stating his conviction about "the *urgency of missionary activity*, a subject to which I am devoting the present Encyclical" (1). The pope asserts: "Missionary activity specifically directed *ad gentes* [to the nations] appears to be waning." This fact "must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ." Why? Because "in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith" (2).

The pope urges a "fresh impulse to missionary activity," the deepening of "commitment of the particular Churches," and the harnessing of "all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization" (2-3). In a word, the focus of John Paul II is direct and clear: "I wish to invite the Church to *renew her missionary commitment*" (2). All are invited to participate: "*Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ!*" (3).

Vision of Evangelization. What view of evangelization emerges from a comprehensive analysis of RM? Repeatedly, the document speaks of mission, evangelization and salvation in a holistic fashion: "Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person" (11); "evangelical witness ... is directed towards integral human development" (42); "action on behalf of integral development and liberation ... is most urgently needed" (58).

Integral evangelization, as repeatedly affirmed in the encyclical (20, 41-60), reflects current missiological thought as well as recent magisterial teaching. Paul VI in EN clearly encouraged Catholics to view evangelization holistically; the second chapter of EN speaks of the complexity of the evangelizing action and its various complementary and mutually enriching elements. RM echoes this vision: "Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways" (41). Again, "mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity" (31). This is the vision of evangelization that the pope consistently promotes throughout RM.

Foundational Mission Theology. RM clearly affirms the foundations of mission theology and the centrality and urgency of mission in the life of the Church. The years following the Second Vatican Council were a golden opportunity to explore and debate, renew and clarify the Church's mission; and, it is true that the Council "has already borne much fruit in the realm of missionary activity.... Above all, there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*" (2). Yet, John Paul II also discerned a need to reaffirm diverse aspects of the Catholic Church's foundational theology of Christian mission and evangelization.

At least one third of the encyclical (three chapters out of eight) deals with theological questions. Chapter One includes core elements of the dogmatic theology of Revelation and Faith, Christology and Soteriology, as well as Ecclesiology and Missiology. Chapter Two focuses on biblical theology, particularly the Kingdom of God. And, to the delight of missiologists, Chapter Three is completely devoted to Pneumatology, examining the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and her evangelizing mission.

The following are key emphases in the opening chapter: (a) All mission is centered in God's wonderful, generous loving plan of salvation (*mysterion*), made known through Jesus and accepted in faith. Jesus is the "definitive self-revelation of God" and "the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature" (5); (b) While affirming with the Scriptures (I Tim 2:4) the universality of salvation, "the Church believes that God has established Christ as the one mediator and that it has been established as the universal sacrament of salvation" (9); (c) The Pope unhesitatingly reaffirms these basics of Church teaching, noting that "*Mission is an issue of faith*" (11).

The biblical theme of the Kingdom (*basileia*) is the integrating leitmotif of the second chapter. Preaching the Kingdom and promoting its values are the evangelizing tasks of the Church which is "effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom" (20). The encyclical offers clarity and interpretation on other dimensions of Kingdom theology: the Kingdom of God and the Christ-event are complementary proclamations (16); the Kingdom necessarily has a transcendent horizon (17); the Kingdom "cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church" (18); theocentrism and ecclesiocentrism demand a nuanced critique which is consistent with Church teaching (17-18).

Currently, the theology of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) is of particular interest to missiologists and missionaries alike. "The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission of evangelization. The Holy Spirit's action is preeminent in mission *ad gentes*" (21). The Spirit's centrality is emphasized because the Holy Spirit's "presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (28). Ask any missionary and you will receive an eloquent personal testimony of the presence and power of the Spirit active in peoples, cultures, and religions — renewing the face of the earth! The acts of today's apostles continuously write the Gospel of the Holy Spirit!

Transmitting the Urgency of Mission. The English subtitle of *Redemptoris Missio* is: "On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate." Thus, mission is always and everywhere essential; it is "not considered a marginal task for the Church but is situated at the center of her life, as a fundamental commitment of the whole People of God" (32). Mission is "the greatest and holiest

duty of the Church" (63). The pope's affirmations resonate throughout the work: "I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern" (1); "mission *ad gentes* is still in its infancy" (40); "I see the dawning of a new missionary age" (92).

No one seeks to minimize the pope's assertions about the centrality and urgency of missionary evangelization; however, it is a valid question to ask about strategies for implementation. Words of exhortation must give way to programs of concrete actualization. In the considered judgment of this author, the encyclical is strong on the *why* of mission, but is only moderately successful on the *how*. Mission animation — the *how* of mission — requires continued discussion. While it is best accomplished locally, within the local Church, one can highlight some creative suggestions found within RM.

The Christian family is a key and irreplaceable force in evangelization (42); this insight is consistent with the teaching of Vatican II which termed the family the "domestic church" (LG 11). Promoting Christian family life should redound to mission awareness and animation. Material and financial donations are gratefully received, yet families are challenged to offer "a special contribution to the missionary cause of the Church by fostering missionary vocations among their sons and daughters" (80).

Saint John Paul challenges Christians: Do you wish to promote mission? True disciples are urged to "carry out a sincere review of their lives regarding their solidarity with the poor" (60). As followers of Jesus, "we should reassess our own way of living" (81); "Fight hunger by changing your lifestyle" (59); "We cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day" (47).

The role of missionary institutes and societies is crucial in worldwide evangelization; missionaries themselves should continue their "radical and total self-giving," initiate "new and bold endeavors," and "not allow themselves to be daunted by doubts, misunderstanding, rejection or persecution" (66). Diocesan seminarians and priests "must have the mind and heart of missionaries" (67). The Church must seek to expand the spheres "in which lay people are present and active as missionaries" (72). Missionary dynamism should become contagious!

Youth involvement is essential to mission and evangelization. They should be offered opportunities to visit overseas missions, to meet and offer hospitality to non-Christians and migrants within their own country (82). The idealism of youth is a potential resource — their rejection of violence and war, their desire for freedom and justice, their rejection of racism and closed nationalism, their affirmation of the dignity and role of women (86). The vision of Charles de Foucauld (as a "universal brother") can fire the imagination of youth (89) and can be a path toward missionary commitment.

Additional Major Emphases. In composing a popular overview of a papal encyclical one faces the challenge of providing a balanced presentation. This writer sees several other major emphases on evangelization within *Redemptoris Missio*; he devotes a paragraph to each theme (indicated by the italicized words found in each paragraph).

Around the world *local Churches* are the central actors in mission today; all evangelization necessarily is harmoniously accomplished in, with, and through the local Church which is responsible for the totality of mission. This is a sea change in the dynamics of mission; both local Churches and missionaries alike must explore the ramifications of this new reality. Many leads are found in the encyclical (26, 30, 39, 48-52, 62-64, 71, 83-85, 92).

Authentic evangelization is a *freely-offered gift*, not an external imposition which violates human dignity and freedom. Or again, witnessing and proclaiming Christ are not at odds with people's

dignity as persons or their freedom of conscience (7-8). Genuine mission does not restrict freedom, but rather seeks to advance it; RM is clear: "*The Church proposes; she imposes nothing*" (39).

The Church needs *missionary vocations*. Individuals who receive the permanent, life-long vocation to foreign, transcultural mission are a treasured resource of the Church. Their vocation is necessary for the Church (32); it is a unique calling (27, 65); it is the model of the Church's missionary commitment (66); it is to be assiduously cultivated (79, 84), particularly by mission institutes themselves (65-66).

