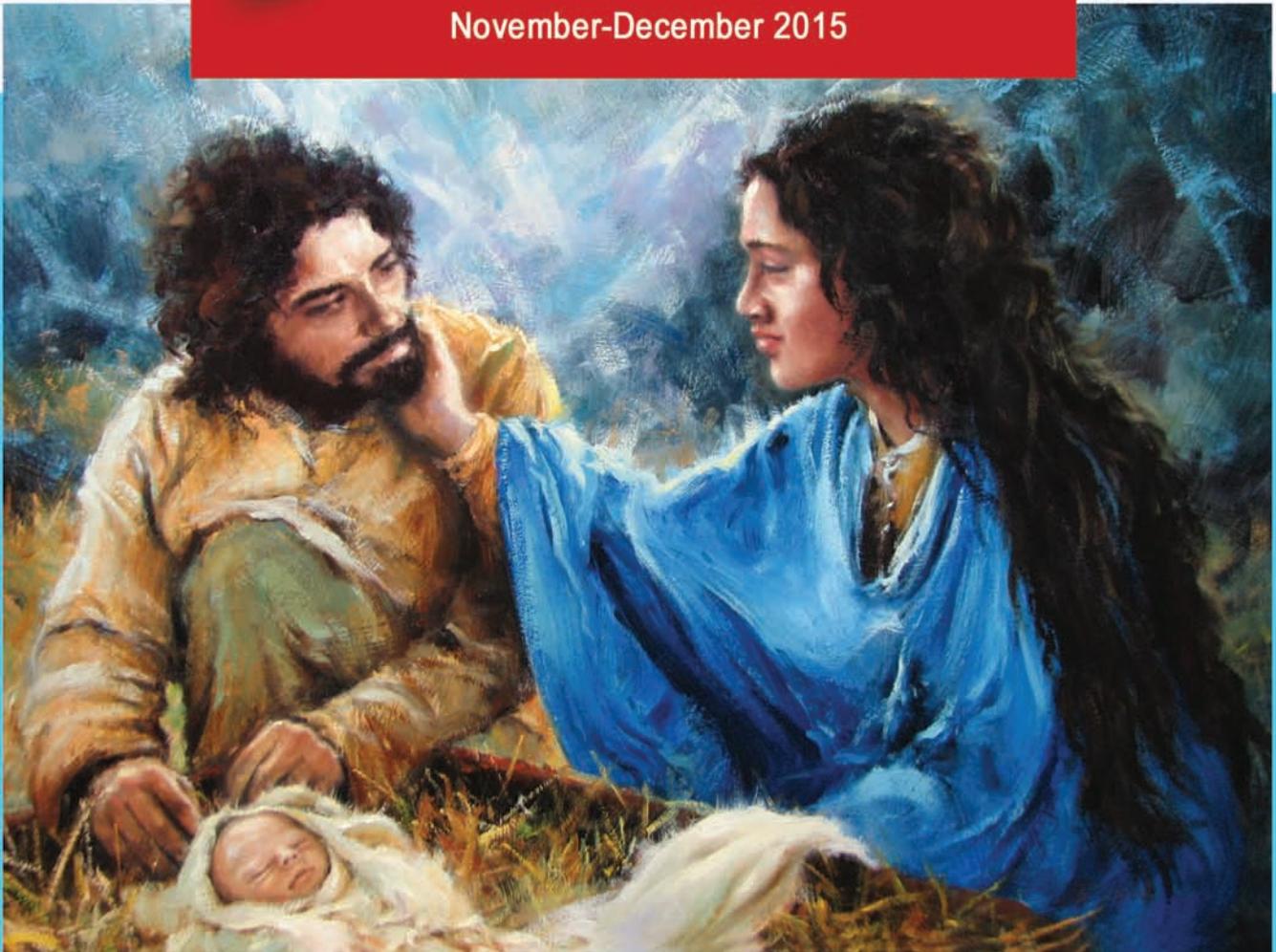


Christmas Special

# JIVAN

News and Views of Jesuits in India

November-December 2015



**Pilgrimage**  
to Teilhard's tomb

**JRS's work**  
in Syria

**Jesus in other planets?**  
interview

**Is Francis**  
a Pope for Asia?

**Jesuit artist**  
& his logo

**Launched:**  
Lok Manch

# A God for You

BY MARION STROBEL

*I never quite know what  
Christmas is about.*

*I never quite know -  
Till, singing on my breast  
And warm as a coloured light,  
Your head is at rest.*

*With your solemn baby stare -  
Soon I'll have to answer you  
When you ask me, "What is God?"*

*God is where you want to go  
When we reach the river's head  
Where the branches are too low -  
And we go home instead.*

*God is everything that you  
Have not done and want to do.*

*God is all those shiny bright  
Stories that I say I'll keep  
To tell to you another night -  
If you will go to sleep.*

*God is every lovely word  
You want to hear and haven't heard.*

*And if you should need a place,  
After searching everywhere,  
To hide a secret, or your face -  
You could hide it there.*

*God is much the safest place  
To hide a secret - or your face.*

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This issue being the Christmas issue, I was quite clear that I should write only about what is heartening or heartwarming in our world today. But, sorry, the story didn't turn out the way I wanted.

Initially things were wonderful. There were these two - a lovely young maiden and the man she loved. Soon after their engagement God sent someone to her with a proposal. She was "deeply troubled" and kept seeking clarifications, but finally because it was God, she surrendered and said yes. The man she loved didn't know what had happened and felt betrayed. When he swallowed his pain and got ready to say a quiet goodbye and go away, God sent another one to explain and assure him that love hasn't been betrayed, but just got bigger and has become Love. He was asked to put aside his own little story and become a part of God's own mysterious, momentous and magnificent story. He too surrendered, saying yes.

The two 'yeses' together brought this Baby whom they named Jesus. Shepherds of the area came to know through a song of the angels. Wisemen from the East looked carefully at a star and knew the joyful truth. It was then the shocking twist in the story happened.

You think you know what happened to the Wise Men from the east, don't you? No, you don't. They were threatened, humiliated and shot at.

It was much later that I realized that I was so deeply affected by what is happening in India and this has got mixed up with what happened in Palestine centuries ago.

Nayantara Sahgal, noted writer and the niece of the former Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, has returned the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in protest against what she called the "vanishing space" for diversity. Now more than 30 eminent writers have done so.

Referring to the recent killings of rationalists and writers M.M. Kalburgi, Narendra Dabholkar and Govind Pansare and of Dadri resident Mohammad Akhlaq, who was lynched on suspicion of consuming beef, Ms. Sahgal said: "In this rising tide of hatred, India is being unmade, being destroyed."

In an article in *the Hindu* (13 Oct '15) Chapal Mehra said, "On Sep 28 a murderous mob got together to kill a man ostensibly for having kept some beef in his refrigerator. They seriously injured his young son and misbehaved with the women in his family. All of this over beef, a meat most Indians have consumed for centuries. Who were these people? Why did they kill a man over an item of food?..

"It was not just a Hindu mob killing a Muslim, it was an anti-national mob attacking India's plurality, diversity and inclusiveness. By killing Akhlaq, a 50-year-old Muslim ironsmith, for having beef in his house, they were attacking our collective Indianness and the freedoms it gives us. They were also illustrating what India can become - a right-wing, intolerant country where majoritarianism trumps basic human rights."

"There is a little in common among most Indians - except the ideas of a plural, diverse, inclusive, equal and secular country. This is our truth. We exist as a nation because we believe in each other's right to live freely without fear and oppression... It is the very idea of India as a free society that is under attack. As Indians, our wisest move will be to recognize this truth and fight it."

Ms. Sahgal said the environment in the country seemed to be getting "worse and worse" in the past 15 months. "In all these cases, justice drags its feet. The Prime Minister remains silent on this reign of terror. We must assume he dare not alienate evil-doers who support his ideology... India is a democracy, and in democracies every party has a right to be in power, but what we are seeing in India today is fascism. There is a vanishing space for diversity to the extent people are being killed for not agreeing with the ruling ideology."

Realizing the shocking twists that are happening to the heartwarming story of India, every Indian should do their bit to ensure that our wise men and poor shepherds remain safe.

What should energize us is the Christmas story in which shepherds and wise men were able to celebrate - safely and joyfully - in spite of the hassles they had to endure.

- M.A.J.A.



GC 36 should think of

# Wider Jesuit Families

BY SEBASTIAN PAINADATH, SJ

*Listen to what the Spirit is telling the Church* – this is a refrain we hear in the last book of the Bible. For us Jesuits this would concretely mean: listen to what the Spirit is telling the Society. This is the attitude with which we are moving towards the next GC. A particular grace that Ignatius would constantly ask in the *Spiritual Exercises* is the ability to listen to the Spirit: to discern the movements of the Spirit of Christ in individuals and the Society, in the Church and in the wider world.

## The consecrated communities of the future will be communities of spiritual seekers, searching the Divine beyond religions and structures.

### A contemplative search

Listening is not an active work, for it is not the *I* that listens, but the true self. Hence one has to let the ego go in the discerning process. Listening is neither a passive engagement, for one has to be extremely alert to the inner voice. Listening is a receptive process: one listens not with the mind but with the *nous*, the intuitive faculty; one listens with the heart to come to an *interior knowledge* of what the divine Spirit is saying (Sp. Ex. 233). It is a process of realizing how “the divine Spirit joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16). Listening to the Spirit is therefore a contemplative process that

presupposes an immense inner freedom. The entire *Spiritual Exercises* enables growth in this inner freedom.

With the inner freedom brought up in the *Principle and Foundation* (Sp. Ex. 23) and with the contemplative perception of the divine work in the world as described in the *Contemplatio ad amorem* (Sp. Ex. 235) a Jesuit looks at the world with a divine eye (Sp. Ex. 102). Then we realise that the Spirit of God makes humanity enter a new stage of its spiritual evolution today. A clear sign of that is the powerful global consciousness with all its positive impacts and negative effects. The entire world has shrunk to a global village, where almost everyone knows everyone else. The international communication system has made a tremendous leap in the last thirty years. This shapes the mindset, the value system and the spirituality of people all over the world.

The new global culture has its impact on the Church too. A global consciousness that we belong to a truly universal (*catholic*) spiritual family is growing. The Catholic Church is understood as the communion of the local Churches, which are sensitive to local cultures and religions. Pope Francis emphasizes this catholicity in the Church and promotes decentralization in



the administration. A new ecclesial self-understanding grows under the impact of the divine Spirit. This we Jesuits have to take note of. Globally the faithful take responsibility for what they believe, and hence they ask questions which provoke a fresh exploration into *the breadth and the length, the height and the depth* of the mystery of the divine work in the world. We cannot move blindly to tomorrow with the answers of yesterday. One cannot say: back to the future!

It is in the global context of this awakening from below that the next GC meets. The main objective would then be a contemplative perception of the presence of the divine Spirit in this global awakening in the Church and in the world at large: *Listen to what the Spirit is telling us* Jesuits in the emergence of this new global consciousness. Here we take note of two phenomena, one disturbing and the other quite challenging:

### The crisis

The disturbing factor is the dwindling number of those committed to the traditional patterns of consecrated life in the Church. The Society of Jesus too is affected by this crisis in vocations, especially in the Western hemisphere. Though in the South Asian Assistency we still do get a good number of young

people joining us now, the situation can drastically change within a few years. What the West is experiencing today will soon come to this part of the world too. The Catholic Church is heading towards a situation in which many of the traditional Orders / Congregations will be wiped off from the map of the Church. Several religious Societies have already got reconciled with this reality. At some time not too far out in the future the Society of Jesus too will have to meet this situation. In

fact no particular religious Order / Congregation is inevitable in the salvific plan of God. What permanently goes on is the process of the Kingdom of God -which Jesus announced; the Church is a sacrament of the Kingdom of God, and the religious Societies offer only *one* form of a basileic community, however sacred they may be for us now. We may look at this reality as a crisis situation. But every crisis, as Arrupe reminds us, can be a *kairos*, if we look deeper and perceive the movements of

**Perhaps the time has come for a completely new structure of Jesuit life to evolve.**



the Spirit in it.

