

The Missionary Oblate

In Tokyo Olympics: Kenyan runner Abel Mutai was only a few meters from the finish line, but got confused with the signs and stopped, thinking he had finished the race. Spanish Ivan Fernandez, was right behind him and, realizing what was going on, started shouting to the Kenyan to keep running. Mutai did not know Spanish and did not understand. Realizing what was going on, Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory (see back cover page).

The Missionary Oblate

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Authors are responsible for the views expressed in the articles.

Cover design by Shane Winston De Rosayro, OMI

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OUR COMMON VULNERABILITY

During this turbulence of Covid-19 pandemic, I like to quote from the letter of Fr. Louis Lougen , Superior General of our Oblate Congregation, written and published on February 17, 2021, on the occasion of the Papal Approbation of our Oblate Constitutions and Rules.

“ The pandemic is helping us see more clearly what is essential in life. The Spirit speaks to us in the signs of the times of this pandemic and enriches our missionary lives. ”

“ Our faith is deepened as we affirm God is right alongside us in this mess. We know that, with God, all things work together for the good of those who love Him. Nothing is outside of God's creative ability to bring good from it. We believe this and we renew our oblation to live for the Reign of God. ”

“The pandemic has made us aware of our common vulnerability. No sector of humanity, no state, no global corporation controls the world. Armies do not regulate borders as the virus travels around the world. St. Eugene knew the wisdom and power of the cross. With courage and humility, we embrace our vulnerability and we gain wisdom and strength. ”

“The pandemic, with its isolation and distancing, has provided the opportunity to draw closer together. Both in religious traditions and secular life, we have discovered a new sense of solidarity and care for one another. The pandemic has reminded us that our missionary life must be based on apostolic community accompanied by prayer and the vowed life. Already in 1816, when Fr. De Mazenod called together Fr. Tempier and his other companions, he was convinced of this. ”

“ We have to ask ourselves whether we too are caught up in the conversation around 'returning to normal,' or the 'new normal,' etc. This ignores the reality that the majority of the people in the world have never experienced the concept of 'normal' being spoken of. The people we serve around the globe live without water, without the minimum of necessary food, without medical care, etc. The pandemic must open the eyes of the world to the great injustice that the majority of earth's people never have enjoyed a so-called 'normal' life.”

“The pandemic has helped us become more aware that consumerism and materialism generate poverty and destroy the environment. These idols of society must be exchanged for a concern for the common good, expressed in caring for the poor and for our common home.”

Let us therefore continue to promote the sense of solidarity and care and concern for one another. While providing material assistance to the poor families, to the Homes for Elders and orphans and to the hospitals, let us join the people of good will and generosity to assist the powerless. Let us also continue to plead on behalf of the poor, the powerless and the natural environment.

Pope haters, who are attacking him because the (Amazon) Synod suggested that there are elements to value in indigenous religions, must likewise condemn Matteo Ricci, sj, and the Chinese Rites. A quotation from Thomas Aquinas may be apposite: “Every truth without exception and whoever may utter it, is from the Holy Spirit, The old pagan virtues were from God.” – Fr. Patrick Flanagan, *The Tablet*, 2 November 2019, p 15

In 2016, Pope Francis elevated the memorial of St Mary Magdalene, traditionally observed on 22 July, to the status of a feast day. A cloud of confusion is finally being lifted from the woman who gets up before sunrise to visit the tomb of the Jesus, while the men are sleeping / By MARGARET HEBBLETHWAITE

Apostle to the Apostles

OVER THE last 30 years, there has been a plethora of books restoring the reputation of Mary of Magdala from repentant prostitute to leading woman disciple. She is always mentioned first among the women followers, and her title as the “Apostle to the Apostles” is founded firmly on the commission given her by the risen Jesus. But though this is now familiar ground among theologians, it has not seeped through to the broad range of Christian believers.

After my article in the 27 March issue, some Tablet readers wrote to me to say they had always thought the woman who anointed Jesus was Mary of Magdala. You can see why. After all, almost every painting of the anointing is titled “Mary Magdalene anoints Jesus”. The pictures need to be renamed. John’s Gospel says Jesus was anointed by Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, but for centuries Rome insisted that the two women were one and the same. Now at last, the Vatican has admitted its mistake, and this February it took another step to clarify that the two women were distinct.

Paul VI had already begun to correct the record in 1969, with new directions for Mary of Magdala’s memorial on 22 July. She was no longer described as a “Penitent”. The collect no longer said that, “her prayers moved thee to restore her brother

Lazarus to life”, but rather that, “your Son first entrusted to Mary Magdalene the joyful news of his Resurrection”. And the Gospel was no longer Luke’s account of a sinner anointing the feet of Jesus, but was changed to Mary’s encounter with the risen Jesus.

Then, on 3 June 2016, the status of the day was raised by Pope Francis from a memorial to a feast on the same level as those of “the rest of the Apostles” The Church has a hierarchy of celebrations from memorials to feasts to solemnities. A new Preface was published for it, saying that Jesus “honoured her with the office of being an Apostle to the Apostles”.

The correction was not made as a result of the modern books written by Lilia Sebastiani, Susan Haskins, Carla Ricci, Esther de Boer, Sandra Schneiders, Holly Hearon, Jane Schaberg, Deirdre Good, Ann Graham Brock and Michael Haag; it was based on the work of the Bollandists, a Jesuit-based association that has been working since the seventeenth century on the lives of the saints, and which prepared the way for the post-conciliar reform of the Roman calendar.

The 2016 decree pointed out just three “certain” facts about Mary of Magdala. She was “part of the group of Jesus’ disciples” (Luke 8:1-3, where she, Joanna, Susanna and many others went with Jesus through Galilee, together with the Twelve); “she accompanied him to the foot of the Cross” (in all the gospels); and she was the first Easter witness “in the garden where she met him at the tomb” (John 20; also Matthew 28:1,9). The decree acknowledged that, “especially since the time of Gregory the Great”, the old interpretation had dominated the tradition of the Western Church in its theology, art and liturgical texts. But “with good reason” Mary of Magdala had been called “Apostle to the Apostles” by Thomas

Aquinas and Rabanus Maurus, for she “becomes an evangelist” and “announces to the Apostles what in turn they will announce to the whole world”.

WHAT THE decree of 2 February 2021 added to that was to give Mary of Bethany her own day in the calendar, so her name and that of Lazarus were added to the memorial of their sister Martha on 29 July, exactly one week after the feast of Mary of Magdala. Now that the two women officially have separate days, it becomes still more difficult to claim they are the same person.

But why should it matter? Why should anyone be offended if two of the three greatest women of the gospels (the third also called Mary, of course) are rolled into one superwoman? It is because the conflated figure was no superwoman, but was demeaned as the alleged sexual “sinner” of Luke 7, in the chapter before Mary of Magdala is mentioned as being freed by Jesus from seven demons. Curiously, in no other gospel text is demonic possession interpreted as sexual depravity rather than illness. When Jesus sets free a woman from the bondage of Satan in another Lucan miracle (13:10-17), no one dreams of saying she is saved from a life of prostitution. There are no grounds for identifying Mary of Magdala with the so-called “sinner”.

The confusion between the two Marys was facilitated by thinking that “Magdalene” was her name. Once it is realised that “Mary the Magdalene” (never without the article in the gospels) means “Mary of Magdala”, just as “Jesus the Nazarene” means “Jesus of Nazareth”, it becomes rather difficult to think that the same woman was both of Bethany (near Jerusalem in Judaea) and of Magdala (a fishing town on the Sea of Galilee).

This is not to say that the attempt has not been made. The Anglican scholar John Wenham hypothesised in 1984 that the “attractive, adventurous” but “moody” Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha, had left home to go to the “delectable” town of Magdala, but her little adventure, “at first so exciting and enjoyable, all turned sour on her” as she turned to prostitution. I doubt anyone would dare write that today. The myth that Mary of Magdala was a repentant prostitute is not only insulting to Mary, but insulting to prostitutes too. Who nowadays considers prostitutes to be lascivious women intent on leading men astray, to fleece them of their money and satisfy their own lustful desires? Do we not regard them as victims, whether of sex trafficking, pimps or poverty? The implication that they must repent is profoundly misogynistic.

If this old Mary Magdalene archetype seems exaggerated, listen to what Gregory the Great said, probably in 591, when he cemented the misidentification. “She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? ... It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts ... She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears. She displayed her hair to set off her face, but now her hair dries her tears. She had spoken proud things with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord’s feet, she now planted her mouth on the Redeemer’s feet. For every delight, therefore, she had had in herself, she now immolated herself. She the 2016 decree pointed out just three “certain” facts about Mary of Magdala. turned the mass of her crimes to virtues, in order to serve God entirely in penance.” Let us leave aside that it was in fact Luke, rather than Mark, who said Mary had been freed of

seven devils (which was then copied into the “longer ending” of Mark, not by the evangelist but by a different hand). By any account, Gregory’s text is profoundly shocking.

But this was the dominant ideology, and it persisted to the point that a millennium later, in 1520, the French scholar Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples was condemned for heresy when he dared to suggest that Mary of Magdala and Mary of Bethany were separate people and that neither was Luke’s “sinner”.

THE TWO Marys do, however, have some things in common – feet and tears – so it can be confusing. Mary, the sister of Martha, sits at Jesus’ feet and listens to him (Luke 10:39), and she anoints his feet with oil (John 12:3). Mary of Magdala and her companions take hold of the feet of the risen Jesus (Matthew 28:9). Mary of Bethany’s tears at the death of her brother move Jesus to weep with her (John 11:33). Mary of Magdala’s tears at the tomb prompt him to reveal himself to her (John 20:15). Also in common is anointing oil, since Luke names Mary of Magdala as one of the women bringing spices and ointments to the tomb (Luke 23:56; 24:1,10). This is rather a relief for those of us who love religious art, for it means that we can keep the pictures that show her with her flask of anointing oil – her “logo”, says Eamon Duffy – so long as we remember that this shows her preparing to go to the tomb, not to Simon’s dinner party. And though she is traditionally shown unveiled, once considered a sign of being “forward”, it is the veils on the other gospel women that I would rather see removed.

WHEN WE strip away the false interpretations, we can be more receptive to one of the most beautiful stories in the gospels, as Mary of Magdala gets up before sunrise to visit the tomb, while the men are sleeping. She finds the stone moved and the tomb

empty, and runs to give the alarm, thinking the body has been stolen. No meek and weak woman, this, but an initiator, a runner and a proclaimer. Desperate with grief that not only has she lost her beloved teacher but even the relic of his dead body, Mary of Magdala returns in tears, and it is to her that Jesus wishes to show himself first. He could have appeared first to Peter, but instead he gives her the responsibility of bearing the news – a heavy responsibility considering that the men are not going to believe her (Luke 24:11). It is not just an act of compassion on his part, but an act of confidence, entrusting her with the most important message that has ever been given. She carries out her mission with the courage of overwhelming joy, and all of us who have received the news subsequently can trace back to her the trail of proclamation.

Margaret Hebblethwaite is writing a book about the women in the gospels.

Courtesy: *The Tablet*, 17 July 2021

POPE FRANCIS IS SAD BECAUSE...

“It’s a very ugly thing! It makes me very sad when I celebrate Mass in the piazza or in the basilica, when I see so many mobile phones held up, not only by the faithful but also by some priests and even by bishops. Mass is not a show, It’s a meeting with the Passion and the Resurrection of our Lord. No cell phones please!”

Pope Francis:

ONE SPIRIT TWO TESTIMONIES

(Pope Francis – Chief Seattle)

Fr.Oswald B. Firth, OMI

Introduction – Our Common Home

On the auspicious occasion of the World Environment Day, 5th June 2013, Pope Francis had categorically stated that it was the responsibility of every human being to transform the world into a garden, a habitat place for everyone to live a dignified life. He signed the encyclical '**Laudato Si**' on 24th May 2015 on the solemnity of Pentecost. It was released to the public on 18th June 2015. The choice of the title is taken from St. Francis of Assisi's medieval Italian prayer '**Canticle of the Sun**', which praises God through elements of creation like Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Mother Earth. 'The primary aim of the encyclical is to inculcate in people personal responsibility for our '**common home**'.¹

Before I proceed any further, I would like to take the reader to the year 1854. In this year, we encounter Chief Seattle, a Susquamish Tribe Chief who lived on the islands of Puget Sound. As a young warrior, Chief Seattle demonstrated his courage as an extraordinary leader. His now famous speech was believed to have been given in December 1854 to the then American President Franklin Pierce.

Pope Francis' Encyclical '**Laudato Si**', and more than one and a half centuries earlier the letter of Chief Seattle contains some

¹Resources for this article:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html; Amaladoss SJ, Michael: 'A Spirituality of Creation According to Pope Francis', Vidyajyoti, Volume 79.No.8, August 2015; Poorvathumkudy SJ, Kuriakose 'Laudato Si': Cry for the Earth & Cry for the Poor', Vidyajyoti, Volume 79. No.8, August 2015.

striking similarities, if not in words at least in spirit and content, which provoked the title of this reflection on ecology: ***‘One Spirit Two Testimonies’***. It’s the same Spirit of God at work in two prophetic leaders whose global concern for creation, ‘our common home’ is remarkable.

What triggered my enthusiasm to take on this timely subject of the ‘environment’ is because of the various abuses that have surfaced that are challenges to the ecological balance of our country. Just to mention a few of them: excessive extraction of sand both from the sea and river beds often causing flash floods and soil erosion; pollution of the sea coast and destruction of marine life; deforestation of our rain forest causing climate change; extensive use of chemical fertilisers that cause desertification; unwarranted land grab and selling them to foreigners, and so on. We have behaved as if we were owners of the world and its resources. No, we are nothing more than their caretakers.

