

Indian Currents

www.indiancurrents.org • Vol. XXXIV • Issue 22 • 23 - 29 May 2022 • ₹15

Total Pages - 40 Including Cover

St Titus Brandsma

Model for Media Mission and a Challenge to Catholic Communicators

On 15 May 2022, Pope Francis canonized Father Titus Brandsma, a valiant journalist and a martyr of freedom of expression against the tyranny of Hitler's dictatorship. He is a role model for journalists in India which is lagging at the tail end of the list of countries on World Press Freedom

WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY 2022





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2022

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2. (SS-44) – June 12 – August 27
3. (SS-45) – September 11 – November 26

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MEDIA MISSION



It could be a mere coincidence. Two weeks after the World Press Freedom Day was celebrated on May 3, and two weeks ahead of World Communications Day which falls on May 29, Pope Francis canonized Father Titus Brandsma, a Dutch priest belonging to the Carmelite Order. He was more than a priest – a fearless journalist to the core. He was martyred in the infamous Nazi concentration camp at Dachau in Germany. He stood alone against a government that exterminated people by poison gas or shooting. Titus Brandsma would probably be the only journalist-saint in the family of the ‘holy persons’. Like the prophets of the Bible who fearlessly took on the brutal and heartless kings of those days, Brandsma went hammer and tongs against the ruthless Hitler regime.

The world needs many such Brandsmas today. The Church needs Brandsmas with prophetic courage. As the editor of a local newspaper and an ecclesiastical adviser to Catholic journalists of several Dutch newspapers, he persuaded Catholic newspapers not to print Nazi propaganda as commanded and ordered by the Nazi occupiers. Unfortunately, today’s journalists are busy mouthing the government’s propaganda material instead of exposing its failures. They have become loudspeakers and cheer leaders of the ruling dispensation. People’s issues are relegated to the backburner to give space to fake information and paid news. They have stopped questioning; they have stopped going beyond what is handed out to them. Here comes St. Brandsma as a torchbearer who dared to speak up against the Nazi regime which was hell bent on genocide of one community.

The Church had many daring personalities in its chequered history. It is not in Church’s interest to identify too closely with regressive and repressive governments. Its mission is to stand with the oppressed masses with little voice to raise their demands and grievances. The Dalits, tribals, minorities, farmers and workers in the unorganized sectors are at the receiving end of the biased policies and programmes of the government which is adept at dancing to the tune of corporate houses and vested interests. There are examples of prelates and priests in Latin American countries, Africa, Philippines, etc. who were powerful critics of despotic governments just as St. Brandsma did during Nazi regime.

The Dutch Saint could be a role model for journalists in India which is lagging at the tail end of the list of countries on World Press Freedom. A recent interview of a journalist with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson could be a trend-setter for the journalists who prefer to sing paeans to the ruling party and its government. ‘Are you in touch with the people’s problems? Are you aware that under your watch, prices of most items are rising?’ the intrepid journalist asked Boris Johnson, looking straight in his eyes. Though defensive, Johnson is seen making a valiant effort to answer her, in the midst of further missives and counter-questions from the fearless scribe. Will any Indian journalist dare to ask such searing questions? The answer lies in the World Press Freedom ranking by Reporters without Borders. While United Kingdom ranks at 24, India’s ranking is an abysmal 150. Some of the neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka fares better than India. A quote from Pope Francis could be the most opportune one to wind up: “Let’s not forget that one of the first things dictatorships do is to remove freedom of the press or mask it, not leaving it free.”

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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MEMBER,
INDIAN NEWSPAPER SOCIETY (INS)

VOLUME XXXIV
ISSUE 22

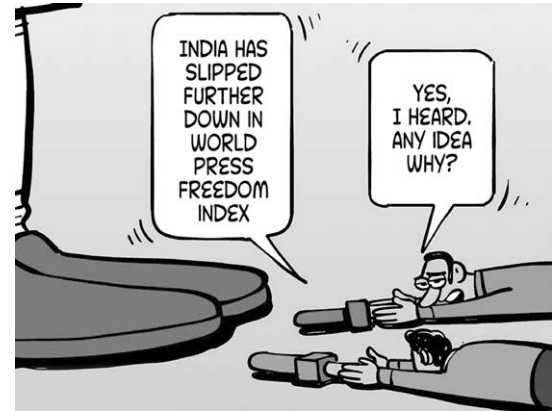
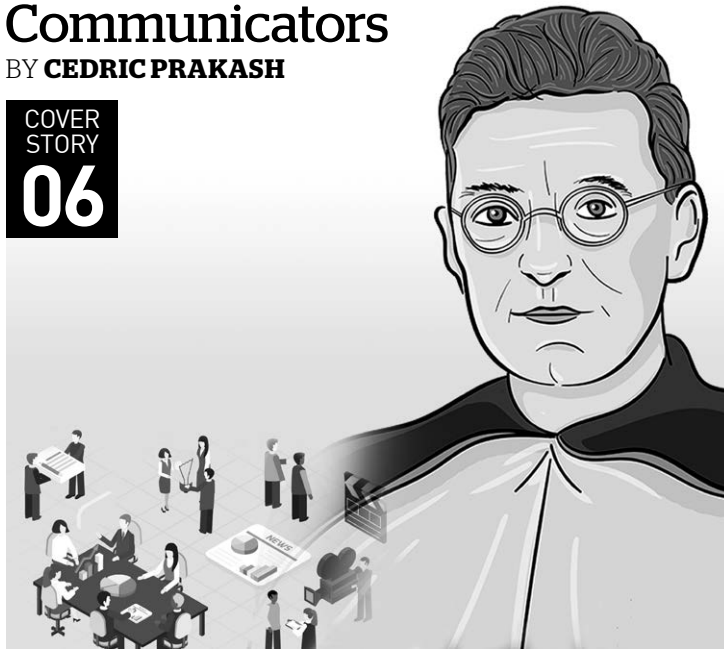
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POWER QUOTES



It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome

- **William James**

• • •



Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them

- **Madam C.J Walker**

• • •



All dreams are within reach. All you have to do is keep moving towards them

- **Viola Davis**

• • •



Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye

- **Helen Keller**

• • •



I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination

- **Jimmy Dean**

• • •



Let us make our future now, and let us make our dreams tomorrow's reality

- **Malala Yousafzai**

• • •



The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot

- **Michael Altshuler**

• • •



Our greatest glory is not in never failing, but in rising up every time we fail

- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

• • •



There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it

- **Edith Wharton**

St Titus Brandsma

Model for Media Mission and a Challenge to Catholic Communicators

On 15 May 2022, Pope Francis canonized Father Titus Brandsma, a valiant journalist and a martyr of freedom of expression against the tyranny of Hitler's dictatorship. He is a role model for journalists in India which is lagging at the tail end of the list of countries on World Press Freedom



Challenge to Catholic Communicators

Titus Brandsma, who was canonized by Pope Francis on May 15, was the embodiment of what communicators and journalists should be. He paid with his life defending freedom of expression against the Nazi regime

BY **CEDRIC PRAKASH**

On 15 May 2022, Pope Francis proclaimed 10 outstanding women and men as Saints of the Catholic Church. Among them was Blessed Titus Brandsma, a Dutch Carmelite priest and journalist. Fr. Brandsma was named spiritual adviser to the Dutch Association of Catholic Journalists in 1935 and became its president after the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands. He worked with the Dutch bishops in crafting their message opposing Nazi ideology and the forced publication of propaganda in Catholic newspapers.

Following Germany's invasion of the Netherlands in 1940, Brandsma defended the freedom of Catholic education and the Catholic press against Nazi pressure. In the face of great risk, he visited the offices of Catholic media outlets around the country over the course of 10 days, encouraging editors to resist pressure to publish Nazi propaganda. His actions drew the ire of the Nazi regime who arrested him in 1942. Several months later, he was transported to the Dachau concentration camp where he was killed by a lethal injection of carbolic acid. He had to pay the ultimate price for his visible and vocal stand against Nazism. St. John Paul II, who beatified the Dutch priest on 3 November 1985, regarded him as a "valiant journalist" and a "martyr of freedom of expression against the tyranny of the dictatorship."

A few days before the canonization of Brandsma, hundreds of journalists from all over the world, wrote an open letter requesting the Holy Father to name the Dutch Carmelite as the patron saint of journalists. The letter is significant on several counts; the key aspects, relevant for all Catholic communicators today, include: "In 2018 you asked us, journalists, loud and clear, 'to promote a journalism of peace', a 'journalism that is truthful and opposed to falsehoods, rhetorical slogans, and sensational headlines. A journalism created by people for people,



one that is at the service of all... a journalism committed to pointing out alternatives to the escalation of shouting matches and verbal violence' ('The truth will set you free' (Jn. 8:32), fake news and journalism for peace. Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day, 24 Jan 2018).

"We wholeheartedly endorse your call to action and in it we recognize a mission statement for the whole of the journalistic enterprise: for old and new media, for editors of newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, and internet platforms -- and not only for journalists of Catholic origin, but for all journalists of good will.

"On 15 May, in Rome, you will canonize a man who embodied these crucial journalistic values until his dying day: the Dutch Carmelite Father Titus Brandsma (1881 - 1942).

"Titus Brandsma has meant a lot to the Catholic community in the Low Countries, but his journalistic work stands out among all his other activities. He was editor-in-chief of a newspaper, devoted himself to the modernization and professionalization of the Catholic daily press in the Netherlands, and strove

Father Brandsma did his work in the context of the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe. In word and deed, he opposed the language of hatred and division that was becoming common at the time

for better working conditions and the establishment of a professional training for journalists.

“Father Brandsma did his work in the context of the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe. In word and deed, he opposed the language of hatred and division that was becoming common at the time. In his view, what we now describe as ‘fake news’ was not to be tolerated in the Catholic press; he successfully argued for an episcopal ban on the printing of National Socialist propaganda in Catholic newspapers.

“He paid with his life for his courageous actions: in early 1942 Father Titus was arrested by the occupying forces and consequently sent to the Dachau concentration camp. There, on July 26 of the same year, he was killed by an injection, on the Sunday that the Dutch bishops had their courageous protest against the deportations of Jews read out in all the churches.

“We, Catholic journalists, recognize in Titus Brandsma a professional peer and fellow believer of considerable standing. Someone who shared the deeper mission that should drive journalism in modern times: a search for truth and veracity, the

promotion of peace and dialogue between people.

“We therefore see him as a friend and advocate for our entire profession, indeed a patron saint of journalism. We would therefore like to boldly ask you to make this patron saint’s office official.

“The current patron saint of journalism is Francis de Sales. He is undoubtedly a holy man of faith and of great merit, but he was not a journalist in the modern sense of the word. Titus Brandsma was.

“And as we said, he gave his life for it. In our view, this makes him particularly suitable for this patronage. According to UNESCO, in 2021, no less than 55 journalists died worldwide while carrying out their work. Many more had to deal with violence, threats, repression, censorship and persecution. The commitment to truth and humanity is extremely dangerous in these times of disinformation and polarization. This urgently requires a holy intercessor who has experienced this personally - and passed the ordeal with flying colours.”

The letter says it all: what Catholic Communications should be today; the fact that St. Brandsma courageously embodied its totality. It was certainly not easy for him; he had to face much hostility from the all-powerful fascists; he did not relent and had to pay with his life for his prophetic stand. There is plenty that Catholic Communicators all over - and particularly in India -- need to learn from St Brandsma and also from the letter written by some renowned Catholic journalists to the Pope.

More so, because on 29 May 2022, the Church all over the globe observes the 56th World Day of Social Communications (In India, it coincides with the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord). The theme of Pope Francis’ powerful message is ‘Listening with the Ear of the Heart’. The theme is rooted in the Gospel of St. Luke ‘Take care, then, how you listen.’ (Lk8:18). The theme complements the 2021 message ‘Come and See’. Pope Francis in his opening statement says, “Last year we reflected on the need to “Come and See” in order to discover reality and be able to recount it beginning with experiencing events and meeting people. Continuing in this vein, I would now like to draw attention to another word, “listen”, which is decisive in the grammar of communication and a condition for genuine dialogue.”

For Pope Francis, ‘listen’ is not something theoretical; it is the *sine qua non* for any catholic communicator who is interested in authentic communications, through searching and arriving at nothing but





the truth, just like the Master Communicator Jesus. One hears a common complaint today “*nobody is listening!*” Many experience this feeling – there is a painful story to share, a cry that needs to be heard – but nobody cares! That story, that cry, becomes a voice crying in the wilderness! Is there someone listening? Does anybody care? In his message, Pope Francis throws a direct challenge to communicators: to listen and when you listen, to do so with the ear of your heart.

In October 2021, Pope Francis launched the Synodal process with the theme “*For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.*” The process will culminate with the 2023 Synod in Rome. The Pope has been insisting that the synodal journey is about listening, learning and loving. His Communications Day message reiterates this when he says, “A synodal process has just been launched. Let us pray that it will be a great opportunity to listen to one another. Communion, in fact, is not the result of strategies and programmes, but is built in mutual listening between brothers and sisters.” The question one needs to ask oneself: Is there serious listening? Or is it lip-service: A tiresome formality without change? The painful reality is that, in several Dioceses the first phase has been sheer tokenism: An attitude of ‘it is a process which ‘had to be done’ – so let’s get over it as soon as possible.’

