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MSMHC Missionary Journal



*Challenges and Opportunities
in Mission Today*



MISSIONARY ANIMATION CENTRE



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"Every man and woman is a mission; that is the reason for our life on this earth. To be attracted and to be sent are two movements that our hearts, especially when we are young, feel as interior forces of love; they hold out promise for our future and they give direction to our lives... To live out joyfully our responsibility for the world is a great challenge."

- *Pope Francis on World Mission Day 2018*

Foreword

Evangelization: A Call to Unity and Integration

We are living in a world marked by growing challenges of fragmentation as individuals and communities become ever more complex with numerous possibilities and opportunities, as well as pitfalls and discrepancies. The evangelizing mission of the church that we share as missionaries cannot remain indifferent to this nature of reality as it forms part of our everyday existence. Complexity often creates anxiety, fear, doubt and even confusion in human psyche; consequently many people tend to avoid facing it in its totality. The need of the hour is to look at the evangelizing mission as a call to unity and integration where opposing elements are held together and fragmentation is healed through ‘a tedious and painful’ and yet a very rewarding process of unity and integration. Pope Francis seems to have this in mind when he spoke of the need to let unity prevail over conflict (Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 226-230). A fragmented view of life and mission can undoubtedly create conflicting situation, as it limits one from going beyond his or her view of reality in order to assume a comprehensive view of the same. Holy Father beautifully analyses the various possible reaction to conflicts. Some people although may look at it but at once ignore it, sweep it under the carpet and go their way. While a second group embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their direction, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But third group of people look at it with the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process, the painful process of unity and integration. They are the peace makers who will indeed be called sons and daughters of God (*Mt* 5:9).

As sons and daughters of God, every evangelizer is to be a peacemaker who is first of all capable of being at peace with oneself, who is at least aware of the conflicting elements within oneself and is capable of holding together the many fragmentations in unity within self; because often the many external signs of fragmentation have their root cause within the persons. Today an evangelizer is challenged more and more to be a person of integrity and consistency, whose life does not contradict his/her proclamation. Personal and institutional inconsistencies, discrepancies and fragmentations may remain hidden under the carpet of repression for a while but they gradually surface to our greatest surprise causing great harm to our lives and that of those to whom we proclaimed the word. It's clear that proclamation without a corresponding witness of life will fall on deaf ears in the long run no matter how eloquent and efficient we may appear to be. There is no better method of learning 'unity and integration' than to constantly look at Jesus and contemplate Him who held all the opposites in unity in himself: heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society. The sign of this unity and reconciliation of all things in him is peace. Christ "is our peace" (*Eph 2:14*). We turn to him with our fragmented lives and fragmented vision of life and mission and seek him to put the broken pieces of our lives together, thus making out of them something beautiful for God and for his greater glory. Indeed the mission of evangelization expected of every Christian and each missionary is all about sharing this treasure with love and for love. May the Lord help all of us in the ongoing process of a personal encounter with the Lord, which will result in greater unity and integration of the fragmented elements within thus enabling us to be more credible and authentic witnesses of the joy of the Gospel encountered and relished in our lives.

Sr. Philomena Mathew MSMHC
Superior General

Message

“Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation” (Mk 16:15).

Pope Benedict XV in his Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, on the “Propagation of the Faith throughout the World,” dated November 30, 1919, sought to give a new impetus to the missionary task of proclaiming the Gospel. He reminded us that before Jesus returned to His Father, He addressed to His disciples the words: “Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). With these words He committed to them a duty, a momentous and a holy charge, that was not to lapse with the death of the Apostles but would bind their successors, one after another, until the end of the world, that is, as long as there remained on this earth men and women whom the truth might set free. Entrusted with this mandate, “they went forth and preached everywhere” (Mark 16:20) the word of God, so that “through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message” (Psalm 18:5). From that time on, as the centuries have passed, the Church has never forgotten that command God gave her, and never yet has she ceased to dispatch to every corner of the world her couriers of the doctrine He entrusted to her, and her ministers of the eternal salvation that was delivered through Christ to the community (cf. *Maximum Illud*, 1).