The encyclical looks positively upon *interreligious dialogue*, devoting several sections to presenting it comprehensively (55-57). Interfaith dialogue "is part of the Church's evangelizing mission, ... is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*, ... [and] *does not dispense from evangelization*." This same section (55) speaks of God's call to all peoples and his presence to them "of which their religions are the main and essential expression". The Church's reverence for the followers of other faiths and religions is clearly affirmed by the encyclical.

In RM *women* receive the Pope's praise and gratitude for their outstanding contribution to evangelization: "I extend a special word of appreciation to the missionary Religious sisters" (70); "How can we forget the important role played by women"? (71). "It is necessary to recognize — and it is a title of honor — that some Churches owe their origins to the activity of lay men and women missionaries" (71).

The process of *inculturation* and its relationship to mission receives extensive treatment (25, 52-54, 76). Authentic evangelization involves the Church in the inculturation process, an "intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures". This task is never finished and today it encounters new challenges — especially in large cities, "where new customs and styles of living arise together with new forms of culture and communication" (37). Mission and inculturation demand fresh initiatives and creativity in the complex age of the megalopolis!

The entire final chapter of *Redemptoris Missio* treats *missionary spirituality* (87-91). Four elements characterize Jesus' disciples-become-missionary: the missionary is to be led by the Spirit, to live the mystery of Christ who himself was sent, to love the Church and humanity as Jesus did, and to desire the holiness of saints. In a word, mission spirituality is "a journey towards holiness" (90) and the success of renewing the urgency of the Church's missionary impulse "demands holy missionaries" (90).

Precious Details — Not to be Lost. In a work as long as RM one expects to find several details that demand further reflection. This synthesis presentation takes note of five additional themes and their importance for evangelization (the specific theme is identified by the italicized words).

The *personalist philosophy* and orientation of John Paul II is manifested throughout the work. The person is always central in evangelization and all mission apostolates: in work for justice (42), in fostering interreligious dialogue (55-57), in promoting development; the human person "is the principal agent of development, not money or technology" (58). In uniquely personalist terms, the missionary is described as "a person of the Beatitudes" (91) and it is personal love that is always "*the driving force of mission*" (60).

The encyclical profusely expresses the *Church's gratitude* to its missionaries (2, 57, 60, 70). The Church's theologians provide an important service to the cause of evangelization (36) and should promote the study of world religions and science of missiology (83). The Church needs a renewed commitment to ecumenism within mission (50).

In looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization, the document distinguishes *three situations*: "non-Christian" peoples, Christians requiring pastoral care, and the so-called "post-Christians"; all require special approaches (32-34). Geographically, the pope emphasizes the missionary demands within Asia (37, 55, 91).

Significant and surprising is the fact that *one unique quote* appears verbatim no less than three times in the text (6, 10, 28): "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God." Certainly, one cannot mistake the Pope's assertion that God's loving plan for salvation includes each and every person!

Evangelization as "*God's work*" (24) is clearly affirmed; it is based "not on human abilities but on the power of the Risen Lord" (23). Missionaries are conscious that they owe their faith and vocations "not to their own merits but to Christ's special grace" (11). They must believe that "it is not we who are the principal agents of the Church's mission, but Jesus Christ and his Spirit" (36). A missionary's faith journey "*proceeds along the path* already trodden by the Virgin Mary" (92).

Fifteen years earlier (1975) Paul VI wrote that "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (EN 41). This passage is recalled in *Redemptoris Missio* (42). It must continue to remain a central focus if the Church wishes to respond "with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time" (92).

Integral Evangelization: A Synthetic Overview. Without doubt, during his lengthy pontificate, John Paul II gifted the Church with a rich understanding of the theology and praxis of missionary evangelization. This piece has consciously limited itself to one pivotal document on mission and evangelization; *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II is a microcosm for understanding missionary evangelization. However, can the discussion be taken further?

Much enlightenment can be drawn from two documents issued by the Secretariat for Non-Christians (founded in 1964 by Paul VI and renamed in 1988 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue). On Pentecost Sunday, 1984, the Secretariat promulgated the document entitled: "The Attitude of the Church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission" (DM). Hidden in this little-known work on the interrelationship between dialogue and mission is a pivotal statement. This source affirms that mission and evangelization are understood "in the consciousness of the Church as a single but complex and articulated reality" (13).

Later, on Pentecost Sunday, 1991, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in conjunction with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples presented the document: "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Once again, the evangelizing mission of the Church is understood as a "single but complex and articulated reality" (2).

These two documents (DM and DP) emphasize the unity and integral nature of evangelization, while at the same time affirming that evangelization necessarily comprises many dimensions; it is a complex reality. In addition, they assert that this multi-faceted concept can be explained, articulated, and elaborated.

Identifying the Elements of Integral Evangelization. Despite the lengthy and complex titles of the 1984 and 1991 documents just mentioned, these two sources have added considerable clarity to a Catholic understanding of missionary evangelization. The clarity results from the fact that "principal elements" are specifically named. Thus, mission and evangelization are composed of: (a) presence and witness; (b) commitment to social development and human liberation; (c) interreligious dialogue; (d) proclamation and catechesis, and (e) liturgical life, prayer and contemplation (cf. DM 13 and DP 2). In a word, the one evangelizing mission of the Church is

comprised of several component elements and authentic forms. This is integral or holistic evangelization; this is — in compact expression — the wide view of evangelization promoted by John Paul II in RM.

This five-point vision has served the Church well over the past decade; this approach takes the thought of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (as well as in DM and DP) and expresses it in a manner that ordinary Catholics can readily grasp and appreciate. At the same time, it does not do violence to the richness and complexity of missionary evangelization. One easily perceives that the thought expressed in RM is adequately captured in this five-point schema; in turn, employing this helpful schema enables a smooth maneuvering through lengthy papal documents. Viewing evangelization through its various essential dimensions results in clarity, insight, and proper integration. Undoubtedly, this is a Catholic vision of evangelization!

The Five Elements: Further Discussion. Additional insight into the integral nature of evangelization is attained by specifically relating these five principal elements of evangelization with *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) as well as with *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) of Paul VI and *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) of Pope Francis. This exercise will illustrate the integral nature of the Church's task of evangelization which includes "bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity" (EN 18).

For Paul VI, *Christian presence and witness of life* form the "initial act of evangelization" (EN 21). Daily activities, living together in harmony, lives as individuals of integrity, duties in the community—all these are to be a basic "faith-witness" that demonstrates how Christian living is shaped by Christian faith and values. Through this wordless witness, "Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live" (EN 21). People desire and respect authentic witnesses (cf. RM 11, 42; EN 41; EG 14, 20, 119-121, 149-151). Mother Teresa of Calcutta (beatified in 2003), known for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor, is an "icon" of Christian presence, life, and service (*Ecclesia in Asia* 7).

Living in harmony as good neighbors based on faith convictions should naturally issue in a mutual *commitment to social development and human liberation*, a genuine service of humanity. This means serving the most unfortunate, witnessing to justice, defending the integrity of creation; this dimension of evangelization includes all areas of social concerns, ranging from peace-building, education and health services to promoting family life and good government. Areas of human development or human promotion are vast fields of the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. RM 58-60; EN 18-19, 29-33; EG 50-109, 181-185, 197-216).