Are we listening to the cries of the poor and the vulnerable, the excluded and the exploited, the minorities and the other marginalised? When we listen with the heart, we are called to do something about it – we need to make a paradigm shift, to

change; to ensure a better quality of life for all. Pope Francis says it rather strongly: “Human beings tend to flee the relationship, to turn their back and ‘close their ears’ so they do not have to listen. The refusal to listen often ends up turning into aggression towards the other, as happened to those listening to the deacon Stephen who, covering their ears, all turned on him at once.”

In this context, he once again highlights the plight of the migrants and their cries. We often treat them as outsiders: They are not like us, they do not ‘belong’ here! These suffer because of man’s inhumanity to man.

They are the ‘other’! To this Pope Francis says, “The reality of forced migration is also a complex issue, and no one has a ready-made prescription for solving it. I repeat that, in order to overcome prejudices about migrants and to melt the hardness of our hearts, we should try to listen to their stories. Give each of them a name and a story. Many good journalists already do this. And many others would like to do it, if only they could. Let us encourage them! Let us listen to these stories! Everyone would then be free to support the migration policies they deem most appropriate for their own country. But in any case, we would have before our eyes not numbers, not dangerous invaders, but the faces and stories, gazes, expectations and sufferings of real men and women to listen to”. The reality of forced migrants is a key concern of Pope Francis’ papacy. Once again,

For Pope Francis, ‘listen’ is not something theoretical; it is the *sine qua non* for any catholic communicator who is interested in authentic communications, through searching and arriving at nothing but the truth, just like the Master Communicator Jesus



we need to ask ourselves: Are we listening to them with our hearts?

In his message, Pope Francis does not spare the Church. He calls for a Church that has the heart to listen. He says, “It is sad when, even in the Church, ideological alignments are formed and listening disappears, leaving sterile opposition in its wake.” In the final segment of his message, he emphasises the need and importance of ‘Listening to one another in the Church.’

He says, “In the Church, too, there is a great need to listen to and to hear one another. It is the most precious and life-giving gift we can offer each other. Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by him who is himself the great listener and whose work they should share. We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the word of God.” He reserves his choicest words to so-called Catholic communicators, many of whom are frightened to be visible and vocal in standing up for truth and justice.

Pope Francis urges them to develop their listening capacities. “Communication does not take place if listening has not taken place, and there is no good journalism without the ability to listen.... In order to provide solid, balanced, and complete information, it is necessary to listen for a long time. To recount an event or describe an experience in news reporting, it is essential to know how to listen, to be ready to change one’s mind, to modify one’s initial assumptions.”

He quotes the German Lutheran theologian Bonhoeffer, who, like St Brandsma, was executed by the Nazis in 1945: “Thus, the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that the first service we owe to others in communion consists in listening to them. Whoever does not know how to listen

to his brother or sister will soon no longer be able to listen to God either”. Strong words indeed if we have the courage to listen with the heart. On 1 May, Pope Francis paid tribute to journalists who have died or been jailed in the line of duty, defending a free press and praising those in the media “who courageously report on humanity’s wounds...I render homage to journalists who pay in person for this right.”

It is important then, for all Catholic communicators to do an honest and objective evaluation of their writings, productions and other forms of communications. How many of these have genuinely responded to the cries of the poor and the vulnerable, the excluded and exploited, the marginalised and the minorities of the country? How many have written/done productions against the sedition, the UAPA and other draconian laws? The illegal incarceration of human rights defenders? The demonising of the Muslims? The anti-conversion laws? The three farm bills and the labour codes? The monstrous and extravagant Central Vista project? The denial of the legitimate rights of the Adivasis, Dalits, LGBT? Growing unemployment and spiralling prices? And much more. Do Catholic Communicators have the prophetic courage to take on the fascist and fundamentalist forces which are working overtime to destroy the sanctity of the Constitution and the secular, pluralistic fabric of our beloved nation? It is time then for introspection! It is time to change!

Meaningful communication is not about sophisticated centres, glossy publications or ‘projects’ to be run – but the ability to stand for and communicate the truth with prophetic courage. Pope Francis has been consistently challenging catholic communicators to live up to this call. His message this year is all about that. Besides, from this year, one has a saint in Titus Brandsma who lived his vocation to the fullest. Will catholic communicators in India then have the audacity to listen with ear of the heart, to stand up and be counted, to be witnesses for justice and truth today?

A tough challenge indeed, but which must be responded to, because World Social Communications Day is also the Feast of the Ascension, when one is sent out to be his disciples, to witness to the good news, in the world today. ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Catholic Media on the Decline

Without proper and effective communication, the Church will not be able to make its presence felt and it may not be taken seriously by the outside world

BY JOSE VALLIKATT

A cartoon widely circulated in social media on this year's Press Freedom Day depicted a pair of huge boots-worn legs and two fallen journalists in front of it in a submission posture donning their journalistic attire. One of them comments, 'India has further fallen down in the press freedom index,' while the latter wonders about its reason. The cartoonist Manjul demonstrates the fallen state of Indian media in a few strokes.

Some people define Church as having a 'communication mission' which is very tenable with its fundamental theology as well as for its consistent engagement with evangelisation and social life. As the Catholic Church is celebrating World Communications Day on May 29, this article investigates how much its media ministry serves to be the voice of the voiceless and analyse its prospectus.



A Christian Mission Derailed

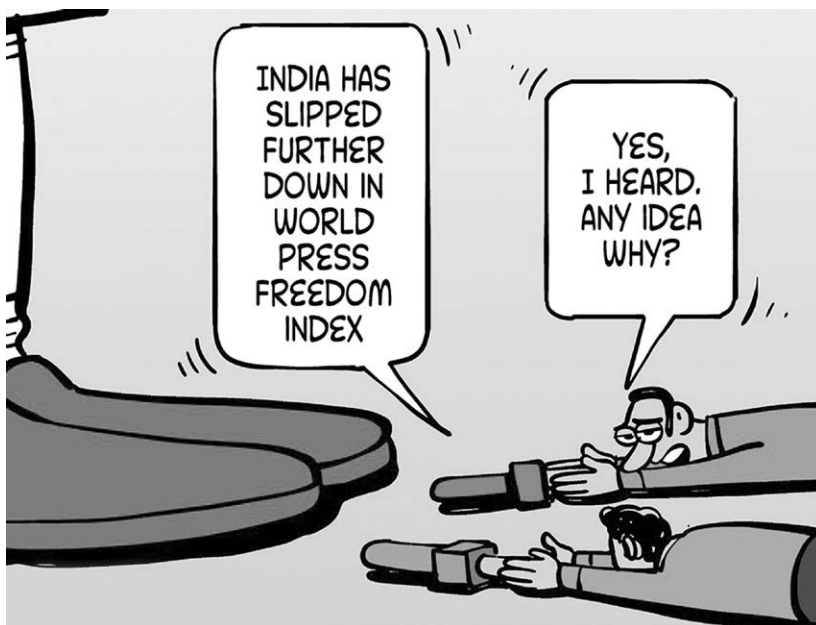
Though Church is not a media house, no one would challenge the Church's positive role as communicators. While the secular media are supposed to serve facts in a professional way, Church has a higher vocation of being ministers of truth. Church's role to be a 'medium' is very much theological and is characteristic to the Trinitarian communication which is an unceasing process. Its media model is Christ who is the messenger of God's love, as well as who channelise life and truth to everything in the created world. These principles have been delineated in the official teachings ranging from decrees, exhortations, and World Communications Day (WCD) messages since the Council of Vatican II.

Even as one accepts the fact that there had been a boom of communication in the Indian Church in the 70s and 80s a sharp analysis makes us conclude that

it was mostly reduced to infrastructure development such as publication houses, AV studios etc. The audience it addressed belong to mostly catholic faithful except in the case of some newspapers such as Deepika, a Malayalam daily.

A Kite Without Strings

The simplicity and ubiquity of social media has increasingly helped people to express their personal opinions, tastes and hobbies breaking the geographical barriers. Women, being second to none, came up to the social media with strong messages and a variety of their personal interests. However,



Courtesy: Manjul

Ecclesiastical leadership including the pastors have failed miserably to understand the language of post-modern generation. This has significantly affected the Church communication

Church personnel with an exception of a miniscule minority, are found to be absent in the digital media domain, albeit they own very expensive and sophisticated mobile devices.

Every year the Church celebrates the WCD to remind its faithful, professionals and the clergy about the duty of communications as well as communication of truth. However, the celebrations reduce to the WCD message, some posters or video reels, or to the maximum of a seminar lecture by some so called communication experts. While day after day it is becoming evident that no one can do away with communications, Church needs better approaches to communications and media.

Ecclesiastical leadership including the pastors have failed miserably to understand the language of post-modern generation. This has significantly affected the Church communication ranging from liturgical performance, homilies, Church communique, dissemination of facts through press releases, video statements, discussion forums and finally religious fiction. The body language of the pastors as well as the organisational language of the basic units of the Church is absolutely un-attractive for the present generation. Pastors direly need post-modern imagination as well as vocabulary.

Fake information

However, we cannot completely criticise that the pastors are an absolute non-presence in social media. A few bishops regularly communicate through their official web pages or social media platforms such as Facebook, or YouTube. Though most official websites of dioceses or congregations present outdated statistical data as well as static history, they do not communicate any relevant current themes related to spirituality, theology, social justice, or morality. The content of evangelical and charis-

matic media – print, electronic, or interactive – is unhealthy and unproductive as they are increasingly becoming Pentecostal in style and content.

Many priests do have Facebook account. But most of them use it to showcase their glamour shoots and as a platform to celebrate their birthdays, anniversaries etc. There are some priests who share brilliant homilies, biblical theological analysis and socio-political criticisms. However, a new set of priests, nuns and youth have emerged in the recent past who are very active in the social media but with Christian fundamentalist and communal extremism, who are characterised with Islamophobia and aligning with right wing Hindutva ideologies. It is surprising that the trend is prevalent in Kerala and, apparently, they are silently supported by the leadership. Whereas some fundamentalist groups have emerged recently with strong anti-Christian messages taking advantages of the Church, no formal ecclesiastical body has yet condemned them. Nevertheless bishops, popular charismatic preachers and organisations have been encouraging some, and some only support them.

The common trend among these groups is spread of lies, half-truths and fake information. It is a disservice to truth, whereas the Church is called to be ministers of truth. They spread ideas such as communal purity, putting women in bad light, spreading hate and instilling fear among faithful. This approach is absolutely against the communication principles of the Church as it denies truth itself which is God himself.

Polarised Agendas

It is shocking to learn that the Church, which would be perhaps the largest organization in India, has



polarised opinions about minority religious freedom and other social issues. Bishop Peter Machado of Bengaluru is very vocal about minority issues even being the voice of the persecuted Islamic community for their rights of religious dress while in Kerala bishops are almost anti-Islamic. They do not dare to speak for those communities, such as oppressed women, Dalits, or on other socio-political issues perpetrated by the right wing ruling class. How come the Church across India, which is under the aegis of CBCI, does not have one single voice regarding national issues?

Flawed Strategies

With regard to communication, the Church does not follow any standard, nor are its stalwarts experts. They think that communication is something like liturgical performance and pulpit preaching which no one questions. However, people are increasingly becoming politically correct and they expect socially responsible people to be politically correct. Some of the recent speeches delivered by bishops as well as high profile priests, and the press statements issued by ecclesiastical organisations suffer from want of clarity, data, and rationale. Spokespersons of the church are unskilled, ignorant and are only politically and communally motivated. These combined flaws reduce Church akin to opportunist political parties with vested agendas.

As Jesus has taught us, lips utter words from the fullness of heart. A terrible lack of docility to spirit, capacity to listen, critical thinking, sensitivity to the poor and marginalised has gripped the Church. We must say this is diabolical which the Church should overcome through continued renewal and submitting to the Holy Spirit. Pastors envision themselves

The Church needs to counter the post-truth mindset by upholding its authoritative and trustworthy position through proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life



Courtesy: Sritish Kumar

as managers and are unquestionable. This is because they view Church as a structure rather than people of God or God's communicative agency. When some issues arise, they panic first (a Frankenstein effect) and then resort to easy and temporary solutions.

Finally, the so-called communicators of the Church often do not have a heart and ear for listening others. The two important anti-dote for communicative pitfalls of the Church are: a) turn to Holy Spirit and renew themselves; and b) make Church more participatory and inclusive.

Without proper and effective communication, the Church is a big zero. This communication should be both internal and external. The Church needs to be more sensitive to Gospel values and its social teachings. It also needs to be well-versed in social developments occurring in the society. It has to respond to the present social milieu by taking a proactive approach in its communication strategies. The Church needs to counter the post-truth mindset by upholding its authoritative and trustworthy position through proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Church's communication must primarily rely on some technologies. It must not only get in touch with the secular society in general, but also with other minorities, persecuted and exploited class. Without this two-pronged communication approach, it risks having its voice being drowned out by a plethora of voices both inside and outside of the Church, many of which aim to disrupt unity within the Church as well as with the general public. ©

A Fearless Communicator

Titus Brandsma was fearless to the core and dared to take a position. He spoke out when everyone else was diplomatic

BY **IGNATIUS GONSALVES**

My Tryst with Titus Brandsma began way back in 1985. Pope John Paul the Second had beatified him on November 3. Yet I had not heard about him. Surely, I was not alone! But today I join the chorus of journalists world over, imploring Pope Francis to declare him Patron of journalists. We have St. Francis Sales as Patron for journalists and writers. Nothing wrong in having one more as we have St. Francis Xavier and St. Teresa of Liseux as Patrons of the Missions.