Pope Benedict XV continued to remind us of the history of the Church in the first three centuries when persecution after persecution, fell upon the infant Church in a raging attempt to crush her, even then when the whole of civilization was overwhelmed with Christian blood, out on the far frontiers of the Empire the heralds of the Gospel journeyed, announcing good tidings (cf. *Maximum Illud* 2). Then, after peace and religious

freedom had been officially granted to the Church, her apostolate to the world made far greater progress. (cf. *Maximum Illud* 3). Very many of those missionaries, while they were working for the salvation of their brethren, themselves attained the heights of sanctity, just as the Apostles did before them. And many of them too, crowned their apostolate with the glory of martyrdom, establishing the Faith at the cost of their blood. Anyone who studies the facts of this great story cannot help being profoundly impressed by them, by all the amazing hardships our missionaries have undergone in extending the Faith, the magnificent devotion they have shown, and the overwhelming examples of fearless endurance they have paid. And to anyone who considers these facts, the realization must come as a shock that right now, there still remain in the world immense multitudes of people who do not know Christ. Millions of souls have not yet accepted Christ (cf. *Maximum Illud* 6).

No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid the supreme duty of proclaiming Christ to all people (cf. *RM* 3). Every baptized Christian is obliged to preach Christ. Faith in Christ must be offered to all, because the multitudes have the right to know Christ and the riches of the mystery of Christ; riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find fullness of life and truth. (cf. *RM* 8). God is opening before us the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. The moment has come to commit all our energies to a new evangelization - to strengthen the faith of the baptized Christians; and to mission *ad gentes* - to preach Christ to those who have not known and accepted Christ (cf. *RM* 3).

Sr. Bridget Diengdoh MSMHC
General Councillor for Evangelization

Editorial

Furthering Church's Mission

The ultimate goal of Jesus' life and ministry focused on the growth of the Kingdom of God (Lk. 4:43). He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of God's kingdom (Mt. 9:35). He strived on seeking and saving the lost (Lk.19:10) and no dissuasion, difficulties and torments could prevent Him from accomplishing the mission entrusted to Him. His true greatness is reflected in His absolute surrender, humility and meekness. His commitment to his Father's mission led him to embrace the most shameful death, through which he brought forth to the world everlasting life.

The followers of Jesus are called to understand the depth of his love being manifested in his call to share his mission. It is the experiential knowledge of him that makes them bearers of the Gospel in all circumstances. Awareness of the bounden duty and knowledge of the Lord and his mission shape their lives, making them true witnesses of the Gospel. No adversities or misfortunes can shake them as they are firmly rooted in the mission. Pope Francis affirms that the Church's mission of announcing the Gospel is inseparably united with her Lord and so it is not an initiative of individual believers, groups or even large groups.

In order to make the journal more handy and convenient for reading it has adopted a new presentation style. Keeping in mind its aim and scope, the contributors of articles in this issue are from among the members of the Congregation. The articles throw light on the various dimensions of the ministries of the Church. The article, "Bishop Stephen Ferrando, the Missionary par excellence"

presents Bishop Ferrando as an ideal missionary, “Consecrated Life, and Mission” clarifies the specificity of those specially called and chosen and “Relevance of Jesus’ Preaching of the Kingdom in Today’s Missionary Context” presents the existing scenario and the urgency of reaching out to all with the attitude of Christ. The article, “Missionary Discipleship: A call for Transformation” elucidates the interconnectedness of discipleship and mission and the article, “Infusing the Spirit of Optimism into Life and Mission” spells out in detail the spirit of St. Francis De Sales which is essential for having a positive outlook towards life and mission. Considering the impact education has in the society, the article “Mission of Education: Building a Just Society” expounds on transforming individuals and society through right education and finally, the article, “Enhancing Church’s Mission through Media” underlines the need to make use of the means of media for the effectiveness of ministries.

The mission of the church initiated by Jesus is to be continued through every baptised Christian. Commitment to this task calls for self-effacement; it prompts to have the same attitude of John the Baptist who said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). Let this noble labour of furthering the mission of the church inspire every missionary to keep Jesus at the centre and sincerely long to let His teachings sink down into the hearts of all who accept to be part of the body of the Church.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC

Bishop Stephen Ferrando, the Missionary par excellence

Sr. Rosita Joseph MSMHC

Introduction

A missionary in the true spirit of the word is someone sent by God with a priority to preach the Kingdom of God and meet other forms of human need. Bishop Stephen Ferrando SDB (1895-1978) is an inspirational figure to many people in Northeast India and the Church. The illustrious and the most distinctive feature of Bishop Ferrando's life as a Salesian missionary, was his exemplary life of holiness and integrity of life as the Founder of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. The obvious aspect of a mission is not what one proclaims, but what one lives and who one may be. The first and foremost principle in the life of a missionary is to be holy by living one's life with love and bearing witness in everything one does and wherever one may be.¹ In his capacity as a missionary, Bishop Ferrando carried God's grace in his humble, servant attitude and identified himself with the people. Joseph Ratzinger says: "The more we are united with Jesus Christ, the more truly are we with the Spirit in his increasing presence with us."² In more specific terms, Bishop Ferrando's missionary life and all his endeavours were directed to spreading the faith and winning all souls to the love of the Father. This necessitated

¹ Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, Rome, Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2018, n. 14.

