

Indian Currents

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POPE IN BAHRAIN

In the midst of increasing gulf between Muslims and Christians, Pope Francis walks a less trodden path “to understand each other and to work together, not to be against each other”



DIALOGUE IS THE OXYGEN OF PEACE

Of the 60-odd nations Pope Francis has visited, as many as 20 per cent are Muslim nations and two countries are in the Gulf region, the bedrock of Islam

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2023 Programme Schedule

1. (PSGA-1) Post-Midlife Spirituality and Graceful Aging (January 15-29)

This workshop explores the dynamics that affect the post-midlife years and provides approaches and exercises that enable one to age gracefully. (Age limit: 50 -70 years)

2. (EFS-1) Enhancing Formation Skills (May 7-21)

This workshop explores the challenges of religious and priestly formation today and provides formators insights from psychological theories and best practices to understand themselves, their formees, and the requisites for healthy formation and suggests ways and means for this and provides opportunities to learn from one another and be formed to form. (Age Limit- 25-55)

3. (ELS-1) Enhancing Leadership Skills (May 27-June 11)

This workshop explores concepts, styles, functions and challenges of effective leadership, particularly transformational leadership in Religious communities. Useful for current and future leaders. (Age limit: 35 - 55 years)

SUMEDHA SADHANA (A PSYCHOSPIRITUAL WHOLENESS JOURNEY): OUR FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME

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A PAPAL VISIT TO REDUCE GULF



In another four months Pope Francis would be completing a decade as the head of the Catholic Church. Known for unorthodox ways of doing things, he has allowed a new breeze of change to waft across the Church. His visits to various countries are a case in point. Of the 60-odd nations he has visited, as many as 20 per cent are Muslim nations and two countries are in the Gulf region, the bedrock of Islam.

Even Pope John Paul II, known as Pilgrim Pope, who visited 129 countries during his papacy spanning over 27 years, had not stepped in the Arabian Peninsula. It was Pope Francis who made history when he became the first pontiff to do that honour by visiting the United Arab Emirates in 2019. Within three years, he has made yet another visit to the region, landing in Bahrain this past week.

The Pope's visits to the Muslim world assume added significance due to the chasm between the two largest religious communities in the world. Across the globe there are many countries where Christians fall prey to the brutal attacks by Islamic extremists. Yet, in the midst of increasing gulf between the two communities, Pope Francis prefers to take a less trodden path "to understand each other and to work together, not to be against each other." He acknowledged the success of his visits and meetings when he said "there is a closeness and we can dialogue and work together and that is important."

The Pope firmly believes that "we have to walk together as believers, as friends, as brothers and sisters, doing good." Hence his visits to the Islamic countries are no small steps. Despite the ties between the two religions hitting the bottom, in some parts of the world, Pope Francis is not willing to give up. He is not ready to be bogged down by the acrimony and bad blood between the two communities.

The Pope is on a different mission, probably a path unwilling to be trodden by some in the church hierarchy. He is taking forward the message of talks with the Muslims despite attacks meted out to the Christians. He has a vision, a vision of dialogue as the best instrument to promote peace and reconciliation.

The highlight of Pope's recent visit was attending the "Bahrain Forum of Dialogue: East and West for Human Co-existence." He expounded his idea quoting from *The Kingdom of Bahrain Declaration* which states that "whenever hatred, violence and discord are preached, God's name is desecrated. Hence, it is not enough to proclaim that a religion is peaceful; we need to condemn and isolate the perpetrators of violence who abuse its name. Nor is it enough to distance ourselves from intolerance and extremism; we need to counter them."

He expanded his core philosophy when he said that he wanted to journey together in the spirit of Francis of Assisi. Coincidentally, the Pope's concept of journeying together literally saw its fruition when he announced in an interview with the journalists on his flight back to Rome: "The Vatican Secretary of State and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar are travelling from Bahrain to Cairo in the same plane, together as brothers." What better way to conclude an eventful visit.

As always, we would be happy to hear your reviews, comments, and suggestions. Happy Reading!

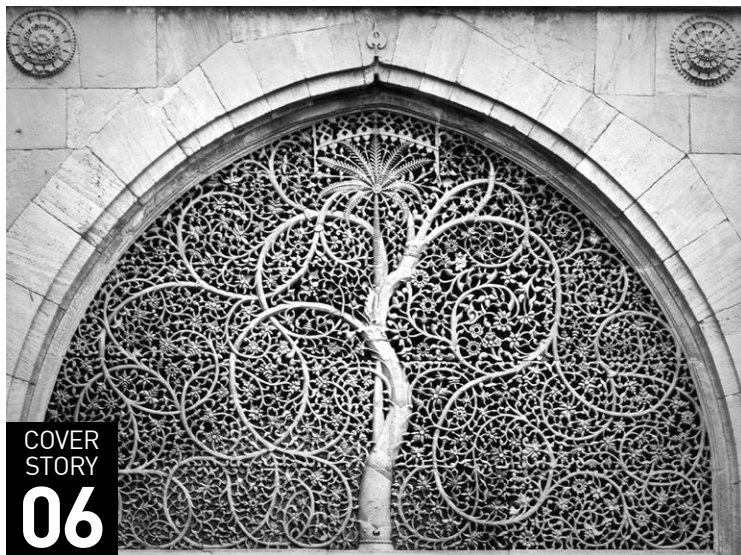
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suresh'.

Dr. Suresh Mathew

Editor

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POWER QUOTES



Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present.

- **Bill Keane**

• • •



You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

- **Abraham Lincoln**

• • •



No matter how busy you are, you must take time to make the other person feel important.

- **Mary Kay Ash**

• • •



Time and tide wait for no man.

- **Geoffrey Chaucer**

• • •



Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.

- **Carl Sandburg**

• • •



All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.

- **William Shakespeare**

• • •



Tough times never last, but tough people do.

- **Robert H. Schuller**

• • •



It is strange that the years teach us patience; that the shorter our time, the greater our capacity for waiting.

- **Elizabeth Taylor**

• • •

The Tree of Life

Pope Francis on his visit to Bahrain this past week made a reference to Bahrain's 'tree of life' which has survived in desert for centuries. Like its roots going beneath the land for several meters, the life of human beings too should be rooted deep in multi-ethnic and multi-religious fabric

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

November 3, 2022, was a special day indeed! On that day, Pope Francis began a four-day historic visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain, where he was given an exceptionally warm welcome. From the time he arrived there, he set the tone of his entire visit, by asking the Government of Bahrain to guarantee human rights to all and abolish the death penalty. Bahrain is ruled by a Sunni monarchy which has been accused of discriminating against the country's Shiite majority. The words of Pope Francis are certainly music to the Bahraini Shiite dissidents, who are harassed and detained, subject to torture and sham trials; some of them have been stripped of their citizenship or sentenced to death for their political activities.



Pope Francis, however, kept his best for the pathbreaking address he delivered to a gathering of the Bahraini Royalty, Government authorities, the Diplomatic Corps, religious and civil authorities and other eminent citizens. Using the time-tested symbol of Bahrain's 'tree of life' as a metaphor, the Pope struck a chord with the august audience. He said, "Here, where the waters of the sea surround the sands of the desert, and imposing skyscrapers rise beside traditional Oriental markets, very different realities come together: ancient and modern converge; tradition and progress mix; and above all, people from various backgrounds create a distinctive mosaic of life. In preparing for my visit, I learned about one outstanding "emblem of vitality"

in this country, which is the "Tree of Life" (Shajarat-al-Hayat). I would like to take it as my inspiration for sharing a few thoughts with you. The tree itself is a majestic acacia that has survived for centuries in a desert area with very little rainfall. It seems impossible that a tree of this age has been able to live and flourish in these conditions. According to many people, the secret is to be found in its roots, which extend for dozens of meters beneath the ground, drawing from subterranean deposits of water.

He went on to focus on the need and importance of 'rootedness' saying, "Roots, then. The Kingdom of Bahrain is committed to remember-



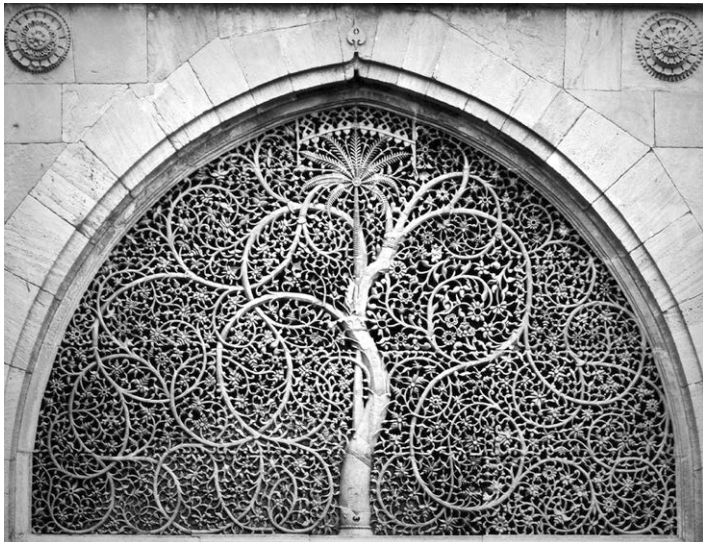
ing and cherishing its past, which tells of an extremely ancient land, to which thousands of years ago peoples came, drawn by its beauty, due especially to the abundant springs of fresh water that gave it the reputation of being a paradise. The ancient kingdom of Dilmun was thus called “the land of the living”. As we ascend from those vast roots – which spread over more than 4,500 years of uninterrupted human presence – we see how Bahrain’s geographical position, the talents and commercial abilities of its people, together with historical events, have enabled it to take shape as a cross-roads of mutual enrichment between peoples. One thing stands out in the history of this land: it has always been a place of encounter between different peoples.”

Pope Francis then lauded the composite, multi-ethnic, multi-religious fabric of Bahrain which has overcome the risk of isolation. He added for good measure and very emphatically, “Let us think instead of the Tree of Life, your symbol, and to the parched deserts of human coexistence let us bring the water of fraternity. May we never allow opportunities for encounter between civilizations, religions and cultures to evaporate, or the roots of our humanity to become desiccated and lifeless! Let us work together! Let us work in the service of togetherness and hope! I am here, in this land of the Tree



of Life, as a sower of peace, in order to experience these days of encounter and to take part in a Forum of dialogue between East and West for the sake of peaceful human coexistence. I thank even now my travelling companions, especially the representatives of the religions. These days mark a precious stage in the journey of friendship that has intensified in recent years with various Islamic religious leaders, a fraternal journey that, beneath the gaze of heaven, seeks to foster peace on earth.” For him then, one has to embark on that fraternal journey for sustainable peace!