To return to Chief Seattle, this is what he tells the president of the United States:

- *"The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?"*
- *Every part of the earth is sacred to my people.... Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods,... every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people*
- *We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us.*

- *The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers.*
- *All this and man all belong to the same family.*
- *The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors.*
- *If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred... The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.*
- *The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give the rivers the kindness that you would give any brother.*
- *The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also received his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life.*
- *Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth.*
- *This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all.*
One thing we know: our God is also your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.
- *What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed?*
- *Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the eagle be? Gone! The end of living and the beginning of survival.*
- *We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it, as we have cared for it.*
- *As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land.*

- *One thing we know - there is only one God. No man, be he Red man or White man, can be apart. We ARE all brothers after all."*

There is an aura of mysticism in these pronouncements of Chief Seattle; a spiritual fragrance that wafts across the various elements of nature: *we do not own the freshness of the air and water; every part of the earth is sacred; and so these cannot be sold.*

All things are connected by blood very much like the sap of the trees; we are part of the earth and it is part of us; We are all members of this earthly family so there can be no domination of one species over another; the murmur in the rivers is the voice of our ancestors.

Teach your children that the earth is our mother; the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth; we love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat.

Reading this anthology, one gets the feeling that St. Francis of Assisi has become 'reincarnate' in Chief Seattle. One cannot also fail to see the emergence of a 'cosmic spirituality' in the Seattle document which transpires in Pope Francis' '*Laudato Si'*'. Creation is not inferior to humans, rather, it is our living partner for both life and survival.

Pope Francis' Vision

1. The focus of the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, '*Laudato Si'*', is to save our sister Earth, our common home, from total destruction by the irresponsible use we humans make of it. If we do not take appropriate

steps to save the earth it might become unliveable in the not-too-distant future.

2. In the process, Francis has outlined a theology and spirituality of creation which is “new” and resonates with Asian religious traditions. This new vision and spirituality invite all people of good will to collaborate in saving the earth.
3. Creation is God’s gift to humanity. We have to share it with everyone and not selfishly exploit it and destroy it. Our relationship to God, to others and to creation has become conflictual because of our selfishness. But in the risen Christ we return to our ‘*original innocence*’ and we can praise God like St. Francis of Assisi did: ‘*Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs*’. The earth is the Lord’s and to him belongs the earth (Ps. 24:1; Deut. 10:14). Let us now explain this vision in some detail.

Emphasis on Creation

1. It is God who has created this universe not out of some compulsion, but out of love. He has gifted it to us not to dominate and exploit it, but to cultivate it creatively and use it for the universal good. God has a plan for this creative project. He lives in his creation. God has not created humans and the earth as perfect beings. They are meant to grow and develop through mutual interaction. God is leading everything to perfection in Christ. (see Col. 1:15-16, 19-20).

2. By his incarnation, the Son unites himself with the earth. When John Paul II declared that the Spirit of God is present in all cultures and religions (RM 28)² it was widely welcomed. The universe is not out there as a material object. It is a 'subject' energised by the Spirit. 'The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge'. (LS 80). The impression that one gets is that 'creation' is very much a living being with whom one can communicate, can engage in dialogue.
3. We are accustomed to 'objectify' and commercialize the universe (LS 82), to give it a market value and look at it as brute matter without life, as science has persuaded us to believe. Humans are being endowed with intelligence and love not only to relate to each other and to God, but also to help the universe. So far we were worried mostly about our own journey towards fullness, now we know that we are responsible also for the journey of creation towards its ultimate goal of fullness in Christ and God. The universe is not simply meant solely for the humans it is also the heritage of all living beings.

Creation Vs Humans

How can humans help creation to achieve its goals? Francis makes a distinction between 'Nature' and 'Creation' (LS 76). We can look at the universe as 'nature', something given, an object that we can 'play' with, manipulate and exploit for our own purposes. But the universe is not mere 'nature'. It is 'creation', created by God out of love (LS 77).

²Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 7th December 1990, RM 28

1. Because it is created it is not divine (LS 78), we do not have to worship it. But we have to respect it and treat it in accordance with its own inner character and the goal God has set for it. It is fragile and we have to protect it. We can use it well or abuse it (LS 79).
2. In creation, not all creatures are equal; the humans stand out (LS 90). They have the special dignity of being created in the image of God. They are endowed with self-knowledge and have the capacity of giving themselves as gift. They are capable of conscious relationships (65). They relate to God, to others and to the earth (LS 66). These relationships became conflicted because of sin. But they can be restored. St. Francis of Assisi showed in his life and, especially in his relationship to the earth and to the animals, how this can be done, ‘when the wolf and the lamb will feed together and ‘the lion will eat grass’ like the cow’ (Is.65:25).’ And a child will lead them’. Sounds utopian!
3. Human beings are not the absolute owners of the universe (67). They are trustees who have to use it according to God’s purposes. In the past, some have used the text of Genesis ‘fill the earth and subdue it ‘ (Gen 1:28) to justify the total domination of the humans over the earth. Francis corrects them and focuses rather on the text: ‘the Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it’ (Gen. 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing and working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving’ (LS 67). This implies a mutual responsibility between human beings and nature (cf. Lev.25:1-4).

4. The OT indicates various ways in which the earth is to be cared for (LS 68). We should help fallen animals. We should not harm birds hatching their eggs. The Sabbath is not meant only for human beings, but also so that your ox and your donkey may have rest. The earth too should have its rest every seventh year.
5. Francis, however, insists that ‘nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also a locus of his presence’. As creatures we do share a common bond and form together a ‘kind of universal family, a sublime communion, which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect’ (LS 89). Francis quotes a poignant passage from his Apostolic Letter, the ‘*Joy of the Gospel*’: ‘God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment’. (LS 89).

Creation the Patrimony of All

1. The universe is God’s gift to all peoples and is meant to be shared by all. Every human has a right for a share of the Earth, sufficient to meet his/her needs’(LS 94). The earth with its fruits belongs to everyone, ‘especially the poor, the orphans, the widows and the foreigners’ (LS 71; Lev.19:9-10).
2. Francis affirms that the *right to private property* is subordinate to the universal destination of goods. Everyone has the right to use them (LS 93). He quotes the bishops of Paraguay to say that the right not only for a piece of land to build a home and to cultivate but also other means to make their ownership fruitful (LS 94). ‘The natural environment is a collective good, the

patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all' (LS 95).

3. 'By his incarnation and resurrection Jesus is present throughout creation by his universal Lordship' (LS 100). We see here the image of the 'Cosmic Christ' as proposed by Teilhard de Chardin.
4. If we look around the world today, we are aware of a spirit of anthropocentrism that does not respect the rest of creation, but abuses and exploits it. The unbridled consumerism and the power of technology which does not hesitate to consume the resources of the earth in a disproportionate way, the misappropriation of the earth's goods that increases inequality among peoples, the growing impoverishment and desertification of the earth, the arrival of biotechnologies that, like genetically modified species that interfere with the process of nature that make some believe that they are masters of the earth, an attitude of secularism that has no place for God, an unjust economy based on a free market which has only increasing profit as a goal, and a throwaway culture that produces mountains of waste. These tell us what is wrong with human groups dominating the world today.
5. As Francis says, we *need a new spirituality* that will influence a new life-style. We should not encourage any industrial processes that are harmful to nature. Francis is down to earth talking of 'avoiding the use of plastic, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking what can be reasonably consumed, using public transport, turning off unnecessary lights' (LS

211), the ‘hoarding syndrome’, collecting things that we may hardly ever use.

6. We have to struggle against merely profit-oriented free market capitalism that is insensitive to the poor and their needs, and seek to promote economic and social equality. Francis says as ‘Christians we need to have the capacity to be happy with little’ – ‘less is more’ (LS 222). We are called to be mystics that seek a certain ‘oneness’ with creation.
7. ‘The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dew drop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things’.(LS 233).
8. Pope Francis is calling for an ‘Ecological Conversion’ which will save the planet from complete disintegration.

A Cosmic and Trinitarian Spirituality

1. First, our spirituality is anthropocentric, redemption-centric and Christocentric. When we think of salvation, we only think of ourselves/humans being saved. We hardly think of creation – nature, plants and animals-participating also in salvation. Now Francis is doing just that, but explicitly. For him salvation is **cosmo-centric**, and not merely anthropocentric.
2. Secondly, when we speak of salvation we think immediately of our sins and the punishment due to

them. Francis refers to the sin of Adam once in so far as it upset our relation to the universe. Now the focus is on creation and re-creation. Traditionally, total re-creation is supposed to happen on the last day. In the meantime, we are in the 'vale of tears', even though we have become children of God in Baptism. But Francis says: 'St. Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, St. Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence' (66). St. Francis did not have to wait till the final judgment for this. If we are now suffering the consequences of the sinful doings of the first Adam, why are we not also enjoying the consequences of the achievements of the second Adam? This seems to have been possible with many saints and mystics.

A Dialogical Spirituality

1. Francis speaks of two types of dialogue. The dialogue with science should not really be difficult since science and religion have different objectives. Science looks for facts, religions look for ethical and spiritual values. Without spiritual inspiration merely technical solutions may not always work (199-200).
2. The second dialogue is between religions. Religions should 'dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity' (201). The common prayer that Francis has given at the end of the encyclical is a big gift for people trying to live a dialogical spirituality.

3. When John Paul II invited leaders of all religions to come together at Assisi to pray for peace in 1986, they were not able to pray together. When Benedict XVI had a similar gathering 25 years later in 2011, they did not pray at all. It was ***‘we come together to pray, not we come to pray together’***. Now Francis is proposing a common prayer which we can share with all who believe in God who is the all-powerful creator’. Just to draw your attention to a small passage: ‘Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light’ (246).

The only lasting family we’ve got.”

“There is no pure church anywhere for us to join, just as there is no pure country anywhere for us in which to live.

This church, for all its checkered history and compromised present, is all we have. We need to own its faults since they are our faults. Its history is our history; its sin, our sin; and its family, our family – the only lasting family we’ve got.”

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MINISTRY AFTER COVID BASED ON ECCLESIOLOGICAL INSIGHTS OF POPE FRANCIS

Nihal Abeyasingha

The basic thesis of this paper is that, as the opening paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* states “Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.” (LG#1) The mission remains, but the modality of the mission remains to be re-discovered and reformulated in each successive era. The question is whether there is a reformulation called for after Covid 19 and issues that need more research.

Pope Francis remarked in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) # 7: “As I was writing this letter, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.”

Centripetal Outreach to Centrifugal Outreach:

In the recent past, the functioning of ministry has been church-centred or one might say centripetal. The celebration of the sacraments and breaking the Word in many forms has been for the most part in the churches. So, also catechism classes and other outreach ministries. Even during Covid the celebration

of the Eucharist, celebrated in Churches has been disseminated through the use of technological means. But the question is whether that alone is sufficient after Covid. What about other sacraments? What about pastoral care, that encounter with truth, which sets people free? Several gestures of the Pope (inviting homeless people to have breakfast with him on his birthday, taking a boy with Down's syndrome on a ride in the Popemobile, laying hands on a man with a deforming skin condition etc.) reflect the pope's personality, but they are also consciously crafted symbols of the Church he wants to lead. It's a Church that doesn't sit around waiting for people to walk through the door but goes out to meet them where they live.

Perhaps we need to begin thinking of the ministry as something of a centrifugal activity, like a cartwheel – the spokes radiating from the centre to the periphery. The periphery would represent those in need. The outreach would be – to use the imagery of Pope Francis – like a polyhedron. A polyhedron is a solid of three dimensions with flat faces, straight edges and sharp corners or vertices. The polyhedron lacks the harmony and proportions of a sphere but retains the unity of a solid. Not only that, it has variable distances from its center and not a single way of being related to it. It may be an awkward type of unity, but it still holds the solid together. Pope Francis believes that the Church of the third millennium must be Synodal, an “inverted pyramid”, like a polyhedron where uneven surfaces meet together.

Centralization and uniformity of church structures and the desire to mould believers into a single pattern, kills it. Conversely, if it celebrates diversity, individuals flourish and make their contribution. The center of this polyhedron is the common humanity that all human beings share while the different faces represent the cultural particulars (with its influence by the different religions) that cannot be squeezed nor

overlooked by globalization. The purpose of the outreach from the centre (the deposit of faith and the common humanity) is to reach out to the periphery heralding the possibility of union with God and the unity of the human race. It is a question of relationships – basically the outreach of *agape*, Christian love - The Church as sign and instrument of intimate union with God and the unity of the human race

Technology, Many Centres, Building Relationships

The means for this activity is through the use of technological means, but operating from different centres or focal points and therefore, with many “flavours”. One obvious focal point is the church (as it has been). But has the time come to have other focal points as well spontaneous groups (blogs) to discuss various issues? Another focal point could be on the family, the domestic church – first of all, inviting families to assist at the live streamed Mass together and then discuss the readings and homily as they pertain to life. It starts with individual families and then spreads to other families – now with technology. Linking with other families in the countries and in fact, may be anywhere in the world. The ministries as will be discussed below having their own outreach? What about the care of the sick and housebound, the bereaved, those in need of counseling after a trauma, those thinking about what they wish to dedicate their lives to? Fostering popular devotion in the interest of devotion and promoting relationships – a joint cry to God our only refuge as in the psalms? These groups need to focus not merely on connectivity, but also on relationships.

Technological means brings people into connectivity, but it does not build them into relationships. Building relationships involves more than “flash in the pan” effects, but the overcoming of fragmentation. As Pope Francis points out in *Fratelli Tutti*, besides social and political inertia (#71) and indifference (#73), even deeper is selfishness right across the

board. “In some countries, a concept of popular and national unity influenced by various ideologies is creating new forms of selfishness and a loss of the social sense under the guise of defending national interests.” (#11) “As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others. Closed groups and self-absorbed couples that define themselves in opposition to others tend to be expressions of selfishness and mere self-preservation.” (#89). “Every society needs to ensure that values are passed on; otherwise, what is handed down are selfishness, violence, corruption in its various forms, indifference and, ultimately, a life closed to transcendence and entrenched in individual interests.” (#113). “The bigger risk does not come from specific objects, material realities or institutions, but from the way that they are used. It has to do with human weakness, the proclivity to selfishness that is part of what the Christian tradition refers to as “concupiscence”: the human inclination to be concerned only with myself, my group, my own petty interests. Concupiscence is not a flaw limited to our own day. It has been present from the beginning of humanity, and has simply changed and taken on different forms down the ages, using whatever means each moment of history can provide. Concupiscence, however, can be overcome with the help of God.” (#166). The issues the Pope raises have to be faced and gradually eliminated by moving in the direction of the church as “sacrament” – sign and instrument of intimate union with God and the unity of the whole human race.