Brandsma's name popped up by chance during a chat with Anna Granda, my journalist-friend, at her residence in Munich, Germany. It was late November 1985. She even 'dared' to take me to the infamous Dachau concentration camp where he was martyred on 26 July 1942.

Indeed, it was a daring act from her part as "no German would normally encourage anyone to visit a concentration camp as they are haunting witnesses of our horrendous crimes against humanity." But Anna was an activist Christian journalist who believed that it is "Truth that sets us free".

Incidentally, all Nazi concentration camps have welcome arches where it is inscribed: "Arbeit Macht Frei", meaning 'work sets you free'. But it didn't simply happen. The cruel irony was that it led the inmates to death.

One of the disturbing images that got deeply etched in my mind during my college days was the one showing a group of German Bishops offering the Nazi style salute to Adolf Hitler. No wonder, I had succumbed to the propaganda engineered by the erstwhile Soviet empire that "the Church was silent, submissive and totally passive". Other anti-Church vested interests too had made good use of the above-mentioned photograph, mainly among the youth.

Then came 'the great John Paul era'. The youth began to flock back to the Church. Global Youth Festivals attended by the Pope began creating world records in terms of the number of participants. Pontifical Council for Social Communication was estab-

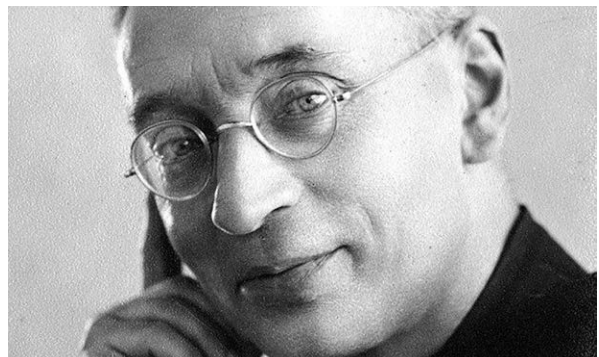


lished with a professional journalist-turned Archbishop John P. Foley (later Cardinal) at the helm. Young Journalists were encouraged and welcomed. John Paul, now a Saint, repeatedly exhorted the world, especially the youth: "Do not be afraid." The rest is history. Anna and I belonged to that era.

The crash of Soviet empire, the Vatican opening its post-1939 closed archives, and Pope John Paul encouraging research on martyrs of the Nazi-Fascist era, have busted several myths regarding the Church's involvement or non-involvement. Remember, Pope John Paul's apostolic letter "Tertio Millennio Adveniente" compares wartime martyrs like Titus Brandsma to the martyrs of the early Church.

This is the setting of my first visit to the Dachau. The exhibits inside the camp depicted horrors beyond words. Coming out, my first urge was to make a confession which I did. How could humans be so cruel to other humans! As a human I felt guilty. I have made pilgrimages to the Dachau concentration camp four more times, learning a lot about Titus Brandsma and other martyrs and the heroic witness and resistance of countless others against an intrinsically evil ideology.

Half of Poland's Catholic priests, monks and nuns suffered repression during the six years of World War II, with more than 2,800 killed by Nazi and Soviet hands. Of the clergy of all denominations incarcerated at Dachau camp, 1,773 were priests from Poland of whom 868 were killed. There were priests and reli-



gious from other nations including Germans.

Catholic clergy of various nationalities who died as martyrs in other concentration camps include St. Maximilian Kolbe and St. Edith Stein. An Italian Catholic from Savona, Blessed Tresa Bracco, was killed resisting rape by a Nazi soldier. Blessed Emilian Kovteh died at the Majdanek concentration camp and was one of the 21 Ukrenians beatified as martyrs in 2001.

Blessed Sara Salkahazi who founded Hungary's Catholic Women's League was shot and tossed into river Danube in December 1944. Her crime: sheltering Jewish women and children in her Budapest convent. Other beatified martyrs include 11 Polish nuns shot by the Gestapo at Navahrudak, in the present day Belarus, in Aug 1943 after the nuns volunteered to die in place of local villagers.

Though they didn't die as martyrs, the heroic resistance and witness offered by Blessed Rupert Mayer, a German Jesuit; Blessed Clemens von Gallen, then Bishop of Munster; and Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber, then Archbishop of Munich, deserve special mention. Not all German Bishops shouted hail Hitler!

The life and witness of Titus Brandsma and his canonization have special relevance to Journalism, particularly for Journalists in India. His life and holiness challenge us on four counts.

1. As a journalist he was fearless and dared to take a position. He was the editor of a local newspaper and the ecclesiastical advisor to Catholic journalists working in about 30 Dutch newspapers. He spoke out when everyone else was diplomatic.

2. His insistence on authenticity and academic depth. In addition to his journalistic work, Titus Brandsma was an academic. He taught in several universities in the Netherlands and translated the works of St. Theresa of Avila, a mystic and Doctor of the Church. He was co-founder of the University of Nijmegen (now Radboud University) where he taught and later served as Rector Magnificus.

3. He was a hardcore professional who always upgraded his skills so that he could be of better use for the Church and the society at large. It was Brandsma who drafted the much-hailed pastoral letter of the then Dutch Bishops Conference, condemning anti-Semitism. The Bishops' Conference in that letter contrasted Catholicism and Nazism, showing how the two ideologies were incompatible.

4. He not only fought evil tooth and nail but also inspired and encouraged others to emulate him. He

An Award for Fearless Journalism

Titus Brandsma Award, often hailed as 'The Catholic Pulitzer', is one of the most prestigious recognitions in the world of Media. It was instituted in 1992, barely six years after Pope John Paul the Second, now Saint, beatifying the scholarly Dutch Carmelite Communicator who fiercely fought the Nazi ideology.

Brandsma died a martyr in the notorious concentration camp at Dachau in Germany for stoutly championing Press Freedom and resolutely refusing to print Fascist propaganda.

The Titus Brandsma Award was established by three groups working in partnership: The Dutch Catholic Bishops Conference, Union Catholique Internationale de la Presse (UCIP) i.e. the world body of professionals in secular and religious media founded in 1927, and the Dutch Province of Carmelites (O-Carm) "to promote, honour and celebrate fearless and principled Journalism".

The award consists of a presentation certificate, cash prize of 1500 Euros, Air fare and two weeks hospitality in Europe for a study tour. It used to be presented triennially along with the World Congress of UCIP.

The first Asian to win the coveted award was veteran journalist and internationally reputed media-trainer Ignatius Gonsalves, currently the President of ICPA (Indian Catholic Press Association). That was way back in 1998. Among the winners one finds people like Tom Kamara, a key figure in the Liberian freedom movement; Prof. Andres Canisales, eminent Human Rights activist from Venezuela; and Svet Evangelia, the Russian magazine that became a rock of refuge to Christians during the disintegration of the Soviet Empire.

Due to a variety of reasons that include administrative anomalies and alleged lack of docility, the UCIP-Vatican relations became strained and the Vatican on 23 March 2011 ordered UCIP to drop the word 'Catholic' from its name. The Dutch Bishops' Conference also opted to be out. Thus ended the story of the original award though a group re-organising as International Christian Organisation of the Media (ICOM) began to present an award in the name of Titus Brandsma. Anto Akkara, the firebrand Journalist who champions the cause of Kandhamal victims, was the winner in 2013.

was arrested and transported to Dachau for trying to persuade other Dutch Catholic newspapers not to print Nazi propaganda.

Brandsma was a hero until the last. He had no complaints. He was executed by a lethal injection. He forgave the nurse who administered it and gave her a rosary as a parting gift. Though not a believer at that time, she later became a Catholic. ☺

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IGNATIUS GONSALVES is a recipient of the Titus Brandsma Award and the President of the Indian Catholic Press Association

Diversionsary tactics **Secularism, my foot!**

The basic structure of the Constitution doctrine is safe only when those who believe in concepts like equality, liberty and fraternity are in power

BY **AJ PHILIP**

One thing is clear. There is no secularism in the country. Those who thought that it was a part of the basic structure of the Constitution and it was, therefore, inviolable have been proved wrong. It is so fragile that even a lower-level judicial functionary can wreck it with a minimal assault.

That is what Varanasi witnessed in recent days. There is a law enacted in 1991 which froze the status of all religious structures as on the day India became independent in 1947. Of course, the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was exempted from the Act as the matter awaited a judicial scrutiny.

The Act remained strong for nearly two decades. Courts refused to take cognisance of complaints and petitions that questioned the legitimacy of certain places of worship. All this changed when a five-member Bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi gave its final verdict on the Ayodhya case.



The verdict endorsed almost all the claims made by the Muslims. Yet, the spot where the Babri Masjid remained for more than 400 years was given to the Hindus. An attempt was made to mollify the Muslims by offering them an alternative site to build a mosque.

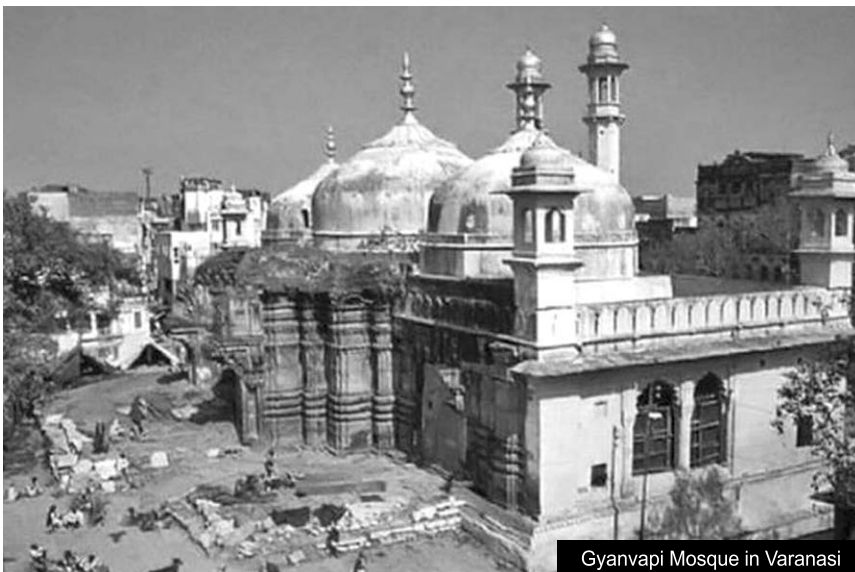
Of course, the Muslims felt cheated. They remembered the promise PV Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister had given that the mosque would be rebuilt there itself. They accepted the verdict as stoically as possible.

It was the first time in the history of the Supreme Court that the verdict was not signed by the judges concerned. What's worse, it did not say who wrote the judgement with which the four others concurred. After the verdict, the Chief Justice took the fellow judges to a five-star hotel where choice wine was served to them.

It was, perhaps, the first time that judges of the apex court celebrated a judgement by drinking wine

which is against the concept of prohibition that the Directive Principles uphold. The laying of a silver brick as the foundation stone of the Ram temple at Ayodhya by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was extraordinary in many respects. It was the first time the chief executive of a secular nation laid the foundation stone of a temple!

To be fair to Modi, he paid scant regard to secularism when, on his first visit abroad as PM, he donated 2000 kgs of sandalwood to





Modi as Prime Minister on his first visit to Nepal prayed at Pashupatinath temple, granted Rs.25 crore to build a 'dharamshala' in the temple complex and offered 2,500 kg of sandalwood

the Pashupatinath temple at Kathmandu and gifted a special edition of the Bhagwat Gita to the Japanese prime minister and took a visiting dignitary to show him the evening Aarati at Varanasi.

Modi never showed even a modicum of secular pretensions while it encouraged his followers to throw secularism to the winds. The courts also began behaving differently. The apex court did not deem it necessary to review such decisions as reducing the status of Jammu and Kashmir to Union Territories and enactment of citizenship laws that questioned the country's secular status.

It was against this backdrop that the Supreme Court accepted a petition that challenged the 1991 law that froze the status of all disputed shrines. That the court wanted to hear the petition was itself an indication of how things were moving in the country.

The Supreme Court has judges who argued for the Hindutva organisations when the Ayodhya issue came up before the apex court. Such a judge may even become the Chief Justice. Of course, it is unfair to believe that a judge who argued for his clients while he was a lawyer would give a verdict on the basis of his old arguments.

Given the extraordinary circumstances in which the 1991 law was enacted, the Varanasi judge should have rejected the petition of five Hindu women that they wanted to worship in a particular area of the Gyanvapi mosque. It could have just dismissed the petition. Instead, it accepted it and ordered a vid-

eo-graphic survey of the whole masjid for which it appointed three persons. It did not pay any heed to the complaint that one of the persons entrusted with the survey was a lawyer, who appeared for the Hindus in a similar case.

He did enough damage, much before the commission could complete the video-graphic survey. He allegedly told the women petitioners that a two-foot Shivling was found in the ablution tank at the mosque. The dispute in Varanasi is at least 400 years old.

There is a Malayalam saying about a person looking for a rope to tie the calf when he hears that a bullock has given birth to a calf. Like that person, the judge ordered immediate closure of that portion of the mosque. He did not think it necessary to hear the Muslims.