One cannot help but draw a parallel with another ‘tree of life’. In the very heart of the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat stands the Sidi Saiyed Mosque named after its builder. The most exquisite crafts-



May we never allow opportunities for encounter between civilizations, religions and cultures to evaporate, or the roots of our humanity to become desiccated and lifeless! Let us work together! Let us work in the service of togetherness and hope!



manship in stone carving can be seen in this mosque which was built around 1572. The distinguishing features of this mosque are the ten intricately carved stone windows (*jalis*), apparently done by a master stone craftsman from Abyssinia. The 20th century Indologist and art historian Vincent Arthur Smith described these *jalis* as the “most artistic stone lattice-work to be found anywhere in the world.” One of the windows depicts the ‘tree of life’ with delicate intertwining of the branches of a tree. For years, this motif was the symbol of Ahmedabad and, in fact, of Gujarat. It symbolized and represented all that India meant and stood for: diverse cultures, faiths, languages, traditions, peoples; everything which indeed constituted a great civilization. The idea and the reality of India: very different but deeply united. A unity in diversity. A unique tapestry, inter-woven with multi-colour hues as the rays of the sun and the moon pierce the gaps of the window. A delightful experience: a marvel, simply magnificent and without parallel!

Yet on the other hand, some years ago, when the Hindu right-wing Government took control of the reins of power in Gujarat, one of their first decisions was to ensure that this replica of the stone trellis was no longer used as a symbol of Gujarat and of Ahmedabad. They quickly replaced it with the replica of a temple. In one stroke, that move underlined the tectonic shift in the mindset and attitude of the regime that controlled Gujarat: exclusive, not

inclusive; myopic, not visionary; petty, not large-hearted! Gujarat, which gave to the world Mahatma Gandhi and his twin doctrine of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*, was being throttled beyond recognition. The pluralistic fabric, the diversity and the communal harmony which characterised Gujarat, has slowly and systematically given way to bitter division, hatred and violence. Religion used as a tool to manipulate people for petty political gains. The intricacy and the beauty of the ‘tree of life’ was being poisoned at its very roots.

In another recent move that belongs to a realm of tragic irony, the prestigious Indian Institute of Management (IIM-A), on 3 November, officially announced a change of its more than sixty-year-old logo! The original logo had the famed

‘Tree of Life’ on it. The new logo has some kind of tree, which is ‘okay’; the word ‘Ahmedabad’ has been dropped whereas the Sanskrit text ‘Vidya viniyogadvikasa’ (development through the distribution or application of knowledge) has been retained! Some months ago, when the changed version of the logo was unveiled, it sparked off a controversy with 45 faculty members signing a letter to the top officials of the institute saying they were not consulted about the new design before it was approved. Over 1,000 IIM-A alumni, at that time, also started a petition to retain the 60-year-old logo that is inspired by the “Tree of Life”. One certainly does not need to be a rocket scientist or for that matter a management



Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let us be committed, everywhere and concretely, to building peace!”

guru, to understand why the IIM-A top brass has calmly succumbed to the political rhetoric currently holding sway in the country and distanced itself from anything seemingly of the minority community! Shame!

Pope Francis has given a road-map, not only to those who listened to him in Bahrain, but to every human on this earth! He said, “Let us return to the Tree of Life. In the course of time, its many branches of varying size have produced abundant foliage, thus increasing the tree’s height and breadth. In this country, it was the contribution made by so many individuals from different peoples that enabled a remarkable increase in productivity. This was made possible by immigration. The Kingdom of Bahrain vaunts one of the highest levels of immigration in the world: about half of the resident population are foreigners, working in an evident way for the development of a country in which, despite leaving their native countries behind, they feel at home. At the same time, we must acknowledge that in our world unemployment levels remain all too high, and much labour is in fact dehumanizing. This does not only entail a grave risk of social instability, but constitutes a threat to human dignity. For labour is not only necessary for earning a livelihood: it is a right, indispensable for integral self-development and the shaping of a truly humane society”.

There can be no life on earth, if the culture of death continues to grip humanity. Pope Francis did not mince words as he calls for an end to war and to the building of peace. “Second, the Tree of Life, whose roots that, deep in the subsoil, furnish vital water to the trunk, and from the trunk to the branches and then the leaves that give oxygen to creatures, makes me think of our human vocation, the vocation of each man and woman on earth, to make life flourish. Yet today we increasingly witness



lethal actions and threats. I think especially of the monstrous and senseless reality of war, which everywhere sows destruction and crushes hope. War brings out the worst in man: selfishness, violence and dishonesty. For war, every war, brings in its wake the death of truth. Let us reject the logic of weapons and change course, diverting enormous military expenditures to investments in combating hunger and the lack of healthcare and education. I grieve deeply for all these situations of conflict. Surveying the Arab Peninsula, whose countries I greet with sincere respect, my thoughts turn in a particular and heartfelt way to Yemen, torn by a forgotten war that, like every war, issues not in victory but only in bitter defeat for everyone. I especially keep in my prayers the civilians, the children, the elderly and the sick. And I beg: Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let there be an end to the clash of weapons! Let us be committed, everywhere and concretely, to building peace!”

The ‘Tree of Life’ is then, much more than an emblem or logo; it is a metaphor and a direction: a way of proceeding! It is a journey: of rootedness to the depths and of branching out, to embrace all particularly those who need to be embraced! It is life in all its fulness – in short, it is ‘synodality’ which needs to be lived today! ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Pope Francis: "Three world wars in one century: be pacifists!"

During the flight bringing him back from Bahrain, **Pope Francis** speaks about Ukraine and the world's many conflicts. He talks about his friendship with the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, of the importance of ensuring rights and equality for women, on migration issues and against child abuse. To German Catholics he says: "Germany already has one great Evangelical Church, I wouldn't want to see another one."

From the Papal flight

Please find below the working transcript of Pope Francis' conversation with journalists on the flight back from Bahrain.

Q Fatima Al Najem Bahrain News Agency: I would like to tell you something before I address my question to you. You have a very special place in my heart, not only because you visited my country but because you were elected Pope on my birthday. I have a question: How do you evaluate the results of your historic visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain and how do you evaluate the efforts Bahrain is making in consolidating and promoting communal living, in all spheres of society, of all religions, sexes, and races?

A Pope Francis: It was a visit of encounter because the purpose was really to be in interfaith dialogue with Islam and in ecumenical dialogue with Bartholomew. The ideas put forward by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar were in the direction of seeking unity, unity within Islam, respecting nuances, and differences, but with unity; unity with Christians and with other religions. In order to enter into interreligious dialogue or ecumenical dialogue you need your own identity. 'I am Muslim,' 'I am Christian,' I have this identity and so I can speak with identity. When your identity is not defined, when it's a little 'airy' it's difficult to engage in dialogue because there's no back and forth and that's why it's important. And these two [leaders] who came, both the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Patriarch Bartholomew, have a powerful identity. And that is good.

From the Islamic point of view, I listened carefully to the three speeches of the Grand Imam and I was



struck by the way he was so insistent on intra-Islamic dialogue, not to erase the differences but to understand each other and to work together, not to be against each other. We Christians have a bit of a bad history of differences that led us to religious wars: Catholics against Orthodox or against Lutherans. Now, thank God, after the Council, there is a closeness and we can dialogue and work together and that is important, a testimony of doing good to others. Then the specialists, the theologians will and can discuss theological things, but we have to walk together as believers, as friends, as brothers and sisters, doing good.

I was also impressed with the things that were said in the Council of Elders, about creation and the preservation of creation, and this is a common concern of everybody, Muslims, Christians, everybody. Now, the Vatican Secretary of State and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar are travelling from Bahrain to Cairo in the same plane, together as brothers. This is something that is quite moving. This is something that has done some good.

The presence of Patriarch Bartholomew – he is an authority in the ecumenical field – also did good.

We saw that in the ecumenical service that we had, and also in the words that he pronounced earlier. To sum it up: It was a journey of encounter. For me the novelty of getting to know a culture that is open to everyone: in your country, there is room for everyone. Also, I saw the King, who told me: 'Here everyone does what they want, if a woman wants to work, let her work.' Total openness. And also the religious part, the openness. I was struck by the sheer number of Christians – Filipinos, Indians from Kerala – who are here and they live and work in the country.

Q Fatima Al Najem: They wish you well..

A That's the idea, I discovered something new that helps me to understand and interact more with people. The key word is dialogue, and to dialogue, you have to start from your identity, have an identity.

Q Fatima Al Najem: Thank you, Your Holiness. I will pray to Allah the Omnipotent to bless you with good health, happiness, and a long life.

A Yes, pray for me, not against me [laughter].

Q Imad Atrach: Holy Father, since the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity three years ago, to the visit to Baghdad, and then also recently to Kazakhstan: Is this a path that you think is bearing tangible fruit? Can we expect it to culminate in a meeting at the Vatican? Then I would like to thank you for mentioning Lebanon today, because as a Lebanese I can tell you that we really are in urgent need of your visit, especially because now we don't even have a President, so you could go and embrace the people directly.

A Thank you. I have been thinking a lot these days – and we talked about it with the Grand Imam – about how the idea of the Abu Dhabi Document came about, that Document we did together, the first one. He had come to the Vatican for a courtesy visit; after our protocol meeting took place, it was almost lunchtime and he was leaving, and as I was accompanying him to bid him goodbye I asked him: 'Where are you going for lunch?' I don't know what he said to me but we decided to have lunch together. It was something that came from within. Then, sitting at tableh – he, his secretary, two counselors, me, my secretary, my counselor – we took the bread, broke it, and gave it to each other. A gesture of friendship, offering the bread. It was a very nice lunch, very fraternal. And towards the end, I don't know who

came up with the idea, we said, 'Why don't we make a paper about this meeting?' So the Abu Dhabi Document was born. The two secretaries got to work, with a draft going back and forth, and finally, we took advantage of the Abu Dhabi meeting to publish it. It was something that came from God. You can't understand it otherwise, because none of us had this in mind. It emerged during a friendly lunch, and that is a big thing.

Then I kept thinking, and the Abu Dhabi Document was the basis of *Fratelli tutti*; what I wrote about human friendship in *Fratelli tutti* is based on the Abu Dhabi Document. I believe that one cannot think of such a path without thinking of a special blessing from the Lord in this path. I want to say this out of justice, it seems right that you know how the Lord inspired this path. I didn't even know what the Great Imam's name was, and then we became friends



and did something as two friends, and now we talk every time we meet. The Document is relevant today, and work is being done to make it known.

Then regarding Lebanon... Lebanon is a sorrow for me. Because Lebanon is not a country in itself – a Pope said it before me – Lebanon is not a country, it is a message. Lebanon has a very great meaning for all of us. And Lebanon right now is suffering. I pray, and I take this opportunity to make an appeal to Lebanese politicians: leave aside self-interest, look at the country and be in agreement. First God, after that the country, then interests. God and the country. Right now I don't want to say, 'Save Lebanon,' because we are not saviours, but please, you have to support Lebanon, help so that Lebanon stops in this descent, so that Lebanon regains its greatness. There are means... there is the generosity of Lebanon. How many political refugees are in Lebanon! It

is so generous and it is suffering. I take this opportunity to ask for prayers for Lebanon, prayer is also a friendship. You are journalists, look at Lebanon and talk about it to raise awareness. Thank you.

