

# JIVAN

News and Views of Jesuits in India

February 2016



## *Ecological Conversion*

**Nepal: new Constitution**  
but religious freedom?

**New Education**  
Policy & implications

**Christians in Syria**  
interview

# Marked by Ashes

BY WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

Ruler of the Night, Guarantor of the day . . .

This day — a gift from you.

This day — like none other you have ever given, or we have ever received.

This Wednesday dazzles us with gift and newness and possibility.

This Wednesday burdens us with the tasks of the day, for we are already halfway home  
 halfway back to committees and memos,  
 halfway back to calls and appointments,  
 halfway on to next Sunday,

halfway back, half frazzled, half expectant,  
 half turned toward you, half rather not.

This Wednesday is a long way from Ash Wednesday,

but all our Wednesdays are marked by ashes —  
 we begin this day with that taste of ash in our mouth:  
 of failed hope and broken promises,  
 of forgotten children and frightened women,  
 we ourselves are ashes to ashes, dust to dust;  
 we can taste our mortality as we roll the ash around on our tongues.

We are able to ponder our ashness with

some confidence, only because our every Wednesday of ashes  
 anticipates your Easter victory over that dry, flaky taste of death.

On this Wednesday, we submit our ashen way to you —  
 you Easter parade of newness.

Before the sun sets, take our Wednesday and Easter us,  
 Easter us to joy and energy and courage and freedom;  
 Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth.

Come here and Easter our Wednesday with  
 mercy and justice and peace and generosity.

We pray as we wait for the Risen One who comes soon.

*Courtesy:* [www.journeywithjesus.net](http://www.journeywithjesus.net)



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I remember a young friend, a fine person who goes out of his way to help people, asking me if I could help him find out if he was really in love with this girl whom he met a few months ago.

After some 'research' I talked to him about the tell-tale signs and symptoms that psychologists say will reliably reveal if someone is truly in love. He was all attention.

The first one is 'This one's special' feeling. I asked him if he feels that this girl is unique - unlike any other girl whom he has met before. His eyes became radiant when he shouted, 'yes!' Does he feel that this girl is just perfect? He thought about it. Are there not major drawbacks, handicaps, shadows? He said, "No. Not at all."

After meeting this girl does he feel excited and at the same time disturbed and agitated? "Sometimes I feel full of energy and enthusiasm. But I am not eating or sleeping as well as before. I keep tossing in bed thinking of her," he said. What did he feel when he saw this girl talking to another young guy? "Oh, I panic." Why? "I'm afraid she might leave me for someone else."

What about his parents, especially his father with whom he didn't have a smooth relationship? "Everyone is against it. But I don't care. It is *my* life, isn't it? Who are they to choose my partner?"

Alright. How often does he think of her? "Hm... All the time, I think. Sometimes it looks as if I can't think of anything else." How often does he want to be with her? "All the time!" he laughed. What does he feel when he sees the girl with another young man? "I feel like picking up a fight with him." Is he possessive of her? "Yeah. If that is the term for it. I don't want ever to lose her."

What if she walks away some day, saying she is in love with someone else? "No, no. That won't happen. I'm sure of that." That's okay. But what if? "I don't want to think about it. I guess there will be no point in living if that happens."

What if her parents and siblings stand in the way? "I'll take care of that. I will do anything for her. Did you hear me? *Anything.*" What happens when she is sick, when she cries about something? "Oh, I feel like crying, I feel as if I am sick."

Has he changed in any way after he met her? "In many ways. My hairstyle has changed. The way I dress has changed. Now I prefer the colours she likes. Earlier I'd go to bed around one or two in the morning. Now I go to bed early, because she wants me to."

Have they gone out together? Have they hugged, kissed..? "Sure. But not as often as I would wish." Can she kiss others? "No way. No, no." Is sex the most important thing for them? "It is important, obviously. But that is not the most important thing. I want her to be happy."

I told him with a smile that it is pretty certain that he *is* in love. When he thanked me and walked away, it looked to me as if he was on cloud nine. For quite a few months after that meeting, he seemed to be a totally new person, with an enthusiasm and energy that galvanised him. When he was not talking excitedly he was singing or whistling a song.

So I knew something was dreadfully wrong when he came after nearly a year to say that it is all over. She told him to forget her because it wouldn't work out. After that he looked weary, terribly exhausted. All the enviable energy was gone. Whatever I tried to say he was cynical. He had lost hope.

I thought of him whenever I read of some individuals in the Gospels. The man who told everyone that he found the Messiah. The men who left everything, their boats, their nets, their families, all for the sake of this person whom they met. The woman who left her water jar and ran into the town to tell everyone of the man she had met at the well. The woman who rushed to a garden-tomb early on a Sunday morning, while it was still dark.

I thought of this young friend when I tried to fathom what could ail some of us Jesuits. It is simple. We have fallen out of love with the person who we thought called us - with the traditions and ways of the Society. If only we could fall in love once again!

Didn't Arrupe say, "Nothing is more practical than... falling in Love?"

How about coming up with something like Valentine's Day to coax us to fall in love all over again?

- M.A.J.A.



**GC 36 should lead us  
to an  
ECOLOGICAL  
CONVERSION**

BY LEO D'SOUZA, SJ

### Introduction

When Fr Adolfo Nicolás SJ, our Superior General, invoked the 36th General Congregation, he had asked all Province and Regional Congregations to respond to the question: "What do we discern to be the three most important calls that the Lord makes to the whole Society today?" Among the responses that were received to this question and synthesized by the *Coetus Praevius*, the care for our common home takes an important place. There is also a call to deepen the integration of our spiritual experience. Instead of considering these as two different issues both could be seen as one – following the call of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si* - to put God back into the environment.

### The Ecological Crisis

Ecology was a subject of study for biology students with no practical applications for daily life. The books *The Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and *World Without Trees* by Robert Lamb shocked people. When it was noticed that large tracts of forests had been cut down for various needs, especially for the fast growing industries, and rivers were being polluted by the effluents from these industries, a worldwide awareness was created about the possible consequences of these human intrusions into nature.

As a first reaction tree planting programmes were initiated and exercises to clean rivers were started. But people soon realized that such efforts were of not much use as these touched the consequences and not the causes of environmental destruction. The trees continued to be cut and rivers continued to be polluted in spite of national and international programmes.

It is now recognized that environmental problems have economic,

social, political and cultural forces at their origin. Only by taking these into consideration ecology acquires its full human scope. Therefore biologists, sociologists, economists and politicians have reflected on the causes of the problem and have come out with various solutions. Most countries have ministries to take charge of environmental issues. National and international bodies are holding conferences and proposing solutions to check deterioration of the environment. But in spite of all these efforts the situation has been steadily deteriorating. The Global Biodiversity Outlook report states, "Despite numerous successful conservation measures supporting biodiversity, none of the specific targets were met, and biodiversity losses continue. Despite an increase in conservation efforts, the state of biodiversity continues to decline, according to most indicators, largely because the pressures on biodiversity continue to increase."

Pope Francis confirms this in his recent encyclical, *Laudato si*. He says, "The international community has made little progress in protecting biodiversity, stopping desertification, or reducing greenhouse gasses because of a lack of political will. What agreements have been made have been poorly implemented." In a recent report which comes a month ahead of the climate summit in Paris, Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary, UN Framework of Climate Change (UNFCCC) warns that "the world needs to do much more to keep a tab on global warming as voluntary contributions pledged by countries to cut carbon emissions will not help in maintaining global temperature rise under 2 degree Celsius by year 2100"

### Reasons for the crisis

The reason for this failure is because what has been undertaken, though much, has touched only the consequences and not the root causes of environmental degradation. It is imperative therefore to pay attention to the root causes three of which are refusal to be a creature, selfishness and consumerism.

**Refusal to be a creature:** God made man according to his own likeness. Man, however, wanted to be not just like God but to be God himself. This was Adam's temptation and the temptation of all of us, his children. To consider ourselves to be Gods, our own masters. to decide what is good and not good is the primieval temptation of humankind. Giving in to this temptation man has decided, for example, which plants are good and which are not good from his point of view. The latter are termed weeds and destroyed to make way for the former which are tended with care. Forests are destroyed to grow cash crops of economic value. Similarly industries today use the various elements of the earth to manufacture products, although in the process, the waste which is generated pollutes soil and air, resulting in climate change. The rich and the powerful decide their priorities unmindful of how these decisions affect the poor in terms of their livelihood and welfare. By playing God, man has rejected or he has forgotten the truth that he is a creature. When a man gives up the humility of admitting this truth, he loses the bond of peace with the creator, with himself, with other men and with the rest of the creation. Even when trying to solve the crisis we humans feel that we can do it without God. According to William Byrne, 'the tragedy of *Laudato Si*' is that Pope Francis suggests that we seek God's help to save the earth.'

**Selfishness:** This is at the heart of the environmental crisis. The "me, mine, don't care for others" mentality is very widespread today at the

personal, community, national and international levels. The refusal to sign international treaties on climate change, the refusal to accept refugees out of fear that their economies and comforts will be jeopardized are just two examples of this mentality. The “not in my backyard” attitude to deal with waste by throwing it in the

philosophy of life which advocated the idea: “Eat, drink and make merry. Tomorrow we may not live”. Living for today using as much of the world’s resources without a thought for tomorrow has been man’s way of thinking and acting. It is the present day culture of the supermarket which offers goods which are not really

economy. Products that didn’t exist so many years ago are offered today by the industry as basic indispensable necessities.

We religious too are children of this world that bombards us with such messages and we imbibe these values. The craze for the latest electronic gadgets especially to access social



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neighbour’s property or persuading poor countries to accept medical, electronic and nuclear waste for a fee, destroying agriculture produce in order to keep up prices are a few others. When persons and nations hoard things for themselves and refuse to share the goods of the earth with others at the personal or community levels, this greed leads to exploitation and injustice. Selfishness, of course, is subtly practiced and is never publicly accepted even by us, religious. It needs a lot of discernment and honesty to pin point and accept areas of selfishness in our personal and community lives.

**Consumerism:** This is one of the important causes for degradation of the environment. The author of the Book of Wisdom warns the Jews living in Alexandria against the prevailing

needed.

Television promotes consumerist and hedonistic values that are destructive of life, community and the environment. It promotes a mentality that fails to promote genuine human growth. Victor Lebo, an American retailing analyst, said in his paper, “Price Competition in 1955, “Our enormously productive economy ...demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.” Much of the world has followed the Americans. Our consumer culture has developed in lockstep with our consumer

media is concrete and widespread even among the religious today.

So what should GC 36 call us to?

#### **Ecological conversion**

No crisis of the present magnitude can be resolved without supernatural means. The Christian response, as noted by John Paul II and clearly declared by Pope Francis, is an ecological conversion, “whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them”. According to the Thomas Reese, SJ, “a systematic overview of the crisis from a religious point of view is the greatest contribution of *Laudato Si* to the environmental dialogue. Until now, the environmental dialogue has been framed mainly with political,

scientific and economic language. With this new encyclical, the language of faith enters the discussion—clearly, decisively and systematically”.

### **Jesuit Commitment to Conservation**

Long before the slogans of today like the environment and conservation were heard of, Jesuits have been

**Pumping more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere must be seen as a denial of Christ - a denial of the meaning of all that we celebrate when we gather for the Eucharist.**

proactive in their love and respect for the environment. Jesuits all over the world, starting right from St Ignatius, have been men with a deep love and respect for nature which they have imbibed from the Spiritual Exercises. It starts with the meditation of the Principle and Foundation and ends with the crowning ‘contemplation for obtaining love’. Jesuits have their own ‘environment saint’ - Joseph Anchieta of Brazil called “Adam before the fall” because of his ability to communicate with animals, birds and even reptiles.

The early Jesuits who went to evangelize the new world were not satisfied with only the preaching of the Gospel. They were also engaged in studying the geography of the land, tracing the rivers to their origin, cataloguing the plants and animals

and noting how the natives used them for food or medicine. In undertaking such tasks they were confronted not only with hardships of the unknown terrain but also the opposition of the tribals which resulted in some of them being brutally killed. Jesuit missionaries took sides with the natives who were being exploited and

institutions have green initiatives like tree planting, water harvesting, waste management. Retreat centres offer eco retreats and ecospirituality programmes.

### **Jesuits too need conversion**

All this is laudable. But a hard look shows that these activities and projects have not touched the heart



robbed by the colonial invaders by organizing cooperative agriculture and marketing. This was done even at the expense of the Society being suppressed by powerful and influential forces accusing the Jesuits of sedition.

In India several Jesuits have engaged themselves in the multifaceted issues of environment. Most provinces have an ecology commission which is expected to supervise, monitor and guide ecological initiatives in the province. Some of the important areas of Jesuit contribution have been taxonomy, biodiversity, ethno botany which are the foundations needed for conservation and large scale multiplication of local endangered plants for afforestation of degraded areas, and bioremediation. Most

of the matter. They have not resulted in conversion of the heart. We have not got out of our comfort zones. Our personal life styles have changed very little. We cannot certainly claim to be living a simple life. Avoiding vehicles for covering short walkable distances, rational use of water, minimizing waste generation, careful use of energy all of which were suggestions made in earlier Jesuit documents, have not yet become a part of our way of life. We need to move from the admiration that causes the fascinating action of the Creator God to engagement, and to the radical life expected from a disciple of Jesus.