² A. Nicholas, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, New York, Burns & Oates, 2007, p. 139.

the crossing of political, cultural, linguistic and religious frontiers. He gave primary importance to mission *ad gentes* and catechesis through various works of charity, as the means to establish the Kingdom of God in the region.³

Bishop Ferrando's Missionary Calling

Amidst the ruins of a Europe devastated by World War I, Ferrando as an iron soldier of the War and commander of the sanitary section confirmed his call to be a missionary in the chaos and tumult of the war. It is upon such a tragic scene of humanity that Ferrando from a faraway country came to Northeast India as a missionary. In the midst of tiresome work in the battlefield, he daily renewed his promise to the Lord to be a Salesian priest and for the grace that his life may become a daily dying to God assisted by the Blessed Virgin Help of Christians and the prayers of his superiors and dear ones.⁴ His Salesian upbringing availed him many opportunities to have deeper knowledge of Don Bosco's teachings especially his passion for souls, *da mihi animas, cetera tolle*. Occasions of meeting the Salesian superiors, participating in the sent off functions of missionary expeditions, inspiring episodes and stories of the missionaries who returned from the missions definitely intensified Ferrando's desire for Salesian life. The dynamic missionary life of the Salesians awakened his imaginative powers; a new enthusiasm began to mature in him towards the goal.

Just a few months after his priestly ordination on 18 March 1923, he was sent to Northeast India's Assam mission by the then Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Fr. Philip Rinaldi SDB. *Obedience, apostolate and sacrifice* were the programme of

³ Cf. ASPF 3078, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 26.8.1936, pp. 846-848; ASC A8900437, Ferrando to P. Ricaldone, 24.8.1936, pp. 1-8.

⁴ Cf. ASC B0421706, Ferrando to P. Albera, 15.8.1916.

his spiritual itinerary as a priest. Recalling the day of his first assignment Ferrando says to the Missionary Sisters: “I did not know what my fate was but I obeyed. I left happily for India as a missionary, a young priest of just 28 years old.”⁵ He was asked to lead the first group of young Italian novices to the mission of Assam, to have their religious formation *in loco*, who would later become frontline missionaries in the region. Thanks to Ferrando who was the Master of Novices from 1925-1934. He was deeply imbued with the pastoral and missionary spirit of Don Bosco, love for Jesus Christ, Mary the Mother of Jesus, passion for the Church and love for souls. His life manifested that he lived to proclaim the Gospel and work for the poor and marginalised. He embodied in him the cry of Don Bosco ‘give me souls’ (*da mihi animas*) had a significant impact on his life right from the start of his life as a Salesian priest till the end of his life.

Bishop Ferrando the Missionary

Bishop Ferrando was an active and enthusiastic Salesian missionary in Northeast India from 1923-1969. His missionary life was a saga of many challenging situations. Tragedies dogged his life right from the beginning of his episcopal ministry in 1934. His life was sandwiched between two great World Wars,⁶ which snuffed out millions of lives and left hundreds materially, physically, mentally and spiritually wounded.⁷ He was a missionary par excellence largely in Northeast India. In keeping with his episcopal motto ‘apostle of Christ’ he travelled long distances in the whole of Northeast India, (the undivided Assam mission) to announce the Gospel to those who have not heard it or those whose faith

⁵ *Copia Publica*, Vol. 7, p. 2338.

⁶ He served as a soldier in the World War I from 1914 -1918 while he was still a seminarian and during the World War II he was the Bishop of Northeast India which was a war zone.