Q Carol Glatz, CNS: Your Holiness, during this trip to Bahrain you spoke about fundamental rights, including women's rights, their dignity, the right to have their space in the social and public sphere; and you encouraged young people to have courage, to make noise; to move forward toward a more just world. Given the situation close by, in Iran, with the protests sparked by some women and many young people who want more freedom, do you support this effort of women and men demanding to have the basic rights that are also found in the Document on Human Fraternity?

A We have to tell each other the truth. The struggle for women's rights is an ongoing struggle. Because in some places women have equality with men, but not in other places. No? I remember in the 1950s in my country, when there was the struggle for women's civil rights: for women to be able to vote. Because until about the '50s only men could do so. And I think of this same struggle in the U.S. But why, I ask myself, does the woman have to struggle like this to keep her rights? There is a... I don't know if it is a legend, a legend about the origin of women's jewelry – maybe it's a legend – that explains the cruelty of so many situations against women. It is said that women wear so much jewelry because in a country – I don't remember, perhaps it's a historical fact – there was a custom that when the husband got fed up with the woman, he would say to her, 'Get out!' and she couldn't go back in and take anything. She had to leave with what she had on her. And (that would be) why they would amass gold, to be able at least to take something away. They say this is the origin of jewelry. I don't know if it is true or not, but the image helps us.

Rights are fundamental. But how come in the world today we cannot stop the tragedy of young girls' infibulation? This is terrible. Today. The fact that this practice exists, that humanity cannot stop this crime, a criminal act! Women, according to two comments I heard, are either "disposable" material – that's bad – or they are 'a protected species.' But equality between men and women is still not universally found, and there are these instances,

where women are second-class citizens or less. We have to keep fighting for that because women are a gift. God didn't create man and then give him a little dog for fun. He didn't. He created them equal, man and woman. And what Paul wrote in one of his letters about male-female relationships, which seems old-fashioned to us today, at that time was so revolutionary that it was scandalous. He said the man should take care of the woman as his own flesh. This, at that moment, was a revolutionary thing. All women's rights come from this equality. And a society that is unable to give the woman her place does not move forward. We have the experience (of this). In the book I wrote, *Torniamo a sognare*, in the part about economics, for example, there are women economists currently in the world who have changed the economic vision and are able to carry it forward. Because they have a different gift. They know how to run things in another way, which is not inferior, it is complementary.

I once had a conversation with a head of government, a great head of government, a mother with several children, who was very successful in solving difficult situations. And I said to her, 'Tell me, Ma'am, how did you solve such a difficult situation?' She began to move her hands like this, in silence. Then she said to me: '[This is] how [we] mothers do it.'

Women have their own way of solving problems, which is not man's way. And both ways must work together: the woman, equal to the man, works for the common good with that insight that women have. I have seen that in the Vatican, every time a woman comes in to do a job in the Vatican, things get better. For example, the vice governor of the Vatican is a woman, the vice governor is a woman, and things have changed for the best. In the Council for the Economy, there were six cardinals and six lay people, all male. I changed the lay people I put one male and five women. And this is a revolution because women know how to find the right way, they know how to move forward. And now I have put Marianna Mazzucato in the Pontifical Academy for Life. She is a great economist from the United States, I put her there to give a little more humanity to it.

Women carry their own, they don't have to become like males. No! they are women, we need them. And a society that erases women from public life is a society that impoverishes itself. It impoverishes itself. Equality of rights, yes. But also equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunities in order to

move forward, otherwise we become impoverished.

I think with that I have said what globally needs to be done. But we still have some way to go. Because there is this 'machismo'. I come from a people with machismo. Argentinians, we are masculinist, always. And that is bad, but then we turn to our mothers, who are the ones who solve the problems. This machismo kills humanity. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say this, which is [something that] I carry in my heart. Let's fight not only for rights, but because we need to have women in society to help us change.

Q Antonio Pelayo, Vida Nueva: Holy Father, the only time you spoke off-the-cuff on this trip was to refer to 'tormented Ukraine' and to the 'peace negotiations.' I would like to ask you if you can tell us anything about how these negotiations are going on the Vatican side. And another question: Have you spoken lately with Putin or do you intend to do so in the near future?

A Good. First of all: the Vatican is constantly attentive, the Secretariat of State works and works well, works well. I know that the secretary, Archbishop Gallagher, works well there.

Then, a bit of history.

The day after [the beginning of] the war – I thought this could not be done, an unusual thing – I went to the Russian embassy, to speak with the ambassador, who is a good man. I have known him for six years, since he arrived. He is a humanist. I remember a comment he made to me then: '*Nous sommes tombés dans la dictature de l'argent*' [We have fallen into the dictatorship of money], talking about civilization. A humanist, a man fighting for equality. I told him I was willing to go to Moscow to talk to Putin, if the need arose. Lavrov [the foreign minister, ed.] replied very politely – 'Thank you' – [but] that it was not necessary for the moment.

Since then we have been very interested. I spoke twice on the phone with President Zelensky; then with the ambassador a few more times. And work is being done to get closer, to seek solutions. The Holy See also does what it has to do with regard to prisoners, these things... they are things that are always done and the Holy See has always done them, always.

I have great affection for the Russian people and I also have great affection for the Ukrainian people

And (then) the preaching for peace. What strikes me – that's why I use the word 'tormented' for Ukraine – is the cruelty, which is not of the Russian people, perhaps... because the Russian people are a great people. It is of the mercenaries, of the soldiers who go off to war as an adventure, mercenaries... I prefer to think of it this way because I have high esteem for the Russian people, for Russian humanism. Just think of Dostoevsky, who to this day inspires us, inspires Christians to think of Christianity.

I have great affection for the Russian people and I also have great affection for the Ukrainian people. When I was eleven years old, there was a priest close to me who celebrated in Ukrainian and had no altar boys, and he taught me to serve Mass in Ukrainian, and all these Ukrainian songs I know them in their language because I learned them as a child. So I have a very great affection for the Ukrainian liturgy. I am in the midst of two peoples that I love.

It's not just me. The Holy See has had many confidential meetings, many good results. Because we cannot deny that a war, at the beginning, perhaps makes us brave. But then it tires and hurts and we see the evil that a war does. This regards the more human, closer part.

Then I would like to lament, taking advantage of

this question: three world wars in a single century! The one of 1914-1918, the one of 1939-1945, and this one! This one is a world war, because it is true that when empires, either on one side or the other weaken, they need to make a war in order to feel strong – and also to sell weapons! I believe that today the greatest calamity in the world is the arms industry. Please! I've been told, I don't know if it's true or not, that if we didn't make weapons for a year, we could end world hunger. The arms industry is terrible.

A few years ago, three or four, a ship full of weapons came from a certain country to Genoa and they had to pass the weapons onto a bigger ship to take them to Yemen. The workers in Genoa didn't want to do it... It was a gesture. Yemen: more than ten years of war. Yemen's children have no food. The Rohingya, moving from one side to the other because they were expelled, always at war. Myanmar, it's terrible what's happening... Now I hope something will stop today in Ethiopia, with a treaty...

But we are at war everywhere and we don't understand this. Now we are closely affected, in Europe, by the Russian-Ukrainian war. But it is everywhere, for years. In Syria, twelve to thirteen years of war, and nobody knows if there are prisoners and what goes on there. Then Lebanon, we talked about this tragedy...

I don't know if I've said this sometimes to you. When I went to Redipuglia, in 2014, I saw that – and my grandfather had been at Piave and had told me what was going on there – and all those graves of young men... I cried, I cried, I'm not ashamed to say it. Then once, on 2 November, a day in which I always go to a cemetery, I went to Anzio and saw the grave of all those American boys, [who died] in the Anzio landings. [They were] 19-20-22-23 years old, and I cried, really, it came from my heart... And I thought of the mothers and of when they hear a knock on their door: 'Ma'am, an envelope for you.' She opens the envelope: 'Ma'am, I have the honour to inform you that you have a son who is a hero of the fatherland...' The tragedies of war.

I don't want to speak ill of anyone, but it touched my heart: when the commemoration of the Normandy landings took place. The heads of so many governments were there to commemorate that. It was the beginning of the fall of Nazism, it's true. But how many boys were left on the beaches in Normandy? They say thirty thousand... Who thinks of those boys? War sows all of this. That is why you, who are journalists, please be pacifists, speak out against wars, fight against war. I ask you as a brother. Thank you.

Q Hugues Lefevre I.Media: Holy Father, this morning in your address to the clergy of Bahrain, you spoke of the importance of Christian joy. But in the past few days many of the French faithful have lost this joy when they discovered in the press that the Church had kept secret the conviction in 2021 of a bishop, now retired, who had committed sexual abuse in the 1990s, while he was a priest. When this story came out in the press, five new victims came forward. Today, many Catholics want to know if the culture of secrecy of canonical justice should change and become transparent, (and I) would like to know if you think canonical penalties should be made public. Thank you.

A Thank you for the question. I would like to start

[with] a bit of history on this. The problem of abuse has always been there, not only in the Church but everywhere. You know that 42-46% of sexual abuse takes place in the family or in the community. This is very serious, but the habit has always been that of covering up; in the family even today everything is covered up, and even in the community everything is covered up, or at least in the majority of cases. An ugly habit that began to change in the Church when a scandal surfaced in Boston at the time of Cardinal Law, who, because of the scandal, resigned; it was the first time that [a case of abuse] came out as a scandal.

Since then the Church has become aware of this and has begun to work, whereas in society and other institutions it is normally covered up. When there was the meeting of the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences [on this issue] I asked UNICEF, the UN, for statistics on this [phenomenon], the percentage data: in families, in communities, in schools, in sport...

Some say we are a small minority, but [I say] even if it were a single case, it would still be tragic, because you, as a priest, have the vocation to make people grow, and by behaving in this way you destroy them. For a priest, abuse is like going against his priestly nature and against his social nature. That is why it is tragic and why we must not stop, we must not stop.

In this awakening, making investigations and moving ahead with accusations, everything has not always [and everywhere] been the same, some things have been hidden. Before the scandal in Boston people were substituted [i.e., priests were moved], now everything is transparent and we are moving forward on this, that is why we should not be surprised that cases like this come to light. Now the case of another bishop comes to mine, there are cases you know...? And [now] it's not easy to say: "We didn't know," or "It was the culture at the time and it continues to be a culture to hide."