There is no such conversion if it does not involve a transformation of our lifestyles, of our personal behavior. In a world where poverty

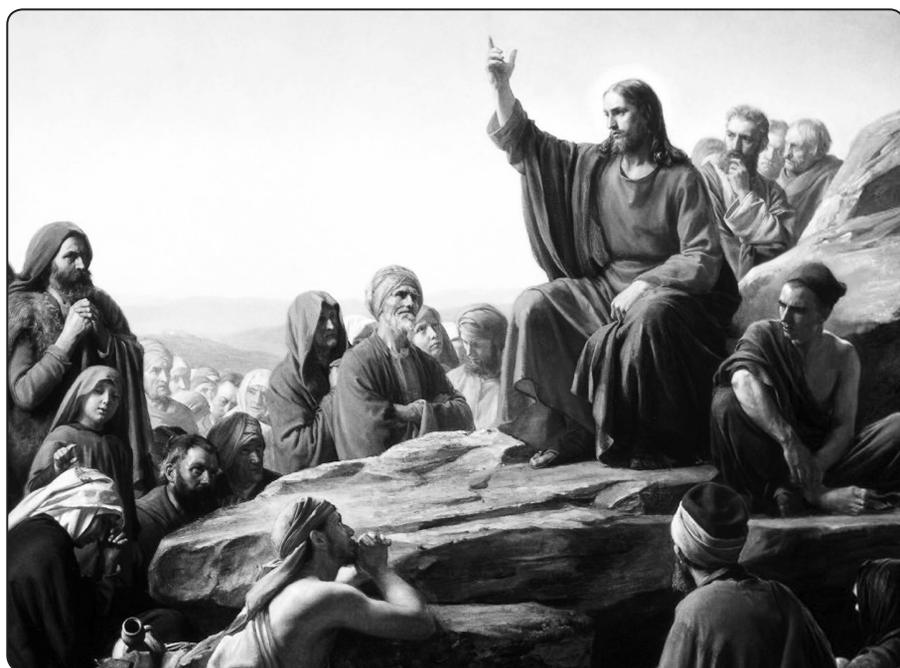
affects the lives of millions we still live a fairly secure and comfortable life little concerned about the poor. Pope Francis has called for a poor Church for the poor. Poverty, voluntarily chosen by an opulent Church, will be an act of solidarity with world's teeming millions of poor and a protest against the poverty that is forced on them? But for this to happen we need a change of heart. We need a heart that sees and feels what is happening around us. Merely offering economic, social

Three important religious apps (to use a modern terminology) are available for us that can help in this journey of conversion. These are sources that we have but are not using to bring about a conversion of heart.

**Daily office:** Most Religious gather twice a day and pray the psalms, and other prayers, as a community. We Jesuits are expected to fulfil this obligation in private. These psalms constantly allude to the power, grandeur and sacredness of God's creation.

struggles and joys, a God whose love is poured out in a special way through the sacraments.

The celebration of the Eucharist is inherently connected with the care of creation. Tony Marzurkiewicz O. Carm. says in his book, *A Look at the Carmelite Tradition and the Call for Ecological Consciousness*, "Wilfully contributing to the destruction of the species or to pumping more and more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, must be seen as a denial of Christ. It



**Most of us do not see the connect between our religious duties and the environment and hence do not think of making environmental matters a subject of our preaching.**

or political, not even moral guidelines is going to bring about this change of heart.

This is a long struggle which needs much more than human good will. We have destroyed this world made by God and are trying to set it right without His help. We have to put God back into the environment to set it right. We can awaken our hearts and move towards an "ecological conversion" only if we see the intimate connection between God and all beings, and more readily listen to the "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor," says Pope Francis.

#### **Helps for conversion**

This prayer could serve to evoke reverence and respect for the goodness of God's creation. Moreover, a religious' commitment to contemplative prayer and silence affects how we view and relate with the world around us. Fr. Ernie Larkin, a Carmelite spiritual writer, said, "that with minds and hearts renewed, this prayer of hope has the potential to expand our horizons and inspire us to think of new and more innovative ways to address the threat to the ecosystem".

**Daily Eucharist:** Ignatius places the Eucharist at the centre of our life. Participating in the Mass is about recognizing God amidst our daily

is a denial of the meaning of all that we celebrate when we gather for the Eucharist. In the same way that the Eucharist is the lifting up of creation to God, so too is our respect and responsibility for God's creation. When we make memory or "anamnesis" in the liturgy we journey through God's immediate presence. We gather up all of creation and pray for transformation through, with and in Christ". When we recite the Lord's prayer "Give us today our daily bread" our prayer will be effective only if we have the humility to align ourselves not with just other human beings but bond ourselves with all creatures looking to the Father

for their daily nourishment. “*Oculi omnium in te sperant, Dómine: et tu das illis escam in témpore opportúno*.” The dismissal at the end of the mass is a call to gather whatever we have experienced during the celebration and to apply it to our day to day duties in the world and to engage ourselves in the challenges facing the world.

**The Pulpit:** We are called today to challenge the human race to ground itself and embrace the ecological crisis as we know it. Jesuits have faced

sinner. So even in this case he wishes that he turn back and live. This is the Christian basis and of hope. We have to share this hope with others through our preaching.

Today we need people who do not just bemoan the destruction of the environment but who instil hope. Most of us do not see the connect between our religious duties and the environment and hence do not think of making environmental matters a subject of our preaching. We still live

deserts and rivers being dried up. He also instilled hope in them that if they return to God, He would restore the fruitfulness of the earth. It is GOOD News when we speak of hope in the face of the world’s despair, when we stand in solidarity with marginalised or suffering people so that they know they are not abandoned on the cross, when we insist that creation belongs to God and is not for human domination or exploitation.

**Conclusion**

**What is needed now is a strong and persistent voice of prophecy like that of Elijah, calling people back to a true and authentic relationship with creation.**



such challenges and paid for it with their lives and even at the expense of being suppressed. We are not alone in facing the challenge. God is with us and offers us a path of hope in love. God who willed and called into being all living things, did not stop to love and allow their continuance. Not man who is evil enough to destroy creation is the Lord of creation but God who wills life – man’s life and the life of all creatures. He does not allow himself to say no to his creation, not even because of man who has introduced in the creation, which is in itself good, the seed of evil and destruction. God does not wish death, - not even that of the

in the assumption that environment and religion are two different issues. Lecturing and writing articles about the environmental is fine but preaching from the pulpit? We subscribe to what an On- line Catholic journal has recently written: “the Christian world view is not about saving the earth but in saving souls”.

What is needed now is a strong and persistent voice of prophecy like that of Elijah, calling people back to a true and authentic relationship with creation. He constantly warned the people that their going away from God has resulted in the earth being scorched, fertile land being turned into

In his letter ‘Our mission today’ Fr Kolvenbach wrote “In spite of all that has been done to spoil the environment there is still hope. God so loved the world that he sent his own son to redeem it”. We need to awaken this hope in ourselves through our spiritual renewal using the daily office and the daily Eucharist and to share this hope with others through our preaching.

How do we respond? How will the GC 36 respond? ■

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BY VICTOR EDWIN, SJ

Recently I visited the dargah of Hazrat Inayat Khan in Delhi after a long time. Though I have gone to the shrine on earlier occasions, this time was very special, as I contemplated the mysticism of Hazarat Inayat Khan who emphasized unity of religions and pursued universal form of religiosity (Cf. J. Slomp, *The Sufi Movement: East and West*, [Hyderabad: Henry Martyn Institute, 2014]). Sitting there for a long time, I felt peaceful. I enjoyed inner peace that gave me much consolation.

While in the metro to get back home I was thinking of the many shrines that bring people of different religious traditions without any discrimination. I am amazed at the power of saints who make all people 'feel at home' and experience peace. I am of the opinion that these shrines could be an important places where interfaith relations between Christians and Muslims could be nurtured and strengthened.



## Oases in the desert

saint to come to their help in times of drought in the 13th century A.D the Muslims in the 18th century invoked the blessings of a Christian saint for sight for the blind. Ayyub al-Ansari was the standard-bearer of Muhammad and St Thomas was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus.

There is another beautiful shrine where Muslims and Christians go to revere the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a shrine in the vicinity of Ephesus, located on Mt. Koressos, Turkey. This shrine maintains a steady flow of pilgrims - both Christians and Muslims. Catholic and Muslim pilgrims visit the house because of their belief that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was taken to this stone house by St John, one of the apostles of Jesus and that she lived there till the end of her life on earth.

We Asian peoples find it easy to recognize holiness

**Shrines like these bring people together and instill in them a sense of the oneness of humanity.**

Take for instance, the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad's standard-bearer Ayyub al-Ansari (d.678 C.E.). It was said to be an important place of pilgrimage for Christians those days. A 13th century report relates that whenever the region suffered drought the Byzantines opened the tomb and prayed to the Muslim saint who lies buried there for rains, usually with success (Cf. David Thomas, *Early Muslim Relations with Christianity*, Anvil Vol.6, No.1 (1989): 23-31).

In the Indian subcontinent it is reported that the burial place of St Thomas was a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. Muslims believed that praying at the tomb of would heal blindness (Cf. S. Bayln, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings - Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700 -1900*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 260-261).

When Byzantine Christians invoked a Muslim

in the 'other'. We reach out to shrines which are considered 'holy' without bothering much about borders and boundaries that separate the religious groups. While visiting these shrines one recognizes that every human person searches for healing, inner peace, and unity. The holy men who lie buried are channels of the grace of God who does not discriminate on the basis of religion. Just like God the saints too do not discriminate in terms of religion.

Shrines like these bring people together and instill in them a sense of the oneness of humanity. Such shrines are really oases in the desert of religious bigotry as they heal humanity from every evil that divides people. May these shrines and those who visit these shrines promote harmony and peace in our world today! ■

*Fr Victor Edwin, SJ, teaches Islam at Vidyajyoti College of Theology at Delhi.*

## Despite new Constitution, Nepal still lacks full religious freedom



BY PRAKASH KHADKA

*(Prakash Khadka is a Catholic peace and human rights activist as well as the Nepal representative of Pax Romana, the international Catholic movement for intellectual and cultural affairs.)*

As a member of Pax Romana, I had the opportunity to be at the U.N. building in Geneva at the same time as Nepal's deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa was telling the world body that our country's new constitution allows for full religious freedom.

This is the same Thapa who had strongly opposed secularism and demanded a full restoration of the monarchy and a Hindu kingdom before joining Nepal's new government last October.

Despite what Thapa might have told this international audience, the reality on the ground in our Himalayan nation is that secularism is not readily embraced and that there remains serious constraints on religious freedom in our country.

Nepal was declared a secular state in 2007 when it abolished its 240-year-old monarchy. The state then promulgated an interim Constitution and only introduced the new Constitution in October.

Prior to the promulgation of the Constitution, three Christian churches in Jhapa, eastern Nepal, were bombed and Nepalese Christians were threatened by pro-Hindu groups to either leave the country or convert to Hinduism. Pro-Hindu groups also clashed with police on the streets.

Some media, political parties and Hindu leaders even tried to define secularism as a solely Christian agenda. Such were the veracity of accusations that it led to the cancellation of Cardinal Fernando Filoni's visit to our country last year. The Vatican official overseeing the church's missionary activities across the globe wanted to meet with earthquake victims.

With the new Nepalese Constitution finally in place, many minority religious leaders believed that the battle in Nepal for secularism and freedom of religion has been won. But Christian leaders see secularism, as it is used in the Constitution, as not being authentic. Moreover, there are parts in the constitution that indirectly restrict freedom of religion.

Article 26 for example says "no person shall ... convert a person of one religion to another religion ... Such an act shall be punishable by law."

A close pastor friend of mine, Tanka Subedi, said this means that freedom to choose a religion has been legally criminalized and constitutionally banned even though secularism has been declared.

Based on a report prepared by one of Pax Romana's thematic working groups and made in consultation with various religious minorities, various issues that needed to be addressed in the constitution came to light.



Apart from some Hindu organizations, there are no provisions for religious institutions or associations to register legally. This has caused difficulties for religious communities to manage their physical assets.

There have been various social

**Hindu hardline groups in India have created an undeclared trade blockade, which is immoral, considering how the country is still trying to recover from last year's earthquake.**

and cultural complications reported where there is interreligious marriage or members of same family professing different faiths. Without a religious commission to manage such situations, there are risks of intensifying social complexities.

Christians and some from other religious minorities are facing difficulties acquiring proper burial grounds.

Article 4 of the constitution, provides a narrow and ambiguous

definition of secularism and therefore, there is no guarantee of freedom of religion.

There are serious concerns about freedom of conversion and how this affects religious priests, monks, imams

**Prior to the promulgation of the Constitution, three Christian churches in Jhapa, eastern Nepal, were bombed and Nepalese Christians were threatened by pro-Hindu groups to either leave the country or convert to Hinduism.**

or pastors. Clause 2 of Article 26 of the Nepalese Constitution has declared legal punishment to those who facilitate the conversion process and hence strictly prohibits freedom of choice of religion as provided by first clause of the same article.