⁷ Cf. ASPF No. 1901, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 24.3.1945, p. 481.

needed strengthening. The greatest challenge before him and the missionaries was to make their way among the various ethnic groups, who were far from the true faith. In his letter to Pope Pius XII, Ferrando states: Mission *ad gentes* offered a new ground in Northeast India, the abode of numerous tribes that waited to receive the Good News of the Gospel.⁸ One of his mission report states: “In the mission filed of Assam there were various kinds of apostolate, but the one more efficacious and beautiful was that of *ad gentes*, announcing the Good News to those who have not received it.”⁹

He interpreted the Word of God in the cultural and ethnic milieu of the people. The meaningful interpretation of the Gospel in the context of the people wholeheartedly welcomed them to accept the faith and see life against the backdrop of God’s designs. What was more remarkable was the attention he gave to every tribe and religion. He dialogued with them so that they could decide what is true and good in Christianity.¹⁰ In appreciation of the local cultures and annual feasts, he wrote: “The cultural festivities of the people, traditional annual events, and the dances of people adorned with magnificent costumes when performed before an enormous crowd one realizes with joy that Christianity does not destroy any culture. But preserves and sanctifies all that is good and true in them that lead to one true God.”¹¹

His missionary visits to villages served as good soil (Mt.13:8) where Christianity grew and produced abundant fruits. Great was the

⁸ Cf. ASPF No. 1251, Ferrando to Pope Pius XII, 11.4.1945, p. 478.

⁹ ASC B7090436, Ferrando to R. Ziggiotti, 1.4.1952.

¹⁰ Cf. A. K. Lynrah, “Testimony”, 5.11.2003, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 1, p. 102; E. Plathottam, “Testimony”, 2.4.2004, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, p. 390.

¹¹ ASC A813, Ferrando to P. Ricaldone “Uno sguardo alla missione”, 18.3.1936; ASPF No. 5317, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 26.3.1950, p. 545.

joy of the people in meeting him in the villages. His love for the people made them exclaim “Yes God is great; He is the master of our hearts.”¹² The oratories served as an important means to bring Christian faith to non-Christian families and a good ground for real apostolic work.¹³ They were won over by the spirit of charity and love. He called the oratory children ‘little apostles’ (*piccoli apostoli*) because they were instrumental in bringing the Catholic faith to their parents, families and neighbourhood.¹⁴ Oratories were welcome places and a second home to the young.¹⁵ The schools in the villages played a major role in missionary evangelisation. Ferrando considered schools as ‘entry tickets’ to non-Christian families and villages.¹⁶ The forming of upright Christians, reliable and responsible citizens was his dictum. One of the witness at the diocesan process in Shillong testifies: “Bishop Ferrando realised that education was one of the corner stone for the growth and health of the Church. He held meetings to discuss over the plight of those schools situated in the rural areas. This shows his concern for the people living in the villages.”¹⁷

Intense works of charity was the special personality trait of Bishop Stephen Ferrando. His charity was born out of his personal experience of various life situations and personal conviction that all human beings have the right to liberty and dignity. As a soldier in the World War I he witnessed various forms of sufferings caused

¹² S. Ferrando, “Padre per carità dammi il battesimo”, in *Gioventù Missionaria* 7-8 (luglio-agosto 1925) pp. 162-163.

¹³ Cf. ASC B7090381, Ferrando to Ricaldone, 25.2.1931; *Copia Publica*, Vol. 3, pp. 919.

¹⁴ Cf. ASC B7090547, “Piccoli apostoli”, Ferrando to P. Ricaldone, 18.5.1940.

¹⁵ Cf. S. Ferrando, *Nella terra incomparabile*, p. 119; K. M. Diengdoh, “Testimony”, 26.3.2004, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 1, p. 336.

¹⁶ Cf. S. Ferrando, “Biglietti d’Ingresso nei villaggi pagani”, in *Bollettino Salesiano* 81 (1957) no.1, p. 24.

¹⁷ P. Malngiang, “Testimony”, 18.10.2003, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 1, p. 84.

by the war. He was brought up in situations where things were hard for him and his family. He learned from his mother goodness, sweetness and compassion towards others while his father taught him humility, docility and hard work. His unbounded trust in God's providential care as loving Father added impetus to his charity towards others. He himself had experienced God's compassion on many of his missionary journeys and this led him to have an interior transformation from within and he was urged to share it with others who were most in need. His acts of charity were often enough very small acts performed with much love and concern. These little acts of being with the sick and consoling the sorrowful and being a father to the orphans, widows, aged, lepers, the outcast, marginalised women and girls and children, refugees and migrants were considered great in the eyes of God.¹⁸

Bishop Ferrando's Mission was Christ

His mission had its fullest meaning in Christ because he united himself with him in a unique way by reproducing in his life various aspects of Jesus's ministry. Even in the midst of whirlwind of missionary activities, he manifested in his life the attitudes of Jesus: his closeness to the poor, outcast and marginalised, his self-sacrificing love, compassion and concern for the needy. He saw his entire life as a mission. His direct contact with people in the villages, in their huts and fields of work, oratories, dispensaries, village schools and leprosy colonies convinced him of the urgency of proclaiming the Gospel and becoming another Christ. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). His missionary project was to put himself at the service (*diaconia*) of people in order to share the Gospel and lead all to the fullness of life in Christ.