This mission involves *caring for the sheep and experiencing the smell of sheep*, which is not very pleasant. Those who do not go out of themselves, instead of being mediators, gradually become intermediaries, managers. We know the difference: the intermediary, the manager, “has already received his reward,” and since he does not put his own skin and his own heart on the line, he never hears a warm, heartfelt word of thanks. This is

precisely the reason for the dissatisfaction of some, who end up sad – sad priests - in some sense becoming collectors of antiques or novelties, instead of being shepherds living with “the odour of the sheep.” This I ask you: be shepherds, with the “odour of the sheep,” make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men.

Covid as Call to Renewal:

Covid has highlighted the fragmentation in the world. The roots of fragmentation are basically selfishness, which is itself rooted in concupiscence. Hence, the practice of the ministry of word and sacrament as done hitherto needs to be extended so that these celebrations touch people where they are at. The charge addressed to ministers of the word in the Uniting Church of Australia can well be reflected on: We are ordaining you to read and interpret those sacred stories of our community so that they speak the Word to people today; to remember and practice those rituals and rites of meaning which in their poetry address people at the level where change operates; to foster in community through Word and Sacrament and pastoral care that encounter with truth which will set people free to minister as the body of Christ.

Instituted Ministries:

Besides the renewal of ministry of word and sacrament by the clergy, the laity need to be assigned their rightful place in the mission of the church. In the context of the institution of the ministry of catechists, Pope Francis has said in *Antiquum Ministerium* (2021) #7 “To be sure, “there has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can indeed count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the celebration of the faith” (*Evangelii Gaudium* #102). It follows that the reception of a lay ministry such as that of Catechist will

emphasize even more the missionary commitment proper to every baptized person, a commitment that must however be carried out in a fully “secular” manner, avoiding any form of clericalization.” When Paul VI by *Quaedam Ministeria* (1972) established the ministries of Lector and Acolyte supposedly as lay ministries, the majority who received them were clerics en route to the priesthood. With Pope Francis opening these ministries and that of catechists to persons of both sexes, there is the possibility of conferring these ministries as part of the outreach of mission spoken of above. What is wanted is not clericalization of the laity, but the laity being in the world, but bearing witness to being not of the world (Cf. *Letter to Diognetus*).

In a Pew survey (August 2019) seven in ten US Catholics believe that the bread and wine consecrated in Mass are mere symbols of Jesus’ body and blood. This is a serious deficiency in faith. Perhaps this is the time for laity specialized in various areas to be available to help their fellow Christians grow in faith. Those who are acolytes may be trained in understanding the Eucharist and its various dimensions; those instituted lectors in the understanding of the scriptures especially the texts contained in the lectionary and read at the Eucharist and other liturgical rites; catechists with a good knowledge of Christian doctrine and morality and able to assist in discernment. Would this be the appropriate time to search for and institute a means for the formation of laity in this world, which is indeed fragmented and given over to selfishness?

Mitchell Stimers, Ryan Bergstrom, Tom Vought And Michael Dulin, “Capital Vice in the Midwest: The Spatial Distribution of the Seven Deadly Sins” undertook the task of statistically representing the seven deadly sins at the county level within the Midwest region of the United States to determine what, if any, spatial coincidence occurred. Each of the seven deadly sins was

given separate treatment based on sociological and economic characteristics and available data. What they discovered is the wide spread of capital sins.

Addressing Our Issues of Selfishness and Fragmentation:

In *Querida Amazonia* (2020) #93 Pope Francis says that it is not simply a question of facilitating a greater presence of ordained ministers who can celebrate the Eucharist. That would be a very narrow aim, were we not also to strive to awaken new life in communities. We need to promote an encounter with God's Word and growth in holiness through various kinds of lay service that call for a process of education – biblical, doctrinal, spiritual and practical –and a variety of programmes of ongoing formation.”

In Synodality: This collaboration with laity needs to take place in a spirit of synodality. In a hierarchical Church Pope and Bishops are privileged listeners to the Holy Spirit and are mandated to teach the people of God, whereas in the Synodal church the magisterium listens to the Holy Spirit speaking to them through the people of God (LG 12) as well and, thus, includes a two-way process of common listening to the Spirit and communal discernment (*sensus fidei*) by the entire people of God who *journey together* to evangelize and bring about the Kingdom of God.

For the Church engaged in this mission, four principles are outlined in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) #217-237 four principles:

(1) *Time is greater than space:* A constant tension exists between fullness and limitation. Fullness evokes the desire for complete possession, while limitation is a wall set before us. This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in

our plans. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. We need to be concerned about generating processes of people-building, as opposed to obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness. This criterion also applies to evangelization, which calls for attention to the bigger picture, openness to suitable processes and concern for the long run. The Lord himself, during his earthly life, often warned his disciples that there were things they could not yet understand and that they would have to await the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:12-13). The parable of the weeds among the wheat (cf. Mt 13:24-30) graphically illustrates an important aspect of evangelization: the enemy can intrude upon the kingdom and sow harm, but ultimately he is defeated by the goodness of the wheat.

(2) *Unity prevails over conflict*: Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality. When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. “Blessed are the peacemakers!” (Mt 5:9). Christ “is our peace” (Eph 2:14). The Gospel message always begins with

a greeting of peace, and peace at all times crowns and confirms the relations between the disciples. The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity.

(3) *Realities are more important than ideas*: There also exists a constant tension between ideas and realities. Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities. It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric. So a third principle comes into play: realities are greater than ideas. This calls for rejecting the various means of masking reality: angelic forms of purity, dictatorships of relativism, empty rhetoric, objectives more ideal than real, brands of ahistorical fundamentalism, ethical systems bereft of kindness, intellectual discourse bereft of wisdom. Ideas – conceptual elaborations – are at the service of communication, understanding, and praxis. Ideas disconnected from realities give rise to ineffectual forms of idealism and nominalism, capable at most of classifying and defining, but certainly not calling to action. Realities are greater than ideas. This principle has to do with incarnation of the word and its being put into practice: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is from God” (1 Jn 4:2). The principle of reality, of a word already made flesh and constantly striving to take flesh anew, is essential to evangelization. It helps us to see that the Church’s history is a history of salvation, to be mindful of those saints who inculturated the Gospel in the life of our peoples and to reap the fruits of the Church’s rich tradition. Not to put the word into practice, not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centredness and gnosticism.

(4) *The whole is greater than the part*: An innate tension also exists between globalization and localization. We need to pay

attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality. Yet we also need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground. Together, the two prevent us from falling into one of two extremes. In the first, people get caught up in an abstract, globalized universe, falling into step behind everyone else, admiring the glitter of other people's world, gaping and applauding at all the right times. At the other extreme, they turn into a museum of local folklore, a world apart, doomed to doing the same things over and over, and incapable of being challenged by novelty or appreciating the beauty which God bestows beyond their borders. We can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective. Nor do people who wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community need to lose their individualism or hide their identity; instead, they receive new impulses to personal growth. The global need not stifle, nor the particular prove barren. Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its parts, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each. There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked. It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone. To Christians, this principle also evokes the totality or integrity of the Gospel which the Church passes down to us and sends us forth to proclaim. Its fullness and richness embrace scholars and workers, businessmen and artists, in a word, everyone. The genius of each people receives in its own way the entire Gospel and embodies it in expressions of prayer, fraternity, justice,

struggle and celebration. The good news is the joy of the Father who desires that none of his little ones be lost, the joy of the Good Shepherd who finds the lost sheep and brings it back to the flock. The Gospel is the leaven which causes the dough to rise and the city on the hill whose light illumines all peoples. The Gospel has an intrinsic principle of totality: it will always remain good news until it has been proclaimed to all people, until it has healed and strengthened every aspect of humanity, until it has brought all men and women together at table in God's kingdom. The whole is greater than the part. The Pope is not too concerned about the evolution of new concepts to back change. He is rather interested in recognizing and working with people who bring about change.

In Discernment: Listening in this way and implementing the principles above involves a training in a process of discernment. There is the very well-known adage of Augustine: "God does not command the impossible; but by so commanding, he exhorts you to do what you can and to seek what you cannot, so that God may assist to make it possible for you." Today's version of that adage could perhaps be what Pope Francis states in *Amoris Laetitia* # 303. The primary responsibility in this situation of seeking what God is asking, or to discover the "do what you can" - is on the person in that situation. But there is a secondary responsibility or co-responsibility that devolves on those who assist that person to come to a decision in conscience. This could be the pastor, the priest or the counselor, who assists the one who falls short of gospel ideals. The primary player and the "assistant" together engage in a process of discernment. When meeting a group of Jesuits in Poland (2016): "Certain programmes of priestly formation run the danger of educating in the light of very clear and specific ideas, and indeed of acting within limits and criteria and are a priori definitively defined, while prescinding from the concrete situation. ... (Translation mine)".

In my experience, not too many priests know much about discernment. There are perhaps even fewer who understands the demand of walking in synodality and discernment. Discernment is not connected to orders. Hence lay people can be trained in it very effectively. In discernment some convictions are basic.

1. *The degree of responsibility* is not the same in all cases (*Amoris Laetitia* # 300). There are mitigating factors that reduce imputability (Cf. *id.* #302).

2. *The principle of gradualness*: John Paul II said in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) #34: "And so what is known as 'the law of gradualness' or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with 'gradualness of the law' ..." And Pope Francis repeated in *Amoris Laetitia* 295 "This is not a "gradualness of law" but rather a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law."

3. The pastor/ counselor assists, but it is only the individual who can take *responsibility in conscience before God for the decision*. His/her conscience is the proximate law of morality for the individual – not necessarily for anyone else. It is not a question of doing something because pastor/ counselor gives permission. The individual needs to come to a decision in conscience before God – a decision for which he/she is responsible before God.

As Pope Francis has indicated, there will always men and women of the Church who are [...] social climbers, who 'use' people, the Church, their brothers and sisters—whom they should be serving—as a springboard for their own personal interests and ambitions ... are doing great harm to the Church." Such attitudes undo the mission of the Church.

Searching for Possibilities

The two supreme instruments which the Church possesses is the Word and the Sacrament. There are limitless possibilities in regard to the word. But there are limitations in regard to the sacrament. On 06.08.2020, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith gave a negative response to the validity of baptism conferred with the words “We baptize you ...”. The manner in which this came into the social media was that it touched upon the case of Matt Hood (who had been ordained on 3 June 2017) and was exercising his ministry in a parish. By chance, his father send him a video of his baptism and he discovered that the presiding deacon had used the words “We baptize you...” His baptism was invalid and so were the other sacraments that he had received. (The error was rectified when he was subsequently baptized and reordained in August 2020.) In that same case, the underlying principles were explained. 1. “When celebrating a Sacrament, the Church in fact functions as the Body that acts inseparably from its Head, since it is Christ the Head who acts in the ecclesial Body generated by him in the Paschal mystery.” 2. In the celebration of the Sacraments, in fact, the subject is the Church, the Body of Christ together with its Head, that manifests itself in the concrete gathered assembly. Such an assembly therefore acts *ministerially* – not collegially – because no group can make itself Church, but becomes Church in virtue of a call that cannot arise from within the assembly itself. The minister is therefore the sign-presence of Him who gathers, and is at the same time the locus of the communion of every liturgical assembly with the whole Church. In other words the minister is the visible sign that the Sacrament is not subject to an arbitrary action of individuals or of the community, and that it pertains to the Universal Church.

But what are the possibilities within the existing structures, without raising doubts about validity of sacraments. As regards the sacrament of reconciliation, the obligation to confess kind

and number of sins applies only to mortal sin. Such mortal sin can be forgiven with imperfect contrition together with the sacrament. But there is no such requirement for those guilty only of venial sin.

Thomas Aquinas says about the Eucharist (STh III, 79,4) “Two things may be considered in this sacrament, to wit, the sacrament itself, and the reality of the sacrament: and it appears from both that this sacrament has the power of forgiving venial sins. For this sacrament is received under the form of nourishing food. Now nourishment from food is requisite for the body to make good the daily waste caused by the action of natural heat. But something is also lost daily of our spirituality from the heat of concupiscence through venial sins, which lessen the fervor of charity”. Innocent III understood that the devout reception of the Eucharist “blots out venial sins and wards off mortal sins.” Both effects are made possible by the infusion of charity. There is therefore the possibility of certainly hearing the confession of venial sins on the phone or other secure mode of communication. Can sacramental absolution be given? That needs be studied.

In addition, there is the third rite of general absolution. Perhaps that can be used more often. Together with that can be considered the question whether those who are to receive absolution are to be gathered physically in one place or whether they can be gathered virtually through technological means. Today major gatherings and discussions are taking place in this way. Why not the sacraments?

As regards live streamed masses, in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist, our *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), Benedict XVI, recommends the practice of making spiritual communions. He states: “Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such

circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion, praised by Pope John Paul II and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life” (no. 55). This is a participation by desire. Thomas Aquinas (STh III, 80.1) says “There are two things to be considered in the receiving of this sacrament, namely, the sacrament itself, and its fruits, and we have already spoken of both (III,73 and III,79). The perfect way, then, of receiving this sacrament is when one takes it so as to partake of its effect. Now, as was stated above (III,79,8), it sometimes happens that a man is hindered from receiving the effect of this sacrament; and such receiving of this sacrament is an imperfect one. Therefore, as the perfect is divided against the imperfect, so sacramental eating, whereby the sacrament only is received without its effect, is divided against spiritual eating, by which one receives the effect of this sacrament, whereby a man is spiritually united with Christ through faith and charity.”