Part of the problem with the new constitution is that the word 'secularism' has been hijacked. The concern is that 'secular' is being used to mean the protection of Sanatan religion and culture.

Generally, the word *Sanatan* is understood to be a Hindu term. Therefore, there is a big question mark as to whether this word also includes protecting Nepal's minority religions.

Not that another Hindu-majority

country such as neighboring India is able to appreciate this ambiguity. Enraged by the idea of Nepal's secularism, Hindu hardline groups in India have created an undeclared trade blockade, which is immoral considering how the country is still trying to recover from last year's earthquake. Much of Nepal's imports enter the country via India, a large country that surrounds Nepal on three sides.

While the Indian government has categorically denied a hand in the blockade of essential supplies, we must not forget that our neighbor is ruled by a party that is closely linked to groups wanting to turn secular India into a Hindu theocratic state.

Nepalese politicians are very good at playing with and twisting words that could be used here with 'Sanatan'. Politicians are obligated to declare Nepal a secular state - especially for an international audience — but the fear is that the government could still favor Hinduism at the expense of other

faiths.

A Constitution needs to be the foundation of the national legislature system and it should be written in simple and clear language so everyone can understand and appreciate it.

The fact that our Constitution makes it illegal to change one's faith also needs to be addressed before our leaders can truly tell the world that freedom of religion exists in Nepal.

Source: UCAN



## New Education Policy - 2015

### *and its implications*



#### NEW EDUCATION POLICY

The Government of India (GoI) has come up with a draft of its 'New Education Policy' (NEP -2015). It has invited feedback on the proposed policy. What should be our response? Do we understand the implications of the policy before we articulate our response?

Jesuit Council for Education, Research and Training (JCERT), Loyola College of Education (LCE), Chennai and Secondary Education Commission (SEC) of the Madurai Province, jointly organized a one-day symposium on 29 Nov '15 at LCE on the New Education Policy (NEP). The aims were to examine the themes formulated by the GoI for consultation of school education, to formulate informed/enlightened responses on selected themes in the policy consultation document for school education, identify concerns that need further attention, deliberation and research and conscientize/enlighten other stakeholders, beneficiaries regarding this. There are 13 themes and 88 questions for school education in NEP.

#### EVOLUTION OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

The Indian Constitution mandates the Indian state to "provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years" (Art. 45, Part IV). This is to be done within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution (by 1960). Unnikrishnan judgement – 1993 further clarifies that Art. 45 in part IV has to be read in 'harmonious construction' with Art. 21 (Right to Life) in Part III of the Constitution. Right to life loses its significance without education. So Art. 45 has acquired the status of a fundamental right.

Initially evolved to fulfil the constitutional mandate, educational policies have undergone drastic changes down the decades after Independence. We can see this in three stages.

**I Stage (1947 – 1968): A Social Welfare State:** A vast network of schools as public institutions, funded by the State, was started. A few private philanthropic schools were also permitted. Fee-charging private schools slowly emerged. Kothari Commission (1964-66), an important milestone in education policy conceived education as a critical socio-political process for building citizenship for a democratic, egalitarian, just and secular society. It recommended education to be transformed to be a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformations. Education should aim to promote democratic values such as scientific temper of mind, tolerance, respect for the culture of other national groups and so on.

**II Stage (1969 – 1990):** Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the then PM of India, promulgated the National Education Policy in 1986. In the context of neo-liberalization, several trends emerged such as:

- Institutionalizing multiple parallel layers within the school system
- Credibility of the public school system destroyed

- Education viewed as literacy, numeracy skills and not a process of unleashing the human potential
- Ministry of Education changed to HRDM (Human Resource Development Ministry)
- State's acceptance of the pro-market agenda in education
- Excuse for non-performance because of lack of resources due to lack of priority in the ruling class agenda for mass education

**III Stage 1991 to date:** Education was tailored to meet the demands of global capital. It became a market oriented system and a commodity in a multi-layered schooling system. It became a means of building a slavish skilled workforce for the global market.

The previous Congress (UPA) regime at the centre tried to put education in the right track through the **Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE)**. It firmly declared that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain norms and standards.

**RTE provides:** Free, compulsory education in a neighbourhood school - Obligation of the Government to provide free elementary education - Appointment of appropriately trained teachers. RTE prohibits: Physical punishment and mental harassment - Screening procedures for admission - Capitation fee - Private tuition by teachers - Running of schools without recognition

It declared that all private schools are to reserve 25% of seats for the underprivileged and the Government will reimburse their fees.

#### Five years after the RTE Act:

- 90% of the country's 1.2 million Government schools are non-compliant with infrastructure norms and standards.
- 6 million children are still out of school.
- 41% of students drop out before completing VIII.
- There is still a shortage of 500,000 school teachers.

**Recent Trends:** The BJP government at the Centre reduced the overall education budget from Rs. 82,771 crores to Rs. 69,074 crores in the last budget. It began to use education as a powerful tool to spread communal poison in the society by injecting it into the curriculum, replace Indian history with Hindu mythology and Indian philosophy with Hindu theology. This is the context in which this New Education Policy is being brought about.

NEP-2015 aims "to meet the changing dynamics of the population's requirement with regard to quality education, innovation and research, aiming to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate the shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry".

#### THEMES AND ISSUES FOR NEP:

There are 13 themes and 88 questions, listed in NEP -

2015 for public discussion. The themes are: Learning outcomes in elementary education, Extending the outreach of secondary/senior education, Vocational education, Reforming examination system, Training for quality teachers, Open Schooling System, Use of ICT in education, New knowledge and new pedagogies, School management system, Ensuring inclusive education, Promotion of languages, Comprehensive education, and child health. MHRD website contains all the details.

**CRITICAL LOOK AT THE NEP**

The present central government, led by Modi's BJP, has been losing its credibility day by day. In any document coming from the Central Government, certain trends are clearly observed. Educators who don't subscribe to BJP's Hindu-nationalistic ideology agree that NEP is a project of saffronization and neo-liberal economic policy. It will lead to market oriented commoditization of education. NEP has been prepared with a Brahminical mind set to maintain the hegemony of the so-called upper castes. Let us now look at certain specific areas, found in the NEP.

**1. Quality:** The document says it is a multi-dimensional concept but boils down only to rankings – one dimensional. How quality is to be ensured while at the same time ensuring quantity (access to a large mass) and equality of educational opportunity are not addressed at all. Quality is seen only from the viewpoint of parity with 'global' or international curricula, accreditation and rating by international rating agencies. Ranking system is to be developed for schools. Can a rural school/college working with first generation learners be compared to an urban school/college? What are the standards of comparison? Rating by international agencies goes hand in hand with GATS.

**2. Centralization:** It aims towards 'uniformity' across the country and centralization of syllabus. A new central agency will be set up for monitoring. We need decentralized, diversified strategies that take into account the multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-nationality character of our society.

**3. Corporatization:** General approach is managerial and not academic. It sees the problems mainly as an issue of managing education. Quantifiable outcomes by increasing productivity of

students is a highly corporatized outlook. There is very little discussion on content and pedagogy. Corporatization is part of the communal agenda of NEP. Instead of forming conscious citizens, it aims to create a skilled labour force.

**4. Expansion and equality:** Education along the axes of social discrimination, especially gender, caste and religious minorities, and the need to expand on a large scale with a massive

**We need to view any policy that comes out from the perspective of the underprivileged majority of India.**

effort to bring in learners from these sections, is not even acknowledged seriously. Concerns of the deprived and the marginalized are never addressed.

**5. Industrial linkages:** The document articulates the society's concern about a large number of students coming out of the system 'unemployable' and about increasing irrelevance of educational content for working life but there is little depth in the solutions suggested. Branching into vocational stream after class 8 has socially divisive implications. Our society has ensured centuries of caste-based linkage to occupation, and so education needs to be an instrument to break such linkages and not renew them. It will be even a reintroduction of traditional caste-based occupations through vocationalisation of education from early childhood. It wants to ensure the safety of girl students through CCTV surveillance or to provide education through DTH at home, thus throwing girls back to the dark rooms of patriarchy.

**6. Cultural integration:** Secular nationalism that recognizes the multi-cultural, multi-regional aspects of the Indian nation is to be replaced by cultural nationalism. This is a majoritarian agenda. Instead of celebrating the rich cultural diversity of the country, it is an attempt at integrating it all into one unitary whole

as dictated by a majoritarian vision. In the name of cultural integration, there is an attempt to impose uniculturalism/ monoculturalism.

**7. Financing:** It proposes the formula of Public-Private Partnership. This will once again favour only the elites and the rich.

**8. Social Sciences:** Importance is given to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) education. Humanities are not important. In general, terms like social justice and accountability are reduced to management 'parameters'. The role of the academia in holding a mirror to society, in critiquing its functioning and in shaping it and its responsibility to society, are not even acknowledged.

**9. Technomania:** There seems to be an uncritical fascination with the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education and its 'deployment' in educational institutions. What about ensuring at least basic infrastructure for all the schools?

**10. Teachers:** NEP does not portray teachers in a dignified manner. With remarks such as 'they do not teach' a deep distrust of Indian teachers as a community is clearly seen in the proposed questions. Serious problems of the country in teacher education and empowerment are not even acknowledged.

**A Call for Action:**

We need to become united and committed educational activists for reviving and sustaining our secular democracy and so understand the communal context in which this policy is being introduced. It is now or never. Let us unitedly put up a brave fight against this hegemonic hindutva NEP and ensure the rights of the vast underprivileged masses for quality education and integral formation.

Speakers during the symposium included Dr. Venkatesh Athreya, former acting vice-chancellor of Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, Dr. V. Vasanthi Devi, former vice-chancellor of M.S. University, Tirunelveli, Prof. R. Ramanujam, Scientist, IMSc, Chennai and a few others. Principals, Head masters, school administrators, educationists, coordinators of education of different religious congregations and a few educational activists, totalling 281, participated in the symposium. - **S.M. John Kennedy, SJ**

*Fr S.M. John Kennedy is Director, JCERT, St Xavier's, Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu.*

# Grateful hearts & Wounded memories

BY EDWIN DALY, SJ

## A Forgiving Heart

I remember sharing with a Sister-Counselor how a near relative had hurt me in childhood. The Counselor listened to me intently. At the end of my story she asked, "Well, when are you going to forgive this person?" I at once remarked, "Oh, this person is dead long ago!" She replied, "He may be dead physically but he is very much alive in your memories and feelings. He is very much alive when you often transfer your strong feelings of anger onto some other, innocent person. Come on, let me hear you say to him in Christ's presence that you forgive him." "No problem", I said, "I have no difficulty giving forgiveness to him."

So, then and there I spoke my forgiveness to him. I felt absolutely nothing. Giving forgiveness was more like a school lesson reply. But from that day onwards for about two years afterwards I repeated my little prayer of giving forgiveness to him with Christ on the Cross. Slowly-slowly, as they say in Hindi, I experienced a quiet change in my behavior with everyone. For one thing I no longer erupted in anger when someone provoked me or contradicted me. Then one fine day at the Eucharist the Lord gave me a sign of great Peace. The thought came forcefully that I was truly healed of my hurt feelings and I was able thenceforth to help others who had wounded memories like myself.

Yes, I learned, when we forgive our enemies, truly we are children acting like our Heavenly Father. We forgive our enemies from our hearts. No strings attached. We do not judge the other's heart. We are obedient

to Jesus on the Cross when He gave general absolution to the entire guilty, human family. I noticed how St Paul responded so sharply to Christians in Corinth when they "played God" with their neighbor by judging their brothers and sisters. Paul says, "Do not judge before the time, until the coming of the Lord. He will bring to light whatever was hidden in darkness and disclose the secret intentions of all hearts." (1 Cor 4:5)

their wrongs, your Father in heaven will also forgive yours. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you either." (Mt 6:14-15)

Now that I am in "old age", the final part of our human pilgrimage, I see this as a precious opportunity peacefully to introspect and to retrospect. Old age is a very special time, free from routine tasks, in order that we can check on all of our past relationships. St Augustine expresses it beautifully when he says



**All of us must learn the evil in claiming to know the hidden motives of our enemies.**

And we can't forget the strong witness to forgiveness given us by Pope John Paul II. A few moments after he was gravely wounded by Ali Agca, he prayed while he was being driven to the hospital, "I forgive him from my heart!" Some time later, after he was discharged from the hospital, the Pope went to the jail to see his would-be assassin to show that he was indeed fully reconciled.

All of us must learn the evil in claiming to know the hidden motives of our enemies. After teaching us the Our Father, he says, "If you forgive others

that God wants all of our memories to be grateful memories. Prayerfully reviewing our lives, we may discover that we need inner healing. For successfully pursuing this we must collaborate with the Holy Spirit. We can do this by forgiving others the hurts that they have inflicted on us, even without realizing it. We must remember that the closer people are to us, the more easily they can deeply wound us, especially our feelings. "Wounded memories", if not healed, can severely hinder our present way of relating with others, including

with God.