**The Chance**

The positive phenomenon is that there is a visible awakening of faith perception from below. The believing community would say today: *we are the Church*. This is evident in the Afro-Asian Churches where the people get actively involved in the pastoral work. This is true also in the European-American Churches where enlightened individuals and communities assert their role in the *ecclesiogenesis*. The very term *laity* has to be avoided for it is a pejorative term that smacks of the superiority of priests over the believing community. The term *laity* also perpetuates the unfortunate divide between the clergy and the community, between the sacred and the secular – a separation that the Incarnation overcomes. Hence let me use the overarching term the *believing community / ecclesial community* to refer to the “majority of the people of God in the Church” (Pope Francis, EG, 102). The small minority of priests and members of consecrated Societies has the mission to serve the Church, which comprises of the vast majority of the believers. We religious are for the people, for the community, and not they for us. This means the emotional and theological acceptance that with all the believers in Christ we form one spiritual community. The forthcoming GC has to look deep into this new consciousness that the Spirit is awakening in the universal Church, and ask how we Jesuits could respond to the movements of the Spirit. In fact GC 34 already initiated this process in the decree on Cooperation with the Laity: “The Society of Jesus acknowledges as a grace of our day and a hope for the future that the laity take active, conscientious and responsible part in the mission of the Church in this great moment of history.” (331)

### The Evolution of Religious Societies

If we look at the historical evolution of the communities of consecrated life in the Church we find three facts: (i) It is on the inspiration of a charismatic person that a religious Order/Congregation emerged; gradually it evolved structures of permanence. (ii)

influence of Buddhist asceticism on the emergence of monastic life patterns in Christianity cannot be overlooked. Cfr. S. Painadath SJ, *Flexible Communities of Spiritual Seekers, Jeevadhara*, May 2015, pp.59-69).

Later the Christian hermits got together to form coenobite communities. Slowly the monastic trend moved to

renaissance period as Christianity was being challenged by the secular culture St Ignatius initiated a new form of consecrated life with the thrust of *finding God in all things*.

In the subsequent centuries, as Europe was establishing colonies outside, many missionary Societies of men and women evolved. In response



Every religious Society was a creative response to a particular need felt in the Church or in the wider society; hence the spirituality and structure of every Society were conditioned by time and space, history and culture. (iii) Several such Societies have also disappeared in the course of time, as the call of the hour changed. These historical facts somehow relativise the claims of survival of every Society.

Jesus invited us to a radical following with the Gospel values. In the early centuries martyrdom was considered a grace of this radicality of commitment. But as the possibility of martyrdom waned off, the believing community searched for other authentic forms of Christian living. Individuals started living as hermits in the Egyptian desert. These Desert Fathers / Mothers were probably inspired also by the Buddhist monks who lived in the Nile Valley since the time of Asoka. (If India is the womb of monasticism, the silent

the Sinai Peninsula. From there it got established in the Eastern Churches. A hub of the monastic movement was Mount Athos, which even today attracts thousands of spiritual seekers from all over the world.

In the process of the Christianisation of Europe the monastic movement in the West started with St Benedict on Monte Cassino in Italy. Integrating regular prayer with disciplined work (*ora et labora*) the Benedictines contributed much to the spiritual growth and agrarian development of the people for centuries. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century St. Francis initiated a mendicant movement of consecrated life in the radical following of *Jesus the poor* as a counter-witness to the dominant power-and-money culture in the Church. St. Dominic and friends with another form of consecrated life based on *contemplata aliis tradere* responded to the need of an adult faith formation of the faithful. In the post-

## Do we have the freedom and humility to experiment with open door communities, communities of spiritual pilgrims?

to the post French Revolution situation several Congregations were established with a secular thrust. In the emergence of all these Societies there was a concrete response to a particular call of the hour. But as the context changes each Society has to *listen anew to what the Spirit is telling* in the given situation. It is in this sense that Vatican II demanded a *return to the sources*.

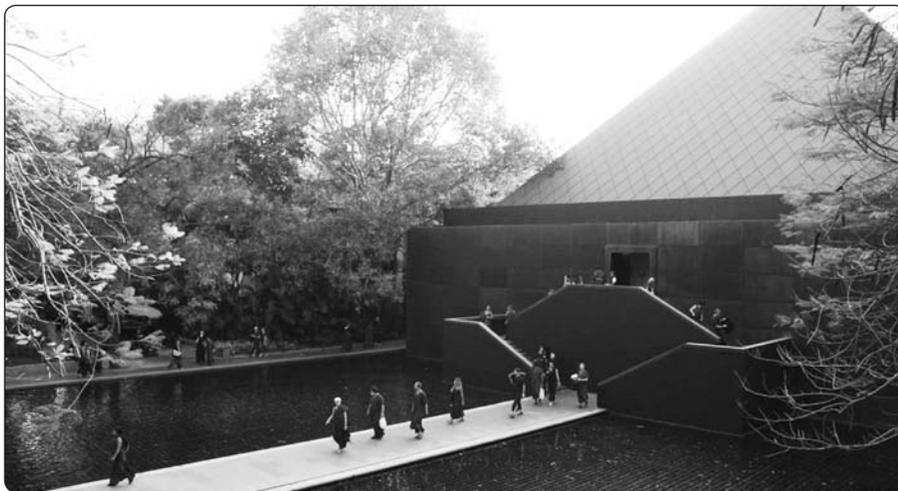
### Returning and exploring

But returning to the sources and regaining the original charism alone would not suffice. We have to see what is happening in the Church, in the wider world today. With the global situation changing so fast and so radically, we are now at a point where entirely new forms of consecrated life have to emerge. In a sense we Jesuits find ourselves in a cultural transition similar to what Ignatius was confronted with in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The discovery of the Afro-Asian-American continents, the questions raised by the

Lutheran Reformation, the creativity of the post-Renaissance period, the spiritual vacuum in Christian praxis, the emergence of critical thinking in believers – all these were challenges which the early Jesuits faced. And they faced them with vision and creativity. This is the exploratory dynamism (*magis*) which we Jesuits have to regain in the present context. Often our concern gets confined to how to deepen the given heritage of Ignatian spirituality and renew the structures of the existing Society. But we have to go beyond Ignatius! If he were

awakening of the believing community from below (the chance). The members of the Christian communities are no more theological illiterate *laity*, but believers who are conscious of their vocation to a life shaped by the Gospel values. Through personal study, retreats, conferences, theological seminars, TV programmes and Basic Ecclesial Communities they assert their presence and role in the Church in diverse ways. But often they meet with opposition from a clerical Church (Pope Francis, EG, 102). Somehow the priests and religious do not take

as merely associated members of an existing clerical Order or as tertiaries of a community of consecrated life. They want to be respected as daughters and sons of God, as co-pilgrims in the *Pilgrim Church*, with all the rights and responsibilities. They would value the integrating power of some of the traditional spiritualities which evolved in the Church. Hence they want to be spiritually nourished by them. Concretely this would mean that they want to belong to the Benedictine family, Franciscan family, Jesuit family. Is there a space for them in the future



alive today he would perhaps offer us another *Spiritual Exercises* and design another set of *Constitutions* to help us listen to the Spirit and respond to the call of the hour.

Has the Jesuit Order a viable future if it goes on as it evolved over the four centuries? Inspired by the spiritual experience of Ignatius in a radical following of Jesus the Saviour and responding to the grace and demands of the present hour should we not explore more universal forms of consecrated life? *The more universal the more divine!*

Perhaps the time has come for a completely new structure of Jesuit life to evolve in the Church. The *sign of the times* for this is not so much the dearth of vocations (the crisis), but the global

the wider sectors of the believing community into confidence. Hence a genuine and creative collaboration does not easily evolve in the Church. This unfortunate divide between the priests / religious and the vast section of the community is not in tune with the vision of Jesus.

#### **Pilgrim communities in the pilgrim-Church**

The traditional pattern of consecrated life bound by the three vows may not attract many in the future. On the other hand many serious Christians look for membership in a spiritual community which would spiritually nourish them and offer a sense of belonging in the Church. But they do not want to be considered

**Perhaps we could start with one or two communities in each Province experimenting with this new form.**

forms of consecrated life? Maryknolls are experimenting with incorporating the believers into the *Maryknoll Family*: they fully share the mission and spirituality of the Maryknoll. Some other Congregations too are exploring in this direction. The next GC may have to make a serious discernment along this line. Can we explore the scope of a *Jesuit Family* in which Jesuits and the *laity* together feel belonging to the one apostolic community, sharing the resources and working together for the one mission?

GC 31 recognised the possibility of “linking the laity to the Society” (591-593). GC 34 initiated an experiment of “juridical bonding of individual lay persons to the Society of Jesus” in order

“to extend the missioning process of the Society to lay persons” (357-358). But nothing conspicuous has happened. Hence GC 35 provisionally decided “not to promote the special kind of spiritual bond” (6:27). I am afraid, we Jesuits have not imbibed the great vision of the GC. 34 decree on *Cooperation with the Laity*. The basic problem is that “shifting the focus of our attention from the exercise of our own direct ministry to the strengthening of the laity in their mission” does not take place in us Jesuits (353).

Our mind-set has to undergo a radical change. We still tend to look at the issue from a juridical perspective, and not with the inner freedom of listening to what the *Spirit is telling the Church* today. The call to create new forms of evangelical life comes from the Spirit of Christ abiding in the Church. In this new form there will be members bound with the three vows, and others without such juridical bonds; some may make a lifelong commitment, others become members for a definite period of time; some may make themselves available for any ministry anywhere, others may come forward with a definite charism with all its limitations. But all have only one goal: the greater glory of God. We all belong to the one spiritual family within the universal Church on the basis of the *one Spirit and the several charisms* (I Cor. 12:11).

What characterises the *Jesuit Family* would be the spirituality of the *Exercises*. “We offer them what we are, what we have received: our spiritual and apostolic inheritance, our educational resources and our friendship. We offer Ignatian spirituality as a specific gift to animate the ministry of the laity” (GC 34, 337). Ours is only a “supportive role” (352). What is important is that the *laity* is not deprived of their “distinct vocation” (339) in “evangelizing the

structures of society” (336). We Jesuits cannot forget that the *Company of Jesus* began at Paris as a *lay* movement! Hence “this actualization of the lay vocation can show more clearly the grace of our vocation” (354). This presupposes that we honestly take them into confidence so that they can genuinely confide in us. Only on the basis of true companionship (337) can we “accompany them and be accompanied by them” (358).

If *thinking with the Church* is an important parameter in the Jesuit heritage, we will have to nourish the Church by designing a completely new form of a community of consecrated life. Do we have the freedom and humility to experiment with *open door communities*, communities of spiritual pilgrims? This would mean that young and old, men and women, married or non-married – all spiritual seekers could be members of the *Jesuit Family*. They may not be bound with the three vows, they may not commit themselves for a life-long adherence, they may not be just collaborators in our institutions; but they will be serious *sadhakas* when we walk together with them. The consecrated communities of the future will be communities of spiritual seekers, searching the Divine beyond religions and structures.

#### Buddhist and Hindu Experiences

One of the blocks we feel within us and outside is the rigidity of structures. The *discreta caritas* given as a key to the interpretation of the Jesuit Constitutions could help us surmount the blocks. Here we could also learn from what the divine Spirit is accomplishing in the spiritual traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Buddhism has a long cherished monastic heritage. One may be initiated to a monastic community at a very early stage in life;

but after some years one may leave the community and take to married life and secular profession. But once the obligations to the family are over one could take to monastic life again. In many Buddhist countries monastic life is well integrated with the life and culture of the local people.

The Hindu ashrams too have a fluid structure. Genuine ashrams are in fact communities of spiritual seekers (*āśrama*). Unmarried and married ones can become members of an ashram with or without a life-long commitment. In both these religions spiritual discipline is an important factor. This does not mean just holding on to structures and strict prayer times, but developing the inner freedom to seek the Truth.

GC 31 dreamt of a “closer linking of the laity with Jesuits” (591); GC 34 envisaged a “juridical bonding of individual lay persons to the Society of Jesus” (357). GC 35 put a tentative closure on that (6: 27). GC 36 will have to address this issue in a wider context. It has to go far beyond the question of juridical bonding by discerning the Spirit-generated process in the Church and in the secular realms.

What could evolve is an entirely new form of consecrated life in the Church. The General Congregation as the apex body can only initiate such a process again. The exploration has to take place in the Provinces, in concrete Jesuit communities. Perhaps we could start with one or two communities in each Province experimenting with this new form. I am confident that in the new climate created by the Jesuit Pope such an exploration will be enthusiastically received by the wider sections of the ecclesial community. ■

*Fr Sebastian Painadath SJ (KER) is the founder-director of Sameeksha, Centre for Indian Spirituality, Kalady. He can be contacted at: spainadath@gmail.com*

## Jesuit Juniorate staff meet in Hazaribagh

A motley band of twelve Jesuits teaching in our six South Asian Assistancy Juniorates spent five absorbing days from 14 Sep to 18, at St Stanislaus College, Sitagarha, in Hazaribagh. With them at this beautiful forest-locale was our ADF, Fr Raj Irudaya to guide and orient the participants in the spirit of Jesuit formation. This is an annual meeting focused on sharing almost everything that concerns Juniorate formation and thus furthering the integral growth of our young men.