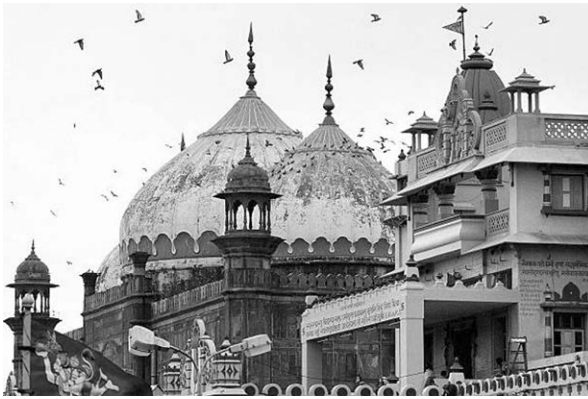
It did not even occur to the learned judge that he should have waited for the commission to give its final report before taking a decision. The Muslims later clarified that what was claimed to be Shivling was actually a part of the fountain installed at the ablution tank.

The Muslims had to approach the Supreme Court to secure the mosque against insensitive and non-sensical decisions. Ultimately, nobody knows how things will take the ultimate course. Will the mosque remain or will it meet the fate of the Babri Masjid? The point to be noted is that secularism is as strong as the whim of a judge.

Taking his cue from the goings-on in Varanasi, a judge in Mathura has accepted a petition that seeks to remove the mosque from the Srikrishna Janmasthan temple premises at Mathura. Again, it is a wanton disregard of the 1991 law that froze the status of the mosque.

This should be seen in the context of the claim that the Taj Mahal was a Hindu temple and there are

Dr Ambedkar had once predicted that the Constitution will remain sacred only as long as those wielding authority respect it



A judge in Mathura has accepted a petition that seeks to remove the mosque from the Sri Krishna Janmasthan temple premises at Mathura

several Hindu religious objects in the closed rooms of one of the world's wonders that attract the maximum number of tourists to India.

The judge did not bother to find out why the rooms were closed. The walls in the rooms are also made of marble and if thousands of people are allowed to enter them everyday, the carbon dioxide they exhale would damage the walls.

It is the fear of chemical reaction that can powder the marbles that forced the Archaeological Survey of India to close the 22 rooms. There are fears that if the Taj is opened for inspection, mischief-makers can claim that some Hindu objects were recovered from there. That is what they feared in Varanasi when the video-graphic survey was ordered.

Such fears are not unwarranted. They all remember how some mischief-makers planted an idol in the Babri Masjid and claimed that it appeared on its own. It was a patently false claim.

The planting of the idol had the blessing of the then district magistrate, a brilliant but mischievous KK Nayar, who later quit the IAS and, in due course, became a Parliament member on the Hindu Mahasabha ticket. He will always remain an icon of the Hindutva forces.

Some cadres of the Sangh Parivar have already found "tell-tale" evidence of Qutub Minar having been built by a Hindu King who wanted to see the Sun and the moon at close quarters. They say that the area is strewn with Hindu objects like idols and pillars patterned after lotus flowers.

They have already renamed Qutub Minar as Vishnu Pillar. Not many people know that the Taj Mahal is taller than the Qutub by about one metre. A temple

at Gurugram is being re-modified to make it taller than the Taj.

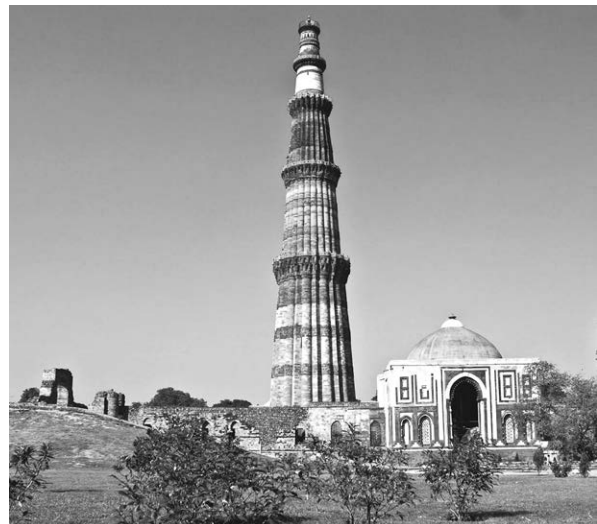
Around the same time a group of people demonstrated against retaining the name of Emperor Shahjahan for a road in New Delhi. Those who thought that they had objection only to the name of Emperor Aurangzeb are thoroughly mistaken. The leader of the Delhi unit of the BJP wants all Muslim names of roads and public places removed.

He is not wide off the mark. In Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has already changed the names of many such places. Before long, there would be no Muslim names. That raises the question, how was all this accomplished without changing the secular character of the Constitution.

Dr Ambedkar had once predicted that the Constitution will remain sacred only as long as those wielding authority respect it. When Modi became Prime Minister he bowed before a statue of the Constitution.

Actually, there is no need to worship the Constitution. Like there is no need to worship women and young girls. What the women need is respect as equal citizens of the country who should not be discriminated against on grounds of gender. Similarly, there is no need to worship the Constitution.

What is needed is to uphold the provisions of the Constitution at all times. The Prime Minister is now busy building a very large Parliament House with large rooms for ministers and MPs. Democracy flourishes not when the Parliament House is made larger.



Hindu groups protested outside Qutb Minar recently, demanded renaming of the monument to Vishnu Stambh



A petition has been filed in the Allahabad High Court, seeking a fact-finding inquiry into the history of the Taj Mahal

The military junta in Myanmar built one of the largest capitals in the world, far from Rangoon. The country has a state-of-the-art parliament building but has this made the country a better nation? It is the same country which killed thousands of Rohingyas and threw them out of the country claiming that they are Bangladeshis. Support to the military junta did not save Aung San Suu Kyi from a corruption case.

There was a time when Prime Ministers like Jawaharlal Nehru attended Parliament sessions and took copious notes from the speeches made by leaders like Madhu Limaye and AB Vajpayee. That is how democracy thrives.

Modi seldom attends Parliament. As Chief Minister also, he had a poor record in this regard. However, he wants to be remembered as the one who built the largest Parliament, perhaps, in the world. Alas, it won't make him a greater democrat!

The various Articles of the Constitution are all great. It is the laws that are enacted which are

When Keshavananda Bharati case came up before the apex court, it decreed that the basic structure of the Constitution can never be altered

against the spirit of the Constitution. When Keshavananda Bharati case came up before the apex court, it decreed that the basic structure of the Constitution can never be altered. A judge was asked to define the basic structure at that time.

He replied that when the basic structure of the Constitution was tampered with, the court would respond. It is now obvious that the basic structure doctrine is safe only when those who believe

in concepts like equality, liberty and fraternity are in power.

The nation saw how under Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi the court thought fit to look the other way when serious questions that challenge Federalism, corruption in high places and religious freedom rattled the nation. The apex court's word is considered the ultimate. It is not because it has the wisest judges. It is because there is no other court above it.

So when BJP leader-turned-Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu got a verdict from the Supreme Court in a road rage case that amounted to man slaughter, he thought the case was over. He was asked to pay a fine of Rs 1000. Now when the case came up again, he was punished by the same court with imprisonment of one year. How can the same person be punished twice in the same case?

This shows the non-application of mind by those in judicial authority. A person convicted of terrorism was released recently by the same Supreme Court which upheld the conviction a few years ago. Worse, one of the former judges who found him guilty of terrorism has invited him to his house at Kottayam.

Justice is supposed to be blind. Blind because in the dispensation of justice it does not matter whether the accused is Hindu or Muslim, man or woman, rich or poor, upper caste or lower caste and educated or illiterate. Alas, Lady Justice uses her eyes to determine which provision of the law should be applied against which person! ©

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Time to end Sedition Law

Section 124 A of the IPC has been grossly and shamelessly misused by various central and state governments to stifle dissenting voices

BY RAMESH MENON

If India has to evolve as a throbbing democracy, there should be no place for Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, commonly known as the sedition law. India has enough laws to deal with sedition. But the sedition law has been grossly and shamelessly misused by various central and state governments to stifle dissenting voices and anything critical about its institutions, governance, and functioning.

It is a tool to punish those who speak truth to power. 124A has no relevance in a democracy. It has been used to suppress dissent, criminalise political criticism, and tag those who speak up as anti-national in the last few years. It was repeatedly used to settle scores with politicians, students, human rights activists, lawyers, and journalists.

According to Article 14, a media and research group, over 13,000 were booked in 867 cases in the last 12 years. Interestingly, only 13 of them were found guilty in sedition cases. It eloquently showed how the law had become a tool to intimidate and create fear as these cases had no evidence to stand



on. It was to throw people into jail for excessive periods.

Bihar led from the top with maximum cases, followed by Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Karnataka.

In various judgments, the court has held that it can be sedition only if the statement or written words had the potential to result in disorder or violence. But, the new normal in India is arresting people who speaks or writes against a political entity in power or the government.

In 1962, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court in the Kedar Nath Singh case ruled that unless there was a call to violence or an intention to disrupt public order, it could not be considered sedition. But, as events proved down the years, various state and central governments have used it to beat dissent. Here are some examples: The Assam police charged journalist Anirban Roy Choudhury with sedition for writing about a lawyer who was charged with sedition. Navneet Rana MP and husband Ravi Rana MLA were accused of sedition for saying that they would recite the Hanuman Chalisa outside the Chief Minister's house. An accused can spend around 50 days in prison until a trial court grants bail. It could be around 200 days until a High Court does so.

The court has held that it can be sedition only if the statement or written words had the potential to result in disorder or violence. But, the new normal in India is arresting people who speaks or writes against a political entity in power or the government



The British spun the law with the specific aim to quell the rising demand for independence. Many freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were jailed under this law. Even after independence, the powers-that-be for the last seven-and-a-half decades did not think it apt to remove it as it was a convenient tool to terrorise the Opposition. Instead, it was amended to make it more stringent. It now provides for a maximum punishment of life imprisonment. The police can arrest you without even a warrant. It is a cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable offence.

When petitioners that included stalwarts like former minister and BJP leader Arun Shourie challenged it in the Supreme Court, the judges saw no reason to let it continue as governments had abused it. They said so in clear words.

Earlier, Chief Justice N V Ramana said that the continuance of this law was a serious threat to the functioning of institutions and individual liberty. Justice Sanjay Kaul had also noted that expression of views different from the government could not be termed seditious.

The Supreme Court pointed out that we have enough laws to deal with situations that would amount to sedition without a specific law. Moreover, it went against the basic principle of freedom of speech.

The government had defended the law, but when it sensed the court's view, it agreed to review it. The court has decided to keep the judgment pending until the review is done. It did well to say that until then, no one could be arrested under the Act, and those under trial could approach the courts for relief. All future proceedings under Section 124A will be kept in abeyance.

It must have seemed like a breath of fresh air to thousands feeling stifled about small things like making a statement, putting out a social media post, and so on. People have been booked for ridiculous things like making harmless speeches, social media posts, and even chanting Hanuman Chalisa in the recent past.

Between 2010 and 2021, the police have used the section to book numerous student leaders, politicians, activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens to silence them and send out a message that this could happen to you and me.

Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees the right to free speech and expression, which means that



Criticism of the legislature, executive, judiciary, bureaucracy, or the armed forces could not be termed sedition. If we stifled such voices, India would become a police state

dissent has been accepted as an essential constituent of a democracy. The mere expression of views unpalatable to the government in power is not tantamount to sedition and cannot be seen as a heinous crime that endangers the nation.

Deepak Gupta, a former Supreme Court judge, said that criticism of the legislature, executive, judiciary, bureaucracy, or the armed forces could not be termed sedition. If we stifled such voices, India would become a police state, he added.

While the Opposition hailed the stand of the Supreme Court, asking the government to reconsider the present sedition law, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said that the court must respect the government and the legislature and that "Lakshman Rekha" must not be crossed by anybody. That, in essence, should tell us what the government thought when it got time from the court to review the law. ¹⁰

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RAMESH MENON is a recipient of the Ramnath Goenka Award for Excellence in Journalism. He is an author of six books, has produced numerous documentary films, is an educator and editor-in-chief of The Leaflet.

Drifting Towards a Violent Society

It is shocking that according to a recent survey every third police personnel think that it is “natural” for a mob to punish “culprits” in a case of “cow slaughter”

BY JACOB PEENIKAPARAMBIL

It is very sad to observe that more and more people of India, the land of the apostle of peace and non-violence Mahatma Gandhi, are taking law into their hands and indulge in mob violence. It appears that mob lynching has become a daily occurrence and the rulers in particular are not serious to prevent such inhuman and cruel incidents. Often the mob lynching is based on prejudices and unverified information; fake news and hate news contribute to the increase in such incidents.

Three tragic incidents that took place in the month of May indicate how violence has seeped into the psyche of Indians. Some people who indulge in such violence believe that they are performing a sacred religious duty. Out of the three incidents two took place in Madhya Pradesh and one in Maharashtra, two of them are related to suspected cow slaughter.



The first incident took place in Seoni district of Madhya Pradesh on May 6. Two tribal men were hacked to death allegedly by Bajrang Dal members on the suspicion of slaughter of cows. As per the report in the *Indian Express*, SP (Seoni) Kumar Prateek said the police have not been able to ascertain if the accused are Bajrang Dal members or not. On the other hand, Tapasvi Upadhyay, the Seoni district chief of Bajrang Dal, said: “Many people are connected to our organisation and it is difficult to give a definite answer that these were our men. They must have attended events hosted by us but that does not make them members.”