While examining our wounded memories, we should think of all those people who knowingly or unknowingly have wounded us. We look first to folks in our family of origin - our parents, sisters and brothers, and those who have stayed in our families for some length of time. We remember all of them, near and far, alive or dead.

Loving people who have hurt us does not mean a feeling or an emotion. It means a firm decision. It essentially includes the desire to

(Lk 6:27-28).

In a world that grows more and more hostile to Christians, loving all, especially enemies, has become the most relevant ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18) - offering mercy to even those who seem hostile. Pope Francis who has declared a Year of Mercy says this world needs mercy more than anything else.

#### **Grateful Hearts**

Many believers - of whatever religion - have the practice once a day, usually at night, to briefly examine

are the object of such lies, are we not obliged to be grateful to them for helping us be more like Jesus? Our enemies are ever available to persecute us. So, in response, we rejoice always, we pray constantly and give thanks to God at every moment. This is God's will for us in Christ Jesus (1 Thes 5:16-19).

Therefore those who hurt us may reveal to us and remind us of Jesus whom we are called to follow. So, when we think of our persecutors, we need to ask, "Lord, who are you?" After Saul had been knocked to the ground



### **To become habitually cheerful, to be grateful for everything, even for those who hurt us, requires God's grace and plenty of efforts and examinations of spirit.**

wish the best to the other person and to do the best for that person. The Latin-origin words for this kind of wishing and doing are *benevolere* and *benefacere*. (From these Latin words come the English 'benevolent' and 'beneficent'.) The world-famous Alcoholics Anonymous use a term "tough love" - doing something that is necessary for the good of the person, although it may not be pleasant.

#### **Struggle to forgive**

This is not easy. In our pilgrim lives we struggle everyday to live Christ's Love-Command. As our Lord's disciples, the words of Jesus are part of our identity: to love as Christ has loved us (Jn 13:34-35). "I say to you who hear me, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who treat you badly

their consciences/consciousness. In the formula which I follow, my examination has as its first step to count the day's blessings one by one. This means we become aware of the blessings that God has given us since our last examination.

But most people will never think of thanking God for those who have hurt them. "How can I thank God for my persecutors. How can I be grateful to the Lord for sending into my life *this* person?"

The fact is our 'enemies' help us to become more mindful of what the Lord has suffered for us. He was often persecuted. He was called all sorts of dirty names. People who are vulnerable to Evil utter lies against innocent people, even those who sincerely live the truth with love for all. When we

outside Damascus, he called out these words. People of all ages cry out this same question. Jesus, the Risen Lord, answers us: "I am Jesus who, though persecuted in my sisters and brothers, loves to forgive you!" (see Acts 9:5f.)

This way we can be freed from bitterness and vengefulness. We can become happy, cheerful people. It is said that there are only two types of Senior Citizens: the Bitter and the Cheerful. To become habitually cheerful, to be grateful for everything, even for those who hurt us, requires God's grace and plenty of efforts and examinations of spirit.

May our lives, till our final breath, be like beautiful hymns and temple bells joining the angelic choirs throughout eternity praising and thanking God. ■

# Fear masking itself as piety

BY RON ROLHEISER

**I**t is easy to mistake piety for the genuine response that God wants of us, that is, to enter into a relationship of intimacy with Him and then try to help others have that same experience.

We see this everywhere in Scripture. For example, in Luke's Gospel, after witnessing a miraculous catch of fish, Peter responds by falling at Jesus' knees and saying: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" At first glance that would seem the appropriate response, a wonderfully-pious one, an acknowledgement of his littleness and unworthiness in the face of God's abundance and goodness. But, as John Shea points out in his commentary on this text, Jesus names Peter's response differently and invites him to something else. What? Peter's response manifests a sincere piety, but it is, in Shea's words, "fearfully wrong": "The awareness of God makes him [Peter] tremble and crushes him down. If he clings to the knees of Jesus, he must be on his own knees. Peter does not embrace the fullness; he wants to go away. This is hardly the response Jesus wants. So he instructs Peter not to be afraid. Instead, he is to use what he experienced to bring others to the same experience. As Jesus has caught him, he is to catch others." Jesus is inviting Peter to move out of fear and into deeper waters of intimacy and God's abundance.

We see a similar thing in the First Book of Samuel (21, 1-6). King David arrives at the temple one morning, hungry, without food. He asks the priest for five loaves of bread. The priest replies that he hasn't any ordinary bread, only consecrated bread that can be eaten only after the appropriate fasting and rituals. David, nonetheless, knowing that, as God's king on earth



he is expected to act resourcefully rather than fearfully, asks for the loaves and he eats the bread that, in other circumstances, he would have been forbidden to eat.

What makes this story important is the Jesus, when confronted by the fear and piety of the Scribes and Pharisees, highlights it and tells us that David's response was the right one. He tells those who were scandalized by his disciples' lack of fear that David's response was the right one because David recognized that, in our response to God, intimacy and a certain boldness in acting resourcefully, are meant to trump fear. "The Sabbath," Jesus asserts, "was made for man, not man for the Sabbath". That axiom might be rendered this way: *God is not a law to be blindly obeyed. Rather God is a loving, creative presence that invites us into intimacy and then gives us energy to be more-creative in the light of that relationship.*

Some years ago, a young mother shared this story with me. Her son, six years-old and now in school, had been trained from his earliest years to kneel down by his bed each night and pray aloud a number of ritual prayers (the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, a prayer to his guardian angel, and blessings and protection for his parents and siblings). One evening, shortly after starting

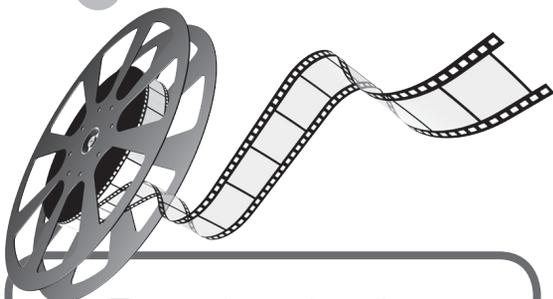
school, when his mother took him to his room, he crawled into bed without first kneeling to say his prayers. His mother asked him: "What's wrong? Don't you pray anymore?" "No," he replied, "I don't pray anymore. My teacher at school (a nun) told us not to pray but to talk to God ... and tonight I'm tired and have nothing to say!" In essence, this is the response of King David, asking the priest for the consecrated loaves. This young boy had an intuitive grasp that God is not a law to be obeyed but an intimate presence that resources us.

A number of the great Christian mystics have taught that, as we grow more deeply in our relationship with God, we gradually *become more bold* with God, that is, fear gives way more and more to intimacy, legalism gives way more and more to resourcefulness, judgment gives way more and more to empathy, and the kind of piety that would have us clinging to the knees of Jesus paralyzed by our own sinfulness gives way more and more to a joyous energy for mission.

Of course, there's an important place for piety. Healthy piety and healthy humility are gifts from the Holy Spirit, but they do not paralyze us with an unhealthy fear that blocks a deeper, more-joyous, and more-intimate relationship with God. David had a healthy piety, but that didn't stop him from acting boldly and creatively inside the intimacy of his relationship to God. Jesus too had a healthy piety, even as he was constantly scandalizing the pious around him.

We too easily mistake unhealthy fear for genuine piety. We do it all the time, naively seeing fear as virtue; however the mark of genuine intimacy is never fearfulness, but bold, joyous energy. The healthiest religious person you know exhibits this boldness and joy rather than a dead, overly-fearful piety. ■

Courtesy: [www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

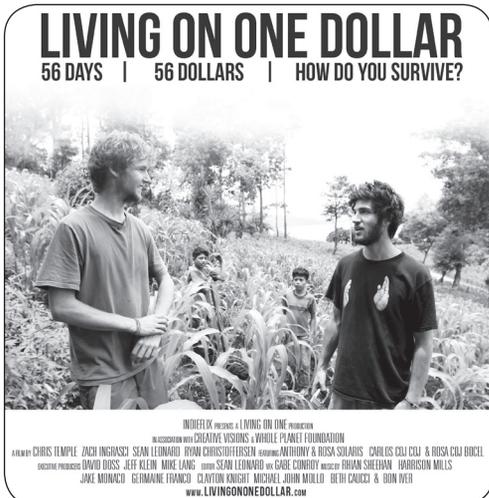


To see how they live

*Living On One Dollar*

A film by Zach Ingrasci, Sean Leonard

Starring Ryan Christoffersen, Zach Ingrasci, Sean Leonard...



An award-winning film that has been called “a must watch” by Nobel Laureate, Muhammad Yunus and Director of *The Hunger Games*, Gary Ross. *Living on One Dollar* follows the journey of four friends as they set out to live on just \$1 a day for two months in rural Guatemala. They battle hunger, parasites, and extreme financial stress as they attempt to survive life on the edge. An unimaginable reality for most young Americans, the challenges they face are real and plague over 1.1 billion people around the world. While the friends quickly learn there are no easy answers, the generosity and strength of Rosa, a 20 year old woman, and Chino, a 12 year old boy, give them resilient hope that there are effective ways to make a difference.

While these American friends experience what it’s like to live on one dollar a day, they take viewers on a funny, inspiring, and heartwarming journey into the lives of the Guatemalan people and show how they live in rural destitution. A must see film for all to open their minds and hearts on life in Central America.

While they get married...



Panchayat members in Chandeni village of Bhiwani district, Haryana, are encouraging all prospective brides and grooms to go for an HIV test before marriage. A resolution to that effect was passed a few days after the 10-member panchayat, and sarpanch Mamta Sangwan, were unanimously elected by the villagers.

Mamta Sangwan is a graduate who was elected as the first woman sarpanch of the village. Her husband, Hitesh Sangwan, is a head constable in the Army.

Agreeing with the idea, Dharamjit Grewal and Mukesh Rani who got married on 18 Jan '16, submitted their HIV reports to the sarpanch. Although the village has not made the HIV test compulsory for people getting married, they are encouraging all to get it done before the wedding.

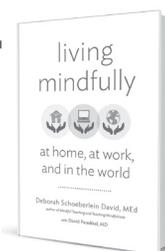
26-year-old Mamta is very confident about the success of the idea, which was suggested to her by Sanjay Ramphal, an activist and theatre artist in the village. The panchayat members have also decided to gift a tulsi sapling to couples and ask them to pledge that they will not indulge in female foeticide.

*Courtesy: www.thebetterindia.com*

Good life

Learn to live a life that’s good - for yourself and for the world.

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**Living Mindfully:  
At Home, at Work,  
and in the World**

By Deborah Schoeberlein David, David Panakkal  
Published by Wisdom Publications  
Pages: 208; Price: Rs.946

# We don't really know the Women in the Bible

*Often their stories hold the key*

**Ms T.J. Wray**, is an associate professor of biblical studies at Salve Regina University, Newport, Rhode Island, U.S. She has devoted her life to writing about the overlooked details of the Bible. Much of her work has centered on telling the story of biblical women. Her book *Good Girls, Bad Girls: The Enduring Lessons of Twelve Women of the Old Testament (Rowman & Littlefield)* explores the stories of women such as Ruth, Rebekah, and Tamar. Wray has just finished a second volume, *Good Girls, Bad Girls of the New Testament: Their Enduring Lessons*, which will be published in March 2016. Both books examine biblical women in a new light and suggest lessons for modern readers.

*Excerpts from an interview published in U.S. Catholic:*

## **Why don't people know as much about the women in the Bible?**

I think it comes out of the reality that most of the women in the Bible that we talk about are unnamed. Naming is important. Unnamed people tend to be more forgettable.

Who are the unnamed women? Well, they are usually designated in terms of a man. "Noah's wife," "Samson's mother," or "the wife of Manoah," "the daughter of Jairus." Sometimes they're identified with a town: "the Shunammite woman." Some unnamed women are more familiar than others. In *Good Girls, Bad Girls of the New Testament*, I profile several nameless women. For example, the woman caught in adultery (isn't it nice to be known throughout history as "the one caught in adultery"?), and the woman with the 12-year hemorrhage.

We make a lot of assumptions when we don't read the Bible carefully. The first named woman in the Bible is Eve. But we misunderstand her story all the time. For one, we all assume that Eve offers Adam an apple, but the type of fruit is never mentioned. The snake is supposed to be Satan, but the ancient writer had no understanding of an evil being opposed to God. Satan came along much later in history.

The other assumption we make is in the beginning of Genesis 3, when Eve's having a conversation with the snake. In my classes, I always ask, "How does Eve know that she's not supposed to eat that fruit?" And a hand shoots up immediately: "Adam told her." Eve wasn't even created when God issued the injunction against the forbidden fruit, and so Adam must have told her.

When we turn to the Bible and look, nowhere does it say anything about Adam telling her. Then another hand will shoot up: "God told her." But then that's not in the Bible anywhere, either. We're only in the third chapter and making assumptions that have no validity whatsoever.