The focus this year was on 'Learning Effective Methods in Language Teaching in order to help increase the Competency Level of our Juniors'. Fr Peter Francis, SJ from XLRI, Jamshedpur, got us to work on new ideas and effective language training methods, and thus upgrade our Juniorate teaching. He stressed the need to bring 'excellence' back into our classrooms through innovative teaching. Fr Francis Kurien, Provincial of Hazaribagh, spoke briefly of the dire need for holistic formation, with a special focus on accompanying our men towards emotional and psychological maturity. Fr Raj Irudaya stressed the need for re-structuring and depth in our formation. His presence helped broaden the perspectives in all our discussions.

Much of the meet comprised a sharing of happenings in each of the six Juniorates in the Assistancy, including the one in Sri Lanka. Every staff member shared his ideas, concerns, events of the past year, and hopes for the future. There was also a special session wherein we took up issues like 'the yardstick to measure the Juniors' preparedness at the end of the academic year', inter-Juniorate events, creative use of internet today, etc. We also finalized details of the short story and essay competitions, and fixed the date for the Standardized Assistancy exam. The programme for next year's meeting was also finalized.

Business aside, the most beautiful part of this meet was the hospitality and warmth of the Hazaribagh Jesuits. Our men at Sitagarha bent backwards to make our stay there an experience to remember. We were welcomed for dinner each day to different Jesuit houses in the vicinity. On the last day we visited a Dalit mission at Tarwa. Fr Patras, Fr Joachim, Fr Varghese, and many other Hazaribagh Jesuits were very helpful. We left with a resolve to constantly endeavour to make Juniorate formation ever integrated and relevant to the times we live in.

- Learoy Rodrigues, SJ

## Launched: 'Lok Manch'

On 18-21 Sep '15 in the Mumbai Retreat House in Bandra, the Province Coordinators for Social Action (CSAs) from 18 Provinces and 2 Regions of the South Asian Assistancy listened to talks, brainstormed, went up to Mount Mary's like our first Fathers went to Montmartre for divine assistance and, finally, gathered the fruits of their exhausting efforts to launch 'Lok Manch' (Peoples' Forum). Jesuits have 50 social organizations which will now join others run by lay, religious and dioceses, for the same basic social cause. With the 100 organizations now working together, they hope to capacitate about 5000 local leaders and through them reach out to at least 300,000 households in 13 States of India in next three years. One of the big benefits of the common endeavour in the banner of Lok Manch will be an easier access to Government-sponsored projects such as National Food Security Act (NFSA), Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) / Scheduled Tribe Sub-Plan (STSP), Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

The target groups are scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, minorities, fisher folk, daily labourers, farmers, shepherds, and other disadvantaged sections. One of the tasks of Lok Manch will be to address the plight of those who live in scarcely arable lands. They are forced to migrate to find some work, and at the same time fight to retain their land which do not yield much. But



these lands are rich in minerals, and so multinationals try to grab them, without the poor owner's consent, by manipulating government agencies. This Common Program, formulated after a year-long deliberation and planning with the CSAs, is one of the efforts made to fulfil the dream of the Assistancy to build synergy across provinces, along with other partner organisations so as to build a national platform and become a force to reckon with at the national level. It shows that the Jesuits with their enormous human resources are willing to transcend province boundaries and work collectively to be and become voice of and for the voiceless thereby safeguarding their dignity and rights.

The 100 organizations of 'Lok Manch' will be under the leadership of JESA (Jesuits in Social Action) and Indian Social Institutes (ISIs) of both Delhi and Bangalore, sharing personnel and money. Its Vision Statement says: "Our vision is to build a vibrant national platform which could make a difference at the national level especially in policy making, comprising of Jesuits and lay partners with due representation from priority communities and women in partnership with academicians, activists and like-minded organizations." A Core Committee comprising of lay people and Jesuits will have general oversight of all the projects and schemes undertaken.

- John Rose, SJ

BY ROBERT ATHICKAL, SJ

Fr Jilson George, CMI, a friend working in Brooklyn parish, New York is an avid reader of Teilhard de Chardin. While working at the United Nations together, we talked about Eco-spirituality and I asked him if he and I could make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Fr Teilhard de Chardin at St Andrews on River Hudson.

And together we went to visit his tomb. Poughkeepsie was the station to get down on Metro-North, which was a trip less than two hours from New York. A taxi cab from the station to the old Jesuit Novitiate took ten minutes.



When the novitiate property was sold out in seventies, the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) bought the place for their campus to train world class chefs.

We were told to report to the Campus Safety office. The man recognized us right away and asked if we wanted the key to the Jesuit Cemetery. He added that 3-4 groups visit Teilhard de Chardin's grave every week!



Making a beeline to the cemetery, we could not but notice the Jesuit Chapel upstairs and the novitiate cubicles. The old novitiate conference rooms were converted into class rooms on cooking and the spacious corridors into eateries. The sign "AMDG" was incised on the floor of the best culinary institute in the world.



## My pilgrimage to Teilhard's tomb

Fr Chardin's grave was easily recognizable since somebody nourished a flowering shrub in front of it. There was total silence inside this neatly manicured lawns surrounded by tall Elm, Maple and Oak trees. After spending time in silence we decided to pay homage to the man who wrote the 'Hymn of the Universe' sitting in a desert in China offering a cosmic Mass without wine and bread.

We certainly came prepared to celebrate a Mass by his grave. It was touching moment when we recalled how he looked at the whole world as a Bread from the Father to be broken and eaten in reverence.

We recalled the fact that Fr Chardin spent the last part of his life in the Jesuit Novitiate, spending his time in prayer and often collecting fossils and stones to explain the biohistory of the Universe to his friends.

His desire was to die on an Easter Sunday and God granted him his wish. Fr Chardin died on 10 April 1955. It was a lonely death for a man condemned by the orthodoxy of the Church. Four people came for his funeral and only one accompanied him to the cemetery on that Spring day.

When Cardinal Casaroli was the Vatican Secretary of State, he sent a letter dated 12 May 1981 on behalf of Pope John Paul II to the Rector of the Institut Catholique de Paris, then Archbishop Paul Poupard, praising the 'controversial' Jesuit Fr Teilhard de Chardin. This letter became famous as the "rehabilitation" of Teilhard, who had been suspected of heresy and barred from teaching. On behalf of John Paul II Casaroli wrote to commemorate the 100th birthday anniversary of Chardin - the man who made an "audacious attempt to reach a synthesis" of science and religion and who "was possessed by Christ in the depths of his soul!"

While we finished the Mass on a makeshift bench in the cemetery, a small group of pilgrims arrived from Chicago along with their parish priest. It was nice to see many ecologically sensitive people visiting the grave of this great Jesuit thinker who could love our universe much before the world woke up to the need for caring for our planet. ■

*Fr Robert Athickal, SJ, is the Director of Tarumitra, Digha Ghat, Patna.*

How did you end up being both an astronomer and a Jesuit brother?

I was a Sputnik kid. I started school the year Sputnik went up, and I was in high school the year people landed on the moon. How could I not be in love with space? Since I went to a Jesuit high school in Detroit, I came to admire the Jesuits. I chose Boston College (BC) because it was a Jesuit school and I figured, "Maybe I'll be a Jesuit."

I went to see a teacher at BC about this and he asked me the killer question, "Have you prayed about this, son?" Prayer? Who prays at 18? So I went back to my room and asked God, "OK, I know you're desperate for Jesuits; say yes and I'll go." And there was no answer. I sat there feeling foolish, and I asked myself, "Actually, what does a priest do for a living?" I realized you

# Could there be some form of Jesus in other planets?

Interview with  
**Guy Consolmagno, SJ**

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which is a nerd school and I was a nerd, so what the heck. That's how I *didn't* become a Jesuit. But always in the back of my mind it was "not now" or "not yet." In my mid-30s, the woman who I had thought was going to be the

getting a call scared me. But I knew it was a call, because I couldn't figure it out. Why a brother? That didn't make any sense at all. Sometimes I wonder if there is a God, but I never wondered about the fact that God wanted me to be a brother.



work with people with problems -like the kids in my dorm who all seemed to have miserable problems that bored me to tears. So, I thought, maybe this is God telling me this is not a good choice for me. I ended up transferring to the

perfect wife for me was smart enough to know that wasn't going to work. I had my career as an astronomer, and I wondered, "This is good; what's next?" And the idea hit me to be a Jesuit brother. The fact that I might be

**How did you end up as a Vatican astronomer?**

When I joined the Jesuits, the last thing I wanted to do was work for the Vatican observatory. I wasn't much interested in doing research; I

had done that at MIT, and the world of big research seemed very political and money-grubbing. But I had taken a vow of obedience, so I joined the Vatican observatory. It was, of course, the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. I love the science, and being part of the Vatican observatory means I don't have to worry about grants or impressing anybody. I can just do the work for the love of the work. When I arrived, the only instruction I got was, "Do good science." That was it!

**As an astronomer, are you ever still bowled over by the vastness of the universe, its sheer size, and how small we are in comparison?**

There are two ways to react to that. You can say, I'm so small and insignificant, how could God possibly notice me? Therefore, there can be no God. Or you can say, I'm so small and insignificant, the fact that God does notice me tells me just how immensely big God is.

**How can we make a claim on the creator in such a vast universe?**

We don't, we can't. The creator makes the claim on us, and that's the important thing to remember, just as it wasn't my idea to be a Jesuit, and it wasn't my idea to be born. The creator has made the claim on us, the invitation to us, and we have to be prepared—whether the invitation was what we were expecting or not.

The one thing about science is that it makes you humble. You'll find some types who want to turn science into religion. Usually these are not true scientists. They think science has all the answers. Anyone who actually does science knows that science doesn't have all the answers. A scientist's life is a life of constantly learning you were wrong, that you had underestimated what was going on. And that kind of humility can be a good thing.

**Some people think that if we discovered life on other planets, that would throw our whole Christian belief system up for grabs.**

A fellow named Stephen Dick wrote a book on the history of human attitudes toward extraterrestrial life. He says that the people who say discovering life on other planets would mean the end of religion are already atheists. In fact, religious people don't believe that would be a problem at all. I think we recognize that if they're from Alpha Centauri or from the next galaxy over, they're still God's creation. It's all God's creation! If we ever find intelligent life, we'll have an interesting dialogue about the nature of the Incarnation. Alternatively, it could be that we're the only ones out there. I don't know which would be scarier.

**Do you think there could be some form of Jesus on other planets?**

I don't know. But I'll take a few hints from what I know about Jesus. John's Gospel says that Jesus, the Word of God, existed in the beginning. Now it's curious that in the universe, the beginning is the one point where we're all joined together. So it's clear that whatever version of Jesus they've got, it's the same Jesus, the same Word. But certainly it would be a word in a different language, to match whatever culture, whatever situation those aliens have to deal with.

**If we do believe that truth is one, and that God created it all, doesn't it make sense to think that if we look hard enough we will find proof on a strictly scientific basis?**

The basic misapprehension there is that science deals with proofs. Science, in fact, doesn't deal with proofs. Science proves nothing. It demonstrates and explains but it never proves, because one principle of science is that every explanation is up for review. The referee never stops looking at the play over and over again.

**Just as the church is always in need of reform, too?**

Exactly, because we aren't perfect. We can't get ourselves back to the garden. There's one interesting difference in science and religion in this: Both science and religion are trying to get a grasp on something that is beyond anything we can comprehend completely. The difference is, science takes an ineffable universe and comes up with human explanations for it, which can be perfectly understood but which are never totally true because humans are always limited.

Religion has truths that are totally true, but never perfectly understood. I know the truth of the experience that said I should be a Jesuit brother, but I sure don't understand it. I know the truth that Jesus Christ, this person who walked in Galilee 2,000 years ago, was something more than a man and yet a man. And yet I'll never be able to completely pin it down, because such words don't exist.

**Just like the Eucharist is not a physics problem.**

Right, and Genesis is not a book of physics. A demonstration: I have a big thick book on gravitation that is 20 years old and completely out of date. A good chunk of what's in there we know isn't right anymore. Parts of the Bible are 3,000 years old, but the truths in it are just as true today as they were 3,000 years ago. If you try to turn the Bible into a science book, you're not doing it any favors.

**Many people are surprised to learn that the Vatican has an observatory. Doesn't the Catholic Church have a reputation for being against science?**

The idea that science and religion are at war first arose 100 years ago. People think it goes back to Galileo, but really it's fairly new. The problem was that there were scientists who

thought that to be good scientists, they had to abandon religion. So the Vatican observatory was established in the 1890s to show that religion was not anti-science.

That's not a problem anymore. Scientists of my generation are churchgoers in the same proportion as the general public. Most scientists have a pretty sophisticated understanding of religion, but the reverse unfortunately is not true. Today the war of science and religion has taken hold among religious people, who know religion and don't know much about science. So what I'm hoping to do is persuade my fellow religious believers that science is not anti-religion, that you don't have to be an atheist to be a scientist. And that on the contrary, science is the root of getting to know God better.