Can there be further development through the consecration of bread and wine during live streamed masses outside the place where the mass is being celebrated? Again a matter for study. In a Mass celebrated by the Pope John Paul II (1995) in the Philippines, there were hosts to be consecrated kept as far away as 2 kilometers from the altar. That was in physical space? Could virtual space extend that distance indefinitely?

As regards marriage, there is a possibility provided by law in cases where a priest cannot be found (canon 1098). What about the possibilities in the case of the anointing of the sick? All these are matters that need study and research in an age of virtual reality.

Finally, a word needs to be said about finances. Most parishes find a drop in financial resources especially when Sunday Masses cannot be held regularly. The issue is not to raise more

finances. The issue is whether the institution (parish, monastery, lay organization or whatever) provides an useful service. Monasteries in the middle ages were centres of intellectual, literary, artistic, and social activity. In return, they received huge donations. In Chaucer's time (14th century), the church owned over one fifth of the arable land in England. Service that is useful and benefits people, will engender donations. Once donations come, there is the question of accountability and transparency. "Ill fares a land to hastening ills a prey, where wealth accumulates and men decay" (Oliver Goldsmith, *Deserted Village*). Pastors become hirelings who prey on the sheep and forget the smell of the sheep.

Promoting and Encouraging a New Evangelization:

After Vatican II, there were individuals and groups that went around disseminating the basic insights of Vatican II. Who is really engaged in this dissemination. In fact, based on anecdotal evidence, it would seem that some are even openly opposed to movement in synodality and discernment. People are still expecting Yes/No answers to their questions as was the case with the *dubia* submitted to Pope Francis about his encyclical *Amoris Laetitia* by a group of Cardinals. Who can describe the smell of a rose? Who can say with certainty that Judas is in hell? And there are dozens of questions of this type.

A ministry envisaged according to the outline above means both a change of mindset (conversion) and a renewal of existing ministry of word and sacrament, without fear of venturing into new territory together with laity in a spirit of mutual listening in the face of reality; discerning together the movement of the Spirit and walking together in synodality.

An exercise of ministry along the lines and more importantly, the spirit of what is suggested above will inevitably lead to the re-thinking and re-formulation of reality.

THE CHURCH IS SYNODAL BECAUSE IT IS A COMMUNION

Interview with **Cardinal Mario Grech**, the Secretary of the
Synod of Bishops:

“Synodality is the form that realizes the participation
of all the people of God in mission.”

By Andrea Tornielli

The Vatican dicasteries continue their service even during the summer period. However, there is one working group that has been in the eye of the storm for weeks: the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, called to draft the preparatory document and to help the local Churches on a new path, one in which Pope Francis wants true participation from below. We spoke with Cardinal Mario Grech, the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops.

Your Eminence, how is the preparatory work progressing?

To create a synod one must be a synod! Before the publication of the document on the synodal process, we listened to the presidents of all the assemblies of the continental Bishops' Conferences, together with the president of the US Bishops' Conference and the president of the Canadian Bishops' Conference. Then, immediately following the publication of the document, we extended an invitation to the presidents of all the bishops' conferences, their permanent councils, and general secretaries for a fraternal conversation during which they had the opportunity to comment, make suggestions, and even ask questions. In all, we held eight meetings divided by language. Two other moments of consultation were one with the Patriarchs of the Oriental Churches and the other with the Major Archbishops. In addition, we accepted the invitation of

the Bishops' Conferences of Brazil, Burundi and the Antilles who asked us for a meeting specifically with them.

How did these first meetings go?

I must say that this has been a much appreciated and fruitful exercise in episcopal collegiality. With this approach we wanted to communicate the message that the synodal involvement of everyone is important even at this stage of the project launch. We have also undertaken a similar approach with the Curia, through conversations with various dicasteries. We have created four commissions to support the work leading up to the Synod: one for theological study, another to help us grow as a Church in the spirituality of communion, a third for methodology, and finally a fourth that will be dedicated to the aspect of communication.

What can you say about the state of work regarding the theme of the next Synod?

I know the sea and I know that for a long voyage by ship, everything must be carefully prepared. The attention we are putting into the drafting of the preparatory document is part of this careful preparation. Of course, we must also agree on the reason for the journey. The Holy Father has assigned the theme of synodality to the 16th Ordinary Assembly. It is certainly a complex theme, because it speaks of communion, participation and mission: these are aspects of synodality and of a "constitutively synodal Church," as he said in his address on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod. "For a synodal Church": it is towards this that we must go, or rather, that the Spirit asks us to go.

The Pope has repeatedly stressed the importance of synodality. Why?

I would like to clarify a misunderstanding. Many people think that synodality is a "fad" of the Pope. I hope none of us shares

this thought! In the various preparatory meetings, it became clear that synodality was the form and style of the early Church. The preparatory document clearly highlights this; and it highlights how Vatican II, with the movement of "return to the sources" - the *Ressourcement* - wanted to recover that model of the Church, without renouncing any of the great advances of the Church in the second millennium. If we want to be faithful to Tradition - and the Council should be considered as the most recent stage of Tradition - we must boldly go down this path of the synodal Church. Synodality is the category that best comprises all the conciliar themes that in the post-conciliar period have often been opposed to one another. I am thinking above all of the ecclesiological category of the people of God, which unfortunately has been opposed to that of hierarchy, insisting on a Church "from below", democratic, and instrumentalizing participation as a claim, not far from that of the trade unions.

What risks do you see in this interpretation?

This interpretation frightens many. But we must not look at interpretations, especially if they intend to divide: we must look at the Council, and the gains it brought, reconstructing only the juridical, hierarchical, institutional aspect of ecclesiology with the more spiritual, theological, historical-salvific one. The people of God of Vatican II is the pilgrim people moving towards the Kingdom. That category has made it possible to recover the totality of the baptized as an active subject in the life of the Church! And it did not do so by denying the function of the pastors, or of the Pope, but by placing them as the principle of unity of the baptized: the bishop in his Church, the Pope in the universal Church. The Church is communion, the 1985 Synod reiterated, initiating the well-known ecclesiology of communion. The Church is constitutively synodal, we are called to say "we". The two statements are not contradictory, but one completes the other: the Church-communion, if it has

the people of God as its subject, is a synodal Church and it cannot have another! Because synodality is the form that realizes the participation of all the people of God and of everyone in the people of God, each according to his status and function, in the life and mission of the Church. And it achieves this through the relationship between the *sensus fidei* of the People of God - as a form of participation in the prophetic function of Christ as indicated in Lumen Gentium 12 - and the discernment function of the pastors.

The centrality of the People of God sometimes seems to struggle to be understood and shared in concrete experience. Why?

Perhaps we need to confess that we have a clear, and perhaps even dear, hierarchical and magisterial function, in the sense that we willingly affirm and defend it. It is not so much the function of the *sensus fidei*. To understand its importance, however, it is sufficient to underline the theme of baptism and how the sacrament of rebirth not only enables one to live in Christ, but also immediately integrates one into the Church, as members of the body. The preparatory document emphasizes all this well. If we know how to recognize the value of the *sensus fidei* and how to move the people of God to become aware of this capacity given in baptism, we will have set out on the true path of synodality. For we will have planted not only the seed of communion but also that of participation. Through baptism, all the baptized participate in the prophetic, priestly and royal function of Christ. Therefore, by listening to the people of God - this is what consultation in the particular Churches is for - we know that we can hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. This does not mean that it is the people of God who determine the path of the Church. To the prophetic function of the whole people of God (including pastors) corresponds the pastors' task of discernment: from what the people of God say, the pastors must grasp what the Spirit wants

to say to the Church. But it is from listening to the people of God that discernment must begin.

There are those who say they are frightened by the amount of commitment that the synodal path will entail for the local Churches. Are there concerns about the risks of complicating the ordinary life of the Church?

All this is not really a process that complicates the life of the Church. Because without knowing what the Spirit is saying to the Church, we could act in a vacuum and, even without knowing it, against the Spirit. Once we have rediscovered the "pneumatological" dimension of the Church, we can only adopt the dynamism of prophecy-discernment, which lies at the heart of the synodal process. This is especially true when thinking about the third term at play: mission. The Youth Synod spoke of missionary synodality. Synodality is for mission, it is listening to how the Church becomes itself by living, witnessing and bringing the Gospel. All the terms proposed by the title are connected: they stand or fall together! Let us also ask to be deeply converted to synodality: it means converting to Christ and his Spirit, leaving the primacy to God.

This is a working translation from the original Italian.

Courtesy: Vatican News: 21 July 2021

Pope Francis approved a **new three-stage process for the next gathering of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023**. The process involves the whole Church **at diocesan, national and continental levels** through a process of listening and discernment on the theme of synodality: **“For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”**

The Synodal process began in the Vatican and in every diocese in the world in October 2021.(Ed)

Jesus: God of small things

(A Conference given by **Fr. Dileepa Jayamaha OMI**, based on Veeresh V. Moras' book, *Jesus: "The God of Small Things"*, to the presbyters (diocesan and Religious) assembled for the monthly days of Recollection at Bishop's House, Anuradhapura on 26-27, July, 2021.)

God of small things

We believe in a God who is a God of small things. The gospels present Jesus as an ordinary person living in an extraordinary way – as the God of small things. Jesus is the one who dethroned and declassified himself. He emptied himself of his divine status and identified himself with the human beings. He became a commoner, a simple layman. He was often present and recognized among unimportant persons, involved in insignificant events in profane places.

Though divine by nature, Jesus lived in solidarity with people, especially with people living in the shanties and slums; with sinners who were considered unclean and unholy. He lived a very simple and ordinary life and was often misunderstood and rejected.

Born in a manger

Jesus who should have been born in Rome or Jerusalem in a palace, in a mansion, was born as a commoner in a stable in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes, not claiming special privileges. *"He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant."* (Phil 2: 7).

Good News in O.T and N.T

"Good News"(evangelion in Greek) were widely used words in the Mediterranean world by kings and emperors whenever they won a war or on the occasion of a royal wedding or when a

male child was born to a ruler. But these words “Good News” were rarely used in OT except in Is. 40:1 and 66:1. *“A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. ... You who bring good tidings (news) to Zion, go up on a high mountain.”*

In N.T ‘evangelion’ (Good News) occurs 76 times and ‘evangelizein’ (proclaim the Good News) 54 times.

First visitors were Shepherds

Luke 2:8-12 : ⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger.”

Shepherds were not more virtuous than other people in the country. They were rough and tough characters. They were accused of unlawful grazing; suspected of stealing the produce of other herds and were listed as members of infamous professions like the tax collectors. They were considered unclean and dishonest. There was no spiritual credit to their profession

“Shepherds were rough and tough people who had to fight against wild beasts, robbers and against each other. There was no Sabbath for them and the laws of the desert where they led their flock were what we now call the laws of the jungle. Theirs were not the polished and civilized ways of human society in

the towns or in the villages. Dirty and smelling, poorly dressed and uncouth (rude), always ready for a brawl, they were the kind of people whom nice folk would rather avoid. According to early rabbis, they were ineligible to the judges or even witnesses.” (L. Legrand: *“The Way of the Magi and the Way of the Shepherds”* pp. 315-316).

But, it was to them that the Good News of the Messiah’s birth was announced. They had the privilege of listening to the choirs of angels (Lk. 2:13). The Gospel text does not mention any virtue of theirs, be it piety or simplicity of soul.

“It is as poor people of no consequence that they get the first Good News of the birth of the Saviour. God chose what is lowly and despised in the world, things that are reduced to nothing so that no one might boast in the presence of the Lord (1Cor. 1: 28 ff)” (L. Legrand, *“The Way of the Magi and the Way of the Shepherds”* pp. 316-317).

	Way of Magi	Way of the Shepherds
1	Second Visitors, Witnesses	First Visitors, Witnesses
2	Coming from East	Coming from neighbourhood fields
3	Wise men	Ignorant compared to the literate
4	Treasurers of East, gold, frankincense, myrrh	Nothing to offer, empty handed
5	Came with spiritual idea	No accepted spirituality
6	Knew how to consult heavens	Angels appeared to them
7	Knew how to pray and worship	Didn’t know what to do

Jesus gives his Good News to the least of the people. It is not reserved for the spiritual elite alone; not to those in power, but to the socially marginalized, simple people.

Humble Virgin Mary

Mary of Nazareth, an ordinary woman; not a significant character in the village but a perfect example of the weak with total dependence on God and Joseph. Four insignificant and despised women in the genealogy of Jesus.

Tamar was a seductress and pretended prostitute. Rahab was a prostitute. Uriah's wife Bathsheba was an adulteress. About Ruth's character unclear.

These women were regarded as foreigners. Mathew shows Jesus' relationship with the Gentiles. Rahab and Tamar were Canaanites while Ruth was a Moabite. Their union with their partners were extraordinary or irregular, scandalous to outsiders but they continued the blessed lineage of the Messiah.

These examples show how God uses the unexpected, simple, sinful human beings for His plan of salvation. To manifest His greatness, God makes use of the insignificant and scandalous human beings according to our perceptions.

Jesus brought up in a Humble Family:

Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of the World, was born and brought up in a humble, simple family of a small village called Nazareth.

Caesar Augustus, the Roman Monarch, was called "God and Lord and absolute sovereign". So a Roman emperor declared himself, as "the one who gave peace to the universe".

So Jesus becomes the sign and symbol of Peace to the world; not a political monarch. True peace is found not in a palace but in the crib, in a simple location where Jesus was born. Jesus

was born in Bethlehem, a small town about five miles south of Jerusalem, a place with not much history. Bought up in Nazareth, people dared to utter, “Can anything of good come from Nazareth?” (Jn. 1:46). Jesus flees from being admired, noticed and applauded. He chooses a humble town, with a population of 1600 to 2000 persons. Though insignificant, Nazareth became a great city. Though despised in the eyes of people, it became a special city in the eyes of God. It became the sacred place of the Incarnation of the Son of God (Jesus). Jesus was also called a Galilean. He lived and preached in Galilee. It was a town far from Jerusalem. But Jesus chose to perform miracles, and preach in Galilee. All the apostles, except Judas Iscariot were from Galilee.