And a final assumption: The whole idea that Eve is a seductress who lures Adam to sin. If you read, you see Adam's standing there the entire time during Eve's conversation with the snake. Why doesn't he interject? "Eve, I know you weren't created yet, but God said not to eat this." But he doesn't. He's equally at fault, and I think even more so because God warned him directly.

## **How do you make these women come to life while still being true to the biblical text?**

I try to stick to primary sources, because if you don't, you really start to

muddy the waters. The first and best source is the Bible. I look at different translations. If I'm confused about a word, then I'll go and look it up in the Greek or Hebrew. And then I do what I instruct my students to do: I read it very carefully. I ask questions about the background and formulate a backstory. If the story is about Jesus, who else is with him? Who's not there?..Then I use primary sources that are contemporary with whatever I'm studying.

## **Can we really know anything for sure about women who lived that long ago?**

Well, we know quite a bit about the legal status of women, because we have not only the Bible, but documents outside the Bible. And archaeology can tell us about their day-to-day existence. Traditionally, land was passed from father to son, but not always. In Numbers 27, there's a story about a man named Zelophehad who has five daughters. When Zelophehad dies, he has no sons, so his daughters believe his wealth should come to them.

This story takes place after the Israelites escaped Egyptian bondage and they are wandering in the wilderness. Moses is in charge, so the daughters go to him and they basically say, "Hey Moses, we think that we should inherit our father's property." Moses doesn't know what to do, since the law says property must pass from father to son, so he goes and asks God directly. That's key. Remember I said to pay attention to the details? Moses doesn't just make it up on his own; he goes right to the source. God sides with the girls. So, here is a biblical example of women inheriting property.

There are outside documents that

are very illuminating, too. For example, we have the documents of a Jewish woman named Babatha, which date from about the year 93 to 132.

Babatha was married twice, with a child. Her first husband died and she remarried. In this marriage, she was a secondary wife, which means there was a first wife who was still alive. Babatha loaned her second husband money. But he died before he could pay her back, and she sued the other wife to get the money back. She ended up going to Ein Gedi - a little town by the Dead Sea - before a court.

During that time, there was a Jewish revolt going on. The Romans invaded the town, so Babatha and her family fled. They went up into one of these limestone caves (there are hundreds of them down around the Dead Sea), and they hid. Unfortunately, the Romans were in camp on an outcropping right above them, and the refugees either starved or died of thirst - we're not sure which.

This cave was excavated in the early 1960s and archaeologists found 17 skeletons, men, women, and children, along with all sorts of artifacts: keys to their homes—which is quite sad—skeins of yarn, shoes. Then, a volunteer found a hole dug out under a rock. In that hole was a woman's purse, which turned out to belong to Babatha.

Inside were four bundles of documents wrapped in sackcloth and tied with string, and 35 papyri documents that detail all of Babatha's legal proceedings. From that, we learn that she inherited property from her mother, even though she had a male sibling, as well as from her second husband. She was also a businesswoman; she owned and operated several date palm groves. There are receipts.

We get an image of women as having more legal rights than we thought that they had. It's exciting.

### **What about in the Bible itself? Do women ever have more power than you would expect?**

In the New Testament, who

do you think Jesus has the longest conversation with? The longest one-on-one conversation Jesus has with anyone in the gospels is with a woman (John 4:4-42). She's never given a name, so we call her the Samaritan woman or the woman by the well. For that reason alone, we need to pay attention to that conversation. Jews weren't supposed to talk to Samaritans, and yet Jesus has a highly theological conversation with her that challenges the social norms of his day regarding ethnicity, gender, and religion.

### **Take us through your writing process with one woman's story.**

Most people have never heard of Tabitha. Her story appears in Acts 9. Acts of the Apostles is the story of the first crop of Christians after Jesus' death and resurrection. Tabitha is the only woman in the New Testament to be called "disciple." Now, we know there are other female disciples, but she is the only woman who specifically has that designation. She's also a philanthropist who cares for local widows.

In the story, Tabitha dies of an undisclosed, seemingly brief illness. Several disciples send a couple of men to fetch Peter to see if he can do something about this.

Peter comes to see if he can help out. The scene when he arrives is beautiful. She's already been washed and prepared for the burial. When Peter comes into the room, all these widows have gathered around, and they're weeping and crying. In their hands, they're holding tunics and clothing that Tabitha had made for them. It's as if these objects attest to her kindness. "Look at what she's done for us. Look how Tabitha cared for us."

Peter is probably moved by the scene. He clears the room, gets them all out, and then, after praying, he says, "Tabitha, get up, wake up." She opens her eyes, Peter takes her hand, and after that he invites the widows and the "holy ones" back into the room. Everyone is overjoyed to see Tabitha is alive.

As I read this, I think, "Who

are these people, and why are they at her house?" I also asked the question, "Where's Tabitha's husband?" Surely, if she had one he would have been there during her illness and her death. But he's not. So is Tabitha a widow as well? Maybe. If so, then she certainly understands the plight of the women she helps.

In the very beginning, men and women were on equal footing. They were both trying to get out the word and bring in converts. The other thing that a lot of people think is that only men were disciples. And yet here we have Luke specifically giving Tabitha the designation of disciple. There's no longer a question of whether women were disciples. They had leadership roles.

In my book, *Good Girls, Bad Girls: The Enduring Lessons of Twelve Women of the Old Testament*, as well as my upcoming book about women in the New Testament, I break each story up into two sections. First, I have the exegetical part where I just tell the story and talk about how it is situated historically. Then I talk about the "enduring lesson." Tabitha's story teaches us so much about love and grief. For example, sometimes, the people who grieve most for you are not the people you thought, while those you assume would be there for you quite literally run for the hills.

### **Why is it important to tell biblical women's stories?**

In the past, I assumed, like a lot of people, that most biblical women who were defined in context of a man were usually subservient to that male. But I started to study all these stories about women who were movers and shakers in their own right — without the permission, or sometimes even the knowledge, of their husbands, brothers, fathers, or sons. The other thing I realized is that it is often the woman's story that holds the key to the lesson the ancient writer sought to impart to us.

Courtesy: [www.uscatholic.org](http://www.uscatholic.org)

**Fr Salah Abou-Jaoudé, SJ** is Director of *Dar el-Machreq*, Jesuit Publishing House in the Near East, and Director, the Institute of Oriental Studies at St Joseph University of Beirut. He is also a professor of Philosophy at the same University. He talked recently to **Victor Edwin, SJ** on West Asia for Jivan:

a challenge to be its director and to coordinate the efforts of some of the best writers, scholars and young researchers and to accompany them in their intellectual labors. The work at Oriental Institute too is demanding as it requires organizing seminars, presenting papers and teaching courses!

persecution after the World War I have found refuge in Lebanon. The Chaldean and Syrian Christians persecuted in Iraq and Syria are here in Lebanon. Around a half a million Palestinian refugees live in Camps within Lebanon. One can safely say that every third person in Lebanon is a refugee. If not handled carefully, this situation could

## Christians in Syria and Iraq need support to rebuild their lives

Interview with  
**Fr Salah Abou-Jaoudé, SJ**  
Director of Institute of Oriental Studies, Beirut



**Fr Salah Abou-Jaoudé, you are the Director of Dar el Machreq as well as the Institute of Oriental Studies. Tell us about your work.**

Dar el Masreq (DM) is one of the intellectual apostolates of the Near East Province. DM has four divisions and each one specializes in a particular area of research and publication. The 'Language Division' focuses on compiling and publishing Arabic dictionaries of high standards.

The Arabic – Arabic dictionary, published by DM, is recognized as one of the best in that category in the Arab world. The 'Cultural Division' provides a platform for publication of first grade researches in historical, cultural, philosophical, linguistic, dialogical studies. These publications encourage intellectual exchanges between scholars of different cultural and religious backgrounds. The 'Religion Division' publishes books written by Arab authors on Religions. The 'School Books Division' takes keen interest in providing good and standard text books for school children. It is

**Travelling around Lebanon one gets the impression that first, it is a pluralistic country; second, the regional as well as some European nations exercise some form of influence on Lebanon. How do you assess this diversity and how vulnerable Lebanon is to the external influence?**

Lebanon, though a young country founded in 1920 under the French mandate, has rich civilizational histories that stretch into many centuries into the past. The layers of Phoenician, Hellenist, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, and Mamluk civilizations enrich the present history of Lebanon. Moreover, the present day Lebanon is a plural nation in which people of 14 different Christian confessions and 4 diverse Muslim groups (Shii, Sunni, Druze, and Alawites) live and share the Lebanese cultural and historical heritage. Thus Lebanon can be called a Mosaic of diversity!

Lebanon also hosts a large number of refugees from the West Asian region. The Greek Catholics who fled Ottoman

be recipe for strife.

Besides these, every group within Lebanon has enlisted some support from the regional as well as European powers. The Shiites are well connected with Iran. Egypt exercised its influence on Sunni Muslims in the past. Now Saudi Arabia exercises that influence on Sunni Muslims. In addition, Saudi Arabia finances a number of groups including some members of the Christian Media and a Maronite political parties in order to have influence here. Certainly they try to sell wahabi/salfi ideologies in Lebanon. The Druzes were supported in the past by the British. Christians are generally well connected with Europe. Maronites have traditional bonds with France and Italy. Orthodox Christians enlist the support of the Russians. All this make Lebanon a complex reality.

**How far Lebanon is affected by the religio-political turmoil with Israel as both Lebanon and Israel are neighbors?**

While the state of Israel was established in 1948, five hundred

thousands of Palestinians who were driven out by the state of Israel found their way into Lebanon and now they live in Camps. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli War Israel scored a decisive victory by capturing the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Israel crushed the joint Arab forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. It was a demoralizing defeat for the Arab countries..

After this defeat Palestinian refugees in the Camps, along with the Palestinian militiamen from Jordan, planned guerilla attacks on Israel from the Lebanese soil. The modus operandi was attacking Israel from a politically and militarily weak Lebanon. The then President of Lebanon refused to allow such attacks on Israel from the Lebanese soil. However, the President was pressurized to sign the Cairo Agreement in 1968 for allowing attacks on Israel.

A little later, in 1970 when the Jordanian King crushed Palestinian rebels within Jordan under American pressure, several thousands of those armed men fled into Lebanon that created a precarious situation for the internal security of Lebanon. At that moment the Palestinian forces within Lebanon were more powerful than the Lebanese Army. From 1973 the Lebanese Army began military operations against Palestinians within Lebanon. This military action polarised Sunnis and Christians within Lebanon. Many Sunni military officers from the Lebanese Army joined Palestinian forces. Lebanon was at the brink of collapse. At this context in 1975 Christian militias were formed. A 'civil war' raged in Lebanon. It was a difficult time. Everyone was fighting everyone and the civil war stretched up to 1990.

In addition to these woes, the Syrian Army that came to Lebanon as part of Common Arab Armed Forces (CAAF) that was commissioned by the Arab League to help Lebanon during the 'civil war' effectively stayed on till 2005 controlling Lebanon. Once again

in 2008 the Israeli-Hezbollah war had its devastating impact on Lebanon.

**ISIS has pressed panic buttons across the world. Where are its roots in your perception?**

ISIS has roots in the faulty US policies towards West Asia. President George Bush's administration played a dangerous game of supporting Shii groups after Saddam Husain was removed from power in Iraq. The U.S. feared Iranian involvement in Iraq if the U.S. did not support Shii in Iraq. Iranian involvement in Iraq will, the US felt, create problems for the U.S. energy concerns in West Asia. The U.S. support for Shii in Iraq side-lined Sunni Muslims. Sunni Muslims felt marginalised within Iraq. Many Sunni Muslim army officers joined hands with Sunni militia men and started operations against the Western interests in Iraq. They received support from Saudi Arabia, since Saudi Arabia did not want the expansion of Iranian influence in the region. In Iraq a large scale persecution of Christians was unleashed by the Sunni militia men. Their cry went unheard as the western governments largely ignored Christian concerns in West Asia.

When the U.S. withdrew its forces from Iraq, many Sunni regions in Iraq became almost independent and went out of control of the Central government in Bagdad, controlled by Shiites. It was in such a context the ISIS was born. Within two years ISIS began to control a number of regions within Iraq and surrounding areas. Many Sunni Arab nations: Saudi Arabia, Turkey and UAE support ISIS financially and militarily. These Sunni Arab nations tacitly would like to have a 'sunnite caliphate' as a checkmate to contain the Shii Iran. The internal struggle within Islam has been effectively used by the ISIS to expand its base. The present Syrian situation is an added advantage for the ISIS.

**Does ISIS pose any immediate danger to Lebanon?**

I do not see any direct danger for

Lebanon from ISIS. The Sunni Muslims here are moderate and the Shii are a big community in Lebanon along with a strong Christian community. All this make a delicate balance that does not give a place to ISIS.

**Is ISIS to stay in West Asia for a long time to come?**

It is possible for a determined force to get rid of ISIS. The question is ... what is the alternative? The Syrian problem should be solved by bringing about a delicate balance between Shii, Sunni, Kurds and Alawites in Syria. Iran appears to be ready for regional conversation with the U.S. on the West Asian question. It is an opportune moment for different players to put their heads together and bring about a closure to the ISIS menace.