As per the report on 6th May, one of the accused, Deepak Avidhya (38), introduces himself on his Facebook account as the “Bajrang Dal Gau raksha pramukh”. He has also posted a series of warnings in Hindi: “We will not allow Seoni to become a slaughterhouse, even if we have to do a fierce campaign. Even if a brick is laid at Seoni, then the Bajrang Dal, in coordination with the entire Hindu society, will do a fierce campaign.” The family members of the other five accused also acknowledged that they are members of Bajrang Dal and all of them are school



Two tribal men were beaten to death while another was seriously injured allegedly by Bajrang dal members on suspicion of cow slaughter under Kurai police station of Seoni in MP

Between 2012 and 2019 at least 133 cow-related attacks were reported nationwide, leading to 50 deaths and more than 290 injuries. About 98% or 130 of the crimes took place after 2014, when the BJP came to power at the Centre



Every third Indian police personnel think that it is “natural” or “to a large extent” or “somewhat” for a mob to punish “culprits” when there is a case of “cow slaughter”

dropouts and involved in some sundry occupations to earn their livelihood.

The second incident of mob lynching also happened in Madhya Pradesh on May 13 in Alirajpur district. A mob set a mini truck on fire and threw the driver into the fire after beating him up brutally for hitting a minor girl. A video of the incident went viral on social media in which a mob could be seen beating the driver and then throwing him into the fire. According to Alirajpur Superintendent of Police Manoj Kumar, “The driver Magan Singh, a resident of Jamali village of Jobat tehsil, was passing from Chhoti Poll village when he accidentally hit an eight-year-old girl, who died on the spot.”

The third incident of mob lynching took place in Raigad district of the neighbouring Maharashtra state on 6th May; but the report appeared in the *Indian Express* on 16th May. As per the report, a 35-year-old man, accused of stealing cattle, was beaten to death by a mob in a village in Raigad district. His two accomplices were also injured in the attack. The victim has been identified as Intzaar Ali, a resident of Thane.

Any sensitive human being should be concerned about increasing violence in society and search for its causes and think how it could be prevented. An article published in *IndiaSpend* by its team on 28th August 2019 throws some light on the reasons for increasing cow related violence. The article has highlighted the nature of the cow related violence and some of the causes based on a survey conducted

by Common Cause, a non-profit organization and Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, a think tank, based in Delhi. The survey report was part of the ‘Status of Policing in India Report 2019’.

As per the report, between 2012 and 2019 at least 133 cow-related attacks were reported nationwide, leading to 50 deaths and more than 290 injuries. About 98% or 130 of the crimes took place after 2014, when the BJP came to power at the Centre under the leadership of Narendra Modi.

Another significant finding of the survey is that Muslims comprised 57% of the victims, Dalits accounted for 9% and Hindus formed 9% of those who were attacked in cow related hate violence. Among those murdered, 74% were Muslims and 20% were Hindus, including Dalits.

A shocking finding of the survey is that in 37 of the 133 cow-related hate crimes, the police filed cases against the victims of such attacks under the prevailing cattle-protection laws in the respective states. For example, in the case of lynching of Pehlu Khan of Rajasthan, the police filed a charge sheet for cow smuggling against the deceased who was lynched by a mob of self-styled *gau rakshaks*, who were eventually acquitted.

The most significant and shocking finding of the survey is that every third Indian police personnel think that it is “natural” or “to a large extent” or “somewhat” for a mob to punish “culprits” when there is a case of “cow slaughter”. Jharkhand had the highest percentage (66%) of police personnel who said such violence was “natural” or “large extent” or “somewhat”, followed by Madhya Pradesh (63%), Karnataka (57%) and Andhra Pradesh (52%). If such an overwhelming number of police personnel think that mob lynching is a “natural” act for certain crimes, it is natural to assume why they would not try to prevent or act against it. Moreover, the survey also has found that 50% of the police feel that “Muslims are prone to crime”.

One can understand from the findings of the survey that Muslims have been the main targets of the cow-related violence and the law has been used to further harass the victims rather than to protect and give justice to them, and the police have been biased against the Muslims.

In another article published in *The Wire* on September 7, 2019 under the title, “Why does mob lynching still continue unabated?” the author Mehtap Alam has explained some of the reasons for it.

One of the reasons is the failure of the Parliament to enact a law to deal with the crime of lynching as per the directives given by the Supreme Court in July 2018 and the failure of the state governments to comply with an 11-point prescription of Supreme Court, which included state governments designating a nodal officer for taking measures to prevent incidents of mob violence and lynching. It is to be mentioned against this backdrop that in August 2019, the Rajasthan Assembly passed an anti-lynching bill with the provisions for life imprisonment and a fine ranging from Rs. 1 lakh to 5 lakhs in cases where mob violence led to a victim's death.

Another reason pointed out by the author is that the idea of "instant justice" has become immensely popular in society. This means that society feels duty-bound to intervene in matters without even

in lynching cases are not convicted. Some of the accused people in these cases are promoted in the party hierarchy and some are given tickets to fight elections to the local bodies. No action has been taken by the administration to book majority of the Dharam Sansad members who called upon the majority community to take up arms and indulge in genocide of a particular community. The root cause of increasing violence against the minorities and weaker sections in India appears to be the result of infiltration of the majoritarian ideology into different levels of society coupled with justification of any kind of violence to achieve its goals. It has also infected the democratic institutions, bureaucracy, especially law enforcing agencies, investigation agencies and even the lower levels of judiciary.

At this crucial junction, the Opposition parties are in disarray. They are not able to come to a common platform to save the democratic institutions and to stop the slide towards dangerous polarization of Indian society due to hate speeches and incidents of mob lynching. The recent Chintan Shivir organized by the Congress did an analysis of the current political and economic situation of the country and severely criticized the government and the ruling party for the increasing hatred and violence against the minorities and the silence of the 'eloquent Prime Minister'. But it could not present a convincing roadmap for reinventing itself and putting the nation on the right track and thereby regain the trust and confidence of people.

What is happening in the country is diametrically opposed to the core values of Indian Constitution and the Reign of God which Jesus has envisaged. The followers of Jesus have a great responsibility to educate people of all sections, especially the youth, on the core values of the Indian Constitution. Because of their prophetic responsibility they have to speak against spreading hatred and rampant use of violence by the non-state actors and the failure of the state and its different wings to protect the fundamental rights of citizens. It is very sad to observe that some Christians are indulging in the monstrous crime of sending or forwarding hate messages against a particular religious community. They are in fact betraying Jesus. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Any sensitive human being should be concerned about increasing violence in society and search for its causes and think how it could be prevented

understanding the issue. "Lynching happens when a mob gets together and they feel that they have a responsibility towards society and that the police or any administrative body can't do justice to that responsibility," says Anuja Trehan Kapur, psychologist-cum-Supreme Court lawyer,

The third reason is the inordinate delay in settling cases due to the compressed criminal justice system and pendency of more than 4 crore cases in different courts of India. Hence people have a tendency to assume that the culprits often escape punishment and they are prone to take law into their hands.

One can notice an undeclared impunity to those who commit such crimes. BJP MP Jayant Sinha in 2018 was seen garlanding men who were released on bail in a lynching case. Most of the accused

Indian Catholics welcome Pope's move on religious brothers

Indian Catholics, both lay people and religious, have welcomed Pope Francis ushering in equality and fraternity in religious congregations that have priests and brothers as members.

"It is not a small technical or legal change but a profound shift with enormous theological and spiritual implications," Delhi-based Jesuit moral theologian Father Stanislaus Alla told Matters India May 19, a day after the Pope promulgated a rescript that offers dispensation from a Church law that stipulates that only priests could head such religious congregations. The Pope's move, the Jesuit theologian adds, "distinguishes the power of ordination and the ability to lead and govern and recognizes them as different spiritual gifts. Put simply, it overcomes discrimination in religious life and serves as a great equalizer," explains the priest who teaches in Delhi's Vidyajyoti College of Theology.

For Capuchin Father Suresh Mathew, the rescript is "a much awaited reform" and "a sign of equality and true fraternity" that his congregation has been requesting the Vatican for long. Father Mathew's congregation has both priests and brothers and the new change gives lay brothers "equal responsibility in religious congregations. It will also put an end to clerical domination. Fraternity now will go beyond words to action. Synodality speaks of walking together. Until now, brothers have been left behind."

Chhotebhai, convener of Indian Christian Forum, a laity group, sees "a natural progression that non-clerics (Brothers) be accepted as major superiors of men's religious orders."

The lay leader recalls the Montfort Brothers getting permission from the Vatican in 1990s to ordain some of their members as priests to minister to their community. In another development, the Conference of Religious India elected Christian Brother Philip Pinto as its president, a post until reserved for priests. "Now an Apostolic Carmel sister is the CRI President," he points out.

Salesian Brother P A Jose welcomes the papal gesture as "an overdue change." The historic decision "will help us Salesians live and work together really as brothers sharing Salesian life as equals," he told Matters India.

Presentation Sister Dorothy Fernandes too finds "a real welcome change" in the canon law. "By the very fact of baptism, we all share in the priesthood of Jesus. This change is a way forward to become inclusive and breaking the bonds of division," says the national secretary of the Forum of Religious for Justice and Peace, an advocacy group for Catholic religious. Sister Fernandes also called for the need to revisit other canons that enslave and work towards renewing the face and image of the Church. "My other concern is that this first move towards equality among the same gender also needs rectification in the other gender too," she added.

According to Father Stanislaus, the change states that to be a leader in the Church one need not have the power of ordination.

He further said: "A good leader (of the faithful or of religious community -as a superior or a provincial or a general) need not be an ordained person. Priests are called uniquely and serve differently and priesthood need not be clubbed with authority. The faithful look forward to be served by good and holy and committed priests. In many ways, clericalism exposed the nexus between power and priesthood and this change will try to counter it, in a small measure." The change, if seen from the view of human dignity, rights and privileges, also corrects a distorted notion that has been prevalent for centuries that compared to priests brothers are second class citizens in the religious life, he says.

The Jesuit finds the change going with the overarching Synodal theme that places all of the Catholics on the same platform, based on the baptism, the great equalizer. He points out that the director of Vatican Observatory is Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, under whose leadership many others including some priests work. Father Stanislaus says the change could trigger vocations to Brotherhood. "Young men may join religious life with the assurance that they would not be discriminated but provided opportunities to blossom," he added.

The Jesuits hopes the Indian religious leaders would not set aside the change with "lame excuses" such as our 'Indian culture is different,' 'our people are not ready for this.' (Courtesy: Mattersindia)

From Death Row to Freedom

Perarivalan's three-decade-long legal battle shows how unjust the Indian system of crime and punishment is. All for buying two batteries

BY JOSEPH MALIAKAN

Perarivalan was arrested on 11 June 1991 at the age of 19. His crime: Bought two nine-volt golden power cells for Sivarasan, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) man who masterminded the conspiracy to assassinate former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The cells were used in the bomb that killed Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumpudur in Tamil Nadu on 21 May 1991.

Perarivalan was sentenced to death by a Terrorists And Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) Court in 1998, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1999. In August 2011, the Madras High Court stayed the execution order. Around this time, Perarivalan's mother Ammal started building a nationwide movement against death penalty visiting prisons across the country with a badge pinned on her saree, *Marana Thandnai Ozhipom* (Abolish

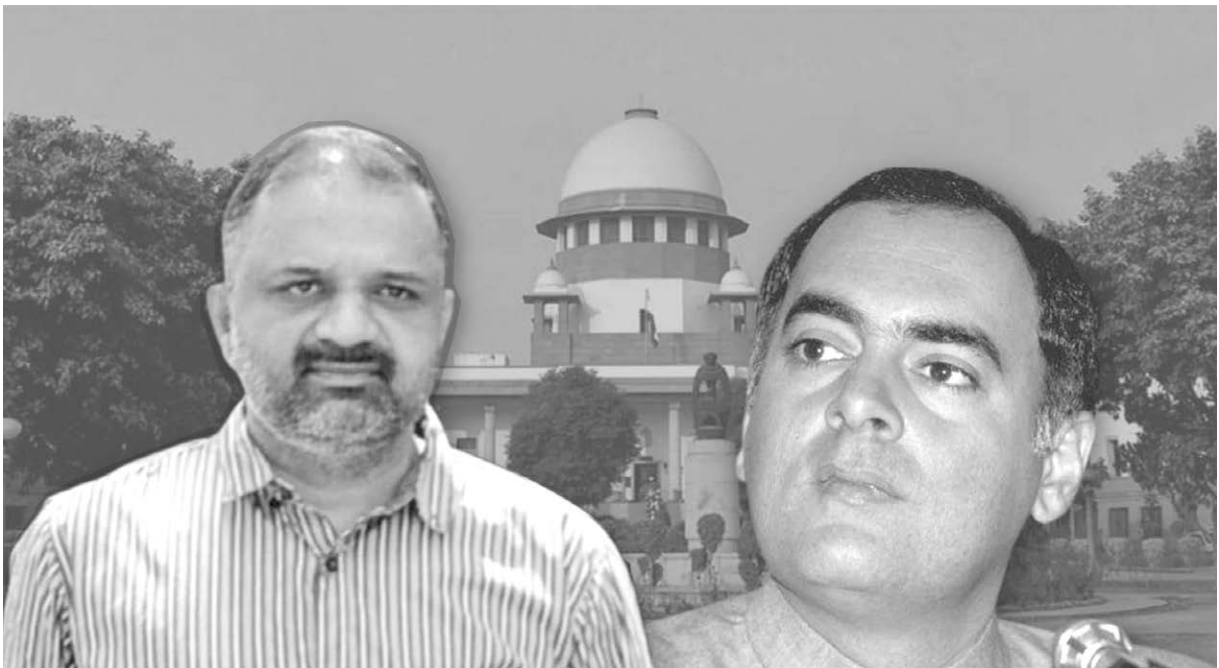


Capital Punishment). On 18 February 2014 the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by the Supreme Court.