All the above-mentioned characteristics show Jesus as the God of small things in an extraordinary manner.

Jesus’ Audience

The farmers, the shepherds, the fishermen, the women and the children were his audience, his listeners. Jesus exclaimed: “I thank thee Father..... that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and the learned, and revealed them to babes (Mt. 11:25).

Jesus’ Disciples (Luke 6: 12-19)

Jesus’ disciples were ordinary men; not wealthy or famous or influential and without special education. The work of Jesus is not in the hands of men whom the world calls great, but in the hands of ordinary people. For example, Matthew was a tax collector, a traitor in the eyes of people. Simon was a zealot, considered a fanatic who could kill any Roman.

The God of small things in the Miracles

Miracles are the supreme manifestations and testimonies of

God, the Father; they are the manifestations of the promised Messiah. The miracles are the signs of the restoration of the Kingdom of God and the manifestations of Jesus' saving power. Jesus performed his miracles in a very simple and ordinary way. They were performed for ordinary people in small settings. They did not require a big audience.

Jesus was prepared to heal the sick in a little circle of people, in an ordinary cottage rather than in the midst of a great crowd inside a synagogue, e.g. healing the mother in law of Peter. Miracle is narrated within the shortest space. Taking the woman's hand, Jesus raised her up, and her fever left her. Then she began to serve the Sabbath meal to the group. Jesus used simple items to perform his miracles, eg. dust and saliva to heal the sick persons.

Real Shepherd who fed the people:

"He saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things" (Mk. 6:34). "I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me and have nothing to eat" (Mk. 8.2). Jesus is shown as a shepherd who embodies God's mercy for the simple people. Miracles were performed by Jesus not to show off his supernatural powers; they were works of compassion and mercy. Jesus never distanced himself from earthly realities. His miracles were his reply to the challenge of human distress.

Parables in simple way

Jesus took examples for his parables from the ordinary daily life of the poor common people. For example, sowing, reaping, salt and dough in the kitchens, house building and field work, lamp, salt, field, bread and mending nets etc. To communicate with people, Jesus used simple language, not from mythology or fairy tales. To preach the Kingdom of God, He used ordinary

words and examples e.g. the mustard seed, treasure etc. In Palestine, the little grain of mustard seed, which is very small, did grow into a big tree. The Kingdom of God starts from smallest beginnings and no human person knows where it will end.

Jesus spoke of Galilean flora and fauna e.g. wheat, grapes, figs, thorns, weeds, beautiful lilies. Jesus spoke of sparrows, doves, ravens and hens, vultures, eagles, snakes, vipers and scorpions, goats, sheep, foxes, wolves, camels, asses and pigs. The Parables of Jesus originate from within his human experience of nature and of human society. In Luke 11: 5-8, the sleeping neighbour becomes the symbol of God's infinite mercy. If the neighbour gets up in the middle of the night from the bed disturbing his whole family, how much concern will God who is a loving Father show supplying all the needs of His children.

Jesus love for children and women

Jesus often took children as example to challenge the adults. Even though the disciples rebuked children for coming near Jesus, Jesus welcomed them with much love. They did not understand the psychology of the children. Jesus who understood children's needs, challenged the disciples saying that the kingdom of God and children are closely linked together. Jesus lifted children from the margins of society into the very center of his community (Jesus community). Both the adults and the children were a marginalized and a over-dependent group during Jesus' time.

Women were a suppressed and a marginalized class in that society. Jesus manifested his concern, compassion for their suffering and took initiative to help them in their needs. He showed esteem/ honour/ reverence and manifested concern and compassion; he took initiative to help them;

Jewish custom prohibited touching or going behind a woman. But Jesus touched Peter's mother in law to raise her up. Jesus took Jairus' young daughter by hand and told her to get up. (Mk. 5:41) A lady poured oil over his head (Mk. 14: 3). Jesus also allowed himself to be touched by women. (Lk. 7: 36-50). He had a very close relationship with Martha and Mary. Thus Jesus manifested a beautiful healthy relationship with children and women. It was protective and enriching.

Who are the Poor of Jesus?

For Jesus, the poor are the "anawim of Yahweh" (the poor of God) in OT. Jesus expressed that in clear terms: "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Lk. 4: 18). Thus Jesus in his mission brought the Good News of salvation to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the beggars, the hungry, the outcasts, the oppressed, the marginalized, the persecuted, the downtrodden, the captives; to all who labour and are overburdened, widows and orphans and all the poor. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted" (Mt. 5: 3-12).

Was Jesus poor?

Joachim Jeremias strongly argues that Jesus should be identified with the lower classes. (M.V. Abraham, "*Good News to the Poor in Luke's Gospel*" in Bible Bhashyam 14, p. 67). Pharisaic opponents regarded Jesus as one of the "unlearned" (idiots), who failed to keep the law (Jn. 7:15).

Let us look at Jesus' own life style. He was one without house or family. Mary and Joseph were able to offering only two turtle doves at the presentation of Jesus in the temple – poor people's sacrifice (Lk. 2:22-24). Jesus and his disciples

depended on the hospitality of their friends. Such a behavior also helped Jesus to be closely knit with the poor. Jesus did not cling to his greatness but became lowly (Phil. 2: 6-11). Jesus decidedly chose to be dethroned and de-classed so that He could be with human beings. Jesus became simple, poor, ordinary, and hidden. He belittled himself from the Crib of Bethlehem to the Cross of Calvary. Jesus found his strength in weakness and his wisdom amidst human folly.

Pope Francis, a follower of Jesus in today's world

Pope Francis has become a model and a real challenge to all of us (presbyters) who serve the People of God of the small things. He releases his message for the fifth World Day of the poor saying, *“the poor, always and everywhere, evangelize us, because they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father. Thus, we are called to discover Christ in them, lend our voices to their causes, listen to and understand them, and welcome them because Jesus not only sides with the poor but also shares their lot.”*

In today's context, we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: "You yourselves give them something to eat!" (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity with them in meeting their real needs which we encounter.



JOURNEYING WITH THE CHURCH

By **Fr. Merl Mendis, OMI**

(The first part of the article was published in *The Missionary Oblate*,
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POST VATICAN II HISTORY CONTINUES

Pope John Paul

After the death of Pope Paul VI in August in 1978, **Cardinal Luciano** was elected on 26 August 1978 to succeed Pope Paul VI and he took the name **John Paul**. He was the first Pope to choose a double name, reminding the happy memories of Pope John and Pope Paul and hoping to continue their teachings during his pontificate. He declined to have a coronation ceremony. He was born in a poor family in Venice. His brother was a glass factory worker. Pope John Paul was an unassuming Pope and everyone expected him to be a ‘father’ and a ‘friend’ of the poor. He was known as the ‘smiling Pope’. He didn’t live long as Pope. He died of a massive heart attack in his sleep on the night of 29 September 1978 from Venice.

Pope John Paul II

A Polish **Cardinal Karol Wojtyla**, the Archbishop of Cracowe was elected on 16 October 1978 to succeed Pope John Paul, and he took the title, **John Paul II**. He was son of a soldier. When he was 19 years old, he was arrested by the Nazis and sent to jail. Being a prisoner, the Nazis forced him to cut stones. When he was freed, he began to study philosophy and theology. In 1949, he was ordained a priest. He worked as a parish priest during the communist persecution. Although the hammer and the sickle ruled the country, the Polish being a very religious-minded people, the cross dominated everywhere in Poland.

Pope John Paul 11 had the good fortune to see his persecuted native Poland triumph over atheism when the Solidarity Union shook off the shackles of Communism and made Poland a free country again. Pope John Paul 11 was the best loved and admired person in the world at that time. His speeches made headlines in the secular press. His travels were international events. *Time* magazine (weekly) reported that Polish Pope of Rome was the most influential man of the 19th century.

In 1979 Pope John Paul 11 published his Encyclical *Redemptoris Hominis*. It brought out the true nature of the Church in the modern world. With delight he saw the world changing its outlook, the iron curtain falling, the freedom of religion and the new spirit of love overshadowing evil and hatred. To a world searching for God, he was a beacon of light. He was also blunt and direct when he demanded from the faithful their Christian values and virtues.

Pope John Paul 11 was a prisoner of the Roman Curia. But he became an itinerant Pope making 104 trips abroad, visiting 129 countries. Wherever he went, he preached equality between the haves and the have-nots. He met dictators and oppressors and demanded an end to slavery. He was the messenger of Christ everywhere promoting peace in the troubled world. He was shot during a general audience in St. Peter's square in Rome on 13 May 1981 but he escaped death. After completing 26 years as the chief shepherd of the Church, he passed away on 2 April 2005 at the ripe age of 92 years.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected as **Pope Benedict XVI** on 20 April 2005. He became the 265th successor of St. Peter. He was born on 16 April 1927 in Bavaria. He was ordained a priest on 29 June 1951. He received his doctorate in Theology in 1953. After being the Archbishop of Munich, he was made a Cardinal by Pope Paul VI on 28 June 1981. Pope

John Paul named him the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF). In April 1993, he became the dean of the College of Cardinals. Due to his weak health condition, he resigned as Pope on 11 February 2013 (becoming the 2nd Pope to resign, after Pope Gregory XI who resigned at the age of 85 on 14 July 1415).

Pope Francis

On 13 March 2013, **Cardinal Bergoglio** from Argentina was chosen as Pope to succeed Pope Benedict XVI. He took the name **Pope Francis** at his installation.

Some characteristics of Pope Francis

- A poor man and a missionary from South America.
- First non-European.
- First Religious from a Religious Order since the Camaldolese monk Gregory VI, who was elected in 1831.
- First Jesuit to become a Pope.
- He longs to see the Church becoming the Church of the poorest of the poor according to the Gospel values.
- He believes that the authentic power is selfless service to the people.
- Church's authority is essentially spiritual, not political.
- Christian life is a joyful life.

Pope Francis' main concerns

a) Regarding Bishops

Pope Francis wants not princes but pastors for episcopacy, pastors who are close to the people and who are lovers of poverty and of simple life-style. A bishop has to be among the people in three ways: in front of them pointing the way; among them keeping them together and preventing them from getting scattered; behind them ensuring that no one is left behind.

b) Regarding priests

A good priest has to anoint the people with the oil of gladness by preaching the Gospel with unction. The Gospel the priest preaches must touch the lives of people bringing light during moments of darkness. *“Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily become meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out”* (EG 262).

c) Regarding the Church

The Church is always a missionary community. *“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures”* (EG 49).

The Church is a mother, a servant and a facilitator of faith, not an administrator and an inspector of faith. The Church is tempted to become increasingly self-referential and lose the need to be missionary. The Catholic Church needs to learn to decentralise leadership and follow the synodal way.

d) Regarding money

Pope Francis says that the worship of ancient golden calf has returned in a new way through the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy, lacking a truly human purpose. Such an economy lacks concern for human beings. Food is thrown away while people are starving. He says that an unequal distribution of wealth leads to violence. He denounces the economy of exclusion.

e) Regarding human fraternity

Pope Francis is the first Pope in the history of the Catholic Church to visit the Arabian Peninsula. On 4 February, 2019,

addressing the Inter-Faith Meeting in **Abu Dhabi**, Pope Francis said: *“With a heart grateful to the Lord, in the 8th century of the meeting between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al Kamil, I have welcomed the opportunity to come here as a believer thirsting for peace, a brother seeking for peace with the brethren. We are here to desire peace, to promote peace, to be instruments of peace.* The world witnessed for the first time a declaration on human fraternity between the Catholics and the Muslims, signed by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb. The trip marked the first time there has been a public Mass in the Islamic country.

Visiting **Iraq** in March 2021, the land of Patriarch Abraham, Pope Francis said: *“We reaffirm our conviction that fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace is more powerful than war.”* The meeting at the Grand Ayatollah’s humble home in March 2021 was the first in the Vatican and Islamic histories between the leader of the Catholic Church and the highest ranking Shiite Spiritual leader.

PS: With humility and gratitude, I would like to acknowledge the inspiration I received from the writings of late Rev. Fr. Hilarian Dissanayake OMI and Fr. Aloysius Pieris SJ.

“The Church needs shepherds of the people, not clerics of the state. Be shepherds living with the smell of the sheep.” – Pope Francis

OBLATES IN EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

In 1798, the British government had entrusted education in the colony (Ceylon) to the Anglican clergy and in 1841 to the School Commission which was predominantly Protestant, with financial support from the government.¹

The three Oblates, led by Fr. Stephen Semeria (later Bishop) who came to Sri Lanka in 1847 at the request of Bishop Orazio Bettachini of Jaffna to Bishop Eugene de Mazenod, the Founder of the Oblate Congregation, were very conscious also of the difficulties the Catholics in Jaffna faced in providing their children education in English. They realized that their children could get well educated only in Protestant schools. Bishop Bettachini who had already been persuaded by the leaders of the Catholics in Jaffna to promote education of their children sent Fr. Semeria to India on 22 May 1848 to study how the Jesuits, great educators, were performing in the field of education. He returned to Jaffna on 15 July 1848.

Right from the beginning, the pioneer Oblates and the others who followed them, have been innovative in their apostolates to the poor and the abandoned in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), motivated by the inspirational words of Bishop Eugene de Mazenod: ***“Love embraces all; for new needs, it invents new means when necessary.”*** Hence, besides teaching the truths of Christianity, administration of the Sacraments and providing guidance to the Catholics, the Oblates had committed themselves also to the formation of the local clergy and to

1 W. L.A. Don Peter, *Catholic Church in Sri Lanka; A History in outline - The British period*.

apostolate of education.