The important challenges are, as far as I see, first, to de-radicalise an entire generation of young people in those regions with the cooperation of all the stakeholders in the region. Secondly, peace should be restored so that Christians could return to their villages and towns in Syria and Iraq to rebuild their lives. These indigenous Christian communities predate the arrival of Islam in Iraq and both Christians and Muslims have lived and worshipped for nearly 1400 years. This faithful coexistence is the shared and valuable legacy of all Christians and Muslims. It is absolutely important to support their continuing presence. Christians need well planned financial and moral support in rebuilding their lives once again.

It is important to affirm that Faith by its very nature requires freedom. Therefore religious freedom as a right inherent to human dignity must always be respected by individuals, social actors and State. Restriction of religious freedom is a violation against human dignity and such restriction clashes with the will of God for human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God.

BY PETER CAMILUS KISHORE, SJ

**A**divasis from Mandal and Vyara Missions in South Gujarat gathered in large numbers at Mandal on 18 October 2015 to celebrate the first death anniversary of Fr Jose Antonio Corral, SJ, their beloved missionary. They dedicated to him the Bhajan Sammelan with Adivasi dances to devotional songs, newly composed by themselves. They erected a memorial with their own money, in Mandal Jagruti High School campus which he had initiated in 1985. What bonded him so closely to their hearts and made him one of them? What made him one of the most complete Catholic missionaries from Spain who worked in South Gujarat?

When I was appointed to Mandal



the inner dynamics of such approaches tend to make people dependent on the 'preacher'.

- Help others with the respect they deserve as children of God; I don't

us, he too had his own shadow sides, which were experienced by some of his close companions. But when I look back at Corral's missionary life, I can confidently say that he tried to practice all these insights in faith formation in his missionary life.

He did not see himself as a giver but a fellow traveler. He was not keen on entering their villages with goodies to offer, or use resources to sell his ideas or faith. He had a passion to enter their soul, and understand their lived faith experiences in their cultural milieu. For this he spent hours sitting leisurely with the people in their homes in the villages, smoking a beedi/cigarette, and chatting freely - listening to tales of their ancestors and gods, noting the tales the elders and spiritual guides narrated.

He knew that God-experience could best be expressed in one's own mother tongue and cultural milieu.

## Remembering the Missionary whom the Tribals love

in 2000, he shared with me the secrets of his successful missionary life - the faith formation strategies he used in a Mission. It inspired me deeply; it could inspire many young missionaries.

**His insights:** Here are some of his insights:

- "The hidden history of the mission is that the missionaries and their preaching clicked with the people's understanding of their needs. From this grew a mutual trust and friendship that evolved into a Christian community.

- The mission of the church is to witness. She is entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel. This is better done in an experiential way - a preaching that arises from one's faith- experience, and connects with the faith experience of the listeners, leading them to desire Jesus in their lives.

- Experience shows that attempts to convert, telling people what to do, or work directed to a limited section of society does not last. Besides,

have a claim over them; I don't make them depend on me. I help and forget. In any group activity, be aware that Adivasi society is very egalitarian.

- Sitting with people leisurely and chatting freely is the occasion for experiential preaching, spiritual guidance, family prayers etc.

- A syllabus for faith formation is not as important as using Gospels to touch people's hearts. Bring in the local flavour to whatever you want to convey.

- Group prayer is a Trinitarian sharing: as the sharing takes place in a group, in the light of the Gospel, there is the assurance of the Holy Spirit to the whole community. In this prayer, reflection on the reality takes place in the light of the Gospel, leading to appropriate action. Pious associations such as 'Dayalu Samruni Mandal' (Good Samaritan Association) can serve with this spirit.

I am not trying to canonize Corral. I am aware that, like any of

He was perhaps the only Spanish missionary who mastered three Adivasi languages - Gamit, Vasavi and Dangi. He always spoke with Adivasis in their mother-tongue. They were occasions for him for experiential preaching, spiritual guidance, family prayers etc. This process allowed him to understand his Adivasis at a depth few missionaries ever reached.

As one of my companions pointed out, going beyond the languages and cultures of the Adivasis, Corral paid keen attention to their heart beats and their unassuming ways of communicating their needs. He sensed their needs, understood and identified *with* them, and worked to solve them, in consultation with them. In this process there is no imposition or subjugation, but a respectful dialogue between cultures and faith experiences. As a result there evolved mutual trust and a benevolent bond between God and the Adivasis.

Fruits of this relationship were many. Corral saw that Adivasis in the area were struggling to fight their poverty, and all other evils that went with it. In his immersion in their lives, he realized the strength of the cooperative and collaborative nature of their community. He had studied cooperative movements during his student days in Spain. He realized the opportunity to bring together the people with the help of their students and his own expertise. He discussed with them about starting a milk cooperative in Mandal village. He foresaw that this enterprise could result in their economic development, reduce migration to cities for employment, and preserve the Adivasi value of cooperative living.

**Milk Co-operatives:** But the Board members of Sumul Dairy in Surat, under which the cooperatives operated, were apprehensive. They could not believe that illiterate Adivasis could run a milk cooperative. But Corral, knowing his people's need and strength, went ahead and started the first milk cooperative run by Adivasis at Mandal in 1972, and Amji village a year later. He got revolving funds from various agencies for people to buy good milk-yielding buffaloes. Adivasis there did not rear buffaloes; some elders even protested that such black animals would bring bad luck to their community!

Fighting all odds, in two years he had two Adivasi Milk Cooperative Societies running successfully - to the surprise and admiration of Sumul. Within a few years, Adivasi milk Cooperatives sprouted in most villages of South Gujarat, bringing dignity and prosperity to Adivasis. Seeing the benefits, the Government too promoted dairy development in Adivasi villages. Today, the two dairies Corral had started collect an average of 2500 liters of milk daily, with a turn-over of Rs.4.5 crore per year. Most of the milk processed in Sumul now come from Adivasi villages! Milk cooperatives have become the corner-stone of self-dignity, economic independence and overall development of Adivasis in South Gujarat. Isn't it a fruitful expression of the God-

experience of a missionary?

**Food security:** He observed that food security was very fragile among Adivasis, in spite of agriculture being their main occupation. Their age-old cultivation system during monsoon, on uneven hilly land, yielded little. When the rains failed for a year or two, people had to migrate in large numbers to cities to survive. He felt that improved agricultural practices could stop this migration. He undertook large scale land levelling of Adivasi fields. With the help of Jesuit Br Galicia and other experts, he trained people in modern scientific agriculture. Today the government and other NGOs continue the practices in most of the villages of South Gujarat, providing Food Security to Adivasis. People who earlier had

Secondary School with Arts, Commerce and Science sections with good infrastructure. Nearly 900 Adivasi boys and girls study in the school to find a bright and dignified future.

**Preserving the culture:** Corral immersed himself into the lives of Adivasis, and became part of it. He wanted to preserve their cultural ethos and wisdom for the future, and for the knowledge of the non Adivasi world. He published various books in Adivasi and other languages: A compilation of hymns in Vasavi and Gamit languages, *Sabiduria Gamit* (Wisdom of Gamits), in Spanish, *Gamit World of Meaning - Adivasi Religion & Culture*, *Dayaha Goth - Gamit Myths & Stories*, in Gamit-English and a series of books with Adivasi stories with moral values.



hardly enough for their consumption are now able to sell the surplus grain.

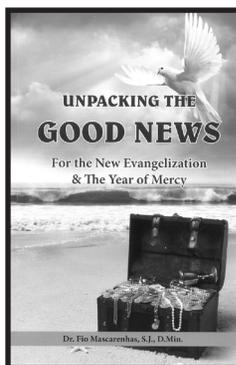
**Education:** The third most important contribution of Corral to Gamits is education. Corral saw that Adivasis could become self-sufficient, free from superstitious beliefs and ready to face the onslaught of capitalistic culture, only with good education. A group of village leaders wanted a school in Mandal village. With these lay leaders, he formed the Mandal Education Society, and started Mandal Jagruti High School. He invited the well-known educationists, the Christian Brothers and Sisters of St. Anne, to run the school and hostels. Today the School is the pride of Mandal Mission. After 30 years, today it is a modern Higher

He built the parish church in Mandal, like an Adivasi home, with stained glass windows. Whatever he took up, he did with complete passion and dedication.

We now have vibrant Christian communities in Vyara and Mandal Missions. Corral has become a revered representative of all the missionaries - both men and women, religious and lay - who worked in these missions with dedication and deep respect for the ethos and culture of the Adivasis. This faith community should imbibe the words of Corral: "The missionaries and the Good News they preached clicked with the Adivasis' insights. Their mutual trust and friendship evolved into a Christian community." ■

## Good News

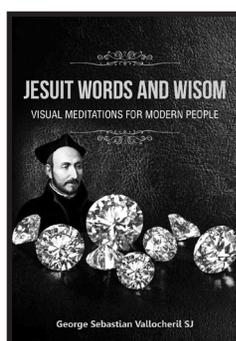
- Unpacking the Good News
- Dr Fio Mascarenhas, SJ
- Asian Trading Corporation  
St Mary's Town, Bangalore - 560 084
- Pages: 212; Price: Rs.200



This is a timely book, as it deals with the theme of mercy. This is the aim of Fr Fio Mascarenhas, SJ, who, says Cardinal Telesphore Toppo in his Foreword, has “a happy gift of teaching biblical spirituality in a very lucid way.” In the book that offers sound biblical teaching about the depths of God’s mercy, Fr Fio has combined the most helpful teachings in his old, now out-of-print books “with new insights, practical examples, and teachings of Pope Francis.”

## Jesuit Wisdom

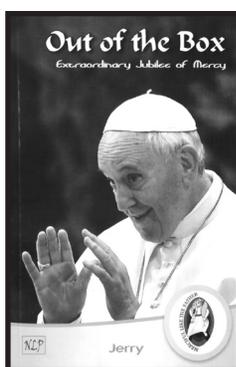
- Jesuit Words and Wisdom  
Visual Meditations for Modern People
- George Sebastian Vallocheril, SJ
- Dee Publishers, Chembumukku  
Ernakulam, Kochi - 682 021
- Pages: 87; Price: Rs.200



In the book, *Jesuit Words and Wisdom* by Fr George Sebastian Vallocheril, SJ I found well-selected quotations from the writings/speeches of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Pope Francis, Pedro Arrupe, Anthony de Mello, Karl Rahner, Teilhard de Chardin as well as of our young Jesuit saints and others. The author has picked precious pearls from the ocean of Jesuit writings and embellished them with suitable visuals that would enable the reader to savour things interiorly. Anyone, particularly the youth, who look for some help for prayer, will find a treasure trove here that will enable the person to make progress in spiritual life. - Richard Sequeira, SJ

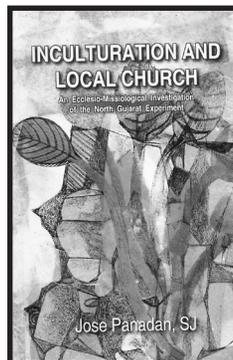
## Year of Mercy

- Out of the Box  
Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy
- Jerry Rosario, SJ
- The New Leader Publications  
Armenian Street, Chennai - 600001
- Pages: 40; Price: Rs.25



The title, ‘Out of the Box’ for a booklet on mercy could be misleading. But this is simply a pastoral aid from Jerry Rosario, SJ to help readers reflect on the theme of mercy in this Year of Mercy and do something concretely to become merciful like our heavenly Father. Jerry gives an abridged version of the bull issued by Pope Francis while declaring a Year of Mercy and 40 brief texts taken from Pope’s speeches or writings. These are followed by questions for reflection, a prayer and a resolution.

## Inculturation



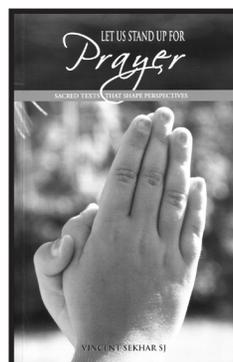
- Inculturation and Local Church
- Jose Panadan, SJ
- Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B.70  
Anand, Gujarat - 388 001
- Pages: 207; Price: Rs.100

This is an important book on an interesting topic: ‘Hindu by culture and Christian by faith.’ Jose Panadan, a missiologist who teaches at JDV, Pune, explores the difficult and delicate topic of inculturation guided by the north Gujarat mission that has grappled with this issue.

In a country where the Christian are accused of prosylitization the idea that Indians can become followers of Christ without losing their religious identity and socio-cultural traditions should be studied by the Church in Indian with an open mind.

## Prayers of Religions

- Let Us Stand up for Prayer  
Sacred Texts that Shape Perspectives
- Vincent Sekhar, SJ
- Claretian Publications, Malleswaram  
West Post, Bangalore - 560 055
- Pages: 263; Price: Rs.197

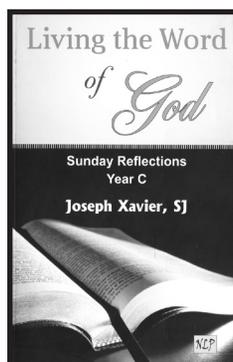


This book can be very useful for all educational institutions - schools and colleges - that are convinced about the need for inter-religious prayer. Fr Vincent Sekhar, SJ, has compiled prayers and sacred texts from scriptures of all major religions. Its regular use will make all students know, respect and learn from all religions. Indirectly it will combat the religious bigotry that some groups try

to promote in India.