Our faith says, God so loved the world that he gave his only son to it. *Loved the world*. Not just the people in it, but the world. That means the world is good. Understanding how this world works is something God wants us to do. Scientists understand this, but religious people often don't.

### How did the church get its bad reputation on science?

When people tell me about the long fight between religion and science, I'll say, "Name three cases." And they'll say, "Galileo and, um . . ."

They might mention Darwin's theory of evolution, but in fact the official stance of the church on that is "Let's wait and see." We're not fundamentalists. Sure, some church statements from the turn of the century sound anti-evolution, but you can find church statements saying anything under the sun. The church is not one person. The church is a body of people, all seeing God from a slightly different direction. To get a good picture you have to put them all together.

### What went wrong with Galileo?

The sad thing is that when I talk about Galileo, people think of Galileo the myth, and they don't know the real history. There are three points to remember about Galileo. First, he was a devout Catholic, even after the punishment he received from the church. Second, he was operating in the middle of a war, in a world where the Vatican was both a religious power and a temporal power. His sponsors were suspected, probably rightly, of secretly supporting the wrong side. So political issues were at stake. The third thing to remember is that the church was wrong. Wrong not necessarily in accusing him of disobedience, because frankly he was guilty of that technicality. But that's not the point. They were wrong to go after him, to use the church's religious power to support philosophical or political acts.

### So how has the church viewed science throughout history?

Even among the earliest theologians you find a strong belief that when the Bible talks about creation, it is not to be taken literally. Our church has long recognized that the Incarnation meant that the physical world was worth studying, that it was blessed.

In the early Middle Ages, John Eriugena wrote a scientific treatise explaining why science was a way of getting to know God. In the 1100s and 1200s, the monk Roger Bacon did work that led him to be called the father of chemistry.

Albert the Great, the doctor of the church who taught Thomas Aquinas, is called the father of geology because he wrote a book on mineralogy. Copernicus was encouraged by a cardinal to write his book. The church started the universities that studied science and astronomy. We aren't afraid of the truth, even when we don't have a complete picture of it - which we never do.

**But the church gets bad press for opposing in vitro fertilization, embryo research, cloning. Don't you think the church often comes across as saying "Stop!" to science?**

First of all, the church never doubts that what scientists say is true. The question is: Is it a good idea? That's a question not enough scientists are willing to ask, especially in the world of biology. Physics, you see, was humbled by the advent of quantum physics, and the recognition that all the things we thought were true aren't. Biology hasn't come to that point yet; it's still an immature science right now. Some scientists say, "Yes, it's possible to clone, let someone else worry about the consequences." Well, that somebody is the church.

In genetic engineering, there are worries as well as tremendous opportunities. The biologists are forcing us to ask questions we never really asked before: What is life? What is personhood? Why is human life sacred? And that always raises the possibility that maybe life isn't sacred, maybe we *can* do whatever we want. We know that's a false answer, because people who've tried that have ended up in places we don't want to be.

### Is there anything in science that you're afraid to find out?

Although it's not a real fear, I'd be afraid of any final answer. I'd be afraid of ever thinking we've run out of things to discover. Because the act of discovery is the fun of science. It's not the answers that are important, it's the fun of discovery - almost like doing a crossword puzzle. The fun is in doing it. When you're done, you toss it away. In a universe made by an infinite God, I'm confident he'll always have another trick up his sleeve. ■

*Courtesy: www.uscatholic.org*



BY RONALD ROLHEISER, OMI

**M**any of us arrive at Christmas tired, running, distracted, and already fatigued with the lights, songs, and celebrations of Christmas.

up decorations, shopping for gifts, sending out cards, preparing food, and attending Christmas socials. When Christmas arrives, we are already tired of Christmas carols, having heard them already, non-stop, for weeks in our shopping malls, restaurants, public squares, and on our radio stations.

more deeply in our lives. Our time of preparation is generally more of a time to prepare our houses than a time to prepare our souls, more of a time of shopping than of prayer, and more of a time of already feasting than a time of fasting as a preparation for a feast. Today advent is perhaps more about already celebrating Christmas

## Rested and ready for Christmas?

Advent is meant to be a time of preparation for Christmas; but for many of us it is not exactly a time for the kind of preparation that enables Christ be born more deeply in our lives. Instead our preparation for Christmas is mostly a time of making ready to celebrate with our families, friends, and colleagues. The days leading up to Christmas are rarely serene. Instead we find ourselves harried and hurried putting

And so Christmas, itself, generally finds us more in a pressured and tired space than in a leisured and rested one. Indeed sometimes the Christmas season is more an endurance test than a time of genuine enjoyment. Moreover and more seriously, if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that in our preparations for Christmas, we, in fact, make very little space for the spiritual, for Christ to be born

than it is about preparing for it.

And the end result is that, like the biblical innkeepers who had no room for Mary and Joseph at the first Christmas, we generally arrive at Christmas with “no room at the inn”, no space in our lives for a spiritual rebirth. Our hearts are good, we want Christmas to renew us spiritually, but our lives are too pressured, too full of activity and tiredness, for us to have any real energy to make Christmas a

special time of spiritual renewal for ourselves. The spirit of Christmas is still in us, real, but lying like a neglected baby in the straw waiting to be picked up. And we do intend to pick up the baby, but simply never get around to it.

So how bad are we?

Now, while this should challenge us to take a look at ourselves, it is not as bad as many religious critics make it out to be. Arriving at Christmas with a life too busy and too distracted to make more room for Christ doesn't make us bad persons. And it doesn't mean that Christ has died in our lives. We are not bad, faithless, and pagan because we habitually arrive at Christmas too distracted, too busy, too pressured, and too tired to make much of a conscious effort to make this feast a time of real spiritual renewal in our lives. Our spiritual lethargy simply defines us as more human than angelic, more earthy than platonic, and as more sensual than spiritual. I suspect that God fully understands this condition.

Indeed, everyone struggles with this in some fashion. No one is perfect; no one gives a full place in his or her life to Christ, even at

**The days leading up to Christmas are rarely serene. Instead we find ourselves harried and hurried, putting up decorations, shopping for gifts, sending out cards, preparing food, and attending Christmas socials.**

Christmas time. That should bring us some consolation. But it should also leave us with a pressing challenge: There is too little room for Christ in our busy, distracted lives! We must work at clearing some space for Christ, at making Christmas a time of spiritual refreshment and renewal in our lives.

How do we do that?

In the days leading up to Christmas, many of us struggle to do all the things we need to do to be ready for all that needs to

happen in our houses, churches, and places of work. We need to shop for gifts, send out cards, put up lights and decorations, plan menus, buy food, attend a goodly number of Christmas socials at work, at church, at friends' houses. This, added on to the normal pressures within our lives, not infrequently leaves us with the feeling: I'm not going to make it! I won't be ready! I won't be ready for Christmas! That's a common feeling.

But being ready for Christmas, getting everything we need to do done on time, making it, does not depend upon getting everything neatly checked off on our to-do list: gifts, done; cards, done; decorations, done; food, ready; the requisite number of social obligations, completed. Even if that list is only half done, if you find yourself in church at Christmas, if you find yourself at table with your family on Christmas day, and if you find yourself greeting your neighbors and colleagues with a little more warmth, then it doesn't matter if you are distracted, tired, over-fed, and not thinking explicitly about Jesus, you've made it. ■

*Courtesy: www.ronrolheiser.com*

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BY DEACON GREG KANDRA

The artist who has designed the logo for the Year of Mercy is a Jesuit, Fr Marko Ivan Rupnik. Born 28 November 1954 in Zadlog, Slovenia, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1973. He studied philosophy in Ljubljana and then, in 1977, enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome where he finished studies in 1981. Theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome followed. He was ordained a priest in 1985. Studying missiology at the Gregorian, in 1991 he earned a doctorate for his dissertation on 'The Theological Missionary Meaning of Art in the Writings of Vjaceslav Ivanovic Ivanov.'

Since September of 1991 he has lived and worked in Rome at the Centro Aletti, of which he is the director. He teaches at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, the Pontifical Gregorian University, St Anselm Pontifical Liturgical Institute, and gives seminars and lectures at numerous other European academic institutions. From 1999 to 2013 he was a consultant for the Pontifical Council for Culture and since 2012 he is a consultant for the Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation.

In 2013 he received a doctorate honoris causa from the University Francisco de Vitoria of Madrid and in 2014 from the Faculty of Theology of Lugano. His work as an artist and theologian has always been pastoral. His bold, colourful icons bridge Eastern and Western traditions in a jubilant mix of

## The Jesuit artist and his logo for the Year of Mercy

art that is both new and ancient. In fact, in 1993 when Pope John Paul II saw his work he was so taken that he invited Fr. Rupnik to decorate the Redemptoris Mater chapel in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace. Today Fr Rupnik's work can be found in sacred spaces all over the world.

*Excerpts from an interview:*

**Can you outline for us, on the basis of your experience at the Aletti Center, the ideal profile of a religious, liturgical artist?**

Naturally there is no fixed rule. Undoubtedly there is always an attraction at work in the life of every artist. There is a beauty that attracts. The theologian Pavel Florenskij used to say: "Truth revealed is Love and Love achieved is Beauty". That's it, the artist is attracted by Beauty, which is Love achieved, that is Easter. He should have the grace and the humility to let the Mystery fertilize him. Those who work with this Mystery can't but welcome it, give it space in their lives and let it work in them.

Religious artists are humble. The mature artist knows he has received this gift and so he will be detached from his work. He will not see its production as his self-affirmation, but as his humble service. Only in that way can his work be handed over to the many and the many will recognize themselves in it. Art is like love. They both demand humility and action.

A religious artist needs to be very familiar with the Word of God – because, as Nicene II says, art is a translation of the Word of God. He should be familiar with the contemporary artistic idiom, and to be inserted in the life of the Church.

**Please explain for us the meaning and significance of the logo you have designed for 'the Year of Mercy'.**

The logo presents a small *summa theologiae* of the theme of mercy. In fact, it represents an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon his shoulders the lost soul, demonstrating that it is the love of Christ that brings to completion the mystery of his incarnation culminating in redemption. The logo has been

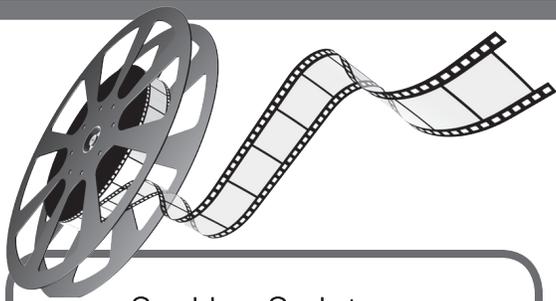
designed in such a way so as to express the profound way in which the Good Shepherd touches the flesh of humanity and does so with a love that has power to change one's life. One particular feature worthy of note is that while the Good Shepherd, in his great mercy, takes humanity upon himself, his eyes are merged with those of man. Christ sees with the

eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ. Every person discovers in Christ, the new Adam, one's own humanity and the future that lies ahead, contemplating, in his gaze, the love of the Father.

The scene is captured within the so called mandorla (the shape of an almond), a figure quite important in early and medieval iconography, for it calls to mind the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The three concentric ovals, with colors progressively lighter as we move outward, suggest the movement of Christ who carries humanity out of the night of sin and death. Conversely, the depth of the darker color suggests the impenetrability of the love of the Father who forgives all. ■

*Courtesy: www.patheos.com*



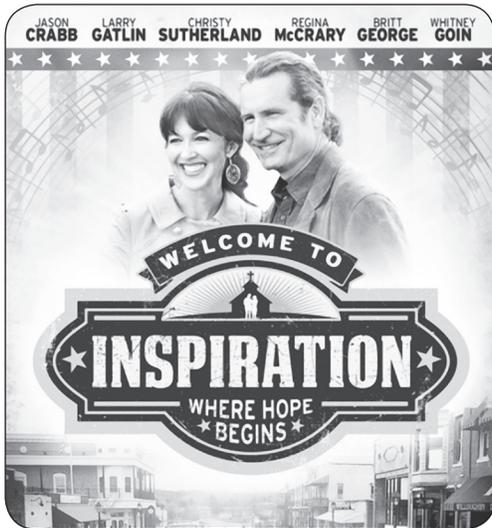


## Seeking Scripture

*Welcome to Inspiration*

A film by Erick Henson, Ryan Ramos

Starring Jackie Stewart, Britt George, Whitney Goin...