I'll tell you this: the Church is steadfast on this, and here I want to publicly thank the heroism of Cardinal O'Malley, a good Capuchin friar, who sensed the need to institutionalize this with the Commission for the Protection of Minors that he is heading. And this does us all good and gives us courage. We are working with all that we can, but know that there are people within the Church who still do not see clearly, who do not share... It is a process that we are under-

taking and we are carrying it out with courage, and not everyone has courage; sometimes there is the temptation to compromise, and we are also all slaves to our sins, but the will of the Church is to clarify everything.

For example, I have received two complaints in recent months about cases of abuse that had been covered up and not judged well by the Church: I immediately asked for a new study [of the two cases] and now a new judgement is being made; there is also this, the revision of old judgements, not well made [not given properly]. We do what we can, we are all sinners, you know?

The first thing we have to feel is shame, the deep shame of all that. I believe that shame is a grace. We can fight against all the evils in the world but without shame.... [it is useless]. That is why I was amazed that St. Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises, when he makes you ask for forgiveness for all the sins you have committed, he makes you go all the way to shame, and if you don't have the grace of shame you cannot go on. One of the insults we have in my land is 'You are shameless' and I believe that the Church cannot be 'shameless.' It has to be ashamed of the bad things, as well as [saying] thank you to God for the good things it does. This I can tell you: [we have] all the good will to go on, also thanks to your help.

Q Vania De Luca Rai-Tg3: Your Holiness, you have also spoken about migrants in recent days. Four ships off the coast of Sicily, with hundreds of women, men, children, in difficulty - but not all of them can disembark. Do you fear a policy of 'closed ports' by the centre-right is back in Italy? And how do you assess the position of some northern European countries on this? And then I also wanted to ask you in general: What impression, what judgment do you have regarding the new Italian government, which for the first time is led by a woman?

A It's a challenge, it's a challenge. Regarding migrants, [this is] the principle: Migrants must be welcomed, accompanied, promoted, and integrated; if these four steps cannot be taken, the work with migrants cannot be good. Welcomed, accompanied, promoted, and integrated; we must go forward towards integration. And the second thing I say: Each EU government has to agree on how many migrants it can receive. Instead, there are four countries that receive migrants: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and

Spain, those closest to the Mediterranean. Inland there are some, like Poland, Belarus...

But [speaking] of the great issue of migrants that cross the sea: lives must be saved. Do you know today that the Mediterranean is a cemetery? Perhaps the biggest cemetery in the world. I think I told you last time that I read a book in Spanish called *Hermanito*, it's tiny and it reads quickly, I think it has certainly been translated into French and also into Italian. It can be read in two hours. It's the story of a boy from Africa, I don't know if he was from Tanzania or where he was from, who following in his brother's footsteps arrived in Spain: he suffered slavery five times before embarking! Many people, he recounts, are brought during the night to those boats - no to those big ships that have another role - and if they



don't want to get on: boom, boom! And they leave them on the beach - it really is a dictatorship of slavery what those people do - and then there is the risk of dying at sea. If you have time read this book, it is important.

The migrant policy must be agreed upon between all countries; you cannot make a policy without consensus, and the European Union must take in hand a policy of collaboration and help, it cannot leave the responsibility for all the migrants that arrive on the beaches of Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Spain. The government's policy up to now has been to save lives, that is true. Up to a certain point. And I think this [Italian] government has the same policy... The details I don't know, but I don't think it wants to change. I think it has already landed children,

mothers, and the sick, at least from what I heard, the intention was there. Italy, let's think here... this government cannot do anything without the agreement of Europe; the responsibility is a European one.

And then I would like to mention another European responsibility with regard to Africa. I think this was said by one of the great stateswomen we have had and have – Merkel. She said that the problem of migrants must be solved in Africa. But if we think of Africa with the motto: “Africa must be exploited,” it is logical that migrants – people – run away. In Europe, we must try to make development plans for Africa. To think that some countries in Africa are not masters of their own subsoil, that they still depend on colonialist powers! It is hypocrisy to want to solve the problem of migrants in Europe; let's solve it at home too. The exploitation of people in Africa is terrible because of this concept.

On 1 January, I had a meeting with university students from Africa. The meeting was the same I already had with Loyola University in the United States. Those students have a capacity, an intelligence, a critical sense [It.: 'criticità'], a desire to move forward, but sometimes they cannot because of the colonialist force that Europe has in their governments. If we want to solve the problem of migrants for good, let's solve Africa. The migrants who come from elsewhere are fewer, they are fewer, but we have Africa, let's help Africa.

The new [Italian] government starts now. I am here: I wish it the best. I always wish the best to a government because the government is for everyone and I wish it the best so that it can take Italy forward. And to all the others who are against the winning party, I hope that they collaborate with a critical sense, with help, but a government of collaboration, not a government where ‘they treat you well to your face, but they're working on your downfall’ [It.: ‘ti muovono il viso, ti fanno cadere’] if you don't like one thing or another. Please, on this point I call for responsibility. Tell me, is it fair that from the beginning of the century until now Italy has had 20 governments? Let's stop with these jokes.

Q Ludwig Ring-Eifel, Centrum informationis Catholicum: I also want to say something personal first, because I feel very emotional, because after a break of 8 years I am back on the papal flight. I am very grateful to be here again....

A Welcome back.

Q Ludwig: Thank you, it's good to be back. We in the German group are few - there are only three on this flight - and we thought: How can we make a connection between what we saw in Bahrain and the situation in Germany? Because in Bahrain we saw a small Church, a small flock, a poor Church, with many restrictions, and so on, but a lively Church, full of hope, growing. In Germany, on the other hand, we have a large Church, with great traditions; rich, with theology, money, and everything, but losing three hundred thousand believers every year, who leave, who are in deep crisis. Is there anything to learn from this small flock we saw in Bahrain for the great Germany?

A Germany has a long religious history. Citing Hölderlin I will say: ‘Many things have they seen, many...’ Your religious history is great and complicated, [a history] of struggles. I say to German Catholics: Germany has a great and beautiful Evangelical Church; I do not want another one, which will not be as good as that one; but I want a Catholic [one], in fraternity with the Evangelical. Sometimes we lose sight of the religious sense of the people, of the holy faithful People of God, and we fall into ethical discussions, discussions about contingent things, discussions that have theological consequences, but are not the core of theology. What does the holy, faithful People of God think? What does the holy People of God sense? Go there and seek what it senses, that simple religiosity that you find in grandparents. I am not saying go backwards, no; but go to the source of inspiration, to the roots. We all have a history of roots of faith; even peoples have it: Find it! That remark of Holderlin's comes to my mind, for our age: ‘The old man should keep [faith with] what he promised as a boy.’ We, in our boyhood... promised many things, many things. Now we get into ethical discussions, into contingent discussions, but the root of religion is the slap in the face that the Gospel gives you, the encounter with the living Jesus Christ: and from there the consequences [follow], all of them; from there you get the apostolic courage to go to the peripheries, even to the moral peripheries of people to help; but [it starts] from the encounter with Jesus Christ. If there is no encounter with Jesus Christ, there will be an ethicism disguised as Christianity. This is what I wanted to say, from the heart. Thank you. **Q**

(Working transcription and English translation prepared by the Dicastery for Communication)

Vision, not Title, Matters

A wise leader should know that people address him with honorific titles and lift him up with their words of praise, not because of his personal merits or extraordinary qualities; they will do this to anyone who occupies the seat of power tomorrow

BY **FELIX WILFRED**

I was in Rajkot to address a mission conference just a few days ago. The occasion was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the missiological journal *Third Millennium*, initiated by the visionary bishop Mar Gregory Karotemprel and is now passionately supported by the present bishop Mar Jose Chittooparambil. It was heartening to see theological initiatives from bishops and to realize that they are not always on the receiving end. Was it not the case with bishops of early centuries like Augustine, Ambrose, Basil, Chrysostom and others who were great Church leaders and simultaneously outstanding theologians? The Church continues to read their writings and nourishes itself as they have become classics and sure points of reference. But, without a theological

vision, a bishop becomes a blind leader who is bound to falter and fall on his own, not to speak of being capable of leading his flock.

In fact, the visit was a unique experience for me as I could meet with some hidden gems of Indian hierarchy working in the missions in the Saurashtra region. These bishops may not be known as many others, but I had the impression that they are exemplary leaders with the "smell of the sheep".

I spoke at the conference about why we should not make synodality an instrument for the goal of mission. We tend to make everything into means and not see things as what they are in themselves and their worth. Right processes are more important than the goals. Hence, we must think of our mission to become synodal. After I spoke, a participant raised a question: If synodality is to become a process in the Church, why do we continue to address the Church leaders as "Your Beatitude, Your Eminence, Your Grace, and Your Excellency". He wondered when we would stop these forms of addressing. I reminded him that decades ago, the CBCI resolved to do away with such addressing.

However, suppose someone honestly feels a leader has beatitude, eminence, grace, and excel-

These bishops may not be known as many others, but I had the impression that they are exemplary leaders with the "smell of the sheep"



Bp Joseph Chittuparambil, Bp Gregory Karotemprel



lence. In that case, there should not be any objection since they have the freedom of expression, and indeed, these titles are not derogatory, calling for any censorship. But there lurks more in these honorific titles than what meets the eye. When they are used to curry favour and to ingratiate oneself with the Church authority, such obsequious behaviour is of poor taste.

Moreover, there is the human weakness and frailty to which the bishops are no exception. Addressing this way could become a “honey-trap” for the leader about which he should be vigilant. I mean that it should not be construed by the leader as a mark of loyalty to him personally, much less to the Church.

There are many clerics who are almost twenty-four hours in their cassocks. Wearing this robe is not necessarily a mark of loyalty to the Church. Is it? As the old saying goes, *habitus non facit monachum* – the dress does not make one a monk. Nor does it make one loyal to the Church.

At this point, I cannot resist recalling what a bishop-friend who is no more narrated to me once. There was a senior priest in his diocese who was the kingpin of all the troubles for him and behind most anonymous letters against him. But he was always found in his cassock and sash. When this priest meets the bishop, he will almost fall prostrate and

passionately kiss his ring. Anyone will be taken up by this gesture of surrender and extraordinary deference. Not so, my bishop friend. He was a clever prelate with sharp perceptions of human behaviour and good judgement on men and matters. He told me that the more this particular priest bowed down to kiss his ring, he knew he could surely expect the following days another anonymous letter denigrating him “below the belt”!

We realize how by addressing with these titles, Church leaders could easily foment hypocrisy if people know that such addresses are expected by him, and he relishes it. There is no end to human proneness to vanity. In fact, people are exploiting this human weakness in Church leaders when doing all this to placate them with ulterior motives. This, unfortunately, creates a very unhealthy atmosphere in the Church and the loss of genuineness and honesty; all the more so when not addressing bishops with these titles and refraining from kissing the ring is taken for lack of loyalty, and indeed as an offence.