The case in the apex court was part of a 2015 remission plea submitted by Perarivalan to the Tamil Nadu Governor, seeking release under Article 161 of the Constitution. On not getting any response

from the Governor, Perarivalan had moved the Supreme Court.

On 18 May 2022, Perarivalan was "set at liberty forthwith" by the Supreme Court after 31 years in prison, using its extraordinary powers "for doing complete justice" under Article 142 of the Constitution. Perarivalan had pleaded for release in accordance with the recommendation made by the Tamil Nadu government in September 2018. The Governor sat on the recommendation for two-and-a-half years



before sending it to President Ram Nath Kovind in February 2021 who also sat on it.

On 18th May, the Supreme Court ruled that it is “well settled that the advice of the State Cabinet is binding on the Governor in the exercise of his powers (to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions) under Article 161 of the Constitution”, and that the “non-exercise of his powers under Article 161 or inexplicable delay in exercise of such power not attributable to the prisoner is subject to judicial review.”

The SC order also pointed out “the reference of the recommendation of the Tamil Nadu Cabinet by the Governor to the President of India two-and-a-half years after such recommendation had been made is without any constitutional backing and is inimical to the scheme of our Constitution.”

The reference of the recommendation of the Tamil Nadu Cabinet by the Governor to the President of India two-and-a-half years after such recommendation had been made is without any constitutional backing and is inimical to the scheme of our Constitution

In fact, the Governor came under severe criticism by the Madras High Court in July 2020. The HC brought to the notice of the Governor that no time limit had been prescribed for the constitutional authority to decide on such issues only “because of the faith and trust attached to the constitutional post. “If such authority fails to take a decision in a reasonable time, then the court will be constrained to interfere.”

The SC Bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao, B.R. Gawai and A.S. Bopana also disapproved of the Tamil Nadu Governor sending to the President the recommendation of the State Cabinet to remit the remaining part of the convict’s sentence. The Bench refused to accept the Union Government’s argument that the

appropriate government to decide the remission of sentence is the Union Government.

Where both the State and the Union had the power to make laws, the Union government’s power will take precedence only if executive power had been expressly conferred on the Union under the Constitution or the law made by the Parliament, failing which the executive power of the State remained intact.

The Bench also said that in so far as offences under section 302 IPC are concerned, in the absence of any specific provision under the Constitution or under any law made by the Parliament expressly conferring executive power on the Union, the executive power of the State would extend, irrespective of whether the subject matter of section 302 is considered to be covered by an entry in the concurrent list.

On 9 March this year, the Supreme Court had granted bail to Perarivalan taking into account the fact that he had spent three decades in jail. In his struggle to get freedom, Perarivalan had the support of two former Supreme Court judges.

Former Supreme Court Judge V.R. Krishna Iyer, with whom Perarivalan was in touch with until Iyer’s death, wrote in 2006: “His soul is precious, his values noble, his jail life has not made him a criminal.”

Justice K. T. Thomas who headed the SC Bench that confirmed the death sentence to Perarivalan in 1999 raised the issue of ‘double jeopardy’ in the case in 2013. Justice Thomas stated that hanging the convicts 23 years after conviction would be unconstitutional. That led to the SC commuting the death sentences of three convicts in 2014.

Perarivalan had written in his book “An Appeal from the Death Row” (2006) that he was implicated on the basis of a confession taken under duress, and asks why a probe did not try to find out where the bomb was made. Following his conviction in 1999 Perarivalan consistently maintained that he was innocent. In fact, IPS officer V. Thyagarajan who interrogated Perarivalan revealed in 2013 that Perarivalan had stated that he had purchased the cells but did not know to what use they would be put to. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Political Writing as Catharsis

At a time when truth has been overwhelmed by fake news, my only solace is that I have published proof that I am not a collaborator through silence

BY **MATHEW JOHN**

*“Mad India hurt a lowly hack into writing
Now India has her madness and weather still
For words make nothing happen, mere
squiggles
In the valley of hate and killing where the
faint-hearted
Would never want to tamper; words are
unheard whispers flowing
From ranches of anguish and unbroken griefs; words
barely survive
As a way of saying, a Sisyphean mouth.”
(With apologies to W H Auden)*



publication of an essay titled “Grace under Pressure”, in which I had, inter alia, rhapsodised over the stirring leadership and heroism of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, I got a call from a senior journalist expressing outrage at my distasteful admiration for a dictator who had rigged his own election, put all his opponents in jail,

was totally corrupt and an American toady to boot. I was stunned by his outburst; it was late morning, so too early for him to be already in the cups, but even as I wondered at what had provoked this rant, he mentioned Tucker Carlson as his source.

The penny dropped! About the Carlsons of the world, Christopher Hitchens had once made an indecorous but telling remark: “If you give him an enema, he could be buried in a matchbox.” The infamous Fox TV host who is a more sophisticated version of our homegrown “nation wants to know” TV anchor, is a specialist in purveying the most obnoxious fake news. And standing by as potent messenger is the omnipresent social media, primed to beam any kind of nonsense universally, in the blink of an eye. Clearly, this is how the journo got his fake snapshot of Zelenskyy which he eagerly embraced as it fed into his ill-conceived ideas about the rightness of Putin’s cause. I sent him a *Washington Post* article that refuted his bogus belief, but he dismissed it as “capitalist propaganda”.

I have copped other criticism about my writing. Despite knowing that the essays have covered a wide range of subjects, my daughter, millennial and tech-savvy with little patience for any writing above 140 characters, has upbraided me for a lop-sided accent on the “Muslim problem”. How do I convince her that when the major social evil is the persecution of minorities abetted by a majoritarian State, dissipating my energy on other issues would be akin to

As an essayist and commentator on our fraught social and political world, I have learnt the hard way that even truth and reasoned arguments are not sacred but merely a point of view that is endorsed or rejected depending on partisan considerations rather than on truth per se or the persuasive power of the polemic. Recently, following the



What’s frightening is that millions have bought into the unadulterated hogwash of the Supreme Leader’s triumphs, despite the economic and social conditions being grimmer than ever before

fiddling with the lyre while India burned?

Closer to the bone, I'd go bonkers if I didn't have the safety valve of writing to vent my anguish at what's happening around us! But if truth be told, those closest and hence most discerning already believe that I am over the edge!

One irate reader has scolded me for quoting political titans of the past – Winston Churchill, JFK, Nehru et al – whom he calls, “dead wood”. I had to remind him rather sternly that only the illiterate is dismissive of history and its leading players, however venal. Quite a few readers have pointed to omissions in my coverage of a subject, but curiously their criticism is not about any substantive content but of illustrative examples that they felt should have been highlighted. For instance, on my piece regarding racism in India, one wiseacre faulted me for not mentioning the racism in our cinema.

My sociologist hero has, time and again, pulled me up for ending my political essays on a gloomy, despairing note. Generous to a fault even intellectually, she knows by now that only a regime change can bring back the jauntiness to my writing.

The *bhakt*s have been in overdrive, apoplectic that I have been unrelenting in my criticism of the Supreme Leader. One kindly *bhakt*, however, suggested that I make amends for this biased and unjust portrayal by expounding on the Leader's vaunted achievements. Hold your breath as I reel out the alleged accomplishments, as perceived by this God-fearing, credulous *bhakt*. Upending all international assessments of performance, he believes that the Supreme Leader has transformed India into an economic powerhouse; captured the spiritual essence and ideals of its saints and leaders through the ages; assimilated multiple ideologies and made India strong and independent; strengthened the public sector for an Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

What's frightening is that millions have bought into the unadulterated hogwash of the Supreme Leader's triumphs, despite the economic and social conditions being grimmer than ever before. The brazen Leader meanwhile, after bartering away the country's jewels to the West-centred predators purely to win favour, is unobstructed when he makes the most bizarre claims, including the recent obscenity of feeding the entire world when millions in his country fight for survival! Do we have to plumb the depths that Sri Lanka has, for eyes to open?

There is no escape from our fractured world of

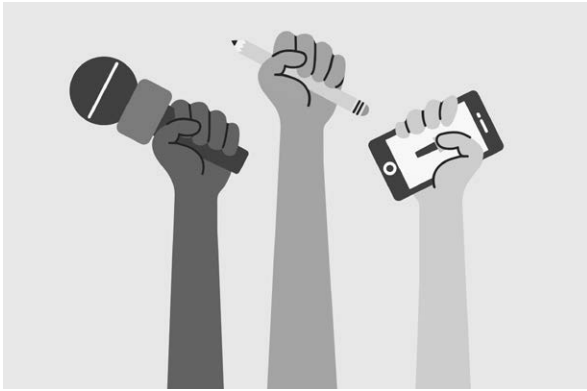
discrete sealed echo chambers where the written word barely makes a dent in converting the diehards to one's point of view. Why then do I persist in wanting to write what I do?

George Orwell who knew a thing or two about the writing craft, had observed that a writer's subject matter is determined by the age he lives in, more so in volatile, tempestuous times. And -- this needs to be underlined -- he was talking of writers in general, not just the great ones but even the lowly, which is a comfort to guys like me. Among the motivations for putting pen to paper, he includes the solipsistic emotion of egoism, that is, wanting to be remembered and talked about; and a desire to write aesthetically, to create a mosaic of words that say it with precision and style.

According to Orwell, an important impetus for writing is the need to espouse the truth for posterity, and that truth must have a “political purpose”, by which he means that all writing manifests an intent to influence society in a particular way. Yoking truth to politics may seem like a contradiction in terms until you learn that Orwell fervently believed that a socially conscious writer can never be loyal to a political party.

Seeking authenticity in our world of alternative reality is an impossible task at a time when truth has been overwhelmed by a deluge of falsehoods and truthiness. What hope is there for truth to prevail in a social ecosystem that Orwell foresaw long ago -- the manipulation of history and narrative by the powerful in the sanguine belief that “who controls the past controls the future and who controls the present controls the past.”? We now live in an environment where “to tell the truth is a revolutionary act.” Nevertheless, I firmly believe that the fakery everywhere is all the more reason for the writer of today to be an inveterate truthsayer, despite the odds being stacked heavily against even knowing what the truth is.

Orwell has brilliantly deconstructed the impelling factors for wanting to write but I daresay he overlooked the fact that deep melancholy and anger can also propel the act of writing which then functions as a kind of salve for an anguished soul. If you can, believe me when I say that sheer angst has been my *raison detre* for becoming a social commentator. And why not? After all, “the personal is political” -- that revolutionary slogan of the feminist movement and the protesting students in 1968, asserts the signifi-



In our benighted country, the Fourth Estate, forgetting its ordained role as chief protector of the vulnerable against the depredations of the powerful, has largely acted as cheerleader of an iniquitous State

cance of individual experience in shaping the trajectory of society. In sum, what the ordinary citizen scribe thinks and experiences also matters.

I remember how it all started, how the ugly communal politics of the nation became an unrelenting dark cloud in my life. Long ago and yet so easily recalled, on 27th February, 2002, I was at a Railway accident site on Allahabad Division when we got news of the horrific Godhra train burning that resulted in the death by incineration of 59 innocent kar sevaks, mostly women and children. As we quietly mourned this terrible tragedy, a young colleague casually remarked: "These bloody Muslims will be taught a lesson!" A chill ran down my spine because I sensed that his sentiment reverberated through the nation.

The next few days were hell on earth for one community in Gujarat as the 59 Hindu deaths were avenged in an orgy of killing, looting and burning that was unhindered by any kind of State intervention. The Godhra carnage highlighted the depths of evil that individuals can stoop to, whereas the pogrom that followed showcased the diabolical wickedness of a majoritarian polity.

Capitalising on the illicit bonding of the State and the majority community, the BJP government preponed the Gujarat Assembly elections and predictably won a massive mandate. Although the Sangh Parivar suffered a setback in the 2004 General Elections when the people rejected the "Shining India" hoax of the Vajpayee government and elected the incorrigibly corrupt and feebly secular Congress to power, the Hindutva juggernaut has been unstop-

pable in the last ten years. The Hindu Rashtra is now firmly established in all but name.

We have been hollowed out as a society, no longer even a pale imitation of the humane, secular democratic Republic conceived by our founding fathers. And shamefully, most of us, merely flaunting the veneer of humaneness and decency, have actually been either active participants or complicit bystanders in the brutal desecration of the Mahatma's legacy of tolerance and brotherhood. The cultural erasure of minorities is now unannounced State policy. Even as I write, the saffron hordes are readying for an assault on yet another symbol of a terminally ill, secular India – the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi. We knew it would happen, and it has, because not one of us has done anything of consequence to ward off this cancerous tribalization of our society.