*Welcome to Inspiration* follows the true-to-life story lines of people searching for meaning in the midst of unfulfilled dreams, challenging circumstances and unexpected struggles. When a big city couple find themselves stranded in a small town, their lives are changed forever. A chance encounter with a street sweeper opens their eyes to inspirational life lessons that come alive through the town's residents: a widow coping with the death of her soldier daughter, a small business owner rescuing a young runaway, a mechanic finding faith and a young musician bravely pursuing his dream. Like Enochs' book, the movie reveals seven Bible-based principles, which Enochs dubs the "Seven Revelations of Irrefutable Success" that point toward a life of increased spiritual fulfilment. *Welcome to Inspiration* points viewers to the Word of God as the source of ultimate authority and direction. The film effectively moves audiences to spark personal spiritual journeys, using drama, music and emotion to seek Scripture for use in daily life.

## Street Medicine



Two to three nights a week, Dr. Jim Withers rubbed dirt in his hair and muddied up his clothes before walking the streets of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, searching for the very people he was trying to emulate. For 23 years, Withers has been searching for the homeless - under bridges, in alleys and along riverbanks - to bring them free, quality medical care.

He calls it "street medicine."

"I was actually really shocked how ill people were on the street. It was like going to a third-world country," Withers said. "Young, old, people with mental illness, runaway kids, women (who) fled domestic violence, veterans. And they all have their own story."

What started as a one-man mission has blossomed into a citywide program called Operation Safety Net. The organization provides a mobile medical van, walk-in clinics, a computerized database of homeless patients, and the ability to track and assist patients with health care and recovery.

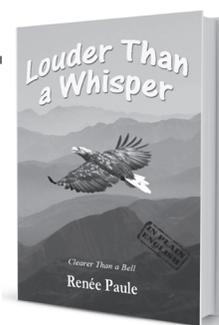
In addition, Withers started a non profit called the Street Medicine Institute, which supports communities in starting their own medical outreach programs for the homeless.

Courtesy: CNN

## Journey within

*Louder Than a Whisper; Clearer Than a Bell* challenges the status quo of Humanity by inviting it to look at the morass of confusion, despair and uncertainty that pervade our society. Through a series of heartfelt essays this book examines topics such as 'Pride', 'Desire', 'Responsibility', 'Betrayal' and 'Loneliness'. What are they and how do they influence our lives?

These topics go deeply inside the human psyche to places many are reticent to visit. The 'journey' we must all one day undertake begins within us and only through this journey will we discover our true nature.



***Louder Than a Whisper; Clearer Than a Bell***

By Renée Paule

Published by RPG Publishing, France

Pages: 174

# Remember Women

- A Letter to Pope Francis

BY SR JOAN CHITTISTER, OSB

Dear Pope Francis,

Your visit to the United States is important to us all. We have watched you make the papacy a model of pastoral listening. You have become for us a powerful reminder of the Jesus who walked among the crowds listening to them, loving them and healing them. Your commitment to poverty and mercy, to the lives of the poor and the spiritual suffering of many - however secure they may feel materially - gives us new hope in the integrity and holiness of the Church itself.

A Church that is more about sin than the suffering of those who bear the burdens of the world is a puny Church, indeed. In the face of the Jesus who consorted with the most wounded, the most outcast of society, all the time judging only the judges, your insistence is the lesson of a lifetime for the self-righteous and the professionally religious. It is with this awareness that we raise two issues here:

The first is the *dire poverty* to which you draw our attention ceaselessly. You refuse to allow us to forget the inhumanity of the barrios everywhere, the homeless on bank steps in our own society, the overworked, the underpaid, the enslaved, the migrant, the vulnerable and those invisible to the mighty of this era. You make the world see what we have forgotten. You call us to do more, to do something, to provide the jobs, the food, the homes, the education, the voice, the visibility that bring dignity, decency and full development.

But there is a second issue lurking under the first that you yourself may



need to give new and serious attention to as well. The truth is that *women are the poorest of the poor*. Men have paid jobs; few women in the world do. Men have clear civil, legal and religious rights in marriage; few women in the world do. Men take education for granted; few women in the world can expect the same. Men are allowed positions of power and authority outside the home; few women in the world can hope for the same. Men have the right to ownership and property; most of the women of the world are denied these things by law, by custom, by religious tradition. Women are owned, beaten, raped and enslaved regularly simply because they are female. And worst of all, perhaps, they are ignored, rejected as full human beings, as genuine disciples, by their churches, including our own.

It is impossible, Holy Father, to be serious about doing anything for the poor and at the same time do little or nothing for women. I implore you to do for the women of the world and the church what Jesus did for Mary who bore him, for the women of Jerusalem who made his ministry possible, for Mary of Bethany and Martha to whom he taught theology, for the Samaritan Woman who was the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, for Mary of Magdala who is called the Apostle to the Apostles, and for the deaconesses and leaders of the house churches of the early Church.

Until then, Holy Father, nothing can really change for their hungry children and their inhuman living conditions. We're glad you are here to speak to these things. We trust you to change them, starting with the Church itself. ■

Courtesy: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>



# Helping a bleeding Syria

- JRS's  
courageous work

BY THOMAS REESE

*Jesuit Frs. Peter Balleis and Michael Zammit were in Washington in April, making the rounds of non-governmental organizations and government offices to inform policymakers of the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Balleis is the international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, and Zammit works with refugees and internally displaced people in Syria. They were also visiting JRS-USA, based in Washington. Excerpts from an interview, published in NCR:*

**What is the Jesuit Refugee Service? What does it do?**

*Balleis:* Jesuit Refugee Service is an organization around 35 years old. Today, we are working in 46 countries and last year reached out to around 760,000 people.

We move according to the crises in the world. Thirty-five years ago, during the Cold War, it was Asia-Pacific, helping refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam.

Then in the mid-1990s when Africa exploded, we continued in

Asia-Pacific and other places like San Salvador, El Salvador, but the main focus became Africa with the Rwanda crisis, the Great Lakes crisis, Sudan and so on. More recently, the conflicts in Africa are more in the Sahel Zone. We work in the Central African Republic, Chad, and we have started in Cameroon. We are going to engage with the refugees who are victims of the Boko Haram.

Today, the conflict zone No. 1 is to be found from Gaza to Kabul. The main focus, 40 percent of our work, is in the Middle East. That means Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, north Iraq, and Afghanistan. This began in 2008, but nobody anticipated the crisis we are having now.

**What is the situation for Christians in Syria?**

*Zammit:* In Syria, the Christians have had a privileged position with the Bashar al-Assad government because there's the idea that minorities should stick together against the others, and

that's a position that the government is pushing a lot.

The situation wasn't wonderful - there were restrictions, but there was no real restriction on getting together to worship. The bishop is a respected member of Syrian society.

At the beginning of the conflict, there was immense pressure by the government to arm the Christians, and luckily, they refused. Some of them in some specific areas have accepted to defend themselves. We don't believe that fighting is necessary. But now, if the Islamic State group (ISIL) comes to our doors, most Christian young people would take arms to defend themselves.

In ISIL-controlled areas, the northern cities on the Euphrates in the northeast near Iraq, Christians have had to leave their villages.

They basically had three choices: First choice, become Muslim. Second, continue to be Christians, but live as a second-class citizen. They might not be harmed, but they would only have access to certain jobs, they would have

to pay the Islamic legal tax (*Djizya*), and they would not be allowed to have more than a certain amount of goods. The third choice was to leave - and many chose to leave - and they were not allowed to take anything with them.

Most Christians would feel more or less at ease living in the government-controlled part of Syria; they would not at all feel comfortable with the ISIL-controlled areas. In the area under the Free Syrian Army, it all depends on which faction was in charge.

There is security in the government-controlled part of the country that we do not find in the rest of the country. We are only working in the government-controlled area.

#### What does JRS do in Syria?

*Zammit:* We're known for education and psychosocial activities, but in Syria, we are heavily into relief work, emergency work. In Syria, we are also into distribution of food. That would be cooked food and noncooked food. We have two food kitchens, one in Aleppo, serving about 9,000 hot meals a day, and another one in Sahnaya, with about 6,000 hot meals a day. The one in Aleppo in the bad times served 20,000 meals in one day. People don't come to the place where we cook the food. We cook the food and give it to partners, who then take care of the distribution.

We've also been giving out food baskets for people who cook their own food. A food basket should feed a family of six for a month. I say "should" because there have been budget cuts. We are also distributing mattresses, blankets, clothes and other items. In Aleppo, we had to stop our educational program for security reasons.

In Aleppo, we also have a clinic. Many of the doctors have left Syria because they are rich and so they can travel. Some diehards have remained. Many of the hospitals have been bombed on both sides, so in Aleppo, you only have two hospitals working and few doctors. We got together a team of four

young doctors just out of medical school, who are wonderful people, and we are offering services in part of Aleppo. They are seeing about 150 people a day. The doctors would examine them, decide what tests they needed, and we would pay for them. They would come back for treatment and pick up their medicine, which would be free.

#### What do you mean by psychosocial work?



*Balleis:* First of all, the main element is family visits, like with the north Iraqi refugees in Erbil. It's the way to reach out to people in urban centers. We have to meet them where they are and find out what their needs are. Psychosocial work is also activities for women, some of whom have been violated. Part of healing is helping people with trauma share their stories in a supportive environment. We provide normal activities so as not to stigmatize them. It is skills training, literacy programs, all kinds of programs. Besides learning practical skills, they have that aspect of healing, of bringing people together again.

#### How do you get along with Muslims?

*Zammit:* We have some 500 employees in Syria, half of whom are

Muslim, half of whom are Christians, and they work very well together. That is absolutely not a problem. The people we are serving are mainly Muslims: 82 percent are Muslims. We work closely with SARC (the Syrian Arab Red Crescent) in Aleppo, and we are very pleased with the cooperation we have with them. We work also with a lot of grass-roots, small organizations. Sometimes just groups of villagers who have gotten together to try to deal with

the situation. We have an outreach program from Damascus that goes into the villages on the coast.

As I said, in Sahnaya, we have a food kitchen that serves 6,000 hot meals a day. We're working with two organizations for the distribution of the food. One is a lay-Muslim organization. They are young people who aren't religiously motivated, but they are a group of Sunnis who want to help the people, so they are giving out food in one area. The other is a group of Druse. So we work with many groups.

#### What is the situation in Aleppo?

*Zammit:* The situation in Aleppo is becoming worrying. ISIL and other radical groups are coming closer, so there's a real panic among people and they want to leave. There's a Christian

school next to our headquarters in Aleppo in which a third of the children have left; they're not there anymore. We have 250 staff in Aleppo; 40 have already either resigned or asked for a leave of absence. It's almost impossible to buy a suitcase in Aleppo nowadays. The buses out are fully booked for several days. So there is panic.

What people need to hear is the international community saying, "Aleppo is a city in which there are 1.5 million people. The status quo will

be damaged; it is that part that has received the barrel bombs. The western part has not suffered so much. But in April, the Christian regions, which had not been heavily bombed, received heavy shelling from the opposition forces. The cousins of two Jesuits had to leave their homes because they were ruined. Many died. The Catholic cathedral was heavily damaged as well. So this also leads to a sense of panic.

Is there local support from

coming from outside and interfering in the situation. ISIL fighters are mainly non-Syrians. You've got people from Afghanistan, from Pakistan; you've got even 3,000 Europeans.

These people might control over half the country, and they are not what the people want. The Syrian Muslims may themselves turn against ISIL. We've had some reports of people being very unhappy in some villages at having to stop hearing music, having to change their ways of dress, but is that enough to overthrow ISIL? Not yet.

Why are you visiting Washington and New York?

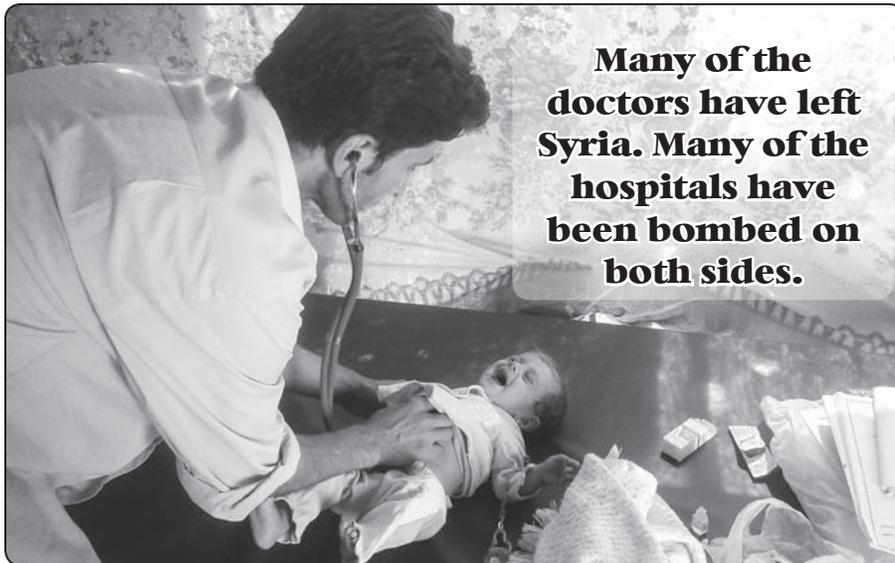
*Zammit:* Our motto has three components: serve, accompany, and advocate. The advocacy component is an essential part of our mission. That means visiting people, talking to them, visiting delegations at the United Nations, trying to show them what the situation is on the ground, where we can go, and how important it is to be able to get, above all, a cease-fire.