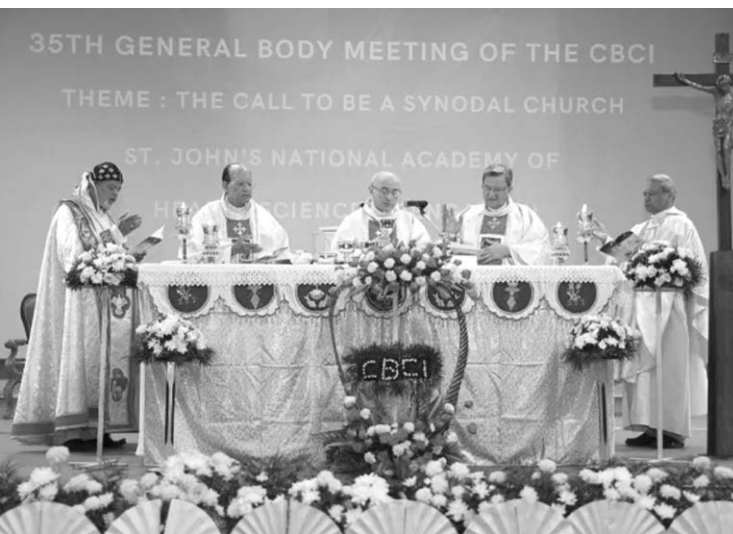
“Vanity of vanity, all is vanity” reminds us the wisdom Book of Ecclesiastes. A wise leader should know that people address him with honorific titles and lift him up with their words of praise, not because of his personal merits or extraordinary qualities; they will do this to anyone who occupies

the seat of power tomorrow. If a leader takes this to heart very personally, it is really pathetic and pitiable.

As for kissing the rings, I think we cannot leave any option here. We need to be guided by the advancement in medical sciences, which tell us that there are millions of microbes in the human body which could be easily transmitted. Hence, for health reasons, kissing of rings --which was, in feudal times, a sign of loyalty of the tenant to the Lord -- should stop immediately, especially after the traumatic experience of Covid-19. In feudal times, they knew nothing of microbiology. Did they?

It is time that we concentrate on more important things than titles and rings. I know these words are

The maturity of CBCI, I think, will be demonstrated when it chooses an ordinary bishop with great vision and leadership as its president and does not go by the trodden path of choosing necessarily prelates with high-sounding titles



written as the CBCI meeting is being held in Bangalore. The titles and honours could also affect this body if they go to choose the president and other office-bearers based on the titles they hold. Following this path may not assure renewal and reform in the Church but rather ensure the maintenance of the status quo.

If change and renewal are to be effected, the leaders should go beyond titles of Beatitude, Eminence and Grace; discern and identify, as is done in the papal election, the bishop, independent of the title, who has the qualities of leadership for our times. The gems are to be discovered. The maturity of CBCI, I think, will be demonstrated when it chooses an ordinary bishop with great vision and leadership as its president and does not go by the trodden path of choosing necessarily prelates with high-sounding titles.

More than the titles, we need today attend to the relationship of the leader to the community. It could be a bishop, religious superior, head of an institution, etc. The insulation of the leader from the community he serves could be disastrous.

Let me illustrate the point with an incident in aviation history. If you are flying these days and are a keen observer, you will notice that of the two pilots navigating the aircraft, if anyone of them gets out of the cockpit to go to the toilet, an air hostess enters the cockpit.

It is not to help the pilot in his job. She may be absolutely ignorant of anything technical about navigating the aircraft. It is a standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for safety.

The reason behind is what happened on 24 March 2015 during a flight of Germanwings, a subsidiary of Lufthansa, when it was flying from Barcelona to Duesseldorf. When the pilot got out of the cockpit to go to the toilet, the co-pilot Andreas Lubitz locked the door of the cockpit firmly, and what he did was horrendous. He wanted to kill himself, so he crashed the plane over the French Alps, killing 144 passengers and 6 crew members.

I think this is a powerful metaphor of what could happen to the parish, to the diocese, to the religious congregation, to the diocese, to the institution when the head insulates himself or herself from the body of the community being served. The greatest danger to the Church is when its leader is insulated and left alone in his cockpit. Renewal and reform in the Church will happen when there is more communication and interaction and synodality is practised in governance. Is this not the most crucial thing, overriding all considerations of titles and rings? ©

Reservation Iron cuts iron

The economically poor should have received benefits like scholarship and fee concessions and not reservation in admission and employment

BY **A.J. PHILIP**

The 66th Kerala Piravi (birthday) celebrations at the Kochi House-turned-Kerala House lasted for a week (November 1-7). Kerala was formed on November 1, 1956, by integrating parts of the princely states of Travancore and Kochi and the Malayalam-speaking areas of the Madras Presidency known as Malabar.

This followed the recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission headed by Fazl Ali with Hridaynath Kunzru and K.M. Panikkar as members. Language was chosen as the deciding factor for the formation of states.

To return to the present, as many as 100 cultural programmes involving no less than 1,000 artistes were staged on this occasion. Sini K. Thomas, who started her career with the Indian Currents and who is now the Information Officer at Kerala House, was the person who organised the celebrations in collaboration with many Malayali cultural organisations, including the oldest of all, Kerala Club, founded in 1939 by VP Menon, the person who integrated all the princely states into what is known as India that is Bharat.

One of the highlights of the programme was the



staging of the one-act-play Nokkukuthi Theyyam (Scarecrow God), written by Prof Omchery NN Pillai several decades ago. There was a reason to stage the play as Kerala House wanted to honour the nonagenarian playwright, who won the recently-instituted Kerala Prabha award.

I do not know how many of the people, who assembled there to watch the brilliant acting by Shibu Raghavan, realised the significance of the day, accidentally chosen for staging the play. I will come to that in an instant.

The drama is about a Brahmin youth who did exceptionally well in studies securing first class first in M.Sc Physics. His forefathers belonged to a Brahmin household which controlled hundreds of acres of land. Reforms related to ownership of land deprived the family of its land holdings. He has the records of the land the family once held but they have no value as the land is now owned by those who were their sharecroppers or servants. Their sprawling house, which his father had to vacate, is now owned by a family retainer. It is now used for shooting popular films.

EWS QUOTA



Justice Dinesh
Maheshwari



Justice S
Ravindra Bhat



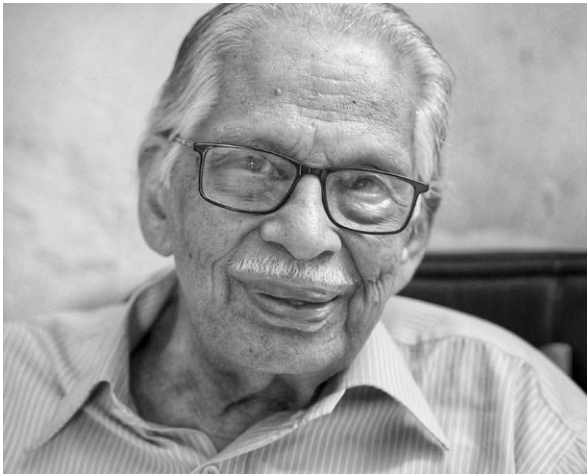
CJI UU Lalit



Justice Bela
M Trivedi



Justice JB
Pardiwala



Prof Omchery NN Pillai

For at least three generations, the family has been poor. His parents hoped against hope that he would be able to get a good job, manage the family and marry off his sisters. Because he was a Brahmin, he could not even apply for many jobs, as they were reserved for lower castes. Finally, a private college offered him a lecturer's job for which he was asked to pay Rs 8 lakh as donation.

When he laughed over the suggestion, the chairman of the interview board asked him why he did so. "Sir, when I do not have even Rs 8 in my pocket, how can I raise Rs 8 lakh? That is why I laughed". His dialogues are quite biting.

For instance, he mentions how the minorities have started educational institutions where jobs are given to those who can pay. Yes, the rich are a minority and they are the ones who have always benefited. They can either create jobs or buy them.

He manages to run the family by working as a labourer. His fellow workers do not consider him as one among them as he is educated. He is, therefore, not a member of their union. He has work only when a regular worker takes leave or is unable to work. He lamented the fact that he did not have enough money to buy oil to let her sisters oil their hair, long like his mother's. As they do not have a proper dress, they prefer to remain indoors most of the time.

He had a girlfriend who was ready to sacrifice everything if she could be with him. How would he support her? He himself persuaded her to think of a better future. Her relatives were able to convince her that it was pointless to think about a penniless Brahmin.

Taking pity on him, the Scarecrow God offers him His own job. He has to wear the Scarecrow's dress and stand there to protect the crops day and night, rain and shine. Only Pillai could have written such a socially relevant play that highlighted the inequities in the social system. The play sought to undermine the rationale for reservation when it did not extend itself to the poor among the Upper Castes.

Alas, everything is not black and white. There is something called grey between black and white. Let us come to that.

On the day the play was staged, the Supreme Court of India held as valid the 103rd Constitution Amendment enacted by the Narendra Modi government in 2019. The law was aimed at providing 10 percent reservation for the economically weaker sections among the general category for admission and jobs. It was a Constitution Bench of five judges which heard over 40 petitions questioning the validity of the Amendment.

Those who have studied the history of reservation know that it was first introduced for a period of ten years. It was extended every ten years. Political parties like the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the forerunner of the Bharatiya Janata Party, were opposed to reservation on the ground that it undermined merit, competence, capability etc. The beneficiaries of reservation constituted a large section of the people and no political party wanted to antagonise such a section. That is why none of the parties showed the guts to oppose reservation when it was extended every ten years. Some time ago, the RSS chief spoke against reservation but, sooner than later, he was forced to amend his views. However, the Sangh Parishad has found an ingenious way to undermine reser-

The beneficiaries of reservation constituted a large section of the people and no political party wanted to antagonise such a section. That is why none of the parties showed the guts to oppose reservation when it was extended every ten years



Shibu Raghavan as the unemployed Brahmin

vation. The 10 per cent reservation for the economically weaker sections is one of them.

Usually, a dissenting judgement or a minority judgement has only academic value, as it is the majority judgement which will prevail. However, in the 3-2 verdict given by the Supreme Court on the petitions that challenged the 103rd Constitution Amendment, it is the minority verdict that received greater attention.

One of the reasons could be that the then Chief Justice UU Lalit preferred to endorse Justice Ravindra Bhat's dissenting verdict. It is seldom that a chief justice, who is on the verge of retirement, prefers to be in the minority on a Constitutional issue. This itself has elevated the minority verdict from the ordinary to the lofty.

Of course, the Union government has every reason to be satisfied with the outcome, as it upholds the law it enacted in 2019. Had there been no dissenting judgement, i.e., had Justice Bhat not articulated his dissent, the public would not have even known that there were two opinions on the 10 percent reservation for the poor among the Upper castes and the minorities like Christians and Muslims.