Nobody would contest Ginetta Sagan's bland denunciation of quiescent fence-sitters: "Silence in the face of injustice is complicity with the oppressor." In our benighted country, the Fourth Estate, forgetting its ordained role as chief protector of the vulnerable against the depredations of the powerful, has largely acted as cheerleader of an iniquitous State.

In conclusion, why do I insist on being heard despite knowing that my deeply felt formulations about injustice around us are making no difference? As a tiny mote in the universe of writing, my impotent plight reminds me of the frustrated poet in a Bertolt Brecht poem who is traumatised that his writings denouncing the totalitarian regime are ignored, whereas the books of other dissenters are being burnt. The outraged poet cries:

*"Burn me!" he wrote, his pen flying, "burn me!
Don't do this to me...have I not always told
The truth in my books? And now
I am treated by you as a liar!
I order you
Burn me!"*

For personal safety it shouldn't, but sometimes it hurts that a cruel majoritarian State that jailed Disha Ravi for an innocuous tweet, has ignored my existence as a conscientious objector to tyranny. My only solace is that I have published proof that I am not a collaborator through silence. ☹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATHEW JOHN is a former civil servant. Views are personal

Karnataka Governor ignores Christians' pleas, signs anti-conversion ordinance

The Karnataka government has passed an ordinance to abolish religious conversions in the southern Indian state ignoring resistance from the Catholic Church and other groups.

Karnataka Governor Thaawar Chand Gehlot ordinance on May 17 signed the ordinance a day after a Catholic delegation headed by Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore appealed against the ordinance through a memorandum.

Father Faustine Lobo, the spokesperson of the Regional Bishops Council in Karnataka, said the governor signing the ordinance is a dark day for democracy in the state. "We are really saddened about this ordinance," he told Matters India.

"It is not about conversion or no conversion, it is all about the government ignoring the contributions by the Christian community to the people of Karnataka," said the priest who called the ordinance a "back door enactment."

Father Lobo said a delegation of Catholic bishops had submitted a memorandum signed by Archbishop Machado to the governor on May 16 and "he had promised to study the ordinance before considering it for signing."

"But he signed it today," lamented Father Lobo who addressed a group of journalists on the matter.

The Karnataka governor gave his assent to the ordinance on the controversial Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Bill, 2021, popularly known as the anti-conversion bill.

With the governor's approval, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is expected not to waste time to implement the bill which proposes stringent measures on religious conversion activities.

The bill was passed by the state legislative assembly but it was yet to be presented in the legislative council, where the ruling party is one seat short of majority. It is in this context, the government decided to go ahead with the ordinance.

The Karnataka government had tabled the controversial bill in the assembly session at Belagavi on December 21, 2021.

All legal entities, educational institutions, orphanages, old age homes, hospitals, religious missionaries, and NGOs are brought under the purview of



institutions. According to the new law, any converted person, his parents, brother, sister or any other person who is related to him by blood, marriage, or adoption or associated in any form, or a colleague could lodge a complaint of conversion that contravenes the law provisions. The offense is made to be non-bailable and cognizable offense.

The bill proposes a declaration before conversion to a religion and also report in advance about conversion.

"No person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any other person from one religion to another by use or practice of force, undue influence, coercion, allurements or by any fraudulent means or by any other means or promise of marriage, nor shall any person abet or conspire such conversion," it says.

Archbishop Machado said that the entire Christian community in Karnataka opposes the bill.

"It is indeed a matter of great concern that the anti-conversion bill would become a tool for the fringe elements to take law into their own hands, and vitiate the atmosphere with provocations, false accusations, communal unrest," the archbishop warned.

"If there were rampant conversions, as claimed by some, the Christian population, both in the state and the nation, would have seen a considerable increase in the numbers," the archbishop said.

"It is a well-known fact that thousands of schools, colleges and hospitals are managed by Christian community across the state and country as well," the prelate added. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

National seminar seeks ways to improve service to migrants

BY RANI PUNNASERRIL

Unemployment and economic inequality force young people to migrate massively and the Church should address their needs at various levels, says a recent Church seminar.

The Commission for Migrants of the Conference of Catholic Bishops in India (CCBI) that organized the May 11-12 seminar at Benaulim in Goa observed that the large-scale migration of young people is leading to a serious socioeconomic situation in India.

The conference at the Shanti Sadan Pastoral Center analyzed issues related to the migrants in the country. As many as 50 percent of India's more than 261 million young people have lost their jobs during the Covid pandemic. Unemployment is increasing by more than 8 percent every year. No appointments are made to fill the vacant posts, the seminar noted.

The situation of unorganized workers, including domestic workers and construction workers, is deplorable, the conference assessed.

CCBI president Archbishop Filipe Neri Ferrao of Goa-Daman, who opened the conference, observed that it was being held at the birthplace of Saint Joseph Vaz, a Goan who was a migrant missionary in Sri Lanka where he served the poor and the sick.

The conference was held to mark the 400th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Francis Xavier.

Archbishop Ferrao pointed out that Saint Francis Xavier too was a migrant who took care of the poor and needy in Asia with Goa as his base.

Archbishop Victor Henry Thakur of Raipur, the chairman of the Commission for Migrants, emphasized that migrants need the Church to listen to them more than anything. He said the ministry to the migrants is not an option but a demand. Migration is a normal process that cannot be stopped, he added.

Lourdes Baptista, a resource person, briefed the participants on the recent instruction of Pastoral Orientations on Intercultural Migrant Ministry prepared by the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. It says "Develop a Culture of Encounter" in complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another.

The Vatican document, Baptista noted, specif-



ically instructs the Church to recognize baptized persons as full members wherever they are. He wants the local Church to be missionary and embrace the arrival of Catholic individuals and integrate them as citizens and equal members.

Reach out to those needing help – discarded, ostracized, oppressed, the lay leader said. He also wants the Church to be inclusive and love unconditionally. The Church has the responsibility to care for everyone who is created by God, he stressed.

The Commission for Migrants was constituted in 2019 with Father Jaison Vadassery as the executive secretary. The priest said the commission has its units in most dioceses. He stressed the need to accompany the migrants and meet their spiritual and economic needs. Networking with all those who are engaged in caring for the migrants is the need of the time, the priest stressed.

Father Vadassery noted that the commission took birth when the whole world was gripped in pandemic. The church contributed to the immediate support as far as it could. Even now the commission reaches out to them with dry food kits as many have lost their livelihood, he explained.

Father Albert Thambi Durai, one of the participants, said the problems of the migrants are many and the Catholic Church, an organized body, should work together to help the migrants through its diocese.

The seminar also noted that the migrants face many problems at the destinations and regretted that the media does not report such issues.

Archbishop Elias Gonsalves of Nagpur, the

commission's vice chairman, stressed the need to network and collaborate with those working for the welfare of the migrants. Compartmentalized work benefits a small group whereas collaboration can make a difference in the lives of many migrants, he stressed.

One such incident happened on May 7. Chittaranjan Nayak of Daringabadi in Odisha was on his way to Kerala with his two friends in search of work. The 34-year-old fell sick near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh and got down from the train. He was admitted to the Government General Hospital, where he died after two days. His family of two small children and wife received the dead boy of their only breadwinner.

The conference charted a plan of action to implement at the regional and diocesan levels for the next five years.

Father Vadassery said the conference was called to devise specific plans for the CCBI regions so that they could improve their services to migrants.

The meeting called for sensitizing the clergy, reli-

gious and laity on the importance of an inclusive Church while promoting synodality in every diocese. Data collection to address the needs of the migrants, linkages to assist them with education, job and other needs were other suggestions.

Pope Francis in his messages exhorts everyone to care for the migrants as they are our brothers and sisters. Now the church is mandated to look out to help the migrants who are distressed, displaced and exploited.

Auxiliary Bishop Alwyn D'Silva of Bombay, the chairman of the Human Rights Commission under the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, stressed the need of various commissions in dioceses to work together for the cause of the needy. The issues of the migrants can be understood only when we visit and listen to them, he said.

The conference also decided to periodically review the progress of the participants' commitment and to develop "a culture of encounter" in consonance with synodality. ©

(Courtesy: Mattersindia)

Christians resent surveillance of Church-run schools in MP

Christian leaders in Madhya Pradesh have objected to the state government's move to put Church-run schools under the microscope

State home minister Narottam Mishra announced on May 16 that police will monitor Church-run schools to curb religious conversions.

A day earlier, police arrested six people, including two pastors, after Bajrang Dal, a militant Hindu organization, complained of suspected illegal conversions at the Christ Memorial School in the state capital Bhopal.

The six were booked for hurting religious sentiments under the Indian Penal Code and released the same day. School director Manis Mathew told UCA News on May 17 that a Sunday prayer service in the school hall "was wrongly portrayed as a religious conversion activity to target our institution."

Church leaders across denominations view the police action and the decision to monitor all Christian schools as a deliberate attempt to target and

defame Christians through a false narrative.

"We don't convert anyone as is being made out," said Father Maria Stephan, public relations officer of the Archdiocese of Bhopal. "The bogey of conversion is being deliberately raised to create distrust and misunderstanding against us."

The Catholic priest said the government had every right to monitor any illegal activity but it shouldn't become a cause for harassment of a particular community.

Father Stephan questioned how "a prayer service in a private institution's space can be portrayed as conversion activity."

He also appealed to the State government to set up a coordination body of its officials and Church representatives to dispel prevailing doubts and confusion over so-called conversion activities.

"The Church believes in mutual respect and a harmonious environment among communities for the welfare of the nation," he added. ©

(Courtesy: UCANEWS)

Living the Synodality

If we are true to synodality there cannot be any divisions and conflicts within the Church. No one can be excluded and discriminated against

BY **VARGHESE ALENGADEN**

A much-discussed theme in the Church circles today is synodality. Hence many people ask me, "What do you think of synodality?" Since synodality is lived in the USM (Universal Solidarity Movement) community mission for the last three decades, the question on the relevance of synodality is not difficult for me to explain.



The prophetic Pope Francis is making all efforts to make the Church return to the way of Christ. He is envisaging a more participative Church free from institutionalism and clerical dominance. Through the process of synodality, the Pope is dreaming of a more inclusive, participative, accountable and transparent Church at all levels.

Many dioceses and religious congregations are having seminars and discussions about synodality in these days. Questions are raised about the practical application of synodality into the daily living of groups and communities. One of the simple proposals which receives maximum resistance is allowing those who cook food for the communities to eat with the priests and nuns in the same dining hall. I had been hearing hundreds of excuses against this simple suggestion. When we are not able to share table fellowship with those who live and work with us how synodality is going to be practiced?

Practice of synodality demands an inclusive and participative way of life and work. The Universal Solidarity Movement was launched thirty years ago with the dream of experimenting the Christo-centric way of life and mission. One can witness how synodality is being put into practice in the USM by including people of all faiths and walks of life in this community mission. Priests, the religious, the youth and people of all faiths and walks of life are invited to participate in the Annual General Body meeting of USM.

Synodality demands including people of all walks of life in the administrative and decision-making bodies. It is successfully practiced in the USM community mission by including members from three different religions in the governing body. Total participation, transparency and inclusiveness have been experimented successfully.

The USM community consists of priests, nuns of different congregations and lay people of different faiths. They are living together, eating together,

praying together, planning and discussing together. Living synodality is successfully experimented through these practices. Each member feels a sense of belonging and he/she is able to personalize the vision and spirituality of the organization. Synodality is practiced through free and frank evaluation at all levels with total transparency.

Synodality can be practiced when members are trusted. Where there is trust there is no need for numerous rules to control the members. This is successfully experimented in the USM because there are no written laws to control the life and activities of members. Members follow the vision and spirituality through self-discipline, open discussion and dialogue.

Synodality creates a counter culture against utilitarian culture of "use and throw". During the daily community meeting, a candle is lit every evening in honour of all deceased persons who were part of the USM mission. Their names with short profiles are read daily to educate members of their partnership in the mission.

Synodality abandons institutional and economic power and influence. Its strength lies in moral authority. In the last 30 years, USM has set the trend of managing a mission across India without the strength of owning land and property. It functions in a rented premise for conducting several retreats and training programmes for people of all faiths. Several bishops, provincials, principals and lay leaders come for exposure and Christo-centric leadership retreats in the community.

Living synodality is nothing but living the Gospel values. It is returning to the Christo-centric way of life. If we are true to synodality there cannot be any more divisions and conflicts within the Church. No one can be excluded and discriminated against.

The success and effectiveness of synodality depend on the change of attitudes and actions of each and every individual, communities, institutions, parishes and dioceses. It demands a radical transformation from individuals, communities and dioceses by correcting the mistakes and returning to the way of Christ. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VARGHESE ALENGADEN is the Founder of Universal Solidarity Movement, Indore.

A 'Conversation' on Arts

The book contains fascinating and engrossing articles on varied aspects of art

BY **BALVINDER**

Books, they say, are the best stress-relievers. And the books that talk about arts, perhaps, are the best bait in this regard.

A recently published book by Dr B N Goswamy, an internationally acclaimed art historian, serves this purpose very well.

We know that the ancient India had the evil eye of foreign looters who have been invading India more than often. Due to the geographical location of Punjab, it had to face the brutal attacks of all those looters first. That is why the political history of Punjab has always been turbulent from the very beginning.