These many evangelizing activities are necessarily inserted into specific contexts; particularly in Asia, these activities naturally assume an interreligious dimension. Thus, the Church in Asia, similar to most places in the world of today, accomplishes her mission in pluralistic and diverse cultures; she enters into *interreligious dialogue*, cooperating with the followers of the great religious traditions. Interreligious dialogue takes many forms; there are the dialogues of daily life, deeds of service, religious experts, and faith experience, as well as other forms. John Paul II asserts: "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission" (RM 55). This dialogue emerges from one's faith convictions. In contemporary circumstances, dialogue with religions and cultures is the truly appropriate Christian response (cf. RM 52-54, 55-57; EN 20, 53; EG 115-118, 238-243, 250-254).

In mission and evangelization today there is the role of *explicit Gospel proclamation and catechesis*. This dimension of evangelization includes preaching, catechesis on Christian life, teaching the content of the faith; in a word, this means "telling the Jesus story." When the Holy Spirit opens the door and when the time is opportune, Christians do tell the Jesus story, giving explicit witness and testimony to the faith. Others are invited, in freedom of conscience, to follow, to know Jesus. Through proclamation Christians themselves are further instructed in their faith; this is

the process through which the Christian faith is communicated to the next generation of believers (cf. RM 44-51; EN 22, 27, 42; EG 3, 12, 24, 110-111, 246).

Finally, integral evangelization will necessarily include *liturgical life, prayer and contemplation*. No one can effectively be engaged in the Church's mission without a strong faith and prayer-life. Evangelization needs holy men and women who are themselves on fire with the love of Christ; spreading the fire of the Gospel will be accomplished only by those already burning with an experience of Christ. Holiness is an irreplaceable condition for evangelizers. The "God-experience" achieved in prayer and contemplation, in sacramental and liturgical life, will illumine and transform all other dimensions of evangelization (cf. RM 46-49, 87-92; EN 23, 43-44, 47; EG 47, 173, 259-288).

Obviously, these five "principal elements" of an integral understanding of evangelization complement and reinforce each other. In speaking of the complexity of the Church's evangelizing action, Paul VI (EN 17) gave a timely admonition: "Any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it" (see also EG 176). The pope continued: "It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements" (EN 17).

Thus, this holistic view sets aside an older concept of the Church's mission. No longer are the elements of social justice, interfaith dialogue, peace-building, education and health care, life-witness, etc. simply "preparatory" to evangelization [*praeparatio evangelica*]; all five "principal elements" are constitutive of an integral understanding. Popes John Paul II, Paul VI, and Francis have expanded the horizons of evangelization; the more restrictive view, which held that only explicit Gospel proclamation and sacramental life constituted mission, has been superseded.

Concomitant with this expanded vision of evangelization, one finds a renewed emphasis on the missionary nature of the *entire Church* (cf. AG 2; RM 61-76; EN 14, 59; EG 14, 20, 119-121). Every baptized member of the Church is an evangelizer, whether layperson, ordained, or religious. Previously, when evangelization was linked more exclusively with explicit Gospel proclamation and sacramental life, laity often found it difficult to appreciate how they were to be evangelizers. Today, Catholic evangelization engages the entire Church (from top to bottom; especially, all the local Churches), all states of life (lay, religious, ordained, married, single), all apostolic activities and forms of witness (the five principal elements). Yes, the totality of Christian missionary evangelization embraces all these aspects.

Conclusion. This piece has presented an overview of John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio*, highlighting its key insights; it has also elucidated a panoramic overview of a Catholic vision of evangelization. When many words have been written, when various definitions and categories have been clarified, and when one more presentation has been completed, Catholic Christians must step back and radically affirm: *All mission and evangelization is God's project. The Holy Spirit is always the principal agent of evangelization.* For evangelizers, missionaries, catechists, religious and lay alike, mission necessarily means trying to find out what God wills and what he is doing. Then, the authentic evangelizer bend his/her will to God's will, joyfully surrenders to God's loving plan, and expends all efforts and energy to become a worthy instrument that enables God's design to unfold. Evangelization, at heart and center, is "*an issue of faith*, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us" (RM 11). For Christians, for all local Churches, to live is to evangelize!

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Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ
Pope Francis in Israel:
"Tear down the walls of enmity"

"Our world is a legacy bequeathed to us from past generations (...) but it is also on loan to us from our children: our children who are weary, worn out by conflicts and yearning for the dawn of peace, our children who plead with us to tear down the walls of enmity and to set out on the path of dialogue and peace, so that love and friendship will prevail."

Pope Francis at the Invocation for Peace¹

From May 24 to 26, 2014, Pope Francis visited the Holy Land as a pilgrim. In three intense days, he visited three countries, Jordan, Palestine and Israel, and experienced a wide range of political, social, cultural and religious realities. On January 5, 2014, Pope Francis had announced that he would visit the Holy Land: "I wish to announce that next May 24 to 26, God willing, I will be making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The main purpose is to commemorate the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, which occurred exactly 50 years ago today, on January 5.... The stages will be three: in Amman, Bethlehem and Jerusalem." In his words and in his acts during the visit, Pope Francis revealed that he came to the Holy Land not as a head of state, not as a diplomat but rather as a religious leader and a pastor, revealing to all who cared to listen the possibilities for encounter in this region of conflict. He invited one and all to look beyond the walls that crisscross the region, dividing neighbors to a horizon that promises alternatives to the conflicts of today.

In this article, I will examine Pope Francis's message to Israel, her leaders and her people. It needs, however, to be pointed out right at the outset that the visit to Israel as a country and as a political reality was not at the center of the Holy Father's visit. This in itself was a blow to some Israeli leaders who expressed dissatisfaction that the visit was so short and not more focused on



relations with the Jewish people and with the State of Israel. I will focus here on these two aspects of the time the Pope spent in Israel: the religious dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jews on the one hand and relations with the State of Israel on the other hand.

At the epicenter of the Pope's pilgrimage was the ecumenical encounter (in fact three encounters) with Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras. Referring repeatedly to the courageous meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964, the Pope came not only to commemorate that event but also to push Catholic-Orthodox rapprochement forward. The magnificent scenes of the two spiritual leaders: their embrace in the courtyard of the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulcher), their standing alongside each other confessing then-shared faith before the empty tomb, their veneration *together* of

the place of the Crucifixion, are not only the center piece of this pilgrimage, but also provide a hermeneutical key with which to read the other moments.

Standing in front of the empty tomb of Christ, Pope Francis clearly enunciated the vocabulary, the grammar, the syntax that framed his message wherever he went on his three day visit.

*Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the basis of our hope, which is this: Christòs anesti! Let us not deprive the world of the joyful message of the resurrection! (...) fifty years after the embrace of those two venerable Fathers, we realize with gratitude and renewed amazement **how it was possible**, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, to take truly significant steps towards unity. (...) We need to believe that, just as the stone before the tomb was cast aside, so too every obstacle to our full communion will also be removed. This will be a grace of resurrection, of which we can have a foretaste even today. Every time we ask forgiveness of one another for our sins against other Christians and every time we find the courage to grant and receive such forgiveness, we experience the resurrection! Every time we put behind us our longstanding prejudices and find the courage to build new fraternal relationships, we confess that Christ is truly risen! Every time we reflect on the future of the Church in the light of her vocation to unity, the dawn of Easter breaks forth!*

Tearing down walls of suspicion and enmity means also renunciation, giving up on things firmly held and valued. In addressing the major obstacle to relations with the Orthodox, the Pope said: "Here I reiterate the hope already expressed by my predecessors for a continued dialogue with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, aimed at finding a means of exercising the specific ministry of the Bishop of Rome which, in fidelity to his mission, can be **open to a new situation** and can be, in the present context, a service of love and of communion acknowledged by all".

The words hope, possibility, grace, forgiveness, courage, open, new and the invocation of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit mark the entire pilgrimage and serve to clarify the message of the Pope to the religious and political leaders of the region too. Past and present, full of pain, anger and rejection cannot block a vision of a different future, a future beyond the walls. The dynamic of renunciation is also a central element in the Pope's message not only to the Patriarch of Constantinople but also in his words to the other religious and political leaders he met with. His meeting with his "brother" Athenagoras was an iconic representation of what is possible, a map of where we must head, hand in hand. The word "brother" was another key term, used constantly in order to sow a vocabulary and a vision that serve as an alternative to those words like enemy, foe and rival used most commonly in the region. In the meeting with Patriarch Athenagoras, the Pope offered a vision of a horizon beyond the walls of enmity. In a certain sense, the meeting at the Church of the Resurrection was the inner circle of the pilgrimage, rippling out in ever widening circles, towards the interreligious and political dimensions.

Tearing down the religious walls between Catholics and Jews

One of the greatest revolutions in the twentieth century was the revolution in relations between Catholics and Jews. A teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism, focused on the Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ, was replaced by a teaching of respect and dialogue that came to expression at the Second Vatican Council and was developed in the Magisterium of the Church in the decades following the Council.

Pope Francis has followed in the footsteps of his predecessors in continuing to express the post-Conciliar attitude of the Church to the Jews in words and in concrete gestures but he has also brought something new to this dialogue. As the first Pope to hail from the New World, he comes from a region which does not suffer from the same traumatic history as Europe when it comes to relations with the Jews. Whereas his predecessors, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, from Poland and Germany respectively, had to deal with the tragic relations between Catholics and Jews in their countries of origin and in Europe in general, particularly during the Second World War, Pope Francis came from Argentina, where Jews have played a prominent role in society, culture and politics. He came with a long history of excellent relations with the Jewish community and personal friendships with Jewish rabbis. Before his visit to Israel, he met many times with these Jewish friends from Argentina as well as with leaders of Jewish organizations.

Unfortunately, the new relationship between Catholics and Jews has not yet taken root in many parts of the religious Jewish community in Israel. Whereas the revolution in relations between Catholics and Jews happened where Christians are the majority and Jews a marginal minority, in Israel, Jews are the overwhelming, dominant and empowered majority whereas

Catholics are a small, marginal minority. In some circles, particularly among religious ultra-nationalist Jews, a teaching of contempt towards Christians is widespread. This is based both upon religious ideas of exclusivism and supremacy as well as centuries of suspicion because of Christian hostility to Jews. Hate crimes against Muslims and Christians, defacing places of worship and cemeteries, anti-Muslim and anti-Christian graffiti had become common in the months leading up to the Papal visit.² Directly connected to the Papal visit, religious ultra-nationalist Jews began spreading rumors that the purpose of the Pope's visit was to take control of King David's Tomb on Mount Zion.³ Certain rabbis spoke out vociferously against the Pope and condemned Christians as idol worshippers, whose main interest was to take over the Holy Land. Local Catholic Church leaders constantly denied the claims of these ultra-nationalist circles.

During his visit to the Holy Land, Pope Francis followed the example of his predecessors, Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, in visiting both Muslim and Jewish shrines and leaders. Like them he paid his respects at the Dome of the Rock and at the Western Wall and he paid courtesy visits to the official Muslim and Jewish religious authorities. Those he encountered, both Muslim shaykhs and Jewish rabbis, lectured him in strong tones about how they see themselves and their enemies. These were words that sought to justify the speaker and those he was representing, projecting all darkness onto the other side of the wall. Wall discourse is very sure that there are in fact only two sides and the division between them is absolutely clear and well defined. The speakers seemed quite sure that God lives on their own side of the wall and shares their limited vision of the world and particularly of those on the other side of the wall. The rabbis the Pope heard from during his stay were Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, rabbi responsible for the Western Wall, who spoke at the Western Wall, and the two Chief Rabbis, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau and Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhaq Yosef, who spoke at the official reception for the Pope in the Chief Rabbinate. Interestingly, all three spoke without notes and official versions of their speeches were not published by the Israeli authorities. They all seemed to want to underline Jewish Israeli national identity, with one eye on the religious ultra-nationalist part of their constituency.

The Pope listened intently and seemed pained by the suffering of those addressing him, both Muslims and Jews. His words, though, were not an answer in kind but rather the attempt to show alternatives on a horizon, beyond the walls. Like them, he brought God into the picture, but not a God who is chained to a cause but a God who loves all God's children and is in pain that they seem to ignore the possibilities of encounter with one another. The Pope spoke not as a head of state nor as a diplomat but rather as a fellow believer, a humble friend, a brother, attempting to draw his hosts out of themselves so that they could gaze on the alternatives that their self-sufficiency, withdrawal and confidence in their own sense of rightness might be obscuring. Here we will mention only the speech at Yad VaShem and the encounter with the Chief Rabbis.

Israelis paid particular attention to the Pope as he made his way to Yad VaShem, the memorial to the six million Jews who perished during the Holocaust. Here Saint John Paul II had made a powerful impression on Jews all over the world. His words and his gestures there had been deeply appreciated. However, the visit of Pope Benedict XVI had been under the shadow of malicious rumors that the German pope had, as a boy, been in the Nazi youth movement. His magnificent discourse, only just ended, was violently attacked by Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi at that time Meir Lau. A general sense among Israelis was that Benedict had not expressed enough remorse and had not asked forgiveness. What would Pope Francis do here?

Nowhere was the direct implication of God in the Pope's speeches clearer during the pilgrimage than in the Pope's words at Yad VaShem. Here, the Pope met six survivors, presented to him, each with his or her story of tragedy. Inclining towards each one, the Pope kissed their hands, hands anointed by suffering, hands that pointed to what humans are capable of doing when idolatrous ideology takes God's place. His predecessors had addressed stirring words to the Jewish audience at Yad VaShem. Pope Francis introduced a new dimension to the visit: this was not a discourse to his Jewish brothers and sisters but rather, standing alongside them, he addressed his words to God. In this place, where many ask where God was at the time that so many millions were slaughtered like sheep, the Pope also gave God a voice. He reminded one and all, that in this place, it is not God who is absent but rather the humanity of the human person. The Pope gave a voice to an anguished, suffering God:

Adam, who are you? I no longer recognize you. Who are you, o man? What have you become? Of what horror have you been capable? What made you fall to such depths? Certainly it is not the dust of the earth from which you were made. The dust of the earth is something good, the work of my hands. Certainly it is not the breath of life which I breathed into you. That breath comes from me, and it is something good (cf. Gen 2:7). No, this abyss is not merely the work of your own hands, your own heart.... Who corrupted you? Who disfigured you? Who led you to presume that you are the master of good and evil? Who convinced you that you were god? Not only did you torture and kill your brothers and sisters, but you sacrificed them to yourself, because you made yourself a god.