¹⁸ Cf. G. Suting, "Testimony", 6.11.2004, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, p. 502.

Seeking common good was Bishop Ferrando's greatest strengths. He reflected in himself and his works the simplicity of Christ, manifested in his generosity, goodness and common good. His simple life of service, union with God and devotions and good will towards all, speak eloquently of his compassionate and sensitive heart, than volumes. For him Christ was found in the untouchables, lepers and people in the margins of the society who were unloved and uncared for. God chose him to be an instrument of Christ to open the key to human hearts by the light of the Gospel. His compassion does not simply suggest an emotional response toward people in distress. It is much more. He taught them about a compassionate and merciful God present in the Gospels, who can guide, illumine and alleviate their misery.

The central and determining goal of his missionary activity was works of charity. He found Christ in people living in poverty and he could not ignore the suffering of his brothers and sisters in need. He saw the compassionate face of Christ in the repulsive and lonely face of the lepers, in the marginalised refugees and war victims. The significant nature of Bishop Ferrando's compassion had moved him from within that led to outward compassionate act of mercy towards others. His tenderness was readily moved into remedial action in the face of tragedy. The first tragic event he had to face was in 1934 in the Krishnagar mission, when the flood destroyed the entire crops of the poor famers. He says: *lo spettro della fame si affaccio terribile*. (The threat of hunger appears terrible). He tried all possible means to help people until the resources he had become exhausted. The World War II once again adversely affected the Church because Northeast was a war zone, and more so with the drastic reduction of missionary personnel.¹⁹ In the subsequent year (1943) there was the great famine when millions of Indians perished of

¹⁹ Cf. F. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. 5, p. 107.

starvation and cholera and other deadly sicknesses. Bishop Ferrando and the missionaries through their works of charity saved many lives, sharing the little they had with the famine-stricken people.

Theological Perspective of his Missionary Activity

The Christian and spiritual experiences of Bishop Ferrando had their source and origin in God and God's initiative in his life. His tremendous faith in Jesus Christ and the experience of his unfailing presence made him a powerful dispenser of Christ's love. Some of his famous axioms prove his closeness to God: "There is a God in Israel" (*Est Deus in Israel*); In everything for everything the will of the Good God (*In tutto e per tutto la volontà del Buon Dio*); The spirit is high, the confidence in God's providence is great (*Il morale è alto, la fiducia nella Provvidenza è grande*); Win many souls for the glory of God (*Conquistare molte anime per la gloria di Dio*); The Gospel: the light for the path of charity (*Il Vangelo: la luce per la via della carità*); Begin anew each day with Mary Help of Christians and fidelity to Don Bosco.

Bishop Ferrando's experiences were actualised in concrete situations of life in communion with the Holy Trinity. This experience is the core of spiritual theology which transforms a person from within; intellect, will, affections, feelings, senses, judgement and actions. Spiritual experiences have three dimensions: historical-phenomenological; God's initiative in one's life; at the centre of one's life is God and she/he becomes a humble and obedient instrument in His hands; theological-hermeneutical: the lived experience is communicated and transmitted through one's mission; and practical and mistagogic: practical directives concerning progress in spiritual life with a view to Christian perfection. It is the meeting of man with God in the daily events of life. This meeting aims to build a mature and meaningful personal identity in a person; rather his spiritual experiences become a

unifying factor and an edifying witness for people who live with him to inspire direction and show a pathway in their life to attain Christian perfection. By proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him, Bishop Ferrando like St. Paul, preached to people the unsearchable riches of Christ (cf. Eph 3:8)

He could not preach Christ without reflecting in himself the values of Christ by a life of intimate communion with him. His mission demanded of him to renounce himself and accept the sufferings of Christ upon himself. On 14 March 1936, Bishop Ferrando took charge of the diocese of Shillong trusting in God's providence.²⁰ On his arrival as the Bishop, he entrusted the diocese of Shillong to Jesus the crucified pronouncing the words, "on the cross is salvation" as a confirmation of his episcopal motto: 'Apostle of Christ.' His theology was always concerned for the poor. He never attributed to himself the merits of his missionary achievements, but to God's grace. By virtue of Christ's solidarity with the poor, he gave dignity and honour to the poor especially to marginalised women, girls and children who were unloved and uncared.