Fr. Stephen Semeria OMI, who was consecrated Bishop in 1857 and who became the Bishop of Jaffna, succeeding Bishop Bettachini, realizing also the urgent need for English-speaking Oblates to promote education and develop the boys in Jaffna, appealed to Bishop de Mazenod to send Oblates from the Anglo-Irish Province of the Oblates. Three Oblate Brothers, Robert Byrne, John Joseph Brown and William Bennett arrived in Jaffna in 1859. Bishop Semeria also invited the Sisters of the Holy Family from Europe in 1861 to undertake the education of the girls in Jaffna.

Development of Catholic education in Ceylon

The real development of Catholic education in Sri Lanka took place with the arrival of Fr. Ernest Christopher Bonjean to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). During his 9 years of priestly ministry in India as a member of the Society of the Foreign Missions, Fr. Bonjean had come to know the urgent missionary needs in Jaffna through Fr. Pajean, a member of the Society of Foreign Missions and he started to correspond with Fr. Semeria. With the approval of his Superior (Religious Leader/ Animator), he came to Jaffna on the 28th November 1855. ²

Fr. Bonjean began the year of the Novitiate in Jaffna on 19th November 1857, and professed his vows as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI) on the 20th November 1858 and began his missionary journeys and missionary tasks in the Vicariate Apostolic of Jaffna, concentrating also on the education of the Catholic clergy and the education of the children and the young

2 Philips Jesuthsan OMI, *Our Tribute*, Oblate Scholasticate, Kandy, p 159-160.

people. He was consecrated Bishop and appointed Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna by Rome on the 5th July 1868, succeeding Bishop Semeria who passed away on the 23rd January 1868 when he went to Europe.

Bishop Bonjean transformed the Primary School of Jaffna initiated by Vicar Apostolic Orazio Bettachini into St. Patrick's College. Having served as the Vicar Apostolic of Jaffna, he came to Colombo on the 20th April 1883 since Rome had transferred him and on the 06th January 1887 he became the Metropolitan Archbishop of Colombo.

Commitment of Bishop Christopher Bonjean to Education

Fr. Bonjean, of French nationality, who had studied English in India, was a good writer and an orator. In 1860, his booklet in English entitled, ***"A few words on Catholic Education in Ceylon"*** "asking the Catholics to educate their children was published by the *Examiner Press* in Madras. In that booklet, called the **"Educational charter of the Catholics"** of Sri Lanka, he invited the Catholics to be vigilant and struggle for the Catholic education which had been denied for them by the British government. In that booklet, he laid down clearly the principles which should guide Catholic education. It was a call to Catholics to understand the need for education of their children.³ He contributed also a series of letters to the *Colombo Examiner*, an influential journal at that time, opposing the system of "Common mixed schools", in which Christian pupils of various denominations were to be taught a common form of Christianity.

.3 Justin Gnanapragasam, *Catholic Education in Sri Lanka during its first century as a British colony* (1796-1901)

In 1865, the Legislative Council appointed a sub-committee to inquire into and report on education in Ceylon. Bonjean was one of those consulted by that committee regarding matters related to education and he became the voice of the Catholic Church in the field of education in Ceylon. Bonjean proposed a system of State-Assisted schools to be administered by each religious denomination (Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim). In accordance with Bonjean's suggestions, the Government decided in 1869 that any religious denomination could open schools for its children which would be given a grant by the government. The Denominational or Assisted School System that would benefit all religions thus came into being due to the painstaking commitment of Archbishop Bonjean and he came to be known as the **'Father of the Denominational School System in Ceylon'**. He spoke; he wrote; he campaigned for quality education in Sri Lanka. Soon the Catholic Church opened schools in urban and rural areas to teach Christian doctrine and raise the quality of life of the neglected people through education. Generally each parish had either a mixed school attached to it or one for boys and one for girls. There were bigger and well-equipped schools / colleges in towns for secondary education. As part of the system, there were also state-aided Catholic Training Colleges for the training of Catholic teachers for Catholic schools. The Oblates in Jaffna and in Colombo were Principals of such schools. Archbishop Bonjean took the initiative to establish St. Joseph's College in Colombo for integral education of Catholic children. According to Fr. W.L.A. Don Peter, Oblate Archbishop Christopher Bonjean's the contribution he made in the course of time to the Church in Sri Lanka, in both Jaffna and Colombo, especially in the field of education, is enormous. He stands out

as the greatest Churchman in the history of the Church in the British period. He might in fact be called 'the Second Apostle of Sri Lanka,' the first being of course Fr Joseph Vaz.⁴

The take-over of the catholic schools

After the take-over of the catholic schools in 1960 by the Government, led by Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Grade 1 and Grade 11 schools were given the option to go private without state aid and without the right to levy fees from the parents. The Church was able to maintain only a few schools since the (UNP) government of Mr. J.R. Jayewardene decided to grant from 1980 in the form of teachers' salary.

After the take-over of the Catholic schools, many schools do not have Catholic Principals or an adequate Catholic staff or proper teaching of religion.

Special Contributions through Oblate Colleges

Special mention must be paid of the contribution the Oblates have made through the colleges. For example:

In the North , at **St. Patrick's College**, Jaffna, **St. Henry's College**, Illavalai and **St. Anthony's College**, Kayts,

In the South: at **St. Joseph's College**, Colombo, **St. Peter's College**, Bambalapitiya, **De Mazenod College**, Kandana, **Aquinas College of Higher Education**, Colombo and **Don Bosco College**, Kaluaggala,

In the North Central Province: at **St. Joseph's College**, Anuradhapura,

In the Eastern Province: at **St. Joseph's College**, Trincomalee.

4 W.L.A.Don Peter, *ibid*

Household names

The names of well-qualified Oblate educators (Rectors of the Colleges) – Fathers Charles S. Mathews, Timothy M.F. Long, L.A. Singarayer, F. J. Stanislaus, N. Arulnesan in Jaffna and Maurice J. Le Goc, D.J. Anthony, D.J. Nicholas Perera, Basil Weeratunga and Peter Pillai in Colombo - have become household names in Sri Lanka.

Fr. D. J. Anthony was a Sinhala Scholar, Free education patriot, General Manager of Catholic schools and the founder of the teacher-training college at Bolawalana, Negombo. Fr. L.A. Singarayer had been Principal of the Training College at Columbuturai, Jaffna. Fr. Basil Weeratunga, was a pioneer for schools and seminary education. and Fr. D.J. Nicholas Perera, who while in England, joined the Ceylonese delegation to meet the Secretary of State for reform in the Constitution of the Government of Ceylon for freedom.

A life-size statue of Fr. Fr. Timothy M. F. Long OMI, erected in front of the historic Jaffna library, is a great sign of appreciation by people of Jaffna for the contribution made by him in the field of education.

As educators, the Oblates have paid special attention to the promotion of genuine values, skills and virtues while maintaining discipline and decorum at all levels.

Publications

Fr. Le Goc's book on "*Introduction to Tropical Botany*" written in 1920 became the standard text book in Sri Lanka and India. The other book on botany written much later was "*Chapters on Nature Study*" which was widely read in Ceylon and India. Another interesting book he wrote in 1932 was "*Simplified Astronomy*", which was the first modern work on Astronomy in Ceylon.

Fr. Peter Pillai became the architect of the concept of the system of the Private Non-Fee Levying Schools. He served on the University Senate and was the President of the Head Masters' Conference attached to the Government. He was a great educator and apostle of social justice in Sri Lanka and began the journal "*Social justice Review*". He was the founder of Aquinas College of Higher Studies, supported by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Thomas Cooray OMI.

Oblate Fr. Michael Silva's book on Music, *Chiranthana Sinhala Sangeethaye Pravanatha* was accepted as a text book at the University.

Ownership and Administration of the Oblate Colleges

The Oblates, having laid solid foundation to education and having promoted it, very generously handed over the ownership and the administration of their colleges to the dioceses, where they had been serving the people.

Educators of Orphans and of the under-privileged

Susithodaya, Children's Home at Maggona, is a Centre, begun by the Oblates in 1895, initially assisted by Franciscan Brothers, to respond to the needs of children a) abandoned by parents due to financial or personal problems, b) of single parents, (c) of parents addicted to alcohol or drugs, (d) living with guardians and (e) delinquents. Susithodaya provides residential programmes for the above-mentioned categories of children (10 yrs to 18 yrs) from Grade 6 to GCE Ordinary / Advanced level. The children are trained in extra-curricular activities, such as Sinhala & English Literary Associations (including speech and drama), Sports (football, basketball, cricket), Debate Teams, Home gardening project. The Dept. of Probation and Child Care and Juvenile Courts which sends the children also organises various programmes at Susithodaya. Fr

W. Jesu Ramesh OMI is the Director of Susithodaya, Children's Home.

St Vincent's Technical School at Maggona is a Technical School begun by the Oblates in 1897, which provides training for students both resident and day scholars. The Programmes include Automatic Mechanic (02 yrs), Electricity (01 yr), Wood Work (01 year), welding (01 yr), and Spoken English Course (01 yr). On completion of the training programme, exams are held and students are awarded the National Vocational Qualification Certificate (NVQ). These training courses are affiliated to the Tertiary Vocational Commission in Sri Lanka. There are also other programmes which are organised by the Department of Probation and Child Care and the Department of Youth Affairs. Fr. H. Sameera D. Fonseka OMI is the Director of St Vincent's Technical School.

Birth of new historic consciousness in the Oblates

A new historic consciousness began to emerge in the Oblates regarding education in the new socio-cultural and religious environments in Sri Lanka.

“Lakrivi”, a Children's Movement, begun in Sri Lanka by Fr. Felix Mevel, OMI in 1954, takes education to the villages-urban, semi-urban and rural areas-, and trains the children, irrespective of their race, religion or gender, in genuine human and religious values and virtues, thereby promoting also social inclusion, equality and friendship among them. It is an extension education programme. Lakrivi Movement also organizes libraries, trains the children in communication skills and leadership in their life situations. Special social leadership training is provided for the local animators of the cells. The present director is Fr. Asanga Aruna Nanayakkara, OMI.

Eugene Academy at Keeri, Mannar, begun by the Oblates in March 2003 has been a great blessing to thousands of young men and young women who have got through O/L and A/L, and intending to enter the Universities, College of Education and College of Nursing. Subjects taught: English, Sinhalese, Information Communication Technology (ICT), Leadership and Career Motivation. Present Director is Fr. Thevasahayam Jesupalan, OMI.

St. Joseph's College, Trincomalee was begun on the 27th July 1867 by the Irish Oblate Fr. Louis-Marie Keating (sent by Bishop De Mazenod to Sri Lanka in 1847), as an English medium school with 18 students, in a single room in St. Mary's Cathedral premises. At that time there were only vernacular schools at Trincomalee. When Trincomalee- Batticaloa became a separate diocese under the Jesuits, it was handed over to them in 1902 and it came back to be administered by the Oblates from the 30th September 2003. Beneficiaries: students from all the parishes and from all the religions, from Grade 01 to 13 A/L. Programmes: Bio-science, physical science, Commerce, Arts. Present Rector: is Fr. A.Vijayakamalan Adlfr OMI

In 2008, Fr, Dennis Iddamalgoda OMI began the **Mazenod English Institute at Katuwapitiya, Negombo** and it continues to impart basic knowledge of English with an integral formation. The Institute's programmes include Basic English immersion and Information technology. The duration of the immersion programme is three months. The day scholar students - boys after O/L and girls after A/L - are given the option to follow the course as residential students. Fr. Lakshman Fernando OMI is the present Director, assisted by Fr. Christy Nirmalarajan OMI.

In 2014, the Oblates opened **Lebrara Library, an Educational Resource Centre at Kilinochchi.**

Programmes: Evening classes for the school children. Day classes for the O/L students who failed in their first attempt. English Diploma course, IT, Sinhala Language, Elocution, Sri Lanka Festival of music, dance and speech. The beneficiaries of the programmes are poor children who are unable to pay the tuition fee and also students who are not given a second chance to sit for the O/L examination. Present Director is Fr. S, Anpurasa, OMI.

St. Henry's College, Ilavalai, a school to respond to the thirst for knowledge of the boys of Ilavalai and of the adjoining villages was begun by Fr, Liguori Rodrigo, OMI, the parish priest of Ilavalai (1907-1910). The Oblates had administered it from 1938 to 1953 and from 1956 to 1976. Well known Oblate educationists - Frs Charles S. Mathews, L.A. Singarayer and F. J. Stanislaus, P.J. Jeevaratnam and J.A. Francis - had been Rectors of St. Henry's College. From the 01st August 2017, the College is being administered again by the Oblates. Beneficiaries: Students from Grade 6 to 13 (A/L). Programmes: co-curricular activities, environmental education, sports, social science club, eco-clubs and drams. The present Rector is Fr. E. Godfrey Joel, OMI and A. Regikumar |OMI is the Vice Rector.

The Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OIHL) was established on 21st May 2016 through the initiative of Fr. Oswald Firth OMI during the Bi-centenary Jubilee celebration of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) and the Academic Year (2016-2017) was inaugurated on 1st October 2016. As highlighted by St. Eugene de Mazenod Founder of the Oblates, *"we must lead people to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and finally we must help them to become saints."* This is the very rationale that underscores our efforts in education. The Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OIHL) is an attempt to continue and bring to

fruition the dream of the Founder, and a response to a crucial need to promote justice, peace and reconciliation in a country wounded by a long civil war.

Oblate engagement in Sri Lanka has been at all levels, from Primary to University and has embraced all kinds of learning in technology, academics, Mass Media, music and making inroads into the formation of the clergy and the Religious Sisters and Brothers.

OIHL, which was begun at the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR), Colombo 10, was shifted to Dev Arana, Minuwangoda. The Administrative Financial Director is Fr. Asanga Viraj OMI and the Secretary is Fr. Eric Wasalathanthrige OMI.

Mazenod College, Anuradhapura: Another desired goal emerged among the Oblates during the Oblate Congress in 2018 held at Tewatte, Ragama, to become educators with the view to serve the poor and to engage in a dialogue of life with the Buddhists, motivated by the spirit (charism`) of their vocation. This desired goal became viable and feasible with the inauguration of **Mazenod College in Anuradhapura**, an English-medium Institute, for boys and girls, on the 07th January 2019, with the motto, “*servire in amore*” (*to serve with love*). Service is the inseparable twin of love, through which we are called to witness to Christ. Every month a Parents’ meeting is held with an input talk given by a competent person. Fr. Dileepa Jayamaha OMI is the Principal and Fr. Shane Winston De Rosayro OMI, the Vice-Principal.