His colloquy ended with a cry for mercy. The Pope had insisted that his was a pilgrimage, a religious and spiritual journey, and indeed at this place, commemorating the horror humans are capable of generating, the Pope directed the attention of all those who heard him to God. This, after all, is the primary role of a religious leader and a pastor. And, for those willing to hear, there was a universal dimension to this confrontation with the evil humans are capable of doing. At the Chief Rabbinate, the next stop after Yad VaShem, the Pope underlined again the theme of "possibility" if indeed this is a conversation among people of faith who trust in a God who is good:

*We need to do more than simply establish reciprocal and respectful relations on a human level: we are also called, as Christians and Jews, to reflect deeply on the spiritual significance of the bond existing between us. It is a bond whose origins are from on high, one which **transcends our own plans and projects**, and one which remains intact despite all the difficulties which, sadly, have marked our relationship in the past.... Mutual understanding of our spiritual heritage, appreciation for what we have in common and respect in matters on which we disagree: all these can help to guide us to a closer relationship, an intention which we put in God's hands.... May the Lord help us to walk with confidence and strength in his ways. Shalom!*

Bringing God into the conversation was a gentle and friendly reminder that self-sufficiency cannot be the path of a person of faith. Rabbi David Rosen, noted Jewish activist in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, lamented that, during his pilgrimage, the Pope had missed the opportunity of conducting an interreligious encounter, bringing Jews and Muslims together with Christians. He remembered that both Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI had participated in interreligious meetings in the Holy Land during their respective 2000 and 2009 pilgrimages. These meetings had been formal and highly planned encounters. However, in Jerusalem, both in 2000 and in 2009, the meetings had been upset by explosions of hurt and rage, which made the walls that loom between Palestinians and Israelis in the Holy Land only too evident. A calmer meeting in Nazareth in 2009 during Pope Benedict's pilgrimage had been organized by the Israeli authorities, gathering together Jewish, Muslim and Druze salaried workers of the government to promote the image that Israel was an interreligious haven. However, these meetings had done little to promote real interreligious encounter on the ground. Did Pope Francis indeed overlook the "possibility" of promoting interfaith dialogue or did he judge that nothing much could be done, in the light of the experience of his predecessors, to promote real dialogue?

While it is true that on this visit the focus was not interfaith but rather ecumenical dialogue, Pope Francis had two interfaith surprises in store for those who hosted him: The first surprise was revealed shortly before the pilgrimage set off: Pope Francis had decided to invite two friends, collaborators of his when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, to join the pilgrimage. The presence during the pilgrimage of Rabbi Abraham Skorka, rector of the Conservative Rabbinical Seminary, and Professor Omar Abboud, former secretary-general of the Islamic Center, gave an interreligious character to the entire pilgrimage. The peak moment with regard to his two friends was at the Western Wall. As the Pope ended his moment of solitary prayer in front of the towering Wall, he was embraced by his two friends. A pope, a rabbi and a Muslim embracing at this holy site: another image that opened up possibilities on the horizon beyond the walls. There were no words here but simply an icon of an alternative: fraternity, genuine and emotional. This alternative was offered to a world that has limited its thinking about the Holy Land to the walls that divide Jews, Muslims and Christians. This was in striking contrast with the discourse of Rabbi Rabinowitz, who had welcomed the Pope to the Wall with a rambling lesson in Jewish history.

The second surprise came when the Pope announced that he wanted to invite President Mahmoud Abbas and President Peres to an "encounter of prayer" in the Vatican.

All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers. All of us — especially those placed at the service of their respective peoples — have the duty to become instruments and artisans of peace, especially by our prayers. Building peace is difficult, but living without peace is a constant torment. The men and women of these lands, and of the entire world, all of them, ask us to bring before God their fervent hopes for peace.⁴

The "encounter of prayer" (later formulated as "an invocation for peace") would not take place in a land too divided by walls to make space for such an encounter but rather "in my home in the Vatican". What did the Pope have in mind in creating a new space for encounter in his home? This was not an attempt to upstage the political leaders of the world and their diplomatic initiatives but perhaps rather an attempt to open the horizon and bring God into the story. In a situation in which the political and diplomatic process is leading nowhere in the present, God might be able to reveal alternatives and possibilities of encounter beyond the walls. The word "God" is much heard in Middle Eastern discourse, a powerful support for the battles of the one who says the word "God" and a potent weapon against his enemies. Religion in the Holy Land too often plays the role of courtier at the court of the political authorities, not speaking as a prophet from the margins, critiquing the system, but rather mouthing a script written by the political authorities in order to make God to the line.

Pope Francis challenged this perception of religion's role. Can those who invoke God, come before God as Creator in thanksgiving, beg God's forgiveness in a sincere confession and intercede for all of creation, especially for those on the other side of the wall? Can the "God" used as an instrument to batter one's foe, manifest as the one Father of all God's children? Can the political dimension be energized by the religious dimension rather than attempting to colonize it and make it its own? Can the religious dimension, with its prophetic imagination, open up a vision of the alternatives on the horizon that the political dimension, enclosed in its walls, cannot even conceive of? Can religion contribute to tearing down the walls rather than encouraging building higher and higher walls of exclusivism, racism, discrimination and oppression?



Tearing down the political walls between Palestinians and Israelis

Pope Benedict XVI, at the end of his pilgrimage in 2009, pointed to the Separation Wall, which cuts through Palestinian territory, enclosing Palestinians and preventing their entry into Israel, as "one of the saddest sights for me during my visit to these lands"ⁱ. This Wall, justified by the Israeli authorities, who built it as a supposed necessity for the security of Israel, is only one of the walls that separates and divides, encloses and excludes in the Holy Land today. Walls are constructed in the Holy Land today out of fear and anxiety, out of jealousy and greed, out of vengeance and enmity. Children are educated about the importance of walls that ensure that each one stays in his own place. The "other", excluded by the walls, is encountered almost uniquely in speaking about him or her rather than encountering him or her directly. Suspicion and even contempt typically characterize the language used to talk of the other. True encounter with those on the other side of the wall is often beyond the imagination of those who live within walls. Yesterday and today, with their hurts and fears, prevent the possibility of imagining a tomorrow radically different from what is already known. These multiple walls, political, social, economic, ethnic and religious, define relations, or lack thereof, among Jews, Muslims and Christian, between Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs. The

walls, which limit the horizons, shut out alternatives, restrain creativity and suffocate generosity, blocking a vision of what might be possible on a horizon beyond the walls.

The arrival of Pope Francis in a land of walls raised levels of anxiety in Israel. He was already known to be a "trouble maker", who does not always respect walls. He had made statements and posed gestures that showed that he was drawn to a deep solidarity with the excluded and marginal. Before he arrived, Israeli security explained that the Pope's refusal of suffocating security measure meant that, in practice the world would have to be kept at an even greater distance than had been the case with his predecessors.