## Sunday Reflections

- Living the Word of God  
Sunday Reflections Year C
- Joseph Xavier, SJ
- The New Leader Publications  
Armenian Street, Chennai - 600001
- Pages: 207; Price: Rs.100



This is the third volume of Fr Joseph Xavier, SJ’s reflections on the Sunday readings for Year C. These were published earlier in the New Leader. Fr Joseph Xavier is an Indian Jesuit who teaches Fundamental Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome. He offers reflections based on the Bible, relevant for today illustrating them with anecdotes.

## Chests & Nuggets

- Treasure Chest  
70 Gold Nuggets to Enrich Your Life
- P. Ribes, SJ
- Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B.70  
Anand, Gujarat - 388 001
- Pages: 131; Price: Rs.100

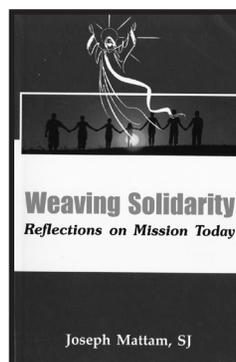
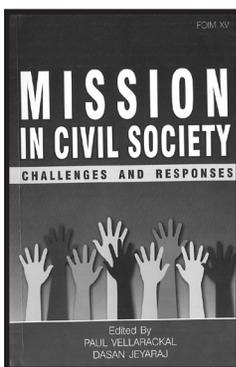
This is the latest collection of what Fr Ribes calls 'gold nuggets' - stories, and reflections that could help individual as well as groups for mediation or discussion. If you keep count of such 'treasure chests' of this tireless Spanish Jesuit who has made India his home, you will agree that he is a very rich philanthropist who keeps sharing his treasures with the readers.



## Salt & Light

- Mission in Civil Society  
Challenges and Responses
- Ed. by Paul Vellarackal & Dasan Jeyaraj
- Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B.70  
Anand, Gujarat - 388 001
- Pages: 328; Price: Rs.300

This is a collection of papers presented by various missiologists at a research seminar of the Fellowship of the Indian Missiologists (FOIM), held in Goa in October 2013. Its unifying theme is 'Mission in Civil Society.' The theologians approach topics related to this central theme from their own study and experience. "The church in India is part of the civil society and we cannot stand aloof as spectators," say the two editors, who hope that this book will facilitate the Christian community in India to engage themselves in the civil society while remaining there as participants."



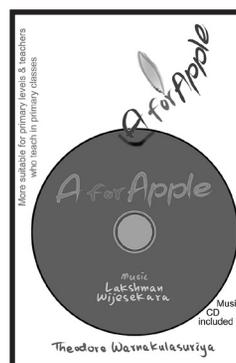
Fr Joseph Mattam, the well-known missiologist, has compiled in this book some of his articles published in various journals and books, after reworking most of them. In his Introduction he refers to the call of Pope Francis in his *Evangelii Gaudium* to reinvent our mission of proclaiming the gospel with joy and enthusiasm and hopes that this book can help us to go forward in carrying out the invitation of Pope Francis.

## Mission & joy

- Weaving Solidarity  
Reflections on Mission Today
- Joseph Mattam, SJ
- Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B.70  
Anand, Gujarat - 388 001
- Pages: 376; Price: Rs.250

## Children & fun

- A for Apple
- Theodore Warnakulasuriya, SJ
- Sarasavi Publishers  
Nugegoda, Sri Lanka
- Pages: 32; Price: Rs.275



This is a rare book written by a Sri Lankan Jesuit for primary school children and their teachers. The book comes with a musical CD with songs and rhymes. The creative booklet is based on the finding that children learn a language - not so much through traditional language teaching methods, but - through fun activities. How many 'learned' Jesuits would bother about primary school children, although everybody knows that it is a highly important stage in human growth? Fr Theodore, therefore, deserves all the support and encouragement.

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P.B. 70, Anand - 388 001, Gujarat

**P**rofessor Vito Perniola, a priest of the Society of Jesus, a Historian and a Linguist, passed away in Negombo, Sri Lanka on 7 Jan 2016 at the age of 102.

Vito Antonio Perniola, born on 10 April 1913, in Bari, Italy, was the fifth of nine children. At the age of 15 he joined the Naples Province of the Society of Jesus. In December 1932 he left Italy for India and entered the Sacred Heart College in Shembaganur, Madurai mission in South India for his philosophical studies, but destined to be a missionary in Sri Lanka which was at that time a mission entrusted to the Province of Naples.

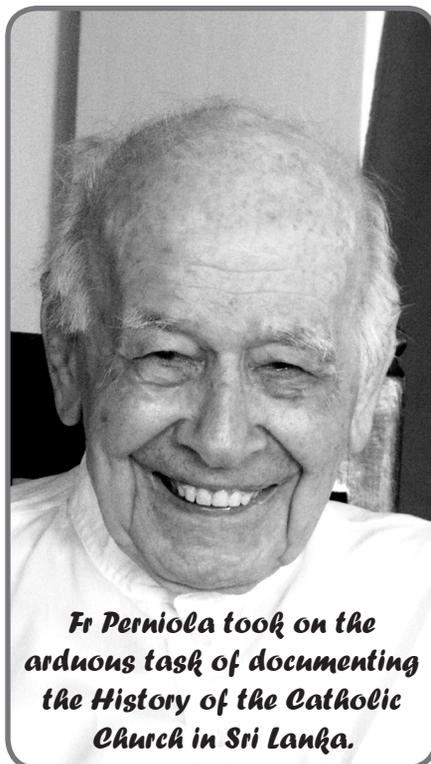
After his philosophical studies at the age of 23, Fr Perniola successfully passed the Matriculation Exam and then a B.A., Honours degree from the London University, with Pali and Buddhism as his main subjects and Sanskrit and Hinduism as subsidiaries. After completing his ecclesiastical and secular studies he arrived in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and was sent to the parish church and school at Elpitiya in the south of Sri Lanka.

In the years from 1941 to 44 he was at the Papal Seminary in Kandy, Sri Lanka for his theological studies. At the age of 30, on 21 Nov 1943 he was ordained a priest. After pastoral work in local parishes and Tertianship in India, he came back to Ceylon in January 1948 and taught history and Pali at St Aloysius' College (SAC), Galle. In 1949 he was made an Honorary Citizen of Ceylon and in the same year he became the Rector of St Aloysius' College, Galle. Invited to teach Pali in 1954 at Aquinas University College he wrote a Pali grammar which was soon accepted as the standard grammar by the Pali Text Society of Oxford.

In 1964, he obtained his Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Pune. He was a linguist 'Par Excellence', conversant in Italian, Latin, English, Sinhalese, Pali, Sanskrit, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Spanish, German and Greek. He was made the Provincial of the Jesuits for Sri Lanka in 1972, which

## The Italian Linguist

*who made Sri Lanka his home*



**Vito Perniola, SJ**  
1913-2016

post he held till 1976. His magnum opus was 19 volumes of "The History of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka". His death has left this work incomplete.

In March 2013, just before his 100th birthday, the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka awarded Fr Perniola the prestigious Sir S. C. Obeyesekere Gold Medal for 2013, in recognition of his scholarly life and his monumental contribution to historical studies.

Fr Perniola had one aim in mind when he opted to be a Jesuit missionary. That vision permeated all his life's activities whether he was at the desk

or at the altar. He said a sentence in a reading at the final prayer service on the day of his departure from Italy in 1932, left a deep impact on him. It was: "There is more joy in giving than in receiving" He said: "The more I meditated those words, the more I realized that the real joy of giving is God's own joy and that I ought to share in that same joy". He was the spiritual guide to many religious men and women and lay people over the years and he regularly mentioned: "I am a priest and must be available to all". He rendered yeoman service to women religious. He was a good listener, a kind and gentle Father and an understanding friend. Despite his years, he would continue to be a beacon and lodestar to many. An unfailing source of knowledge, of encouragement and strength - many experienced a sense of peace and comfort from just being in his presence.

He was all things to all men and women; a man for all seasons because he believed his pastoral care should be marked by a total availability of himself to others, an availability that should resemble God's own availability; an availability that would bring to others the Saviour Jesus in whose mission he shared.

Life's lessons had brought him to a spiritual freedom that led him to keep asking, "What shall I do for Christ?" This is what made him ever ready and willing to accept anything, to go anywhere, to do whatever his superiors would ask of him and to do it with joy. The secret of his energy and the foundation of his achievements is the wisdom derived from his silent meditations he practiced, where he let go of all unnecessary baggage. His life was dedicated to God and fellow humans and we are all beneficiaries.

He spent his last years at Snea Niketana (Home for Senior Jesuits), St Xavier Residence, Akkara Panaha, Negombo. Although he had no particular illness, like the old soldier he just faded away on 07 Jan '16, breathing his last at the age of 102, having spent 87 years as a Jesuit. - Anton Pieris, SJ

**BLACIUS EKKA, SJ**

(RNC) 1933 - 2015



Br. Blacius, 82, went for his eternal reward on 09 Dec '15. He was born on 28 Jan 1933 to his immigrant parents at Donkamokam in Dibrugarh, Assam. Blacius started his schooling only after his parents returned to

his native place, Bhikhampur in Gumla District, Jharkhand) His formal education ended with the 10th standard.

Br. Blacius became a Jesuit Brother when a big number of youngsters were interested in joining the Society for Brotherhood. There were eight Brother Candidates in his batch including late Brothers Livinus Xess and Solozbal. He completed Builders' Training Programme at Sitagarha and cleared the examination at Madras. He also underwent training in carpentry under late Fr. Carey of Bombay Province.

The best years of Br. Blacius were devoted to putting up buildings. He constructed a large number of buildings: the school hall in Banabira, the science wing and study hall at Samtoli, the clerk's office, store room and repair works at Rengarih, the presbytery and the church building at Dighia, one part of Barway High School and enclosure wall at Chainpur . He stayed for a year at Sitapahar to build the Jesuit residence. Back home he undertook the construction of the Chainpur College building which included class rooms, Fathers' refectory, farm house and a well. Thereafter, he was sent to construct the parish church and living quarters at Pathalgaon.

Br. Blacius spent a few years in Jamshedpur Province, chiefly for construction works. Thereafter, he was assigned to Bharat Mata Church, Muri as in charge of boys'hostel. He was made in-charge of the farm at ATC , Namkum and the garden in Bundu, Ranchi. While at Kishor Nagar, Namkum, he became ill and he was shifted to the Manresa House infirmary in 2013. Br. Blacius was a hard working, sturdy and tough man. He was faithful to the community activities like the daily Eucharist, Rosary, community meals and meetings. After he complained of severe congestion in his lungs, his earthly life came to an end. Now he rests in peace at ATC Namkum cemetery.

- Walter Beck & Cyprian Ekka, SJ

**SANTIAGO ARUL MARIA, SJ**

(MDU) 1928 - 2016



Br Santiago, 88, came to the Society as a conver in the year 1950, as a 23 year old young man. Construction work was his forte, which eventually became his main occupation for the rest of his active life.

He had been tutored by the legendary builder of Loyola College, Chennai, Mr Gnanapragasam in the basics of architecture. He took to building work as ducks to water, although he had just minimal formal education. Of course, the Society's formation laid the necessary foundation for him to carry on.

He had a passion for constructing buildings and learning new techniques and skills in this art. The blocks that he put up in Beschi, are a standing testimony to his architectural skills. Similarly, his buildings in many of our campuses speak volumes for his meticulous care for quality and stability. He will stick to the structural and other details given by the Engineer or Architect and will not deviate from them for any reason.

He was always available to the Provincial for any building work to be done anywhere in the Province. Thus Provincials down the years, starting with Fr Gordon, assigned him to places like Beschi, SXC, Palay, SJC, Trichy, ALC, Viayawada, Loyola, Chennai, De Britto, Devakottai, and St Paul's, Trichy for carrying out construction projects that have withstood the vagaries of nature and are still standing tall to proclaim Brother's commitment and competence. Br Santiago was not only known for his versatility in his profession but also for his piety and humility. He had great respect for the priests and was ever ready to obey the orders of the Superior. The last seven years he spent at the Beschi Infirmary. He was ever cheerful and prayerful. On 12 Jan when Sisters went to wake him up for communion, they found him dead. The funeral Mass was said by Fr Joe Antony, the Acting Provincial and Fr S.M.Selvaraj was the homilist. Fr Tagore, Superior, Beschi, thanked the family for the gift of Brother to the Society. He thanked also the Sisters and Fr Lawrence, the Minister, for taking care of him with loving concern. May his soul rest in peace!

- Leo A Tagore, SJ

**VARGHESE CHELLANTHARA, SJ**

(AND) 1964 - 2015



The words of Mother Theresa "it is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them that matters" certainly were true in the life of Fr Varghese.