Conclusion

During the nine years of his retired life in Genova- Quarto, Italy (1969-1978) he was a missionary from within, from within his own soul. He said about his retirement days to Fr. Fabian Vitto SDB: "Now I am not a missionary who goes but who is, who carries the mystery of Christ within."²¹ He set a wonderful example of a missionary who carried out his missionary and apostolic activities after the pastoral heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd and in the style and spirit of Don Bosco. He was a man of living faith who had a cry from within "to win all souls for

²⁰ Cf. S. Ferrando, *The Northeast India*, pp. 16-17; *Copia Publica*, Vol. 4, pp. 1113-1114; ASPF No. 3078, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 24.8.1936, p. 847.

²¹ S. Ferrando, *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, p. 184.

Christ.” What made Bishop Ferrando outstanding as a missionary is that he lived what he daily taught and preached. By his life of integrity and loving kindness, he brought hope and dignity to people in the margins of the society. The saintly life he lived was an example of the beatitudes of Jesus and of his trust in God’s unfailing providence. His heroic sacrifices coupled with ardent missionary zeal and total giving of self for the poor brought apostolic fruitfulness in the Church.

Consecrated Life and Mission

Being Another Christ and Doing His Mission

Sr. Theresi Zoremsangi MSMHC

In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II states: “In the unity of the Christian life, the various vocations are like so many rays of the one light of Christ, whose radiance brightens the countenance of the Church.”¹ The radiance of Christ falls on every one of us and this light prompts us differently to respond to him in different ways. This is distinctly explained in the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians as thus: “There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4-7). Hence, corresponding to the different vocations, we have different forms of life with a particular way of service in the Church. By virtue of the sacrament of baptism, all the faithful, viz. the laity, the religious and the ordained ministers share a common dignity and all are called to holiness. All cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ; each in accordance with the proper vocation and gift which he or she has received from the Spirit (Rom. 12:3-8). “These vocations are at the service of one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world. Everyone in the Church is consecrated in Baptism and Confirmation, but the ordained ministry

¹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (25 March 1996), 16.

and the consecrated life each presuppose a distinct vocation and a specific form of consecration, with a view to a particular mission.”²

Unlike the laity who has specific but not exclusive characteristic activity in the world, the consecrated persons have special conformity to Christ who is chaste, poor and obedient. Along these lines the mission of consecrated persons is the commitment to make their own chastity, poverty and obedience, the way of life practiced personally by Jesus and proposed by him to his disciples.³ Therefore, Consecrated life is not just following Christ with one’s whole heart but of “living and expressing this by conforming one’s whole existence to the person of Christ in an all-encompassing commitment”⁴ by living chastity, poverty and obedience. Consecrated persons are called to be *a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren.⁵ We consecrated persons are called to a transfigured existence, for the prolongation of Christ’s humanity. Call to consecrated life, therefore is essentially a commitment to conform to and transmit the person of Christ. Despite the difficulties we occasionally encounter, and despite the lessening of esteem for the consecrated life in certain quarters, we have the task of inviting the men and women of our time to lift their eyes, not to let themselves be overwhelmed by everyday things, to let themselves be captivated by the fascination of God and his son’s Gospel.⁶

The purpose of the counsels consecrated persons embrace is not only to make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but, but also to “reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, that form of life

² *ibid.*, 31.

³ *ibid.*, 31.

⁴ *ibid.*, 16.

⁵ *ibid.*, 22.

⁶ *ibid.*, 109.