The amendment was questionable, as it sought to introduce a new doctrine in affirmative action. Until 2019, reservation was available only to those castes and groups which were socially and educationally backward. That is how the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes were entitled to reservation because they had been suffering from social inequities for hundreds of years.

Nobody can say that the child of a scavenger, who may be a Christian or a Muslim, is better placed socially and economically than the son of a Brahmin. Such a child is not entitled to any reservation for admission or job because their religions are supposed to be egalitarian. It is on this ground that the BJP has been opposing the demand for reservation for Scheduled Caste Christians and Muslims even after reservation was provided for Scheduled Caste Sikhs and Buddhists.

When 27 percent reservation was introduced under the Mandal Commission report, the argument was that it was necessary to uplift the OBCs educationally and socially. It was the educational and social backwardness of the other backward castes (OBCs) that was considered by the Mandal Commission. Their economic condition was never considered. For instance, in UP, the caste to which the Birals belonged was eligible for reservation under the Mandal formula.

It was the Supreme Court which ordered a 50 percent ceiling on all kinds of reservation. However, the court also introduced a new concept of the "creamy layer" under which the socially and educationally backward should not have a yearly income of Rs 4 lakh to be eligible for reservation.

Of course, the court built into the Constitution a

The exclusion of Scheduled Castes and others from the 10 percent reservation is certainly discriminatory in nature. The Constitution specifically mentions that it does not tolerate discrimination on any ground, be it economic, gender or caste

clause that specifically mentioned that while ordinarily the 50 percent limit remained, there could be situations whereby the ceiling could be breached.

It is this clause that has allowed the five-member Bench to grant a wholesale 10 percent extra reservation for the EWS under the 103rd Constitution Amendment Act. Nobody knows how this verdict will impact the case pending in the apex court against Tamil Nadu which has introduced reservation far in excess of 50 percent.

The exclusion of Scheduled Castes and others from the 10 percent reservation is certainly discriminatory in nature. The Constitution specifically mentions that it does not tolerate discrimination on any ground, be it economic, gender or caste. That is why the argument that the 103rd Constitution amendment contravenes the basic structure of the Constitution is raised. Reservation for the EWS is available to those who have a yearly income of Rs 8 lakh with the sizes of the houses and plots of land they own specified.

A person may have a large house or flat inherited from his parents or other relatives but he may still be poor as he does not have access to money. Also, a person who is rich can squander away his properties and declare himself a pauper, to be eligible for reservation.

To give an example, the younger brother of Mukesh Ambani, Anil Ambani, was a very successful businessman. It was he who built the Airport Metro Line in New Delhi.

Alas, all his companies failed in the marketplace. He was unable to pay his debtors. He virtually declared himself a pauper. Yet, when he was questioned how he was able to manage his luxurious lifestyle, he claimed that he borrowed money from his mother. Now the point is that he can also claim jobs and employment for his children under the 10 percent quota, as they are poor.

At the other end is Anoop, an auto-rickshaw driver in Kerala. He won the Onam bumper lottery prize of Rs 25 crore. Even after tax he will get Rs 15 crore. A poor man suddenly becomes rich and a rich man suddenly becomes poor. That is why reservation on economic grounds was never given. Poonthanam is a great Malayalam poet. His Jnanppana is the Bhagavad Gita of the Malayalees.

This is what he writes about the ephemeral nature of life: "If God wishes, the people we see now or are with us now, may disappear or be dead in the next



Finally a scarecrow!

moment. Or if He wishes, in a few days a healthy man may be paraded to his funeral pyre.

"If God wishes, the king living in a palace today may lose everything and end up carrying a dirty bag on his shoulders and walk around homeless."

A laborious person who gets less than Rs 8 lakh a year can increase it several times. However, this reservation does not encourage him to stand on his own legs. Why should he deprive himself of reservation by working hard?

Because of corruption, it will not be difficult for the resourceful among the socially and educationally forward castes to manipulate the income certificates to deprive the real poor from getting the benefits of reservation.

The economically poor should have received benefits like scholarship and fee concessions and not reservation in admission and employment. It is no secret that efforts have been made at various levels to abolish reservation by introducing new concepts like extension for the retired, appointment of contract staff and what is known as "lateral entry" for those in the private sector.

In other words, reservation as such is being undermined in a hundred and one ways. Reservation for the "poor" among the educationally, socially and culturally privileged is, alas, one of the last nails in the coffin of affirmative action in the country. As the saying goes, only iron can cut iron. ☹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Septuagenarian Blues

Old age comes with its own blues. Nonetheless, one cannot turn one's back on it. Cope with it gently without much ado

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

I have a dear friend, like me a septuagenarian, who is an incurable optimist. I joke that if he ever fell from the 50th floor of a skyscraper, he would, while hurtling past the 24th floor, cheerfully proclaim, "So far, so good!" When I recently griped that my memory had started playing tricks, he tried to convince me that cognitive decline was a God-ordained defence mechanism to erase bad memories and thereby attain greater happiness in the autumn of life. His poppycock psychoanalytic hypothesis got my goat but to be fair, he was only trying to help me cope with the inevitable depredations associated with old age.

Wikipedia, with absolute indelicacy, defines old age as "ages nearing or surpassing the life expectancy of human beings and is thus the end of the human cycle." Mercifully, culling, which is the selective slaughter of redundant and dispensable specimens, is not applied to humans because otherwise, we geriatrics would be foremost in the line to the chopping block of the expendable. And yet, ironically, it is the degenerate oldies – Putin, Trump, Xi Jinping, our homegrown fascist – who have been calling the shots and ruining the world. Take it from a wizened old foggy, there is really very little to commend old age!

Gerontologists have classified those above 85 years as "oldest old". By such a reckoning, my age group in their seventies should rightfully be pronounced "older old", and fledgeling geriatrics in their 60s as "early old" though in keeping with our proclivity to sugar-coat the unforgiving ageing process, we resort to euphemistic, delusionary appellations such as "senior citizen" or "late middle age" to define our decrepit state. But try as hard as we might, when one hits the seventies, it is impossible to ignore the ravages that time has wreaked, both physical and mental. For confirmation of this sad reality, look no further than septuagenarian, Joe Biden, the President of the most powerful nation on earth!



Biden's physical and cerebral condition is an abiding national concern in America. Having suffered two brain aneurysms and nursing a heart condition that causes dizziness and confusion, his competence and ability to withstand the rigours of his job are a legitimate worry. Recently, he slipped twice while walking up the ramp to Air Force One. When asked whether she would vote for Biden if he stood for the Presidency in 2024, a staunch Democratic supporter plaintively replied: 'Yes, if he is still alive.'

But his cognitive decline exhibited unrelentingly through gaffe after gaffe is what most frightens his supporters. His foot-in-mouth stumbles have got even his well-wishers expressing misgivings about his fitness for the onerous job entrusted to him. His former boss and close friend, Barak Obama, is reported to have let slip this verbal bazooka in despair: "Don't underestimate Joe's ability to fu-k things up."

He committed the most outrageous faux pas at a recent conference where he sought out Indiana Representative Jackie Walorski barely weeks after her high-profile death in a horrific car accident. "Where's Jackie?" asked the President from



the podium as he peered about the room, adding, "I think she was going to be here." Anthony Blinken, the Secretary of State and others in the US administration are perennially cleaning up after the verbal bloomers that their boss leaves in his wake.

You cannot stop ageing or its vexatious repercussions! While a cruel, unforgiving world mocks Biden for his physical degeneration, erratic memory and rhetorical miscues, those among us in the penal institution called dotage know better than to joke about it.

For me, the reminders of frailty and decay are unmistakable and getting more insistent. Eliot said it with empathetic clarity: "*I grow old...I grow ...old...I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*" Yes, the clothes now hang limply over a shrunken frame but that's only one small part of the ravages that time has wrought. Nobody could have better described one's physical appearance today than Philip Larkin, one of my favourite poets: "*Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried in lines.*" One can't help notice the deepening lines on the face, the tumescent double chin, the rapidly receding hairline and simultaneous lush growth in and around the ears, the sagging waistline. Ironically, it is precisely when you notice all these clear signs of physical degeneration that you get compliments about how great you are looking. Like Mark Twain perceptively observed: "When your friends begin to flatter you on how young you look, it's a sure sign that you are getting old."

There are other markers to remind me that I am over the hill. I don't drive anymore because I am unable to look over my shoulder while reversing the car; if my shoelaces get untied while walking, I have to watch my every step until I gingerly reach a bench or home; the first thing I look for when I enter a building is a ramp or elevator; I dare not plonk myself on a low chair or sofa because getting up thereafter is a Himalayan task; the time is ripe for a cataract operation and, in the foreseeable future, a hearing aid; sleep, apart from being punctuated by at least two toilet breaks, is fitful and all too short, reminding one of that percipient observation in *Moby Dick*: "*Old age is always wakeful, as if, the longer linked with life, the less man has to do with anything that looks like death.*" What further intimation do you need of being on the home straight?

It was all so different when I was declared "superannuated" (obsolete due to age according to the OED) by the Government of India over a decade ago



at the "early old" age of 62 years. I welcomed retirement and who wouldn't be happy to have year after year of Sundays, doing what you love best – watching movies, soccer and cricket, getting on your wife's nerves, reading other than soul-killing official documents, et al? Of course, not everyone shared my enthusiasm about life after retirement. My younger friends were worried that bereft of a regular job, I would not know what to do with myself. My very supportive wife was also quite concerned about how I would cope after spending more than half my waking hours for 39 years pushing moth-eaten files, but I think her main worry was that she now had twice as much husband and half as much money.

There is a commonly held but debatable proposition that age brings wisdom, but you have only to listen to senior politicians and retired bureaucrats to disabuse yourself of such a sweeping abstraction. In any case, let me forewarn you from my own experience that just when you think you have the answers to all the knotty problems of the day, there is nobody approaching you with questions or seeking your advice. Your knowledge lives in splendid desolation. The object lesson learnt: the old should shut up!

As you near the finishing line, you begin to do things that you never did before. You start taking a sneak look at the obituary notices in the newspapers in the faint expectation of seeing the picture of somebody you know. You periodically get news of contemporaries who have kicked the bucket and you realize that intimations of mortality have become the background score of your life.



In the context of dealing with dotage, I cannot think of a more appropriate resolution for an old person to make to herself than "The prayer of an anonymous abbess". Here is the summary: "Keep me from being talkative and from the unfortunate habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject; release me from the idea that I must straighten out other people's affairs; keep me from reciting endless details,

My sociologist mentor and sternest critic believes that even in the bleakest of situations, there is always a glimmer of hope. She reminds me of the precept that however bad things are, they won't always remain so, implying that there will inevitably be a change for the better. Sadly, such optimism would be deeply misplaced in the context of ageing where the alternative is rather dire. Perhaps, more than hope and optimism, it is fortitude and dignified acceptance that are required to cope with ageing.

and wings to get to the point; grant me the patience to listen to others' complaints and curb my volubility on my own aches and pains; teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong; teach me the grace to appreciate the work of others; most importantly, make me gentle and kind for a harsh old person is one of the devil's masterpieces!" ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATHEW JOHN is a former civil servant. Views are personal



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Cardinal Alencherry asked to appear in person in court

The Kerala High Court has asked Cardinal George Alencherry, to appear before a court in connection with cases related to a land sale.