But it is to be commended that even during such an uncomfortable environment, the courageous and kind-hearted Punjabis not only preserved their creative and artistic skills, in every field of arts, but also kept adding new dimensions to them.

The contribution of many local and foreign historians in compiling the history of various artistic aspects of United Punjab has been invaluable.

Dr. B.N. Goswami's name, who specialises in visual art history, is prominent and unique in the list of all these historians.

To begin with, he daringly entered into the fold of a then dull-looking teaching profession by stepping down from a plum administrative post to examine and evaluate various aspects of the history of local visual arts with a keen eagle-like vision.

For the first time in this region, apart from establishing an exclusive Department of Art-History at the Panjab University, Dr Goswamy also set up an art museum here, exclusively housing contemporary art works.

So far, he has written some 25 books on various aspects of art, which are internationally recognised. Due to



these achievements, he has received many national and international awards, including the most prestigious Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan.

In the early days of Dr. Goswamy's long journey, he made valuable contributions as an art critic of *The Tribune*, an old and well-known in the Northern region daily,

for many years. As a result, he not only enumerated local artistic events but also made several successful attempts to guide and encourage the emerging young artists.

In addition to his research papers and books on art history, Dr. Goswami started, in 1995, a bi-weekly column in *The Tribune* which continues to this day. In this column, he expanded the range of art to make the historical and social aspects of art more interesting and intuitive for the readers, covering varied artistic perspectives of whole of the South Asia.

Dr. Goswamy's recently published book, titled "Conversation", is a collection of hundred-plus selected articles published in *The Tribune*. This

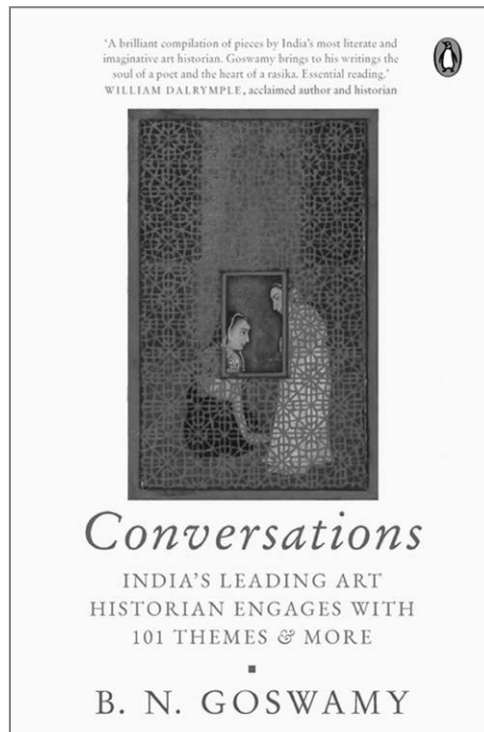
600-page illustrated book has been attractively published by Penguin, which Dr. Goswamy has fondly dedicated to his chief source of inspiration, his historian and loveable wife Karuna who breathed her last recently.

The unique articles in this group are private and informal -- philosophical but not planned. They have a loose unity that is both fascinating and interesting representation of varied aspects of art.

These engrossing articles not only shed light on the artistic knowledge in the minds of the readers but also provoke the readers to question, to raise their curiosity to know more. ©

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BALVINDER is a former principal of Chandigarh's first government college



Charles de Foucauld: Soldier, Priest, Hermit, and Now a Saint

Charles de Foucauld was canonised by Pope Francis in Rome on May 15. His spirituality was “to become nothing before God.”

BY **LITTLE SISTER LEELAMMA**

Charles De Foucauld, also known as Brother Charles of Jesus, was born into an aristocratic family in Strasbourg, France. He was orphaned at the age of 6. He and his little sister were raised by his devout grandfather. He rejected the Catholic faith as a teenager, and joined the French army as it was the family tradition. He inherited a great deal of property from his grandfather.

Charles as an army officer went to Algeria with his regiment. Later he was dismissed from the army due to his misconduct. With the help of a Jewish rabbi, Charles disguised himself as a Jew and in 1883, began a one-year exploration that he recorded in a book that was well received. Seeing the faith of the Muslims, he experienced a sort of ‘restless-

ness’ regarding his Christian faith, which led him to a personal conversion at the age of 28.

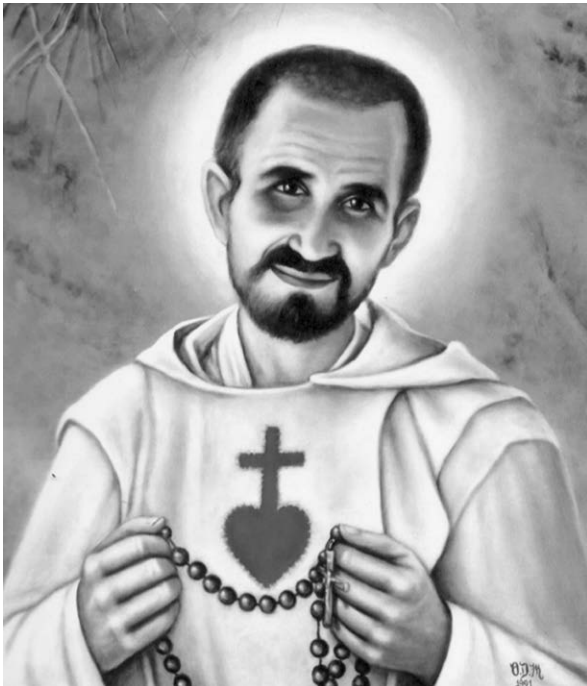
Inspired by the Jews and Muslims he met, Charles resumed the practice of his Catholic faith when he returned to France in 1886. “My God, if you exist, let me come to know you,” was his prayer. Providence led him to meet Fr. Huvelin, a priest who would prove to be both a father and a friend to him. He was motivated to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he was fascinated by the mystery of the Holy Family, by the relationship of Jesus with his parents and neighbours, working silently and praying with humility.

He was so much taken up by the simplicity of the Nazareth experience, that he lived for some time as a hermit in Nazareth. Later he joined a Trappist monastery in Ardeche, France. Leaving the monastery in 1897, Charles worked as a gardener and sacristan for the Poor Clare nuns in Nazareth and later in Jerusalem. In 1901, he returned to France and was ordained a priest.

Later that year, Charles journeyed to Beni-Abbes, Morocco, intending to found a monastic religious community in North Africa that offered hospitality to Christians, Muslims, Jews, or people with no religion. He lived a peaceful, hidden life but attracted no companions. A former army comrade invited him to live among the Tuareg people in Algeria. He learned their language enough to compose a Tuareg-French and French-Tuareg dictionary, and to translate the Gospels into Tuareg.

In 1905, he came to Tamanrasset, where he lived the rest of his life. In early 1909, he again visited France and established an association of lay people who pledged to live by the Gospels. His return to Tamanrasset was welcomed by the Tuareg.

The outbreak of World War I led to attacks on



the French in Algeria. Charles was seized in a raid by another tribe and a boy was kept to guard him. The boy saw two soldiers were coming to visit Charles de Foucauld. He fired the bullet out of fear and thus Charles fell dead on 1st December 1916 in front of the fort in Tamanrasset which he had built with the villagers for their protection. He was far away from his native land, the only Christian living alone in the village among his friends of the Tuareg tribe. He was buried in a far off place of Tamanrasset on 1st December 1916. Later his tomb was moved to El Golea, closer to human habitation.



The Little Sisters of Jesus Christ founded in the diocese of Eluru in Andhra Pradesh in 1984 by Little Sr. Nirmala Mary Panamthanam

had a deep sensitivity towards the Eucharistic Presence of the Risen Lord, but adoration 'through Him, with Him and in Him' extended to seeking His divine Presence concretely in the little ones.

Hospitality was the hallmark of Brother Charles. Already during his turbulent youth, he was known for sharing everything with his friends. His door was always open, as he would welcome the Master in any guest, so much so that he had to curtail even his hours of explicit prayer. Soon, he came to be known as the Universal Brother for whom nobody was a

Spirituality of Nazareth

Charles felt that his call was not to imitate Jesus' public life of preaching, but of imitating His hidden life as a poor and humble worker at Nazareth. He had also a great desire to bring the Eucharist to people living far away in the Sahara desert. Brother Charles is remembered also as a model of "desert spirituality."

During the rest of his life which he lived in solitude and away from his people, he had also desired to set up two fraternal communities, one for men religious and other for women religious, who would be motivated to live the 'hidden life of Nazareth' of Jesus. He formulated rules for these communities, based on simplicity, abjection, prayer and manual work.

He envisioned a Union of Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, comprising Christians without having any distinction as priests, religious or laity, who would live "openly, but silently, doing good" and witnessing by their life the hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth. He saw this as the Nazareth ideal of "living in the continual presence of God", "preaching the Gospel not by words but by living it" and thereby in his own words becoming 'a seductive perfume that spreads'.

According to Brother Charles, "Nazareth is the extraordinary beauty hidden in the ordinary life of an ordinary family." He wanted to opt for radical implementation of the pure Gospel, by humility, lowliness, littleness and poverty to the extreme limit. He

stranger.

Brother Charles valued manual labour, to be able not only to sustain himself, but also to share, up to the last morsel of bread. This included any kind of occupation. Thus, he laboured unceasingly for collecting linguistic and cultural data about the tribal nomads. He imitated the hidden Carpenter of Nazareth who in His public life became the Prophet from Nazareth and later the Risen Lord and Messiah. His spirituality was "to become nothing before God".

Charles De Foucauld had no followers at the time of his death and would have remained virtually unknown had it not been for a biography published a few years after his death by Rene Bazin. He was beatified in Rome on November 13, 2005.

Brother Charles' special legacy for his followers was the Prayer of Abandonment, which he prayed with Jesus, in total confidence, fused with happiness and joy, and his followers around the world continue to recite it in the same spirit.

There are nearly 20 branches of the family of Brother Charles de Foucauld in different parts of the world. One among them is the Little Sisters of Jesus Christ founded in the diocese of Eluru in Andhra Pradesh in 1984 by Little Sr. Nirmala Mary Panamthanam under the patronage of Most Rev. John Mulagada, the then Bishop of Eluru. Today, other than their communities in the diocese of Eluru, the Little Sisters of Jesus Christ render their services in different dioceses of India and Germany following the Spirituality of Nazareth. ©



Bob's Banter » BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

bobsbanter@gmail.com

Your Chair and You..!

As a writer and journalist, I often had to visit men and women in different leadership positions at their offices. As soon as I was ushered into their offices, the chair on which they sat told me where I stood. The chairs came in all shapes and sizes. Small made men sat in big, huge, opulent chairs and towered over the people who came to visit them. In the same way some sat with ease on chairs that were the same size and height of the visitors.

The height of their chairs told me how the meeting would go: How I would be treated and how I should treat him. The chair told me where I stood.

I remember a meeting with a religious leader who wanted me to write a book on him, offering me a handsome amount to do so. I entered his office and found him towering over a huge table. I sat in front and listened and was astonished to hear a man of God talking with such vanity. Somewhere during our talk, he excused himself to go to the bathroom, and suddenly I found him actually climbing down from a high chair: He was a very short man! All he wanted to do was to look down at the people who came to see him. I did not write his book.

Kings and queens of old, did this. Their thrones, palaces and castles were made to frighten and intimidate their subjects.

But I remember quite often walking into the office of a chairman or director of a leading company and finding him sitting on an ordinary chair with normal height, very often on a sofa and inviting me to sit across. Some did not even need a table between! These are men and women of confidence! They don't need to be lifted up physically to show their power. Their power is within, and not outside themselves. Some wear simple clothes; they don't need a double breast suit to show how big they are. Some of them arrive to work in self-driven cars like JRD Tata used to do.



I am not making fun of people whose office has supplied them with furniture, nor am I making fun of anybody for that matter, but my plea to you today is to work towards increasing the size of your confidence, not the size of your chair. Build a foundation of values based on truth, not on the legs of your chair.

Also leaders don't need gigantic Parliament buildings and God doesn't need huge structures too; leaders need to serve with humility, and God wants to reside in your heart!

Like I said, as soon as I was ushered into an office I knew where I stood. Tell me, what kind of a chair you sit on? I wonder how I'd feel if called over to your office?

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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SUMMER COURSES AND RETREATS - 2022

For – Priests and Religious, Animators / Jubilarians

COURSES

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
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| DVS – 2: April 18 – 23, 2022 | - Communication Skills in Evangelization through Digital Media |
| DVS – 3: April 25 – 30, 2022 | - God Experience through Mystical Prayer |
| DVS – 4: May 02 – 07, 2022 | - Leadership and Community Building Skills |
| DVS – 5: May 09 – 14, 2022 | - Psycho-Spiritual-Sexual Development |
| DVS – 6: May 16 – 21, 2022 | - Counseling Skills and Human Wholeness |
| DVS – 7: May 23 – 28, 2022 | - Re-Visiting the Consecrated Life |

RETREATS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| DVR – 1: April 18 – 23, 2022 | - Encounter Jesus in Prayer |
| DVR – 2: May 02 – 07, 2022 | - The Art of Living the Contemplative Prayer |
| DVR – 3: May 23 – 28, 2022 | - Walking with Christ to Calvary |

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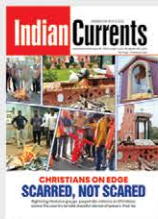
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