LADANI – a Home for the deprived

Ladani Home at Lansigama, Katuneriya was founded on 5th November 1985 by **Fr. Neville Merinus Coonghe**, a diocesan presbyter of the diocese of Chilaw, to respond compassionately to the painful cries of the children affected by the devastating incidents caused by the actions of irresponsible adults during the ethnic riots of the Black July of 1983 in Sri Lanka. The ethnic riots deprived many children of the love and care (the children's inherent right) of their dear parents who lost their lives.

On the 5th of November 1985, the first Ladani Home began its selfless loving service with five orphan children. It began in a weaving shed with habitable conditions in a little hamlet of Katuneriya. It continues to be a home of caring love and has journeyed with the generous support and encouragement of many friends.

Extension services

Ladani Home has expanded and its caring presence is being felt in several parts of Sri Lanka due to the creative fidelity of its Founder to the cause of the poor children. It has six homes in three Districts.

<u>Home:</u>	<u>Date of foundation</u>	<u>District</u>
Katuneriya	05/11/1985	Puttalam
Thambarawil	18/06/1989	Puttalam
Mattakotuwa	08/09/1990	Puttalam
Bibiladeniya	30/01/1997	Kurunegala
Haldanduwana	31/03/1998	Puttalam
Mullaitivu	02/11/2013	Mullaitivu

Thambarawila home is dedicated for the slow learning female children. It has children who are resident as well as day scholars

and it is named as Mudhitha School. There is also a day-scholar school which is named “Dharma” at the Head Office Premises at Lansigama for slow- learning children.

Ladani Home is a legal entity, registered with the government under the Parliamentary Act, as a Charity, in terms of the gazette of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. It is also a NGO.

Education of children

200 children are being cared by Ladani Home, majority being the girls and only one home is being occupied by boys. Ladani Home imparts the values of good citizenry, religious and religious moral values and provides primary and secondary education for those who are eligible. It also provides meals, nutrition for good health, counseling and other physical and mental development and shelter. Besides providing food, shelter and education for the destitute and poor children, it also helps poor families with dry rations and also financially on a monthly basis. Ladani helps the poor sick children every month to buy their medicines.

Lighting up a candle

The theme song of Ladani Home emphasizes the basic values and virtues. *“Let us not curse or be deterred from prevailing darkness; on the contrary, let us become aware and light up a candle and dispel the darkness.”* Faithful to these words, LADANI Home has brought light and joy to the life of many children, thanks to the spirit of dedication of its founder, Fr. Neville Merinus Coonghe, who has been encouraged and supported by many people, to enrich this apostolate and ably assisted also by his dedicated staff. Ladani Home depends on local and foreign donors and benefactors for its maintenance.

Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI

CATHOLIC NEGOMBO

(Editor's note: **I am happy to publish a Conference on Catholic Negombo delivered by Fr. S. G. Perera, SJ, a great Sri Lankan priest-historian. This text was given to me (Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI) by Bishop Edmund Peiris, OMI, on January, 29, 1986. In his Talk, Fr. S.G. Perera speaks of the eventful history of the Catholic Church in Negombo under the Portuguese and the Dutch. He has shown how the Catholics of Negombo had suffered and struggled to keep the Catholic Faith in defiance of a most rigorous persecution by the Dutch. Fr. S. G. Perera had concluded his Talk saying, "It is a grand and noble heritage, and I have no doubt that you, in your turn, will guard it jealously and hand it down unsullied to your children and your children's children").**

A brief sketch of the History of the Catholic Church in Negombo under the Portuguese and the Dutch

S. G. Perera SJ

Mr. Chairman¹, Revd. Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have often been struck with admiration at the manner in which the Catholics of Negombo withstood the Dutch persecution. All the available Dutch histories and records represent Negombo as 'a stronghold of Catholicism', the 'hotbed of Popery': and to acknowledge that in spite of all the proclamations and, *plakaats* and edicts, the Dutch Reformed Religion was unable to make the least headway among the people of Negombo. Such testimony, coming from such a quarter, is proof positive that the Catholic Faith had been deeply planted and firmly rooted in

¹ Mr. John H. Pereira, Vice Chairman, Urban District Council, Negombo

the hearts and homes of the Catholics of Negombo in the Portuguese times And being of an inquisitive turn of mind, I was curious enough to endeavor to find out how Christianity was first introduced, and how it flourished, in a town which has come to be regarded as so distinctly Catholic.

I must confess that our sources of information on this point are very scanty. It was, first of all, never my privilege to have access to your local traditions; and most unfortunately no records are available of the earliest missionaries of Negombo. The first to preach Christianity in Negombo were the Friars of the Franciscan Order, and a member of that Order, who had himself worked on the Ceylon Mission wrote a history of the Franciscan missionaries²; but the manuscript has disappeared and all attempts to trace it have failed.

With the Jesuits I was naturally more successful. From the Archives of the Society of Jesus I was supplied with photographic copies of every scrap of paper referring to Ceylon, letters and reports, written from Ceylon or about Ceylon³. But the Jesuits had little to do directly with Negombo. Their jurisdiction began with Maha Oya and extended northwards, and their writings contain only indirect references to Negombo.

After the expulsion of the Franciscans and the Jesuits there came to Negombo the Fathers of the Congregation of the Oratory of Goa. And there existed in Goa, fifty years ago, a Chronicle of the Oratorians,⁴ containing the letters and reports of the Venerable Father Joseph Vaz and his companions and successors. But though I searched Goa high and low, I was bitterly disappointed to find no trace of it there. My friend, Father S. GnanaPrakasar, OMI, has recently been more fortunate. He has found out that the manuscript is now in some

library in Portugal. He is following up the clue, and if he succeeds we can expect from him detailed history of the most momentous period of the history of the Church in Ceylon.

Meanwhile, I propose to lay before you the little that I have been able to gather about Negombo from the Portuguese and Dutch histories, from the Franciscan writings imbedded into the historical and missionary literatures of the period from stray letters of the Oratorians, from the surviving extracts from the Franciscan and Oratorian Chronicles and from the Dutch records and other miscellaneous compilations ⁵. And I venture to hope that my piece-meal collation will be found to confirm your local traditions and even to amplify them, and in general to give you a fair idea of the introduction and progress of Christianity in this town.

In order to view events in their proper perspective and to give the narrative a historical background, I feel I must needs give you a brief and very general idea of the train of events that led to the introduction of Christianity into Negombo.

First of all you must lay aside that very common, and very recurrent, but very false, notion that Portuguese came to this island to convert it, or that they attempted to do so by force of arms. No doubt a religious halo hovers about that era of discoveries and navigations which once made that little kingdom of Portugal the foremost in Europe. Prince Henry of Portugal, aptly surnamed the Navigator, was the inspiration and moving spirit of those epoch-making expeditions which culminated in the discovery of America on the one side and of the sea-route to India on the other.

Many elements, good and bad, went to the making of these *armadas*. There was a stimulating thirst for knowledge, the lust

for adventure, and the greed for gold; but over and above it all there was the mediaeval spirit of the crusades, the spirit engendered by the long-drawn wars between the Cross and the Crescent. Portuguese arms and Portuguese expeditions received the Pope's blessing and Christian Europe looked forward to, and hoped for, a speedy extension of the bounds of Christendom.

After a series of expeditions, the Portuguese successfully doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and reached India by sea. The discovery of the sea-route was a triumph. For one thing, it enabled the Portuguese to carry the rich eastern products to Lisbon far cheaper than by the land route from the Arabs, whom the Portuguese called Moors. From the Moors they had suffered for centuries and the bitterness of the warfare had even made them look upon it as a sacred duty to their country and their Faith to rob and slay the Moors.

Thus it happened that when the first Portuguese Viceroy was ruling in India, his son, Don Lourenco de Almeida, who was cruising about the Indian Ocean in search of Moorish vessels, was driven by wind and waves to make landfall in Galle in the year 1505. He came to Colombo, entered into a treaty with the King of Kotte, erected a small factory, engraved the Portuguese Coat of Arms on the boulder still to be seen in the Gordon Gardens, and sailed away leaving a few men behind to guard the Factory. Within the next few years the Factory was abandoned and the troops withdrawn owing to the hostility of the people instigated by the Moors.

Twelve years later, a Portuguese *armada* came to Colombo to erect a fort. The fort was built; there were some hostilities; and a larger garrison with a Franciscan chaplain was left behind to protect the fort. But very soon, owing to the increased hostility

of the people, they gave up the attempt and dismantled the Fort on orders from Portugal, leaving a few Portuguese in Kotte with a friendly Singhalese King.

So far there was no attempt at conversion; no attempt at conquest; trade was their only purpose. But very soon the hordes of Portugal began to come to Ceylon, not as conquerors or as Missionaries, but as allies, on the invitation and at the request of the King of Kotte, to battle against his brother kings. This is a capital point in history which is often ignored; that if the Portuguese came to have a figure in the pie and ultimately to rule the seaboard of Ceylon, it was because the Singhalese Kings in defiance of the Singhalese people turned to foreign aid to settle domestic disputes.

However that may be, what I wish to impress upon you is that there was no organized attempt at Missionary work so far. Individual priests, it is true, had come to Ceylon as Military chaplains or otherwise, and some of them doubtless attempted to preach and convert according to their ability and opportunities. They even succeeded on a very small and limited scale, but there was no mission. Strange as it may seem, the first Christian mission came to Ceylon on the express invitation of the King of Kotte.

You must not suppose that this king was any way anxious for the salvation of his soul; his anxiety was for the salvation of his crown. That crown he had won by a deed of blood. In 1521 BuwanekaBahu and his two brothers fell upon their uncle, the reigning King of Kotte, sacked his palace, put him to death and divided the kingdom among themselves, and it was to settle the disputes consequent on the division that Portuguese arms were definitely introduced into Ceylon.

This Buwaneka Bahu had no direct male issue and he was anxious to secure the crown to his daughter's son. His brother Mayadunne of Sitavaka, was itching to lay his hands on the selfsame crown. Thereupon BuwanekaBahu decided to place his grandson under the protection of the King of Portugal. With this purpose he despatcher SallappuArachchy on an embassy to Lisbon with a golden image of the boy to be crowned in effigy. And in order to make sure of the Portuguese help, the ambassador was instructed to invite Christian Missionaries to Ceylon.

No request could have given greater pleasure to the King and the People of Portugal. The policy of Portugal in the matter of religion has been grossly distorted and caricatured. The Portuguese, alike with other Christian nations, believed that their most treasured possession on earth was their Faith; and though Portuguese adventurers did not live up to their Faith any more than the adventurers of other nations, unlike others, they were ever ready to fight for it and to die for it. The Portuguese, moreover, believed it to be their duty to preach their Faith in the territories under their domination, and that their Faith in the territories under their domination, and that their Faith was the best gift they could give to their friendly kings.

This is a general principle admitted by all Christian nations. The Dutch and the British also admitted this principle, but they admitted it only in theory, and often shrank from the cost and sacrifices it entailed. The King of Portugal on the other hand was only too ready to spend his revenues in founding Churches and Missions and Colleges. Large numbers of Portuguese priests, likewise, were ready and anxious to embark on perilous voyages and suffer the inconveniences and hardships and

discomforts of living among Eastern races and learning their language and working for them.

The Dutch and the British were never too hasty in spending their revenues in Missionary and educational work. Their Missionaries likewise were exceedingly few. These few were seldom given to fraternalising with the people of the country, and very rare and solitary were the early Protestant Missionaries who were able to converse in the language of the country. There is moreover a very interesting phenomenon observable in the history of European nations abroad. The Latin races, who are characteristically Catholic, such as the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French and the Italian, believe that the souls of natives are just as good as their own, and accept all the consequences of the doctrine in a Christian spirit. The Teutonic races, characteristically Protestant, such as the Dutch and the British, on the other hand, believe in the equality of men also, but only in theory. At least in practice, we find that while the Portuguese Missionaries lived with the people and for the people and spoke their tongue and fraternalised with them, the Protestant Missionaries of the other races were, generally speaking content to live with their countrymen at some respectable distance from the 'native' whom they, of course, periodically visited and baptized and catechized through interpreters.

These considerations will make you realize how the King of Portugal jumped at the offer of his brother of Kotte, and how eagerly the Catholic priests accepted the invitation. Six Franciscans sailed out with the Sinhalese Ambassador to convert Ceylon.

I will not detain you with even a brief account of their doings. Suffice it to say that they found a great disappointment and

tremendous difficulties awaiting them in Ceylon, not the least of which was the scandal caused by their own countrymen which obliged the first Superior of the Franciscans to go back to Portugal to make his complaints to the king in person. But after a great many trials and toils and sufferings, the Franciscans succeeded in making an impression in Ceylon, and ultimately even the King of Kotte, crowned in Portugal, Don Juan Dharmapala, and all the leaders and nobles of the Court were received into the Church.

It was at the time of the conversion of the King, Don Juan Dharmapala, that we hear of the conversion of the people of Negombo. The Franciscans were all this time far too busy along the southern coast of Ceylon, and we hear so little of them along this coast, that there is reason to believe that the conversion of the people living along these parts of the sea-coast of Ceylon was due, in great part, also to another series of events.

You all know how St. Francis Xavier came to India and embarked on an apostolic career unparalleled in modern times. Even non-Catholic writers who have studied his life are forced to confess that his path was marked by signs and wonders such as we read of in the early church. The report of these marvels reached Mannar and the inhabitants of that Island sent a message begging St. Francis to come and preach to them. As he was unable to come at the time, he sent a young Indian priest trained by himself to whom he had given his own name. This apostle came to Mannar, preached, converted, instructed and baptized the islanders including their Governor, the viceroy of the King of Jaffna.