which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world.”⁷ This entails the mission to conform to and to represent the person of Jesus, his vision and mission which he lived and mediated in the Gospel. This vision and mission is to be lived and expressed creatively in today’s context in a variety of ways, styles and means. It involves and demands ‘**being** another Christ’ and ‘**doing** his mission.’ This calls for a Christic existence. The identity of consecrated persons is a Christic identity. Consecrated life in other words is a progressive Christification of life where one undergoes a process of being stripped off of all that is inimical to the nature of the Christ of the Gospel. This means that Christ becomes not only the object of worship but also one who is to be configured in one’s life. It is a growing from fascination to discipleship, imitation, assimilation, conformation and configuration. This is vividly expressed by Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata* when he says: “Do not forget that you, in a very special way, can and must say that you not only to belong to Christ but that you have **BECOME CHRIST!**”⁸ To configure Christ is costing one of anything that is worldly. The spirit of the world is opposed to the Holy Spirit. This is clearly found in the Scriptures. Our choice tells to whom we belong. To forego that which is pleasing to human predispositions is a sacrifice but at the same time a privilege. Creatively consecrated persons are to figure out how Christ would evangelize the world if he were to be present in person today. This necessitates merging ourselves with himself; to act or do as Christ did. This is what has been done down through the centuries in the history of consecrated life by legions of saints of the Catholic Church. Being inspired by the Spirit who is the principal agent of mission, the need of the age has been responded creatively by consecrated persons. This is evident in the various cycles and forms of consecrated life from time immemorial.

⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 16.

⁸ *ibid.*, 109.

With this perspective of the mission of consecrated life, we understand the mission of consecrated life not just as apostolic activities but as a proclamation of Christ through our very being; a being which is Christic. Mission actually flows out from our being in conformity with Christ. It is not a projection of one's own obsessions or drives. It is proclaiming Christ. Christianity or consecrated life is not merely a bundle of pious practices, a chain of truths and creeds. It is Christ; nothing more and nothing less.

Today the setback we find in consecrated life is that its mission suffers because of its failure to configure with Christ while it has the responsibility of representing Christ on the one hand, and on the other hand, because it fails somewhere to embody the archetypal or liminal values which the universal unconsciousness or collective unconscious aspire to attain. What is fundamental to religious life is a radical experience of faith. It is an experience of the Divine, the deepest level of being and of life. The fundamental mission of religious life in different cultures and religions has been to remind societies and cultures of this experience, and to give testimony to the mystical dimension of reality. This can be best explained as mentioned previously with the concept of 'archetypal values' and the concept of 'liminality.'

According to Diarmuid O'Murchu in his work, *Religious Life: A Prophetic Vision*, archetype denotes a set of values, hopes, dreams and aspirations, which all human beings are assumed to possess because we all share in that universal consciousness or collective unconscious. Religious exists to express and mediate archetypal and spiritual aspirations. Archetypal values are related to the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. As an archetypal value, the vows are not just for religious themselves but they say something to all human beings. Religious life in its original sense expresses the archetypal aspirations of the collective unconscious. When religious life is no longer capable of serving the archetypal values

it is intended to articulate, the collective unconscious produces new archetypal models. When meaning-bearing values are exhausted and when symbols die because of excessive institutionalization, antiquated legalism, or insipid spirituality, the collective unconscious will produce new archetypes which will be embodied in a variety of other liminal groups.⁹ This is seen in the various cycles of religious life starting from the early Christian community that express a form of consecrated life to the present form.

What is 'liminality'? Diarmuid O'Murchu describes liminality as "an ambiguous, sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structures of society."¹⁰ The liminal group embodies in a profound way the deepest values, which the culture and society cherish most deeply, but struggles to live. In fact, the function of the liminal group is to mirror for the wider community the deepest hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the people. It is a product of the creative imagination, seeking to respond to the pressing needs of the contemporary world driven by a new vision of the future.¹¹ A vowed life is a creation of the collective unconscious. In this way religious life stands as a sign in the world. It provides liminal space to express and articulate humanity's deepest aspirations. Its initial aspiration tends to be embodied in one person (founder/ foundress) and comes to fruition in the group which the initial founder/ foundress gathers around himself/herself. Accordingly, the mission of the religious today is to live out the liminal values of the Gospel in a prophetic manner. This demands consecrated persons to be in the margins of the society and to have the courage to get out of a certain kind

⁹ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life* (London: Excalibur Press, 1989), 40-49.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 37.

of society or social structure just as Abraham in the Old Testament was told: "Leave your people." Elijah is one example who stands completely alone against the whole structure. Something similar happens to St. Francis of Assisi. He had radical break with the world into a prophetic and free life where he made his own choice. Whenever one make a choice from one's deepest center, one is not being determined by somebody else. To have a liminal existence it is necessary to be radical enough to break away from convention. Prophets in the Scripture are called to stand on a different ground where they can choose freely before God, where they can make choices not predetermined by the society.¹² The moment any religious congregation move away from the liminal values it embodies it ceases to give appeal and impact. This will be evident when the style of life is no more counter-cultural. One such is institutionalization, this tendency suffocates those attempts made to articulate the Gospel values. This is evident in the breakdown phase of the various cycles of consecrated life found in history of consecrated life. Here is a point for deeper reflection of the way we function. And so the challenge is upon consecrated persons as to how to retrieve and make our liminality more appealing and significant in our contemporary society.