On the Wednesday before the beginning of his pilgrimage, Pope Francis told the crowds gathered for the weekly General Audience:

I will travel to the Holy Land, the land of Jesus. It will be a strictly religious visit. First, I will meet with my brother Bartholomew I, to mark the 50th anniversary of the meeting between Paul VI and Athenagoras I. Peter and Andrew will meet once again, and that is very beautiful. The second reason is to pray for peace in this land that has suffered greatly. I ask you for your prayers for this trip.

It is the second reason for the visit that creates the link between the religious and the political. When it came to the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the Pope was modest in outlining his objectives: this was a pilgrimage of a man of prayer. Indeed, no wand was waved by an all-powerful magician to make walls disappear. However, with determination and courage, Pope Francis did accomplish a spiritual assault on the walls behind which the residents of the Holy Land imprison and are imprisoned. The imagination of those who witnessed the Pope in action was expanded by a Spirit filled in-breathing that opened up a vision of alternatives on a horizon beyond the walls. Pope Francis did not come to impose but rather to propose a way of seeing, experiencing, listening, speaking and acting that enabled this vision of the alternatives to emerge on the horizon despite the confessional, religious, social and political walls in place. This discreet message was also directed at his hosts in Israel.

Despite his insistence that he came as pilgrim, the Pope's pilgrimage certainly had its "political moments", some discreet and some as "loud" as the trumpets blowing before the walls of Jericho. Some of these important "political moments" that were focused upon in Israel were the following:

- His reference to "the State of Palestine", broke with the hypocritical tendency of many countries, who say "the Palestinian Authority" rather than referring to Palestine as a state. On November 29, 2012, 138 countries had voted to recognize Palestine as a non-member state. This was an overwhelming majority and the Holy See, a non-member, had voiced support for this move. Few countries, however, acted consistently and called Palestine by its name, preferring expediently to follow the lead of two of the *states* who opposed the vote, the United States and Israel.
- Making his way to Manger Square for mass, the Pope stopped the Pope mobile and got out to pray at the Separation Wall, the huge concrete edifice built by Israel. This image of the pilgrim praying at this wall infuriated the Israeli authorities.
- Speaking from the heart, after hearing that the Israeli police had brutally removed a group of Christian Palestinians from a Jerusalem street corner, where they had gathered, hoping to see the Pope pass by, he added some words to his prepared homily at Gethsemane on the afternoon of May 26, 2014, expressing his proximity to the Christians in Jerusalem: "I would like to assure them that I remember them affectionately and that I pray for them, being well aware of the difficulties they experience in this city." In all these encounters, the Pope touched the political reality and gave voice to the cry for justice. He did not simply repeat well known formula for peace as do the political and diplomatic leaders who visit the area. He insisted, rather, on what the Biblical prophets repeat, justice and righteousness are necessary because without them there can be no real peace. "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. Peace, peace, they say, when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11).

After his visits to Jordan and Palestine, the Pope landed at Ben Gurion Airport in Israel, to be greeted by the Israeli authorities. The Pope, at every step along the way, respected his hosts and the protocol they imposed on him for the visit:

- He complied with the Israeli demand that he fly from Bethlehem to Tel Aviv rather than landing in Jerusalem directly.
- He agreed to lay a wreath at the tomb of Theodor Herzl, the late 19th century Jewish ideologue who had promoted the creation of a Jewish state, a feature of the protocol defined three years ago by the Israeli authorities for visiting heads of state. He also desisted from correcting his host, the Israeli Prime Minister, who implied in his welcoming words at the airport that the Pope had chosen to make this stop on the itinerary. There had been no choice rather the Pope respectfully accepted the protocol.
- He acceded to the insistence of Prime Minister Netanyahu that he pay his respects at the monument created to commemorate the victims of Palestinian terrorism. Netanyahu imagined this as a corrective to the image of the Pope at the Separation Wall in Bethlehem. Laying his head on the wall of this monument, he uttered his heartfelt condemnation of all acts of terrorism.

In all of this, the Pope was probably less concerned with political balance and diplomatic tightrope walking than he was about being a pilgrim and a pastor. This was about listening to his hosts, respecting them and then respecting them enough to speak the truth as he saw it.

When Pope Francis did speak, he spoke as a religious leader, trying to refocus attention on the horizon and the alternatives it offered to tear down the walls, focusing on possibilities rather than on the wounds of the past and the obstacles of the present. In his words to his Israeli hosts at the airport when he arrived, Pope Francis said:

Jerusalem, of course, means "city of peace". This is what God wills it to be, and such is the desire of all people of good will. Yet sadly Jerusalem remains deeply troubled as a result of longstanding conflicts. We all know how urgent is the need for peace, not only for Israel but also for the entire region.... I implore those in positions of responsibility to leave no stone unturned in the search for equitable solutions to complex problems, so that Israelis and Palestinians may live in peace. The path of dialogue, reconciliation and peace must constantly be taken up anew, courageously and tirelessly. There is simply no other way.

The Pope's insistence that there is no other way than peace is not the language of a seasoned diplomat or a savvy politician but rather the language of a wise man of God, who has familiar knowledge of the Creator and the Creator's desire for creation. The next day, visiting Mr. Shimon Peres, Israeli State President, the Pope continued on this line:

Peacemaking demands first and foremost respect for the dignity and freedom of every human person, which Jews, Christians and Muslims alike believe to be created by God and destined to eternal life. This shared conviction enables us resolutely to pursue peaceful solutions to every controversy and conflict.

He continued, also making discreet reference to the attacks against Muslim and Christian place of worship, saying:

There is likewise need for a firm rejection of all that is opposed to the cultivation of peace and respectful relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims. We think, for example, of recourse to violence and terrorism, all forms of discrimination on the basis of race or religion, attempts to impose one's own point of view at the expense of the rights of others, anti-Semitism in all its possible expressions, and signs of intolerance directed against individuals or places of worship, be they Jewish, Christian or Muslim.

Faced with walls, Pope Francis single mindedly presented a counter image: a horizon of alternatives, constantly opened up by the faithful God, whose love binds this wounded humanity together as brothers and sisters. On his return to Rome, he told the Wednesday general audience:

Another purpose of this pilgrimage was to encourage in that region the path to peace, which is at the same time gift of God and commitment of men. I did so in Jordan, in Palestine and in Israel. And I did so always as a pilgrim, in the name of God and of man, bearing in my heart great compassion for the children of that Land who for too long have coexisted with war and have the right to know, finally, days of peace!

Mission of the Church: Going beyond the walls

Despite the brevity of the visit, with its ecumenical focus, Pope Francis also came to the Holy Land as Pastor of his own flock. The homilies addressed to the Christian faithful were exhortations to them to be "salt and light" in their societies, promoters of the alternatives on the horizon, builders of bridges to replace the walls. He called on Christians to take up the yoke of discipleship and go out as witnesses to the Risen Lord, who unveils the horizons, pointing to the alternatives beyond the walls. Intimately and painfully aware of the constraints on Christian life in the Holy Land and throughout the region, the Pope insisted that the Christians carry out their mission with courage and joy.

Two extracts from the homilies delivered by the Pope focus on this mission of the Church in the Holy Land today, a Church that is nurtured by her prophetic imagination and is established to go forth, bringing down walls and pointing to the alternatives on a horizon opened up by God:

Let us ask the Spirit to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters, so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking, language, culture and religion. Let us ask him to anoint our whole being with the oil of his mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings and disputes. And let us ask him to send us forth, in humility and meekness, along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace (homily in Amman, 24.5.2014).