The top court in Kerala November 9 dismissed the cardinal's plea seeking exemption from personal appearance before the Judicial First Class Magistrate Court, Kakkanad, a suburb of Kochi. The prelate is facing seven criminal cases in connection with the sale of land belonging to the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese a few years ago.

The cardinal is accused of selling prime land belonged to the archdiocese fraudulently without consulting canonical bodies and other concerned authorities and incurring a loss to the tune of close I billion rupees.

The cardinal had denied the allegations and reportedly admitted having certain failures in overseeing the land deals and made no gains from them.

Cardinal Alencherry in his plea said that he "is a senior citizen aged 77 years and head of the Syro Malabar Church spread over whole world, having a membership of 55 lakhs (5.5 million)."

The prelate further said, he is "bestowed with the duty of performing religious ceremonies, rituals, including ordination of bishops, priests, consecration of churches."

Citing his busy schedules, the cardinal further said he had to render supervisory administrative functions over 35 dioceses out of which 4 are out of India and 18 are outside Kerala.

Apart from this, the cardinal added that he is also the head of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) and he has to attend meetings as well as perform duties as its president and also the member of College of Cardinals and also has to attend meetings in Rome. Against such a background, the prelate urged the court grant him exemption from appearance before the court and allow his counsel to deal with the cases in his place.

The single bench of Justice Ziyad Rahman A A, however, disagreed with Cardinal Alencherry's argu-



ment and said, "Since he is a member of the College of Cardinals, he also has to participate in meetings in Rome. Thus it can be seen that he is admittedly attending meetings worldwide as part of administrative functions. This would indicate that he is not under any physical

difficulty, which prevents him from appearing before the court at least on one occasion to take bail and execute the bond."

"It is reported that the distance between the place of the residence of the petitioner and the court is just about 3 km. Therefore, under any circumstances, it cannot be concluded that there exists exceptional circumstances which prevent the petitioner from attending the court in person, at least for the first time and executing bonds," the court asserted.

"Moreover, granting an exemption to the petitioner for the first appearance in this case would send a wrong message to society as well. According to the petitioner, he is a religious head required to carry out several functions in various capacities and seeks exemption on that ground," observed the court.

"In my view, the position that he holds would not make him entitled to any special privileges when he is brought before a court of law as an accused. The statutory mandate is over and above all the superiority the accused possesses or claims to have, by virtue of his position. Irrespective of his position, he is just an accused before the court of law, who is not entitled to claim any special privilege and is required to face the proceedings just like any other citizen," the court said in its 44-page order.

"The provisions of the law does not distinguish between ordinary citizens and persons holding superior positions in their religious, political, social, or other institutions," the high court explained.

It further said, "If such a privilege is given to the accused, people will lose their confidence in the administration of justice." ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

CBCI elects Archbishop Thazhath as President

The new office-bearers of CBCI



Most Rev. Dr. Andrews Thazhath
Archbishop of Trichur
President



Most Rev. Dr. George Antonysamy
Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore
Vice-President 1



Most Rev. Dr. Mar Joseph Thomas
Bishop of Batheri
Vice-President 2



Most Rev. Dr. Felix Machado
Archbishop-Bishop of Vasai
Secretary General

Archbishop Andrews Thazhath of Trichur has been elected president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), the national body that represents more than 22 million Catholics in the country.

The conference's general body that met in Bengaluru Nov 6-11 also elected Archbishop George Antonysamy of Madras-Mylapore and Bishop Joseph Thomas of Batheri as the first and second vice presidents of the conference.

The meeting reelected Archbishop Felix Machado as the secretary general.

The elections took place on November 10, the penultimate day of the plenary meeting.

Under the 1987 papal directive on the rites in India, the post of the CBCI has been rotated among India's three ritual Churches – Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara.

Pope John Paul II's May 27, 1987, letter asked the three rites to set up their own bishops' conferences and directed the CBCI to continue with "questions of common concern and of a national and supra-ritual character."

Hailed now as "a watershed" in the Indian Church, the letter sought to resolve inter-rite rivalry and help the Church present a united witness to Christ in the multireligious country.

Archbishop Thazhath from the Syro-Malabar Church replaces Cardinal Oswald Gracias of

the Latin Church. The first vice president and the secretary general belong to the Latin Church while the second vice president represents the Syro-Malankara Church.

Cardinal George Alencherry, head of the Syro-Malabar Church, was expected to be elected the CBCI president,

However, the 77-year-old cardinal announced before the elections that he would not be available for elections because of his age, according to a press release issued by the CBCI press office.

Archbishop Thazhath was nominated the Auxiliary Bishop of Trichur archdiocese on March 19, 2004, and succeeded Archbishop Jacob Thoomkuzhy as the head of the Trichur archdiocese on January 22, 2007.

He was the secretary general and president of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council and the first vice president of the CBCI.

Archbishop Antonysamy was appointed the archbishop of Madras and Mylapore on Nov. 21, 2012.

Bishop Thomas was appointed the third bishop of the eparchy of Batheri in 2010.

Archbishop Machado was appointed as the bishop of Nashik in 2008. In 2009, he was transferred to the diocese of Vasai. Pope Benedict XVI granted him the personal title of Archbishop as he had worked in the Vatican Curia. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

French Church in shock after abuse cases involving 11 bishops revealed

The president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of France (CEF) expressed the shock of his fellow prelates as he revealed that 11 former or serving French bishops have been accused of sexual abuse, or failing to report cases, including a cardinal who admitted to assaulting a girl over three decades ago.

Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort of Reims told reporters at a press conference in Lourdes on November 7, during their autumn general assembly, that some high-ranking Church officials faced either criminal or canonical prosecution, or both.

Among them is the former Archbishop of Bordeaux, Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, who has been twice president of the CEF, and is presently a member of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In a message addressed to the CEF and read out by Archbishop de Moulins-Beaufort, Cardinal Ricard admitted to having “behaved in a reprehensible manner towards a 14-year-old girl” 35 years ago, when he was a priest.

“There is no doubt that my behavior caused serious and long-lasting consequences for that person,” the 78-year-old cardinal said, adding that he has asked the woman and her family for forgiveness, and that he was going on retreat to pray.

Archbishop de Moulins-Beaufort told the press that the public confession by Cardinal Ricard was “a shock” for the bishops.

His case brings the number of French bishops accused of sexual abuse to a total of eleven. These include Bishop Michel Santier of Creteil, who was sanctioned by the Holy See for “spiritual abuse having led to voyeurism involving two adult men,” though the news of this canonical sanction has come to light only in recent weeks.

A total of 11 bishops accused over abuse cases

According to Archbishop de Moulins-Beaufort, six other bishops, one of whom has since died, have already been accused of sexual abuse either by the State or the Church judiciary. Two other retired bishops are being investigated by the French authorities and are also the target of a Church procedure. Another bishop has been reported to the authorities,



Archbishop Eric de Moulins-Beaufort delivering the press conference on November 7 on abuse

but prosecutors have not yet responded, while the Holy See has suspended him from his duties. Finally, one bishop, André Fort, was sentenced in 2018 to a suspended prison sentence of eight months.

Commenting on Santier’s case, the president of the French bishops admitted that there have been “serious shortcomings and dysfunction at every level.”

In a message addressed to the bishops at the opening of the meeting on 3 November, Pope Francis invited them “not to be discouraged” as they face this difficult moment, but “to persevere” with their “gaze fixed on the Cross of Christ” in the assurance that the Holy Spirit accompanies their efforts.

In the final message of the general assembly released on November 8, the CEF reiterated “in the strongest terms” that “there cannot be any impunity for bishops” and that they share the “shock” felt by “so many faithful, priests, deacons and consecrated persons. These feelings are ours too. As members of the same ecclesial body, we too are wounded, deeply affected,” the statement reads.

(Source: vaticannews.va)

Seminar marks jubilee of *Third Millennium*

A 3-day national mission seminar was conducted by the Diocese of Rajkot marking the Silver Jubilee of the foundation of "Third Millennium", an Indian Journal of Evangelization, one of its theological publications.

The seminar on the theme "Mission again at Crossroads? A Roadmap for Mission in the Changing Indian Context", conducted at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre at Rajkot was attended by 161 participants from various States.

Eminent speakers, Justice Kurian Joseph, Bishop Thomas Dabre, Archbishop Joseph Pamplany, Dr. Felix Wilfred, Dr. Pearl Drego, Dr. Lancy Lobo SJ, Dr. Joseph Valiamangalam SJ and Dr. Davis Varayilan CMI presented papers on different aspects of Mission. The topics included the present missionary context, the changing socio-religious-political situations and how it affects the mission, the methodological aspects of mission, the crucial role of Laity in the mission in view of the new understanding of Synodality of the church, the role of social media, and the freshness Pope Francis is bringing into mission theology.

These topics were discussed with a view to charting out a roadmap for mission that will better suit the evolving Indian situation. The seminar was inau-



gurated by Archbishop Thomas Macwan, Metropolitan Archbishop of Gandhinagar, during the colourful inaugural function presided over by Bishop Mar Jose Chittooparambil, Bishop of Rajkot. The office-bearers in the last 25 years were felicitated during the inaugural function.

The Journal "Third Millennium" is the fruit of the missionary vision of Bishop Gregory Karotemprel CMI, the second Bishop of Rajkot, who founded it in 1998. ©



'Untouchability Not Prevalent In Christianity Or Islam' : Centre Opposes Plea Seeking Scheduled Caste Status For Converted Dalits

The Union Government has filed its Counter Affidavit in the Supreme Court opposing a petition which seeks Scheduled Caste status for Dalits who have converted to Christianity and Islam.

The petitioner seeks a declaration that the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 is discriminatory and violative of Article 14 and 15 of the Constitution as it does not confer Scheduled Caste status to persons converting to religions other than Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism.

Opposing the petitioner's plea, the Centre stated that "the object of the reservations and identification of Scheduled Castes is over and beyond the 'social and economic backwardness'. It is submitted that the identification of scheduled castes is centered around a specific social stigma [and the connected backwardness with such stigma] that is limited to the communities identified in the Constitution [Scheduled Castes] Order, 1950."