Next, we tell officials that there is the need include all parties in discussions, whatever they are, and taking care to respect the existence of the minorities. If you cannot guarantee the existence of a minority community, they will hold on to the bitter end. Their reading at the moment is that if they lose, they will be eradicated. Certainly, you have to address that fear.

What would you like to see from the international community?

*Balleis:* The countries who are major players in the region need to contain the conflict and to stop it. We encourage negotiations with everyone. There's nobody who is absolutely evil and nobody who is absolutely good. Today, you think this one is a good guy; tomorrow, he shoots others and is a bad guy. So we have to talk. You have to talk to the devil. We have to talk in order to stop the war. ■

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



**Many of the doctors have left Syria. Many of the hospitals have been bombed on both sides.**

remain; it will not fall." If people hear things like that, they won't leave, they won't be afraid. But they are not hearing that, so they are beginning to wonder if they should move. If ISIL does come in - and that's a possibility - it will be a major humanitarian disaster -- 1.5 million people on the road, because it's not just the 80,000 Christians who will leave, but a lot of Muslims too.

Who holds Aleppo now?

*Zammit:* Aleppo is a divided city. You've got western Aleppo, which is government-controlled, where you've got some 1.5 million people. You've got eastern Aleppo in which there are some 200,000 people left. That part of the city is controlled by a mixture of al-Nusra, of Syrian Free Army, and other Islamic groups. The eastern part has been heavily

Syrians themselves for ISIL?

*Zammit:* You have two elements. You have the fundamentalists, who are drawn toward the idea of the caliphate. But the majority of Syrians would not want that. The majority of Syrians believe that Christians and Muslims can live and work together. For example, our association, we're half Muslim, half Christian, and we're not the only ones. We have a history of living and working together.

Now it's evident that there are communities that have the ascendancy and others that are suffering, that do not have liberty. The feeling of frustration has increased in most Syrians.

Those questions have to be addressed, and I think that they can be addressed, but they will not be addressed when so many people are

# That daring young woman

BY SALLY READ

Perhaps it is impossible to imagine how it would feel to be carrying the Son of God as a pregnant virgin. After the Magnificat, Scripture tells us nothing of Mary's feelings about her new state. But this pregnancy, I would argue, is the über-gestation: it magnifies not only the Lord, but the fear, power and wonder of any pregnancy. Seen in this light, the insipid figure in so many Annunciations, the cleaned-up mother in the Christmas cards, is revealed as a woman of dizzying strength.

There is, of course, a jubilant certainty, in the Magnificat: Mary seems to have come through being "greatly troubled", and seems set to bloom in great contentment. But surely it wasn't that simple. In the first trimester, any woman is acutely aware of a life unfurling inside her – yet, more often than not, the signs of pregnancy seem inconclusive. More than one mother has told me they half-expected the first scan to reveal an empty womb: they must have made it up! Could any mortal in Mary's position not have wondered if they'd got it wrong?

The wonderings of pregnancy don't end there. Will we miscarry?

Is it a boy or a girl? Is it healthy? All mothers sense that the future is taken out of their hands – but none so much as Mary. After hearing an angel, it must have seemed as though

anything could happen (and, indeed, it did). The psychological tension this could have provoked seems more than anyone could bear.

Mary may have gone to Elizabeth to help her in the last part of her own pregnancy. But she may also have gone to her for support, and to pray together through those quietest and most obscure first weeks. This may have been the truest dark night: apparent silence from God when he was closest. The unique pitch of Mary's uncertainty had to be matched by the deepest communion. Only faith could hush the terrifying array of possibilities, as an imperceptible Christ swam in her.

We can't know if Mary was fortified, then, by the foetus' growth. Women often bond with a baby when they feel his or her movements. There develops a rightness that eclipses blood-test results or financial worries. We can't know if Mary's cargo gave her this sense of rightness – or an increase of awe.

We do know her stomach, pelvis and liver squashed and shifted like anyone's, to make space for this unknown. This is the Incarnation's poetry: Mary lived physically what we strive for spiritually – transformation, as Christ forms within us. But this internalisation of Christ asks of us, as well as gives, and it certainly asked of Mary. Her swollen belly would have been the subject of gossip. Add to that her ignorance as to what, exactly, she would produce, and it's clear she could only carry on with a constant renewal

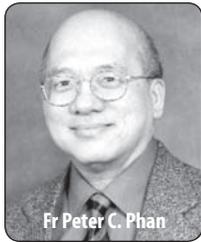


of her fiat. The fiat wasn't a one-off declaration. It had to strengthen itself with the growing body of God himself. Ambivalence could have led to what we would now call a breakdown. Every pregnancy leaves us vulnerable: we are about to unleash something over which we have little control. Mary's pregnancy was the acme of this. But let's not kid ourselves: every pregnancy asks a fiat of every woman – we know this because women and babies are damaged or destroyed every day by its lack.

Modern women can often mistake Mary's submission for weakness. In fact, her life is a courageous, quietly hair-raising navigation of God's will. As Sylvia Plath says in her poem for three voices about motherhood, we crave normality in our children – isolation, eccentricity and rebellion all break a mother's heart. Mary knew too well the tremendous discomfort of difference, and its agonising finale. Her earthly walk through maternity has the breathtaking dare of a tightrope walker, never taking her eyes from God. ■

Courtesy: [www.thetablet.co.uk](http://www.thetablet.co.uk)

BY JOÃO VITOR SANTOS



Fr Peter C. Phan

Fr Peter C. Phan is the Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, and the author of many books, including *Being Religious* Interreligiously:

*Asian Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue*. Earlier this year, Phan was interviewed for IHU On-Line, a publication of the Humanitas Institute Unisino, which is part of Unisinos, a Jesuit university in southern Brazil. Excerpts from the interview:

**In these two years of his pontificate, what are the most significant marks left on the Church by Pope Francis?**

...Clearly there is a new way in which Francis has exercised his papal magisterium, and that is not primarily by means of innumerable documents, often filled with theological jargon and couched in almost impenetrable Latin prose, which very few Catholics, including bishops and theologians, read from cover to cover. I am thinking of shelves of encyclicals and other official documents of John Paul II which remain a closed world to 99.9 percent of the Catholic population!

In our time, there is of course still the need for the teaching function in the church, but it must be done by other, more effective, means in addition to the written word. This is one of the ways Pope Francis has transformed the church radically.

**In which ways then has Pope Francis made a significant impact on the church so far?**

One of the most significant things Francis has done, literally within hours of his election to the See of Rome, is giving us a radically new image of what the papacy should be, and by dramatic gestures. We can still see him, as he was introduced with the *habemus papam* to the crowd in Saint Peter's Square, presenting himself simply as the Bishop of Rome, and asking the people to pray that God bless him before he would bless them, and then bowing his head in deep prayer. The

## Is Francis a Pope for Asia?

whole world was stunned into deafening silence.

Clearly there was a new shepherd in town, one who smells the smell of his sheep, and not the Supreme Pontiff - the *Pontifex Maximus* - a title for the high priest of the College of Pontiffs in ancient Rome and later claimed by Roman emperors and popes. Pope Francis signs his documents with a simple *Franciscus*, without adorning it with PP (Pontiff of Pontiffs), as his predecessors were wont to do. He wears no papal accouterments - red shoes, the golden Ring of the Fisherman, the precious stones-studded pectoral cross suspended on a gold chain, embossed cufflinks, water-silk cassock, red mozzetta, ermine-trimmed camauro, and sundry other insignia of power. Instead, his liturgical vestments are exactly like, and even much simpler than, those of any other bishop. No magisterial statement on episcopal collegiality can be more visually potent than Pope Francis's clothing.

Then, there is his decision to live at the Casa Santa Marta rather than at the Apostolic Palace, where he says his daily Mass and preaches for ordinary people, and where he eats his cafeteria-style foods with ordinary folks. There is no private meal with the pope as a signal honor reserved for the elites. Popes have piously claimed to be *Servus servorum* [Servant of servants], but only now do we see what the title entails practically for their personal lifestyle. With these humble gestures and hundreds of others such as embracing a disfigured man, washing and kissing the feet of juvenile prisoners, including a Muslim girl, on Holy Thursday, eating at the same table as Vatican manual laborers in a cafeteria, declining summer vacationing at Castel Gandolfo, Francis has transformed the papacy for good. No future pope can revert to the princely lifestyle without feeling

pangs of conscience about how the Vicar of Christ the Crucified must live.

But surely these gestures are only gestures, and as you noted, future popes will not necessarily repeat them. Is there anything else in Pope Francis's life as pope so far that implies a more permanent doctrinal teaching?

To answer your question I must discuss in detail some of Pope Francis's teachings as contained in his *Joy of the Gospel* and *Praise Be to You*, with special reference to Asian Christianity, since the focus of our conversation is on the ways Pope Francis can speak meaningfully to Catholics in Asia.

But before doing so, I would like to point out another gesture of Pope Francis that will have a permanent impact on the spiritual life of the church. Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI have written large and profound tomes on penance and the necessity of the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation, popularly known as confession. But we have never *seen* them go to confession. The impression is reinforced that they are "Holy Fathers" - as they are called - and do not need to go to confession like the rest of us sinners. I am sure all of them have personal confessors to whom they regularly confess their sins. But that's precisely point. These are *personal* confessors and the confession is done *in private*. How many Catholics can afford personal confessors, like personal trainers, to whom they go for confession in private whenever they wish?

Here came Pope Francis to St Peter's Basilica on Ash Wednesday. He was supposed to listen to confession, but as the master of ceremonies steered him toward the confessional, the Pope indicated to the utterly stunned monsignor that *he* wanted

to go to confession, and not to a personal confessor and in private. He simply walked to one of the confessionals, knelt down, made the sign of the cross, and made his confession. Imagine the shock of the poor priest sitting in that confessional! More powerfully than encyclicals and learned disquisitions on the sacrament of penance Pope Francis's public confession drove the point home on the necessity of confession.

I would like to point out that Pope Francis's way of teaching is very much in tune with the way of teaching of Asian spiritual masters. Confucius, China's teacher of wisdom par excellence, was reluctant, not unlike Jesus, to accept the title of "teacher" and did not advocate teaching as a profession. The Hindu guru can only teach his disciple by virtue of his own enlightenment. In both cases, teaching is most effectively carried out by personal example rather than by intellectual indoctrination.

**Turning now Pope Francis's possible impact on Asian Catholicism, what do you think are the challenges facing a Latin American, more precisely, Argentinian pope in connecting intellectually, pastorally, and spiritually with the people of Asia, a different continent?**

There are lots of similarities between Latin America and Asia, despite their geographical distance and cultural differences. For one thing, both continents belong to the so-called Third World, characterized by large populations and massive poverty. Politically, many countries of the two continents have suffered from colonialism, armed conflicts and violence of proxy wars, especially during the Cold War, and military dictatorship. Religiously, the Catholic Church in Asia and Latin America owes its origins to the same Iberian (Portuguese and Spanish) missions, mostly led by Jesuits, and shares a great number of popular devotions.

Thus, as an Argentinian who did his pastoral ministry as priest and bishop during the Cold War and under the brutal rule of right-wing military dictatorship, Pope Francis can personally sympathize with Catholics in countries such as the

Philippines, Vietnam, East Timor, India, and Korea - North and South- which have been exploited by colonialism and have been victimized by dictatorial governments.

Similarly, steeped in Iberian Catholicism, Pope Francis can readily resonate with devotions to Mary and the saints and with many practices of popular piety that are widespread in Asian Catholicism. For instance, Asian Catholics can easily understand and readily agree with Pope Francis's moving words about popular piety in *The Joy of the Gospel*: "To understand this reality we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love. Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among the poor. I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a rosary; or of all the hope poured into a candle lighted in a humble home with a prayer for help from Mary; or in the gaze of tender love directed to Christ crucified" (no. 125). Yes, there are lots of rosaries, candles, and statues of the suffering Christ in many Asian Catholic homes.