In those days, the King of Portugal, as Grand Master of the Order of Christ, claimed to protect Christians, so that to become a Christian meant putting oneself under the protection of

Portugal. This was a thing which the King of Jaffna was not disposed to allow. He therefore sent his troops to Mannar to give the new converts the choice between their lives and their faith. Wonderful to say, all these new Christians, men, women, and children, to the number of about 700 souls, refused to abandon their Faith and were promptly put to the sword, including the Governor of Mannar and its Missionary.

This is perhaps the most romantic episode in our Church history, but the truth of the event rests on testimony as great and as numerous as may be produced for any event of the period. Anyway, it created a great sensation in Europe and Portuguese writers ever afterwards referred to Mannar as the isle of Martyrs. The people of Ceylon living along the sea coast could not but be struck by the event, and they decided in a body to embrace Christianity. The most authentic account of this episode is the following letter:

“King Don Joao 111 to Friar Francisco de Chaves, Custodian of the Order of St. Francis.....I rejoice likewise at the news you give me of how Our Lord has been pleased to illumine by means of the Religious of your Order that nation of Careas, who, you say, live in the sea-ports of Ceylon, and are said to be more than 70,000 souls, whose Captain, called Patangatin, accompanied them. I give great praise to Our Lord for this, and I charge you that as far as in you lies you should labour in order that there may be no lack of the means necessary to bring the matter to the conclusion which may be hoped for from such a beginning, according to the indications which you say are to be found in these people that their conversion is genuine Antonio de Aguiar. Thus done at Lisbon, 20 March 1587.”⁶

Though this conversion was an epoch-making event in the history of the church in Ceylon and though the Karawa people here spoken of are henceforth always referred to as faithful and devoted Christians, we have little information about the time or the manner of their baptism. Portuguese priests did not baptize their converts till they were fully instructed and weaned from pagan customs and habits. Their uniform practice was first of all to erect a church, set up a school, and to teach and instruct grown-ups and children, and when they were sufficiently instructed to baptize them in batches on feasts of great solemnity or on the occasion of the visit of a prelate.

Such systematic instruction required time and toil required priests, and above all it required a period of peace. The sea ports to the north of Colombo were not at this time under the effective control of Dharmapala or of his allies, the Portuguese. They were for the most part in the hands of princes hostile to Dharmapala, and it was more over a period of bitter hostilities, in the course of which Negombo was repeatedly raided by the Portuguese.

The number of Franciscan Missionaries in Ceylon moreover, though comparatively large, was not sufficient to meet the requirements. Thus it would seem that, though the people living in the seaports of Ceylon were catechumens, they were not baptized for several years afterwards.

The people to the North of Negombo were certainly not baptized till fifty years later, and even then in very small numbers at a time, though eventually all the people in Caymall, Madampe, Chilaw and Puttalam were baptized by the Jesuits. But of the time when the people of Negombo were baptized there is no positive record.

“The Provincial”, writes a Jesuit,⁷ “sent to Chilaw a Father who knows the language and is an experienced Missionary who, by his meekness and charity, has captivated hearts of these gentiles, so that many asked for the water of baptism. But as they are much in need of better instruction, they have been postponed for another time. It seemed to him more expedient also to begin with the chief men first and thus the five Patantgatins, who are the leaders and rulers of the people, were baptized.

“That their baptism might be the more solemn, it was arranged to take place in Malwana, on the feast of Our Lady of Victories, which the Captain General observed with great ceremony, when all those who were subject to us in the Island had to come with gifts in token of their vassalage. The baptism was conferred in these circumstances to the great pleasure of the Captain General, and of the other captains who stood sponsors to them, and to our consolation and to the honour of the baptized. The General was pleased to grant them many favours and privileges in order to cause the envy of the other gentiles who might thus be led to follow their example.”

There is, however, some reason to believe that the baptism of the people of Negombo took place earlier; for we know that in 1603 there was a Church and a priest for the congregation of Negombo.⁸ Besides, in the course of a petition presented to the Dutch Government in 1750, the Catholics of Negombo claim according to their traditions “that the Roman Catholic Faith had been taught two hundred years ago to their forefathers.” Making allowance for round numbers and calculating the period from the time they placed themselves under instruction, this would mean that the faith was preached in Negombo from the time the Portuguese began to fortify and hold Negombo.⁹

The beginnings of the Portuguese fort of Negombo are also very obscure. The Dutch writer, Baldeus says in 1672 that he could not find out from Portuguese histories when and how the fort was built. Father Queyros in the *Conquista* supplies a few details. He describes the port of Negombo in 1575 as rich and frequented for commerce. In that year a Portuguese force marched upon it, seized the rich cargo, burnt 14 vessels and returned with valuable booty.¹⁰ This performance was thrice repeated in the course of the next ten years, which obliged Raja Sinha to send a force under Wanigasuriya Arachchi to defend the District of Negombo.¹¹

These hostilities seem to indicate that there was up to that time no Portuguese fort in Negombo. The first mention of any fortification is in 1593. On the 16th of March of that year, Pedro Homem Pereyra despatched a force of 50 Portuguese by sea to Negombo and sent Kuruppu Mudaliyar by land to erect a fortification.¹² This was soon done and consisted of a stockade (*tranqueyra*) of coconut trees and earth with a bastion and a ditch, being defended on the outside by some entrenchments. The Portuguese force settled down in this fort to reduce Alutkuru Korle and Pitigal Korle for Don Juan Dharmapala against the machinations of Manamperi Mohottala.

In 1594, the armada of Pedro de Souza, who had been sent from Goa to enthrone Dona Catherina in Kandy, put into Negombo, and the troops marched by land to Colombo leaving the ships under the shelter of the Portuguese fort. This fort was further improved or rebuilt by Lourenco Texeyra de Macedo, to whom Don Jeronimo de Azevedo granted the little islet that lies at the bar of the Negombo lake when the territories of kotte passed to the King of Portugal by the death of Don Juan Dharmapala.¹³

It is probably about this time that Negombo first had a Catholic priest permanently stationed there. The Convention held at Malwana on the death of Don Juan Dharmapala recognized the King of Portugal as sovereign of the territories that once belonged to the kingdom of Kotte. Representatives of the various districts assembled at the General's Court in Malwana undertook to give free scope to the preaching of the gospel throughout the realm, and those who had hitherto held back from Christianity for fear of opposition now freely put themselves under instruction.

This increase in the number of converts made the Bishop of Cochin and the Governor invite the Jesuits to labour in the Island. They came to Ceylon, opened a first-rate College in Colombo, and were entrusted with the task of evangelizing the district from Maha Oya to Mannar. They erected temporary churches and schools in Caymal, Madampe and Chilaw. The territories from the Maha Oya southwards to Dondra Head remained in the care of the Franciscan Missionaries who soon erected in this district more than 56 parish churches.¹⁴

The first Franciscan Missionaries in Negombo of whom we have any mention is Friar Bernardo who was in the church of Negombo ministering to 1300 souls. The Portuguese garrison in the fort at the time numbered only 25. But in 1603 there broke out a general rebellion in Ceylon against the Portuguese consequent on Azevedo's disastrous expedition to Kandy. The Kandyan troops pursuing the retreating General and his army came upon Negombo. News of the defeat of the General had spread like wild fire all over the Island, and the women and children of Negombo had been hurriedly despatched to Colombo. As the exultant Kandyan troops began to besiege the walls of the fortlet the Captain felt that he was unable to protect

the town and decided to abandon it. When the enemy was already within four paces of the walls, he and his men got into a foist under cover of night and sailed for Colombo.

Meanwhile the Sinhalese troops killed Father Bernardo in his church, and robbed the Christians.¹⁵ On the following morning they entered the fort. On their way to Negombo they had destroyed every village occupied by a Portuguese or a Christian, and had burnt all the churches and houses. In his endeavours to retrieve his lost reputation the General first dispatched Mudaliyar Simon Correa to Negombo with a force of Lascarins; but it only resulted in giving rise to the revolt of Antonio Barreto who from being an attendant of Mudaliyar Don Fernando Samarakoon eventually became King of Uva.¹⁶

It was only in 1605 that the state of the country was safe enough for missionary activities, but unfortunately we have no record of the work in Negombo at this time. This work, however, must have been very successful and very considerable, for in a list of Franciscan parishes made a short time afterwards we find no less than six churches around the town of Negombo.

In the fort stood a small chapel served by a Franciscan Chaplain. "In the town was a large and handsome church dedicated to the Mother of God: on the other side of the river of Negombo, the church of the Holy Ghost; half a league to the east, the church of the most Holy Trinity; half a league further to the south, in the village of Bolawalana, a large church dedicated to Our Lady of Remedies; a league eastward from Bolawalana, in in the village of Gaboyana, the new and handsome church with cloisters and cells dedicated to St. Mary of Jesus; and another church a league southward, in the village of Vilicare, inhabited by new Christians"¹⁷

Such is about the only available information regarding the church of Negombo before it fell into the hands of the

Hollanders. The event took place in 1640. The King of Kandy was so disgusted by the behaviour of the Portuguese that he determined to call the Dutch to his aid to expel the Portuguese from Ceylon.

The King of Kandy, Raja Singha II, was however, according to Robert Knox, very well disposed towards Christians. His mother Dona Catherina had been brought up a Catholic after the death of her father and mother, the King and Queen of Kandy, who both died Christians. She was forced to abandon the practices of her faith when the apostate Don Juan Wimaladharma strengthened his claims to the throne of Kandy by seizing her and making her his wife; but she died repentant of her apostasy with the name of Jesus on her lips. Raja Singha himself had been educated by Franciscan tutors. His brother and several of his relatives had died Christians. But in spite of all these circumstances the Portuguese succeeded in making a bitter foe of him.

The Dutch bargained with him to drive the Portuguese out of Ceylon and after capturing Batticaloa and Trincomalee a large Dutch Fleet appeared off Negombo in December 1689. Their aim was to seize Negombo and Galle and invest Colombo from both sides by sea and land. It was no easy task for a naval force to land and capture even a small fort like that of Negombo without the aid of land troops.

The Dutch forces, therefore, landed in Caymel without opposition and fortified themselves awaiting the forces of King of Kandy. The Portuguese army hurried to Caymel but was defeated with great loss. On the 28th December a Sinhalese auxiliary force arrived in Caymel, and the united built a bridge over the Maha Oya and marched against the fort of Negombo.¹⁸ Raja Singha watched events from the interior and the Dutch ships hovered about the coast and the people of Negombo

joined the besiegers. The Dutch forces were encamped in the coconut groves. The fort was surrounded by a line of trenches and heavy artillery was landed from the ships.

(To be continued in the next issue of *the Missionary Oblate*, No 62, July- Dec.2022)

End Notes

¹ Mr. John H. Pereira, Vice Chairman, Urban District Council, Negombo

² Friar Francis Negrao, O.S.F, Chronica da Provincia de S.Thome

³ Translated and published in the Ceylon Antiquary 1-V

⁴ Chronica da Congregagao do Oratorio de Goa: by Sebastiao do Rago, author of the first Portuguese life of the Venerable Father Joseph Vaz

⁵ Fernao de Queyros, Conquista de Ceylao, which contains extracts of the Cronica of Friar Negrao O Chronista da Tersuary, which contains letters of the Oratorians “Account of the Dutch Church in Ceylon” compiled by the Revd.J.D.Palm from the Records of the Dutch Consistory (Journal R.A.S. Ceylon No 3)

The Educational Establishments of the Dutch in Ceylon by the Revd J.D. Palm (Journal R.A.S no 2) Valentyn – Beschryclage rau Ceylan, which contains reports of the Dutch clergy Ceylon Antiquary V1: “Catholic Agitations in Dutch times”, “Old Negombo” by R.P.L in the Ceylon Literary Register ⁶ Queyros. O. C 261-2 ⁷ Ceylon Antiquary 11 21. Also Guerreiro. Relacam Annual ⁸ Queyros 479 ⁹ Baldeus 141 ¹⁰ Queyros 314 ¹¹ Queyros 359 ¹² Queyros 383 ¹³ Queyros 36 ¹⁴ Queyros 582 -586 ¹⁵ Queyros 479 ¹⁶ Queyros 480 ¹⁷ Queyros 585 ¹⁸ Queyros 674.

Pope Francis appoints women to Vatican posts

- On 24 March 2021, Pope Francis appointed **Sr. Alessandra Smerilli**, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Under-Secretary for the Faith and Development Sector of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and as a delegate of the Vatican Covid-19 Commission. She obtained a doctorate degree in political economy and a PhD degree from the School of Economics of the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK. In 2015, she was an auditor at the 15th ordinary general assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2015.
- On 11 August, 2021, Pope Francis appointed **Dr. Jennifer Doudna** to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. She has a doctorate in Biological Chemistry at Harvard Medical School in Cambridge, She is attached to the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology at the University of California, Berkeley, USA. In 2020 she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.



The Loser-turned Victor

A different kind of champion emerged at the recently concluded Olympic games held in Japan.

A Kenyan runner, Abel Mutai was just a few feet from the finish line, but became confused with the signage and stopped, thinking he had completed the race.

A spanish runner, Ivan Fernndez was right behind him and realizing what was happening, started shouting at the Kenyan runner to continue running. The Kenyan runner didn't know Spanish and so didn't understand what he said. Realizing what was taking place, the Spanish runner pushed the Kenyan to victory.

A journalist asked Ivan, "Why did you do that?" He replied, "My dream is that someday we can have a kind of community life where we push and help each other to win." The Journalist insisted "But why did you let the Kenyan win?" He replied, "I didn't let him win, he was going to win; the race was his." The journalist asked again, "But you could have won!" Ivan looked at him and replied, "But what would be the merit of my victory? What would be the honour in that medal? What would my mother think of that?"

Who is the true champion? Values are passed from generation to generation. What values are we teaching our children. Let us not teach our kids the wrong ways and means to win. Instead, let us pass on the beauty and humanity of a helping hand, because honesty and ethics are WINNING!

- A meme on social media.