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment submitted in its affidavit that the Report of Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission (which favoured

Scheduled Caste status for Dalits in all religions) is flawed as the report was created without conducting any field studies and thus cannot be corroborated with the situation on the ground. The Centre stated that the said Commission had taken a myopic view of the social environment in India and has not taken into account the effect that the inclusion would have on the present castes listed as Scheduled Castes and thus the Government had not accepted the findings of the said commission.

The Government further stated that the exclusion of Christianity or Islam was due to the reason that the oppressive system of Untouchability was not prevalent in the Christian or Islamic Society.

The Centre also quoted from a dissent note in the report of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities which stated that Christianity and Islam are essentially foreign religions and thereby they do not recognize caste system and conferment of SC status on converts will amount to introduction of caste system in those religions.

(Courtesy: Livelaw)



Goa announces next Francis Xavier exposition

Goa archdiocese has announced that the next decennial exposition of the sacred relics of St. Francis Xavier, which draws millions of people of all faiths from across the world, will commence on Nov 21, 2024.

Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, Archbishop of Goa and Daman, issued a special decree on Nov 5 announcing the seven-week-long exposition of the sacred relics of the 16th century Spanish Jesuit saint and co-founder of the Society of Jesus, one of the largest priestly congregations in the Church.

The body of Saint Francis Xavier, which was considered incorrupt until three decades ago, is placed in a silver casket in the Basilica of Bom Jesu in Old Goa. During the exposition that takes place every ten years, the body – now seen only as relics – will be lowered and placed on a podium to allow pilgrims

to come near and seek the saint's intercession.

Close to 4 million people visited the relics during the last exposition, which concluded in January 2015.

"In conformity with long-standing practice ... we determine that the Solemn Exposition be held in 2024, beginning on Thursday, 21 November 2024, and ending on Sunday, 5 January 2025," the decree said.

The cardinal said a special committee to deal with matters concerning the exposition has also been appointed, consisting of lay men and women, religious sisters and priests.

"The decennial spiritual event gives the faithful an opportunity to reflect on the 'faith journey' of St. Francis Xavier and to emulate his zeal for the Gospel of Jesus Christ," Father Barry Cardoza, director of Diocesan Centre for Social Communication Media, said in a statement. (Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Indian Church calls for release of seafarers in captivity in Guinea

BY BISHOP ALEX VADAKKUMTHALA

The Office for Labor of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) has made an international appeal to facilitate the immediate release of 26 crew members, including 16 Indian nationals, on the ship 'MT Heroic Idun' held in captivity in Guinea for nearly three months.

"The seafarers have been treated as criminals without formal charges or legal process. This is a great maritime injustice," Bishop Alex Vadakkumthala, Chairman of CBCI Office for Labor and country-

in-charge of Apostolate of the Sea (known as Stella Maris), pointed out in a statement on November 10.

Since August 14, the 26 seafarers belonging to the Philippines, Poland and Sri Lanka besides India have been held up in Guinea.

While appreciating the efforts by the Government of India through its diplomatic channels, Bishop Vadakkumthala urged various networks concerned "to work tirelessly to ensure the release of the seafarers and return to their distressed families." ©



Christian group seeks release of jailed pastors

A group of Christian pastors in Uttar Pradesh has appealed for the release of some 30 fellow pastors incarcerated in different jails across the province.

Pastor Jitendra Singh, general secretary of the Pastors' Association, Uttar Pradesh, told UCA News that all of them were falsely charged with indulging in religious conversions.

Most of the arrests were made after the Bharatiya Janata Party government criminalized religious conversions through allurement, force, or coercion among other means, by enacting an anti-conversion law in February 2021.

"We want justice for the pastors who have been victims of persecution by Hindu nationalists," Pastor Singh told UCA News on Nov. 7.

The group has sought the intervention of the police commissioner in Kanpur city to protect the Christian pastors from harassment and persecution.

The pastors in their memorandum have alluded to how the hardcore nationalists groups and individuals disrupt Christian prayers gatherings, ransack churches and prayer halls, destroy copies of the Holy Bible and manhandle pastors, priests and nuns, by citing violations of the state's anti-conversion law.

The pastors also urged the police commissioner to provide protection to the community members and



Christian devotees participating in a prayer meeting in the city of Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. (Photo: Facebook)

their places of worship. Police Commissioner Bhagirath P Jogdand has assured the group that he would look into their grievances.

"Persecution of Christians has increased since the anti-conversion law came into being," Brother Joy Mathew says adding that this was since the BJP government came to power.

"Many Christian leaders were sent to jail, but so far no one has been convicted as the cases do not stand legal scrutiny in the court. We proclaim the Word of God strictly within the purview of the constitutional safeguards and the state's laws but those attacking us are violating the legal and constitutional mandate. They must be punished," he added. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Tides – A Story Bank launched

DR. SOMAK SEN, *Assistant Professor, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata*

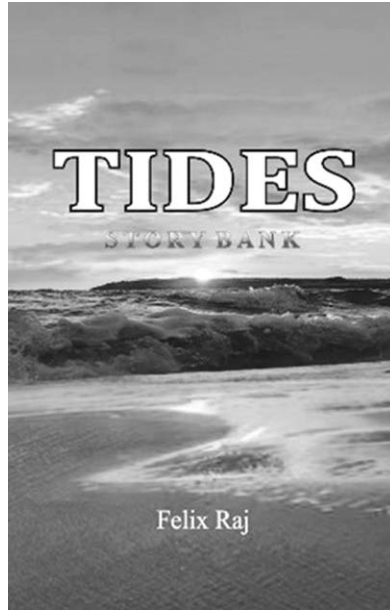
After a grand success of 'Waves – Story Bank', Fr. Felix Raj's another literary creation 'Tides – Story Bank' narrating different experiences of life was released recently at SXUK campus. While releasing the book, Shri Jawhar Sircar, Hon'ble Member of Rajya Sabha briefed the audience regarding the ongoing scenario of the country and stressed on inclusiveness through practices of perseverance.

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala has written the foreword to this book. He mentions about the literary contribution of Fr. Raj to its readers that observe people's stories with supreme importance than anything ever.

'Tides' came after 'Waves', the first volume which had received wide acceptance among its readers. While acknowledging Fr. Raj's contribution as an academician and an educational entrepreneur in the field of developing higher education in West Bengal, Dr. Tharoor says in his foreword that this new creation narrates vivid experiences of life that a human being passes through. Stories here express a wider angle of life starting from religious beliefs, philosophical stances, political aspects and historical references, he added.

Fr. Raj in his book expresses that today's mundane world leave people's minds filled with complexities and doubt, which take away peace of human life. Selfishness, hatred, disbelief, cruelty are being practiced at worst level across the world. But that do not affect the normal course of nature. Every day the world runs in its own order; seasons are changed automatically, years pass away. Despite all irregularities, incessant waves of sea keep us reminding that nature will continue to move in its own chosen path unperturbed.

Fr. Raj, in his book, spreads the message of 'Vasdhaiva Kutumbakam' taken from various angles of Christianity to Hinduism, from Islamic beliefs to



Buddhist philosophies as preached by great leaders earlier; thus, creating an essence of reaching to one goal of 'attainment' through various ways. From mythological aspects to modern literature, he has narrated every aspect of humanity through an artistic way; yet presenting the non-fiction. His expression of evangelism has been represented here through description of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the founder of Bhakti movement in India; while binding of social order in a same string has been reflected through the humanitarian activities carried out by the Jesuit society since time immemorial across the globe.

'Tides' narrates stories of life.

It tells its readers to experience the very truth of life rather than believing in superficial structure of materialism. Stories here in the 'Divine Touch' section pacify readers with knowledge of great souls of the world, who dedicate their lives for the sake of humanity. The next section 'Faith' helps to strengthen belief in the Almighty, thus, making one devoted to Him. The next two sections 'Greatness' and 'Inspiration' motivate the readers to work selflessly to get solace in life instead of only thinking and chasing after material profits. Historical incidents under the 'Sparks' section have been narrated by the author in a lucid way which help readers not only get connected with past glories, but also come to know about various national and international acts of greatness.

Mostly India centric stories, in many cases, Fr. Raj has used first-person narrative style to make the stories more appealing directly to its readers. His final stories, thus, conclude with the message of strengthening one's will power more to realise and follow the ways of universal truth of life, i.e. selfless service. His very words, therefore, reverberates through the last few lines of the book, "If we want the rainbow, we need to put up with the rain. God is always there with us and for us."



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

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Toughening Foreign Investors..!

A cry I'm finding across our country, from frustrated citizens is, "Repair the potholes!" Along with this pathetic plea, comes the proud shout, "Make in India!" As from our rooftops and in WhatsApp groups we applaud national leaders spending precious time and tax payers money going from country to country wooing their industrialists to open factories, offices and make huge investments in our country.

What they find when they do arrive are narrow, pothole filled roads, filthy streets lined with un-lifted garbage, sprawling slums and pollution.

"Is there some sinister master plan you are following?" I asked a spokesman from the government,

"You are a tough Indian, because of the very muck you slipped on today. Now do you understand?"

"That the muck, the pot holes and dirt shaped me?"

"Yes! And we want to do the same to these white collared, suited booted men and women in their swanky designer outfits, Mercedes Benzes and Cadillacs."

"You want to give them dirt and grime?"

"To make them world beaters like we Indians are. Guess what happens when their fancy cars hit the first pothole? They get a broken shoulder, ha, ha, ha."

"They then fly off to Shanghai or Hong Kong and open their companies there."

"We don't want those."



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"How is it you call these foreign companies, then give them such terrible facilities?"

"For their own good my friend, for their own good!" said the smiling spokesman who seemed to be all ready to go somewhere with his bags in tow, "We want to toughen these investors in our country!"

"By giving them filth, rubbish and potholes?"

"It worked for you and me didn't it? Did you grow up in hygienic conditions and sanitized settings?"

"No," I admitted.

"There you are, I told you!"

"Told me what?" I asked, confused.

"It was the pot holes and dirt that shaped you!"

"Really?"

"It toughened you. You don't go about with a hanky to your nose like those Americans and Germans and Britishers. You don't get sick when you drink tap water and pick up a cough from vehicle fumes! See you even have dirt on the seat of your pants."

"That's because I slipped on some muck outside."

"You don't want them?"

"No, they are the weak. We are looking for those who can fight our hurdles and obstacles and come out winners. We want to make men out of boys. Legends out of heroes! We want the world to think of our country as a 'strength and character building' destination! We have plans for other exercises!"

"Planning more potholes?"

"Let's go farther, no roads at all! No dustbins. Just garbage all over. No buildings, only slums!"

"It's already becoming like that," I whispered.

"Aha, our master plan is at work. Goodbye!"

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Abroad," smiled the spokesman, "to woo those weak foreign investors to come here and toughen up..!" ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROBERT CLEMENTS is a Newspaper Columnist, with an estimated readership of 6 million. He also conducts a short-term Writer's Course. Contact him on bobsbanter@gmail.com for more details

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