**What about diversity of religions, which is widespread in Asia but practically absent in Latin America, where Christianity predominates. Can someone like Bergoglio who grew up in a Christian country like Argentina enter into dialogue with people of other faiths?**

It is true that Pope Francis grew up in an almost exclusively Christian---and more precisely, Catholic---environment, just like Pope John Paul II did. But not unlike his predecessor, as archbishop of Buenos Aires, Pope Francis had formed deep friendship with Jews, such as Rabbi Abraham Skorka, with whom he co-authored *Sobre el Cielo y la Tierra* (On Heaven and Earth). While experiences in interreligious dialogue are helpful, far more necessary is the requisite attitude toward it, which Bergoglio describes

splendidly: "Dialogue is born from a respectful attitude toward the other people, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It supposes that we can make room in our heart for their point of view, their opinion and their proposals. Dialogue entails a warm reception and not a preemptive condemnation. To dialogue, one must know how to lower the defenses, to open the doors of one's home and offer warmth" (*On Heaven and Earth*, xiv).

**Has Pope Francis displayed this attitude in his trips to Asia?**

So far Pope Francis has travelled to Asia twice, the first time to Korea, 13-18 Aug 2014 on the occasion of the Sixth Asian Youth Day, during which he beatified 124 Korean martyrs; the second to Sri Lanka (12-15 Jan 2015) and then to the Philippines (15-19 Aug 2015). With regard to interreligious dialogue, the country of greatest interest is Sri Lanka, where according to the 2011 census, 70.19% of 21 million Sri Lankans were Theravada Buddhists; 12.6% Shaivite Hindus; 9.7% Muslims (mainly Sunni); and 7.4% Christians (6.1% Roman Catholics and 1.3% other Christians). But interreligious dialogue is no less urgent in the other two countries with Christianity as their majority religion. In the Republic of Korea (South Korea), of the population of 52 million 30% are Christians (20% Protestants, 10% Catholics), 23% are Buddhists, and 46% profess no belief. In the Philippines, nearly 90% its population of 100 million are Christians, and dialogue with Muslims is pressing as there is a sizable portion of its population (11%) following Sunni Islam.

In Sri Lanka, at the impromptu invitation of Banagala Upatissa, the head monk of the Agrashravaka Buddhist temple in Colombo, Pope Francis changed his schedule to pay a visit to the temple, the second pope, after John Paul II, to visit a Buddhist temple. The visit coincided with the sacred ritual of opening the casket containing the relics of two of the Buddha's disciples. The Pope listened respectfully to the monks' chanting their prayers during the ceremony, and Rev. Federico

Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, made a point to note that the Pope did not pray or meditate during the visit, in an apparent effort to show that there was no religious syncretism involved. During his visit Pope Francis canonized the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Indian missionary to Sri Lanka Joseph Vaz and took the opportunity to exhort Sri Lankan Catholics to follow the example of Vaz in “transcending religious divisions in the

together to pray” and “gathering to pray together,” with only the first alternative being permitted. In fact, in Assisi, religious leaders did not pray together with a common prayer, but came together in a common place to pray, each in his or her own religious tradition.

Strictly speaking, common prayer between Jews and Christians is possible, since Christians make use of the Hebrew

the existence of God). Furthermore, in Theravada Buddhism Siddhartha Gautama is not regarded as divine, as Jesus is in Christianity, but as an enlightened (buddha), wise, and compassionate teacher who is not to be worshipped. Perhaps that is why Pope Francis did not pray or meditate with the monks in the Agrashravaka temple. However, in Mahayana (popular) Buddhism, the



service of peace” and to call upon all Sri Lankans to practice religious tolerance.

It is very interesting that you mentioned Rev. Federico Lombardi’s point that the Pope did not pray or meditate during his visit to the Buddhist temple. In your opinion, could the Pope have done so? Would common prayer among the followers of different religions not be a natural thing in Asia where there are so many different religions?

Your question broaches a very difficult and controversial issue. As you may recall, in October 1986 Pope John Paul II gathered a group of leaders of different religions in Assisi to pray for world peace. Cardinal Ratzinger, then-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, voiced his strong opposition to the plan for fear that the spectacle of leaders of different religions praying together would give rise to the scandal of “religious syncretism” To avoid this danger, a clear distinction was made between “gathering

psalms in their liturgy and private prayer, and indeed Christians must pray as Jesus the Jew did. Regarding Islam, Pope John Paul II has affirmed that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, and therefore it is possible in principle for Christians and Muslims pray to God together. Furthermore, in 1964, during his visit to India Pope Paul VI quoted the celebrated Hindu prayer: “From the unreal lead me to the real; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality” and went to say: “This is a prayer which belongs also to our time. Today more than ever, it should rise from every human heart.” It would seem therefore that it is not theologically impossible for the followers of monotheistic religions to pray together to God, despite their different conceptions of divinity.

On the other hand, common prayer between Buddhists and Christians would present serious difficulty since Buddhism as a philosophy is non-theistic (note: not “atheistic” in the sense of explicitly denying

Buddha, though not regarded as divine, is prayed to, like saints in Catholicism, for his blessings and assistance. There is of course no theological objection for anyone, including Christians, to praying to the Buddha for his blessings since he is a saintly person.

**Was there any time in which Pope Francis prayed with non-Christian believers?**

During his visit to Turkey, 28-30 Nov 2014, Pope Francis visited the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. He took off his shoes before entering the mosque. In a gesture of interreligious harmony, standing next to Istanbul’s Grand Mufti Rahmi Yaran and facing Mecca, he bowed his head and prayed silently for several minutes, in what a Vatican spokesman described as a joint “moment of silent adoration” of God.

Another significant example of Pope Francis’s interreligious prayer is his prayers at the end of *Praise Be to God*. At the conclusion of what he calls his “lengthy reflection” on ecology, the Pope proposes

that we offer two prayers: “The first we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus” (no. 246). This is, to my knowledge, the first time ever a papal document explicitly composes an interreligious prayer side by side with a Christian prayer. It would be fascinating to compare the two prayers and highlight their similarities and differences. Pope Francis hopes that his interreligious prayer will be shared by all those who profess faith in God the Creator, not only, as I mentioned earlier, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus, but also people of the so-called primal religions. But, it may also be shared, I suggest, by Buddhists, who, though philosophically not professing belief in (but not necessarily denying) God the Creator, can replace the name of God with that of the Buddha and pray for help in caring for our common home.

**Is there currently any special form of oppression and marginalization in Asia that Pope Francis’s words and deeds address?**

Among the poor and the marginalized, Pope Francis has drawn our attention to the tragedy of migrants and refugees, as hundreds of thousands of terrorized and impoverished migrants risked their lives to reach European harbors, especially Italy, from Africa across the Mediterranean. In recent decades Asia too has been experiencing a huge phenomenon of migration, often in the form of war victims and guest workers, especially to the richer countries such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and to the Middle East. These migrants suffer physical abuse, sex trafficking, labor discrimination, and emotional trauma, and because their sufferings are less graphic, their voices are not heard, their faces not seen. But Pope Francis’s words and deeds on behalf of migrants and refugees have given Asian migrants hope, and hopefully will draw the attention of international powers to their plight.

**In addition to interreligious dialogue and work for justice, peace**

**and reconciliation, has Pope Francis said anything about Asian cultures and the need for inculturating the Gospel into Asia?**

As you know, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) has been espousing three main tasks of the church’s evangelizing mission in Asia: liberation, interreligious dialogue, and inculturation in the form of dialogue. Pope Francis has profound things to say about the third task as well. Speaking to the representatives of the FABC gathered at the Martyrs’ Shrine in Haemi in the Daejeon Diocese on 18 Aug 2014, he said: “On this vast continent which is home to a great variety of cultures, the Church is called to be versatile and creative in her witness to the Gospel through dialogue and openness to all. Dialogue, in fact, is an essential part of the mission of the Church in Asia (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 29). But in undertaking the path of dialogue with individuals and cultures, what should be our point of departure and the fundamental point of reference which guides us to our destination? Surely it is our own identity, our identity as Christians. We cannot engage in real dialogue unless we are conscious of our own identity. Nor can there be authentic dialogue unless we are capable of opening our minds and hearts, in empathy and sincere receptivity, to those with whom we speak. A clear sense of one’s own identity and a capacity for empathy are thus the point of departure for all dialogue. If we are to speak freely, openly and fruitfully with others, we must be clear about who we are, what God has done for us, and what it is that he asks of us. And if our communication is not to be a monologue, there has to be openness of heart and mind to accepting individuals and cultures.”

**Is there anything in Pope Francis’s encyclical on ecology that is specifically relevant to Asia and Asian Christianity?**

If I may be permitted a hyperbole, *everything in Praise Be to You* is relevant for Asia. The encyclical refers to environmental pollution, climate change, the poisoning of water and land, and the loss of biodiversity. If you think that this ecological destruction is just a

natural cycle and not a human product, take a walk in Beijing, Manila, Bangkok, and Ho Chi Minh City, just to mention a few Asian cities, and fill your lungs with air and slake your thirst with unfiltered water. Of course, if you are a tourist from a rich country, you can stay at a five-star air-conditioned hotel and drink Perrier water or something more fortifying.

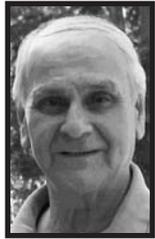
But what about the poor people of these cities and countries? Here is what Pope Francis says about them “Its [climate change] worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades...” (no. 25). Any Asian (and African and Latin American) will be deeply grateful to Pope Francis for his concern for their well-being.

However, if I must choose parts of the encyclical as most relevant to Asia, I would select Chapter Four (“Integral Ecology”) and Chapter Six (“Ecological Education and Spirituality”). In Chapter Four the Pope insists that ecology is not only an environmental, economic and social issue but also a cultural one. Given Asia’s rich cultures, Asians heartily applaud the Pope’s assertion that “the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal... (145). Chapter Five stresses the necessity of rejecting the “myths” of “a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)” and living “an ethics of ecology” which values “solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (no. 210). This “ecological ethics” resonates deeply with the Asian ideal of universal harmony, which has been the constant teaching of Asian religions and of the FABC.

As an Asian, I find it gratifying - and humbling - that ideas and sentiments as Pope Francis’s have been repeatedly expressed by the FABC and Asian theologians in the last fifty years. In view of this I would like to turn the question “Francis, a Pope for Asia?” into a resounding affirmation: “Francis, a Pope for Asia!”

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

**MORETA LOUIS, SJ**  
(GUJ) 1928 - 2015



"All right, my dear father, thank God for this honest and sincere confession! For your penance, in honor of five wounds of Our Lord, say five times Our Father, five times Hail Mary, and five times Glory Be. That's all." I will miss these encouraging words of Fr Moreta now, which I used to hear every time I presented the litany of my sins to him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation since 1988.

Fr Luis Maria Moreta was born in Manila, Philippines on 19 Dec 1927 to parents who had come from Spain. After his studies he served in the U.S. army for two years. After his early formation in Loyola, Spain, he came to India in 1951, when he was 24. He spent one year studying Gujarati in Anand; two years for regency in Vadodara, 15 years as an Assistant Parish Priest and Parish Priest in Bharuch; 15 years, as Parish Priest in Ankleshwar; 7 years as Parish Priest and Superior in Karamsad; and the last 15 years in Ankleshwar.

He was available not only to me, but to anyone who approached him for any spiritual benefit. Celebrating Holy Eucharist in the villages, hearing confessions of the faithful, playing his accordion to entertain the gatherings, directing retreats of the parishioners, and conducting catechism camps for the children, for all these Fr. Moreta was ever ready, and available.

After his ordination on 24 March 1961 in Ahmedabad and a year of Tertianship in Kodaikanal, from 1963 onward, except for seven years in Karamsad, he served in Bharuch and Ankleshwar till he breathed his last.

Obedience was his strength. He would restrain from involving in uncharitable conversations. He was faithful to prayer, daily Eucharist, the Breviary, the Examination of Conscience. Fr Moreta was an authentic person and there was hardly any discrepancy between his exterior and interior. Authentic persons are normally optimistic persons.

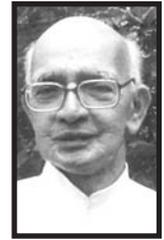
Fr. Moreta had a very positive outlook on life. His joy knew no bounds when he could procure toys, educational material, clothes, and food items from his friends and benefactors for the children of his parish. As Santa Clause or the Christmas Father he went around distributing gifts, carrying the load of gifts from village to village. If anyone beseeched him for his vehicle, he never declined. He held that whatever is owned by the Society of Jesus belongs to all of us. He aspired to be of help to everyone.

When he got angry he was open-minded person to compromise and to reconcile with the offended companion. .

Regular exercise, timely meals, rest at regular intervals, relaxation with music, routine work, and daily spiritual acts, all these kept him hale and hearty. Before anyone could digest the news that Fr Moreta is not doing that well, on 27 Sep, Fr. Moreta at the age of 87 years left us for his Eternal Rest. At his funeral on 28 Sep in Ankleshwar, Bishop Godfrey de Rozario of Baroda concelebrated the funeral Mass with more than 100 priests. Fr. Francis Parmar, the Provincia, preached the homily. Hundreds of people attended the funeral.