V a r g h e s e Chellanthara, fondly known as Baby Achan, was born on 19 Dec 1964 at Tekkemala of Idukki District in Kerala belonging to Kanjirapalli Diocese. He joined the Society of Jesus in Andhra Province in 1987 and was ordained a priest in 1997. He lived 28 years as Jesuit and 18 years as priest. He professed his final vows in 2005. Soon after ordination, After some pastoral ministry and serving as Socius to the Novice Master, he moved to Loyola, Chennai for an M.A. in Social Work. Later he served the young lads of Loyola Junior Hostel, Nallapadu as Warden and then at Loyola High School, Vinukonda as the Minister, and went back to Loyola Public School as Warden and Vice-principal. It was here that he noticed the symptoms of latent Multi-sclerosis (Motor Neuron Disease). But overlooking the symptoms he moved to Amalapuram to be the Principal of Loyola English Medium School and the he was appointed the Minister and Vice-principal of St. Patrick's High School, Secunderabad. But multi-sclerosis progressed. Almost every school of medicine was experimented with like Kerala Ayurveda and massage, homeopathy and allopathy. From the last week of November 2015 onwards he started to deteriorate at an alarming speed. He bore excruciating pain and physical helplessness. But he exhibited total abandonment and unconditional surrender to the Almighty. The end came on 06 Dec '15. The funeral took place at Andhra Loyola College. The final rites were performed by Fr. P.S. Amal, Provincial of Andhra.

Varghese had an infectious smile and was humble. He was gentle yet firm while correcting others. He was courageous to face what could not be changed. He readily forgave all those who inadvertently hurt him. He was simple and humorous. He was sensible and sensitive to the needs of others despite his chronic pain. He was graceful and cheerful amidst suffering.

- Chiluvuru Amara Rao, SJ

## Still unable to find a balance

In his article, "Called into the Deep", (*Jivan*, Jan '16) Hector D'Souza rightly says, that GC 32, in 1974, was a watershed Congregation that crystallized for us our mission, "The service of Faith and the promotion of Justice." The reason for the painful events, which he alludes to, that followed the GC, and many being disturbed by the new direction taken, is that in its implementation, the Society was not able to strike a harmonious balance between the demands of Faith and those of Justice. It appears that we have yet to find that middle path, which the Spirit is calling us to follow. In many parts of the Society, Decree 4 alone, with a one-sided emphasis on the 'option for the poor and the marginalized', was being implemented in such an aggressive manner, that the Ignatian 'option for God, Christ and the Church' was almost considered outdated, and as virtually impeding the urgent demands of justice. Moreover, the defense and propagation of the Faith, which had been the forte of the Society, ever since its inception, no longer seemed relevant.

It is true that, after GC 32, Jesuits began taking numerous path-breaking initiatives in promoting greater justice to marginalized groups, which found a quick echo in other religious orders and congregations, and even in secular society, at large, in almost all countries. In the field of dialogue with other faiths and experimenting with methods of prayer inspired by other religious traditions, a lot of commendable and pioneering headway was also made. At the same time, the Order appeared to be getting increasingly secularized and functioning more and more like an NGO, rather than as a Catholic religious order. Jesuits were becoming indifferent to their spiritual life. What mattered was working for the poor, or at least talking about them, and reaching out to people of other religions.

Many trademark devotions and practices of the Society began to disappear: recitation of the breviary; devotions to the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady, the annual retreat, daily community prayer and liturgical propriety, which had for centuries enabled Jesuits to live out the Spiritual Exercises in their daily lives. Many chose to ignore the fact that all these spiritual 'sadhanas' were practiced, in an exemplary manner throughout his life, by Fr Pedro Arrupe, and are faithfully adhered to by Pope Francis, publicly, even today. A good number of Jesuits began regarding their work as their prayer, disregarding the indispensable need of formal prayer to make that happen.

Powerful anti-intellectual and anti-institutional voices were raised against the key apostolates of higher education and intellectual discourse, labelling them as anti-poor and elitist. It is these this-worldly trends that could, at least partly, explain the drastic drop in Jesuit numbers worldwide. Though the GCs 33, 34 and 35, tried their best to restore the balance, they have not been very successful, due to the enormous impact of GC 32 which still persists. Now we have to look forward to GC 36 to show us how to integrate Faith and Justice, and harmonize them with the great Ignatian tradition of the last 500 years.

- Joseph M. Dias, SJ  
Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400 093

## Mercy - not sacrifice

Pope Francis has initiated a paradigm shift in the catholic Church as regards preaching the good news of Jesus to the modern world. Earlier there was much insistence and heavy emphasis on doctrinal purity, on the need to be baptized in order to be saved (outside the Church no salvation), and the observances of Church's laws and commandments etc. Through preaching God's mercy, travelling to countries affected by poverty and war, publishing the widely acclaimed encyclical, *Laudato si* and announcing "The year of Mercy" Pope Francis has turned the focus on the core of Jesus' teaching. This is much needed in our world today facing severe crisis especially, religious intolerance, religious hatred and its consequent cruelty and bloody violence that force people to abandon their homelands and become refugees in alien lands. Let's be grateful to Pope Francis for making us understand and realize the true meaning of the good news of Jesus. It's time all the followers of Jesus rediscovered the core of Jesus' preaching, which is still relevant to our universe.

And lest we repeat the same mistake our earlier missionaries committed let's remember Dr. Ambedkar's remarks when he saw the caste discrimination among Indian Christians. He said, 'The Christian missionaries in India misunderstood the teaching of Jesus. They thought to baptize a person was to make him/her the follower of Jesus!'

- William Macwan, SJ  
Vadodara, Gujarat - 390 002

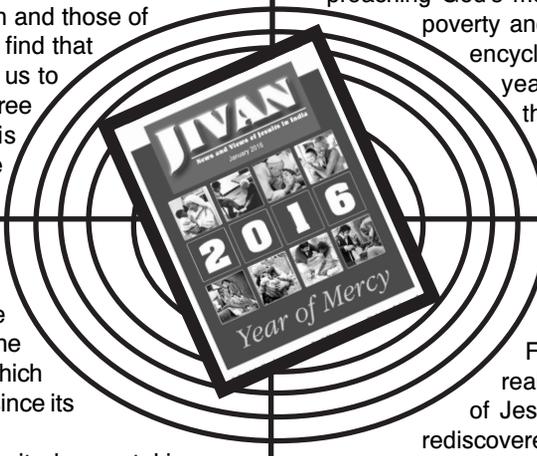
## Not mere piety, but great wisdom

The announcing of the Year of Mercy by Pope Francis has come as the clear echo of the biblical announcement of the year of Jubilee, which Jesus had claimed as the sum and substance of his life and ministry (Lk 4: 18f).

The importance of the Year of Mercy gains a special significance at a time when our planet is reeling under the brutality of the cycles of violence and counter-violence at the local, national and global levels. One queries with an acute sense of dismay whether there would ever be an end to such violence! These cycles need to be broken at some point before they snowball into uncontrollable conflicts and even full-blown wars. Among the means available for doing so, the most effective one seems to be *mercy* – mercy at the individual as well as societal level. For, mercy alone can heal the unhealable wounds and erase the inerasable scars.

We should realize that mercy or forgiveness is not an act of piety but wisdom of the highest order. It is truly foolish to store up hurts in one's heart and suffer the burden within and consequently end up being a person sick at heart. A wise person on the contrary forgives and gets rid of such burdens at the first possible opportunity and enjoys true peace.

- Joseph Lobo, SJ  
Anekal, Bangalore - 562 106



# Lessons for Life

## *I've learned from Italy*

BY JIJI PUTHUVEETILKALAM, SJ

### **Greet others with a smile:**

The first day after my arrival in Rome, the primary thing that I had to do was learn the Italian phrases for greetings. Italians have a wonderful tradition of greeting others, and they do it almost for all occasions in daily life. Amazingly, they have a smiling face when they do it. Even when you go for a walk, they greet you saying, "Buona passeggiata!" which means "Have a good walk!"

### **Treat everyone equally:**

A few days after my arrival in Rome, I once got into a bus, but I was a little hesitant to sit in an empty seat near the door, thinking that it was reserved for a special category of people, as was customary in India. Soon an old woman came to tell me that I could sit there. It is amazing to notice that in public life here, all are treated equally. Whether you are a man or a woman, a foreigner or a native, a civil officer or an ordinary citizen, a church authority or a lay person – all are treated equally everywhere.

### **Enjoy food and company:**

When for the first time I was invited to have a dinner with an Italian family, I really marvelled when the dinner continued for more than an hour and a half. Later I came to know that this is normal here and more common still when there is a guest. Usually a good Italian dinner will have various courses, and the people eat them slowly, around a table, of course - not in front of the TV. While enjoying the food, they maintain a friendly and personal conversation.

### **Drink a little bit of wine, but not too much:**

Italy is famous for good wines. There would always be wine with lunch and dinner. When there are guests or on feast days, Italians prefer festive wines. They have an art of social drinking and relish it among friends and family. It is amazing to notice that they keep it classy.

### **Have an interest in music and art:**

At the beginning of my stay here in Rome, I used to be amazed to see that in almost all the public squares and in streets reserved for walking, there would be someone performing beautiful melodies, either vocal or instrumental. For an Indian

*Jiji Puthuveetilkalam, SJ (KER), is doing his first cycle of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.*



like me, it was also always a wonder to see great and historical works of art – such as sculptures carved in stone or marble or paintings – in practically all the public squares, streets, and churches. Italians do enjoy these works, whether visual art or music, and spend long hours studying their details.

### **Stand in a queue, wait for your turn:**

The first-come-first-served policy is observed well in all public places in Italy. Whether someone has a low or high social status does not matter. Everyone should wait in the queue, whether in a super market, in a self-service shop, at an ATM, at a ticket counter, in a city bus, or at a taxi stand. They all make a queue themselves quietly, without the supervision of police.

### **Know the art of working and that of relaxing:**

During the weekdays, I see the people working hard in their work place. However, on Friday evening, they start relishing time with their family and friends or going for parties, to the theatre, to music concerts, or to other cultural events. They also enjoy their weekends in the mountains or at the seashore.

### **Have a "bella figura":**

The "bella figura" is a common idiom among Italians. Though it is literally translated as "beautiful figure," the expression has a greater significance as far as public life is concerned. It implies that one needs to keep a pleasant and courteous behaviour in the public. Italians, in general, do not get drunk in public, walk shabbily with inappropriate dress for public functions, or eat discourteously at table.



### **Develop a reading habit:**

Italians, generally speaking, read a lot even in this cyber-sophisticated world. I am always inspired when I see people in Rome reading with much interest and attention in the crowded metros and buses, or while waiting outside an office, in a long queue, or traveling in a car. Sometimes I see that the drivers themselves read a bit during traffic jams and at signals.

### **Have a sense of cleanliness:**

Although Italian houses seem to be old and not so well maintained on the outside, inside they are very clean, neat, and beautifully decorated. From children to the old, everyone knows how to sort the waste into different categories like compostable, glass, and plastic and then dump them into the prescribed containers. They always keep the trees in the public gardens and streets pruned and the mountain tops polished. ■

# Green Cover



## Bringing forests to cities!

Gujarat Jesuits bought some 40 acres of saline wasteland overgrown with thorny 'mad Babul' some decades ago at Katamba, on the outskirts of Vadodara. Fr Jolly Nadukudiyil was a practicing lawyer, working in social action and free legal aid. In his observation, work and readings he was struck by the causal link of environmental degradation with migration and inhuman poverty.

Looking at the land, he saw visions of a forest with great bio-diversity. He plunged into the task of 'taming' the land in 2001, and creating a forest. Hailing from a farmer's family in Kerala Jolly was at home with agriculture. With hard and relentless work, personally supervised day and night, he cleaned up the land, and converted it into cultivable plots. In the next four years he planted some 60,000 trees, of some 70 varieties. They grew well in the virgin land. Some suitable plots were kept for grain and vegetable cultivation. He grew medicinal plants and trees, fruit trees, and trees for firewood and timber.

He built an elaborate and ingenious irrigation system. Canals dug along the meandering, tree covered roads that criss-cross the whole land reach water to the nooks and corners of the forest, all through the year. Rain water supplemented from a close-by irrigation canal keeps the water flowing, always. He has constructed four large and deep ponds so far to store water. Pisciculture was also tried in the ponds. Jolly takes a morning round of the forest every day to check everything out – nothing escapes his keen observation! The bio-diversity forest attracts many birds.

Jolly felt strongly about the destruction of natural forests, and the consequent migration of Adivasis. They had to move from green forests to concrete jungles! They eke out a living in unliveable slums in cities, doing the hardest work for the lowest pay. He realized that their children suffered the most - in health and education. Jolly started a private school for migrant workers' children in 2004. Now he has some 140 students from the community of migrant workers. They are given a well-rounded education, good food, health care and cultural activities.

Jolly's unique contribution to fight eco-degradation is creating a bio-diversity forest close to Vadodara city, out of wasteland. Children of migrant Adivasi families study and grow there in an ambience similar to their traditional habitat, and they are enjoying it.

**- Rappai Poothokaren, SJ**



# MOMENTS



"Love isn't something you find.  
Love is something that finds you."

- Loretta Young