Here the Church was born, and she was born to go forth. From here she set out, with the broken bread in her hands, the wounds of Christ before her eyes, and the Spirit of love in her heart.... These horizons are opened up ..., the horizons of the Risen Lord and his Church homily in the Cenacle, (Jerusalem, 26.5.2014).

End Notes

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- 1) Pope Francis at the Invocation for Peace held at the Vatican on June 8, 2014 in the presence of Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.
- 2) These attacks, known as "price tag", were carried out by ultra-nationalist youth, protesting the call to dismantle certain illegal settlements in the West Bank.
- 3) King David's Tomb is the first floor of a three storied shrine that includes the tomb, the Room of the Last Supper (Cenacle) and the Room of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. Like his predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Saint John Paul II, Pope Francis celebrated mass in the Cenacle, which religious ultra-nationalist Jews presented as a contravention of the status quo in this Holy Place. The vitriolic campaign against any Christian presence on Mount Zion intensified before and during the Pope's visit.
- 4) Words of Pope Francis in Nativity Square on May 25, 2014. The invitation was repeated that same day at Ben Gurion Airport when the Pope arrived in Israel.
- 5) Address of Pope Benedict XVI at Ben Gurion Airport, May 15, 2009.

Ref.: *Al-Liqa' Journal*, Vol. 43, December 2014, pp. 84-100.

Shyny Joseph, SSpS

Trinity Inspired Ecospirituality Based on Biblical Sources

There are three dimensions of *koinonia* (communion/mutual participation) within Trinitarian life. We can see these three dimensions in God's relationship with the world. The first dimension of *koinonia* within the Trinity is the interchange of emptiness and immanence. Human beings and the entire creation can have their own reality due to the emptiness or absence of God. God does not interfere in their lives directly. Immanence comes from the very nature of God. The whole of creation is supported and maintained through the immanence of God. The second dimension of *koinonia* is the freedom within the three persons in the Trinity. Three persons have their own identity and they encounter each other in freedom. The same is applicable for human beings and other creatures. Two persons are not the same but we need to respect the other. The third dimension is the communion. The three divine persons are unique and at the same time there is communion within and among the three persons.¹ The Trinitarian God is a relational God and the three persons of the Trinity are in communion with each other. Thus, the very core of the Creator's being is relational and this relational aspect is found in His creatures too. Human beings and all other creatures are interrelated in the Universe.² For example "A carbon atom is part of a molecule, which forms part of a cell, which belongs to an organ, which is part of my body. I am part of a family, a human society and a community of interrelated living creatures on Earth. The Earth community depends on and is interrelated with the sun, the Milky Way Galaxy and the whole universe."³ This interrelatedness asks for eco-spiritual living. It gives us the message to get out of our selfishness and to care for every being.



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There is a mutual indwelling and communion in the Trinity. In John 14:10 Jesus says "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." In John 14:15-17 Jesus promises His Spirit to be with them forever. Divine communion is not limited to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but spirals out to all creatures.⁴ "All creation means an overflow of life and communion of the three divine Persons, inviting all creatures, especially human creatures, to also enter into the play of communion between themselves and with the divine Persons."⁵ This is seen in John 14:23 "Those who love me keep my word and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them." The communion of God is seen in the diversity of creatures in the universe.⁶ This communion derives from the desire of the three divine Persons to expand their communion on another level. It is different from the communion within the Trinity in the internal level. They act together in creation as the principle of life and love. "Each Person stamps creation with something of its own specific property. That is why creation is so rich because behind it and within it is hidden the wealth of each divine Person, as that Person is, ever distinct and ever in communion."⁷ There is a drive within creation towards union. This desire to be in union comes from the Trinity.⁸

The main question for this paper is what are the biblical sources of the Trinity that inspire eco-spiritual praxis and how could they be understood? I develop this research question

¹ Mark S. Heim, "Wounded Communion: Prophetic Dialogue and Salvation in Trinitarian Perspective," in *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue*, ed. Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans (London: SCM press, 2015), 136-148.

² Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth*, 80.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 71

⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 4.

⁶ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth*, 71-72.

⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 104.

⁸ Ibid.

in three parts. The first part deals with the Father who is the creator and sustainer of the universe. The second part focuses on Jesus who is an inspiration for eco spiritual commitment. The third part describe the life giving presence of the Holy Spirit as a model for eco-spiritual living.

1.1 Life of the Father an inspiration for ecospirituality

The Father is the creator. This image of God as creator is found in Genesis chapter 1 which depicts God as the creator of the whole universe and of all creatures in it. Since God is the Creator, human beings have a responsibility to honor creation. When we do not care for the environment and cause destruction, we are in a way dishonoring the creator.⁹ The Psalms too present God as creator. Psalm 115:15 says "May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth." The life of all creatures is sustained by Creator-God who creates fertility and blessing.¹⁰ The bible presents creation as praising the creator. We find in Psalm 148 all creatures worship God. In this Psalm more than thirty categories of creatures are mentioned and human beings are placed at the end of the Psalm just as in Genesis chapter one.¹¹ Through this Psalm the Psalmist invites us to join creatures worship and praise the creator. "The various creatures contribute to a symphony by being both individually different and mutually complimentary."¹² Creation also mourns in the scriptures. We see this mourning of creation in the books of Isaiah 24:4, Jeremiah 4:28 and 12:11, Hosea 4:3, Joel 1:10 and Amos 1:2. Jeremiah 12: 4 says "How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and birds are swept away and because people said, He is blind to our ways." Creation mourns due to the wrongdoings of human beings both towards flora and fauna.¹³ "The non-human creation mourns before God for the ways in which God's human creatures have polluted, degraded and destroyed it, in so many ways preventing it from being what God made it to be. Its very ruin is a lament to its creator."¹⁴ The non-human world reflects the glory of God as well as the ruins caused by the human beings.¹⁵

God delights in His creatures. Genesis 1:31 says "God saw everything that he had made and indeed, it was very good." "That conveys a sense of worth and value to each and every creature that cannot be matched by any human evaluation."¹⁶ There are millions of species in the universe. Many of creatures live in tropical rain forests. Due to deforestation and the loss of other habitats, many of the species are endangered or forced into extinction.¹⁷ "This can only be an affront to a God who delights in creatures in all their diversity and specificity."¹⁸ This divine delight embraces all the species of the universe.¹⁹ It comes from divine ecstatic nature. This ecstatic nature does not remain within the Trinity but it flows out to all creatures.²⁰ God can delight only when His creatures are happy, healthy and flourish in the universe.

We can see the image and likeness of the Trinity in all created beings.²¹ The image of the Trinity is seen in the multiplicity of creatures, colours, flowers etc. "Creation is God's masterpiece, a witness to divine presence and power."²² There is mystery in all beings. We cannot fully understand it. Each time we learn something more about somebody or something. This mystery comes from the mystery of the Father. The Father gives everything its beginning. In the same way every being gives birth to something new or becomes a cause of a created

⁹ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth*, 66.

¹⁰ Arthur Walker-Jones, *The Green Psalter: Resources for an Ecological Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 85.

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), 77.

¹² Ibid., 78.

¹³ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴ Ibid., 102.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 40.