- James B. Dabhi, SJ

**THOMAS MULANJANANI, SJ**  
(KER) 1926 - 2015



Sitting in his office with children around him or standing anywhere on the school compound and talking to staff members or parishioners was a regular sight in the life of Fr Thomas Mulanjanani. His simplicity, serenity, spiritual orientation and sustainable economy attracted the staff and students of the school, the parishioners and the neighbours to him.

Fr. Thomas was a person of simplicity and silence. He constantly struggled to achieve the goal set before him. He had a strong desire to work in the missions, but he was sent to A.K.J.M. School, Kanjirappally in 1963 after his tertianship. There the students found in him a spiritual guide, besides an excellent Maths teacher. He was a headmaster there for a short while. As procurator, he put up the boarding house for the students who came from faraway places. After 13 years of work in A.K.J.M., he got a greener pasture where he could work out his long cherished dream of being a pastor along with his work in Loyola School and in the Jesuit community as treasurer. His teaching and spiritual guidance were an enriching and elevating experience for the staff and students of Loyola School. Cheruvikal, a parish in the neighborhood of Loyola School, Trivandrum was awaiting a Jesuit parish priest. The desire of Fr. Thomas to work in a parish turned out to be a fulfilment of both the desires, of course, two birds in one shot. He was parish priest for 35 years in the same place. He gave a facelift to the parish. A new beautiful church was constructed near the old thatched one. A few families were helped to renew their houses. The advent of a hardworking parish priest opened a new horizon of hope and progress in their lives. Now they move along a path of growth and achievement. Their occasional visits to Fr. Thomas in Christ Hall to console him in his illness and to take part in his funeral is a proof of their love and attachment.

He stood the test of severe pain for around thirty years because of cancer and herpes. He proved himself victorious by conquering the suffering and continued to serve others both in the school and the parish. After 37 years of silent service in Loyola, Trivandrum, Fr. Thomas was brought to Christ Hall, Calicut in September 2013. His health gradually deteriorated. He had to be admitted to hospital on and off. Finally on 19 August night he was rushed to the hospital. At 12.30 am he received viaticum and took off to his heavenly abode. May his soul rest in peace and intercede for us.

Fr. Thomas was born in 1926 at Teekoy in Kottayam District. His parents, Thomas and Mary, were farmers. He studied in Teekoy and then in Pavaratty, Mannanam and Thevara. He joined the novitiate in 1948. His juniorate was in Christ Hall. After graduating in Maths at St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli, he had his philosophy and theology at Shembaganur and Pune. Fr Thomas was ordained in 1960. Soon after his ordination he did B.Ed. at Mannanam and Tertianship at Kodaikanal.

Whatever be the work entrusted to him he had the tenacity and willpower to execute them in the most efficient manner. As a religious he was quite conscious of his commitment to Lord Jesus and he made no compromise with his religious observances. Let Fr. Thomas continue to inspire us to do our work with real devotion and great commitment!

- Varghese Anikuzhy, SJ

## Now I can see Him not merely in a church

The article by Godfrey D'Lima S.J. (*Jivan* Sept. 2015), especially his statement in it "If our spirituality or religious spirit comes from narrowly defined cultic practices / dogmas then we cannot sense the divine in ideas and action which do not use religious terms that are familiar to us", has strengthened my attitude towards other religions and faiths; hence the article was extremely encouraging for me.

About 25 years ago circumstances forced me to reside nearly for three years in a housing colony surrounded by neighbours who were all Hindus. My circle of friends in the town included also many Muslims besides the Hindus. I had to fend for myself for everything.

Both the Hindu neighbours as well as the Muslim friends were extraordinarily kind to me to the extent that they often obliged me to accept their hospitality. One Brahmin neighbour cordially invited me to join him in his daily morning pooja. As it was not possible for me there to celebrate the Mass I decided to join him in the pooja and thus did my daily morning meditation cum prayer. I still cherish the happy memories of the deep spiritual experiences of those daily morning prayer sessions. Then I also began joining the Muslim friends in their Namaj. Besides the deeply satisfying spiritual experience of praying with these friends I also developed respect for their way of praying to God/Allah, so far alien (and branded as idolatry/mere physical gestures) to me!

Gradually, I began to notice within me a change that was very salutary. Not only I began to respect other forms of praying to God but also my horizon of God's *darshan* was widening. Earlier I could see God or have His darshan only in Jesus, in the Eucharistic celebration, in the Catholic community and its celebrations. Now I had His darshan also in Ram, Krishna & Allah; in pooja & the Namaj; in the Hindus & the Muslims; in Id biriyani & Diwali sweets. . . My horizon of God's darshan had really expanded. All this reshaped my image as "a Christian Father who cherishes deep respect for our religion." I consider this as the greatest gift bestowed upon me by God the Loving Father which has radically transformed my life. I can never thank Him enough for this great grace. And Jesus' words: 'Only the good tree produces good fruit' have never before sounded as true as they do now.

- William Macwan, SJ  
Vadodara, Gujarat - 390 002

## Cognitive Dissonance in Sri Lanka

What I have seen in Sri Lanka confirms the truth of an interesting theory related to psychology and learning. It is called the Cognitive Dissonance theory. It was proposed by Leon Festinger (1957). This theory says that a powerful motive to maintain cognitive consistency can give rise to irrational and sometimes maladaptive behaviour. We try to hold our beliefs in consensus to avoid disharmony. Most of the times our religious teachings go against our behaviour but we, in order to avoid disharmony within us, try to interpret religious teachings to justify our behaviour or life style.

Interestingly we not only support our good deeds in this manner but also justify our evil deeds, even though they are against our customs, traditions and religion; we try to seek harmony between our acts and religious teaching by choosing what suits our behaviour. We hold different understandings (cognitions) about the world and ourselves. When our understandings clash or a conflict is aroused, resulting in a state of tension known as 'Cognitive Dissonance' we are motivated to eliminate it by any means, and achieve consonance. For example, people who smoke know that the doctors affirm that smoking causes lung cancer. But instead of getting rid of the habit, they collect new information in an effort to show that this is not conclusive. Likewise we justify war, poverty and communal violence by quoting verses from the Bible, Dhammapada, Quran and Bhagavad Gita.

Not only in Sri Lanka but also in other parts of the world, we hear, see and witness cruel killings, rapes, abductions etc, in the name of God, race and caste. The unanswered question is 'why do people mercilessly harm fellow human beings in the name of God who loves all?' Why do we justify an act which is obviously cruel and inhuman by quoting verses from religious texts? Because we want to maintain cognitive consistency. We have interpreted religious teaching according to our convenience in spite of knowing what is right and wrong, and what are taught by the Dhammapada, Bible, Quran and Bhagavad Gita.

During the civil war in Sri Lanka, innocent civilians were killed. The whole world knows that killing an unarmed child or woman is wrong, and a punishable crime, but yet we hesitate to bring justice to innocent people who lost practically everything in the civil war in Sri Lanka. I don't blame anybody but I would like to ask: what prevents us from taking the side of the war victims, poor, needy and marginalised? I hear Sri Lankans say let us forget everything and live in harmony. Do you think it is possible? The Cognitive Dissonance theory says that in order to reduce dissonance we irrationally argue that we are right and justify our inhuman acts. At present this is what is happening in Sri Lanka.

When a new government is in power, Sri Lankans, who have committed crimes against innocent people, should accept their mistakes openly without justifying them. It is time for us to be true to our religion than using our religion as a weapon to harm our fellow beings. Only truth and reconciliation will bring about a peaceful, united, prosperous Sri Lanka.

- Jude Deluxion, SJ  
Sri Lanka



### A joy-filled Christmas!

All of us at the Jivan Editorial office in Chennai, and Anand Press - GSP, in Anand, wish all the readers of Jivan a joy-filled Christmas! This Christmas Special Issue is dated Nov-Dec '15. The next issue of Jivan will appear in Jan '16.

# Lessons for Life

## *I've learned from U.K.*

BY G.S. THAYRIAM, SJ

**Be grateful:**

Being in London, I often think about the many good souls who have shaped my life and sharpened my thinking and thank God for them. Ever since I joined the Society, I gratefully remember all the good things that the Lord has showered on me through the Society, Jesuit formators and friends, family and well-wishers. Being grateful at all times is a difficult task, for once we go up the ladder, we tend to forget those who helped us climb up the ladder.

**Be Joyful:**

This is a new place, and I am in the company of new people, but I make it a point to spread the fragrance of joy to the people around. In my Hurtado Jesuit Community, we do have many community activities that keep us together and happy. In the province too, once a month, the young Jesuits in Formation meet at different Jesuit houses.

**Be broad-minded:**

In a Christian country like England, living in a different culture, meeting people from different parts of the world, listening to people of different faiths and at times none, I have learned to be broad-minded and appreciate the people here and their culture. London is a city with many famous and attractive buildings. As I walk the streets of London, I marvel at these architectural wonders.

**Be compassionate:**

London is now home for many refugees and migrants mainly from Syria and African countries. Hurtado Jesuit Centre, Wapping, where I live, is also the headquarters for the JRS- UK. I admire the great service that the JRS is doing in this country for refugees and migrants. The Jesuits and the volunteers at JRS are very compassionate towards these people. Their service makes me eager to know the

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problems in these countries that have driven them out and offer empathy to the refugees and migrants.

**Be alive and active:**

Everyone and everything here in this country which once ruled more than half of the world inspires me to be alive and active. I am busy learning from the people around me. I actively participate in the community activities. I see the eldest Jesuit in my community cooking for us and doing all works by himself. This has inspired me to learn the art of cooking.

**Be original:**

We have here an entirely a new educational system at Heythrop College. In India I have attended five lectures a day continuously. Here I have just one lecture a day and learn more by myself through personal reading. I am expected to be original in my thinking and writing, which of course requires effective reading and serious reflection.

**Be responsible:**

Here in the British Jesuit province, Scholastics are given a lot of freedom so that they become responsible. I cherish the freedom and I learn to be more responsible.

**Be mindful:**

People here are very friendly once acquainted, but they are also very sensitive. Every word and act of mine matters much. And so I am cautious of my words and deeds, especially while dealing with children and vulnerable adults. Coming from a different socio-cultural background, I find it hard to refrain from helping an elderly person or lifting up and blessing a child.

**Be connected:**

I don't want to forget my roots. I find great joy in being connected to friends back home, mainly the Jesuit friends, who have been a great source of support and encouragement. I strongly hope that this collective connectedness would give me more strength and confidence to be connected to the people here in this new land. ■



# Green Cover



## Eco-spirituality Retreat

The Jesuit NGO of, ALBOAN, invited me to direct an Eco Spirituality Retreat at Loyola, Spain, on 2-10 Oct 2015, in Spanish. I adapted the retreat from the retreat-design given by Fr Robert Athickal of Tarumitra, Patna. The sessions are presented through Power Points (PP), documentaries and movies. Plenty of time is given to commune with God in and through Creation. As I was not too familiar with the Spain of today, I asked Sr Medea Fernandes in Javier, Spain, for help. The Retreat was held at the wonderfully restructured Spirituality Centre at Loyola (once the Spartan Philosophate building where I studied 50 years ago!). In spite of Eco Spirituality being unknown in these parts, 16 people joined the 8-day Retreat – mostly lay people from different parts of Spain, and some Jesuits and Nuns.

Right at the introduction, we told the participants that the Retreat was a holiday with God. So, no rigid time-tables or schedules to be completed, no 5 hours of prayer etc. The participants were invited to enjoy 24x7 hours of relaxed communion with God in His creation! Most participants were open and interested or involved in ecological concern and care. The participation was active and high. All of them were fully open to the process, inputs and experience. Some of them came up with interesting suggestions, well-attuned to the spirit of the retreat, and we incorporated them.

The first session of each day began with a short Indian style prayer with lighting of the lamp and Agarbattis, ably conducted by Sr Medea. The PP's presented our intimate, familial relationship with the whole creation. The Christian and other religions' understanding of a Creation Spirituality were explored. Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, brought Eco-spirituality to the heart of our Church. Movies/Documentaries like "Brother Sun and Sister Moon", "Oh my God", "Ganges", ... enhanced our intimacy with the God of Creation. Lot of time was available for communion with God in His Creation.

The Eucharist - a relaxed, shared and fully participated celebration - before sunset was the culmination of the day. Three days it was held in "God's own Cathedral", in the open, under a tree, with a ribbon we tied to a tree to represent the other members of the Universal family. Creation was always part of all Eucharistic Celebrations.

Bright, sun-lit days at Loyola gave us glorious green hills; the diverse, emerging autumn colours were gorgeous.

- Rappai Poothokaren, SJ



**“Every time we love, every time we give, it's Christmas.**

*- Dale Evans*