¹⁷ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth*, 76.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 77.

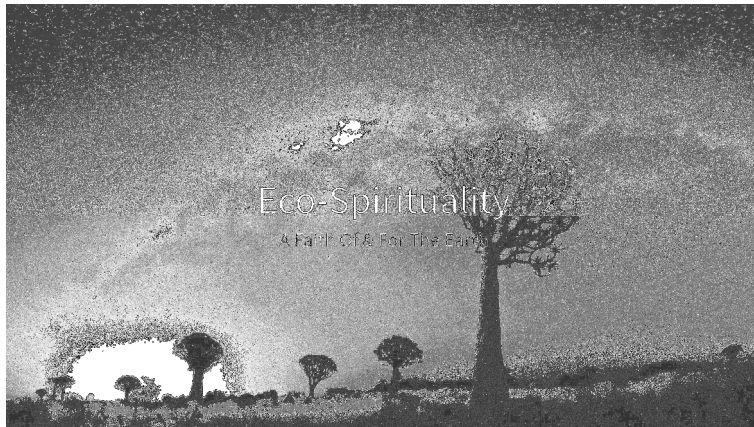
²¹ Ibid.

²² Dawn Nothwehr, "The Church's Mission of Ecojustice: A Prophetic Dialogue Approach," in *Mission on the Road to Emmaus: Constants, Context and Prophetic Dialogue*, ed. Cathy Ross and Stephen B. Bevans (London: SCM press, 2015), 87-105.

beginning. This reveals the Father who is the origin of every being yet without beginning.²³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, a systematic theologian speaks about "the role of the Father as the origin of creatures in their contingency, granting them existence, caring for them and making possible their continued life and independence."²⁴ The varieties of life-forms in creation describe the creative power of God. The Father loves the entire creation. There is no difference in the way Father loves His Son and His love towards creation. In fact, creatures experience the love of the Father through the Son.²⁵

1.2 Life of the Son an inspiration for eco-spirituality

John 1:14 says "the Word became flesh and lived among us." Jesus is the Word became flesh and therefore He is part of creaturely pattern of life. In this sense incarnation does not only speak about human reality of Jesus but also the whole of humanity embraced by God.



Incarnation even goes beyond humanity.²⁶ "In Jesus of Nazareth, God becomes a vital part of an ecosystem and a part of the interconnected systems that support life on earth."²⁷ Danish theologian Niels Gregersen point out that God enters into the life of creatures through the incarnation. God identifies the suffering and pain of creatures in the cross of Christ. In this time of ecological crisis, we need to reflect the meaning of God with us today in the person of Jesus.

God-with-us means today God is with all living beings.²⁸

Colossians 1:15-20 presents Jesus as the cosmic Christ stating, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ..." The hymn gives us the message that the whole of creation is integrated in Jesus Christ. "He is intimately related to the whole, and the meaning of the whole of creation consists in having Jesus Christ as its source, its focus, its healer and its goal."²⁹ Therefore we need to understand Jesus Christ in his relationship with God, creation and humans. We see enmity and violence in the world. This has something to do with 'powers' which means good and evil forces. The tangible forms of these forces are natural disasters, sickness, death etc. We see in the gospels Jesus pacify these forces. For example calming the storm in Mark 4:35-41. There are forces that are active in our world today which are responsible for the destruction of the world. For instance consumerism, economic and political systems which focus only on profit and development at the cost of the environment etc. Christ's pacification of such powers need to take place today through us as we strive to bring peace and reconciliation between humans and creation.³⁰

1.3 Life of the Holy Spirit an inspiration for eco-spirituality

The Holy Spirit is a "loving companion to each creature."³¹ Each creature exists in the universe because it is being encircled by the love of the Holy Spirit. It is expressed in the book of Wisdom 11: 24-12:1 "For you love all things that exist and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. How would

²³ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 106.

²⁴ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2:21 in Anne Hunt, *Trinity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 101.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 58.

²⁷ Ibid., 59.

²⁸ Ibid., 60.

²⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, 157.

³⁰ Ibid., 159.

³¹ Ibid., 42.

anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living. For your immortal spirit is in all things.” In other words God loves each creature and the Spirit of God is present in all the creatures.³² “The Spirit of God is the faithful companion to each creature, present to every creature in the universe, accompanying each with love, valuing it, bringing it into an interrelated world of creatures, holding it in the dynamic life of the divine communion.”³³ This is an invitation to care for each individual creatures and to see the Spirit of God present in them.³⁴

The Holy Spirit is also addressed as the “unspeakable closeness of God.”³⁵ We experience the unspeakable closeness of God when we stand before the mystery of the universe in awe and wonder. This awe and wonder is evoked in us when we observe the variety of flowers, birds, forests, creatures, colours etc. This closeness can also be experienced in loving friendship and a loving and caring presence in sorrow. We cannot limit the Spirit to human imagination and expectation. It is explained through an image of the wind. John 3:8 “The wind blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” The Spirit is present in the whole of creation.³⁶ “To be in communion with this Spirit is to be in communion with the whole of creation. To be a person of the Spirit is to share the Spirit’s love for the creatures that make up our earth community.”³⁷ In other words when we love creation, we are in a way loving God.

Creation is renewed through the Spirit. Psalm 104:30 says “when you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth.” Creation stands in need of renewal. The Spirit is the one who brings transformation to the creation.³⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, a Christian feminist theologian identifies “responsible care for the earth’s life as action that aligns human beings in cooperative accord with the renewing dynamism of God’s Spirit, a partnership crucial for the very future of the cosmos”.³⁹ The presence and power of the Spirit is experienced in the renewal of political and social structures, working against oppression of the poor, working for justice, peace, integrity of creation etc.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The interrelatedness of the Trinity reminds us that we need the other and the other needs us for our growth, enrichment and survival. To live a healthy life, we need clean air, clean water, clean surrounding, healthy food, good climate etc. To have all these, we need to be responsible for our actions. We cannot achieve it by ourselves. Everyone needs to cooperate to achieve this goal. For instance when we use fireworks, we are polluting the air of the whole surrounding. It has a negative impact on our neighbour. Therefore interrelatedness in the Trinity is an inspiration for eco-spiritual praxis by being sensitive, responsible and caring for creation.

We can say definitely that biblical sources of the Trinity inspire an eco-spiritual praxis. The challenge for Christians today is to learn, recognize and acknowledge the biblical sources about Trinitarian communion in creation and imitate this Trinitarian communion in their attitude and actions towards all creatures and the entire planet. Trinity inspired ecospirituality encourages us to protect all creatures by creating an atmosphere where they can grow and multiply. We need to plant trees and preserve water, We also need the sensitive use of natural resources etc. to create this atmosphere.

We live in a world of chaos because of the environmental crisis. Due to climate change, we see changes in the four seasons, even plants are confused. Flowers which are supposed to be blooming in March are blooming in January. The Holy Spirit is a God who brings order in the

³² Ibid., 42-43.

³³ Ibid., 43.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 12 in Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, 128.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 129.

³⁸ Patricia A. Fox, *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 125.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

chaotic world (Genesis1:2). To bring order to our earth today, we need to be Spirit-inspired persons. Like the Spirit of God, we need to value each creature in the universe. When we value something, we care for it and protect it. Our environment is in need of our care.

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