The Christ of the Gospel whom consecrated persons strive to conform in their being is indeed a liminal person par excellence. Liminal groups arises from the time of the early Christian to the desert movement and the successive cycles and forms of religious life mediating to the Church and world, periodically the deepest values of the Gospel and the person of Christ himself. In all these forms religious life as a liminal group arises in every culture and religion directing its mission towards the heart of the society because it reminds, testifies and urges society to the deepest values

¹² Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation* (New York: Frarrar, 1992), 131-133.

of being human, which are at the same time values of the Gospel.¹³ The challenge of religious life today is to offer a Christ-like personal presence in the world. In the *Essential Elements*, a Church document on religious life we see that “the totality of religious consecration requires that the witness of the Gospel be given publicly by the whole of life. Values, attitudes and life-style attest forcefully to the place of Christ in one’s life.”¹⁴ Who does, what is done and how it is done should all proclaim Christ. Radicality comes because of this overall proclamation of Christ by the consecrated.¹⁵ Because of this radicality consecrated persons are called to be a “liminal group,” on the limits, on the frontiers, on the margins of the society at large. Consecrated persons need to be prepared to walk on the fringes of the Church and the world. Consecrated persons need to break away from the conventions of the society. We, as consecrated persons are called to question the perverse political structures and stand for those who are dehumanised and oppressed. We are called to be like Jesus and the prophets of the Old Testament to question the unjust economic systems, exploitation of the resources of the earth which leads to ecological crisis, issues pertaining health, scientific pursuits and ecclesiastical institutions. Any project that touches and transforms the human reality and well-being of our world must find resonance with the consecrated persons. Religious life is called upon to proclaim the Kingdom of God, of his healings, of his solidarity with the outcasts, and of his mercy. In doing this we re-incarnate Christ again on this earth.

¹³ Xavier E. Manavath, “Rediscovering the Mission of Consecrated Life,” *Consecrated Life for a Transformed World*, ed., Saju Chackalackal (Bangaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2016), 314-316.

¹⁴ Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life* (31 May 1983), 34.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 35.

The mission proper to consecrated life is not just engaging oneself in apostolic activities. It is much deeper than this. It is the proclamation of the Christ of the Gospel through our very being who is a liminal person par excellence. It is growing in conformity with Christ who went about doing good. The heart of this article is to stress on the challenge and responsibility of consecrated persons to make our liminality more relevant and appealing in today's context. This calls for a prophetic consciousness to observe and perceive the social structure and the readiness to be on the margins and to operate in the fringes of the society to critically evaluate what is oppressive, manipulative, consumerist and unjust. The perception of the plight of the people widens the imaginative horizon of the prophet in her attempt to respond to the call of God in that situation. So, "the prophetic outreach is essentially one of sensitivity and imagi-nation. It readily connects with pain, hardship, suffering and injustice."¹⁶ This is how a religious today could embody the compassion of God to the suffering world. This demands breaking away from the conventions and articulating the Gospel values creatively in our own time and space. This has always been the theme and exhortation of His Holiness Pope Francis for today's consecrated persons.

¹⁶ O'Murchu, *The Prophetic Horizon of Religious Life*, 52.

Relevance of Jesus' Preaching of the Kingdom in Today's Missionary Context

Sr. Nycy Joseph MSMHC

Introduction

We live in a context where suffering, poverty, injustice, sickness, loss of values, immoral activities, corruption and varied forms of evil are mushrooming day by day. Every human person encounter difficult moments in life one time or other. No one is exempted from this reality. Jesus came to this world with the message of salvation. He told his disciples to seek first the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 6:33); the kingdom as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 14:17), a state which is achieved by present submission to the rule of God. When Jesus is asked about the time of the coming of the kingdom, he answers, "it is in your midst" (cf. Lk 17:20). His answer signifies that the kingdom is a present but unrecognized reality, and most probably, the kingdom is identified with Jesus Himself, in whom the establishment of the reign of God is being accomplished.¹

The reign of the Lord is necessary for the triumph of the kingdom. The future of the kingdom is ultimately about the abolition of sin and death.² There is an 'already' wherever there is a surrendered

¹ John L. Mckenzie, "Kingdom of God" in Louis F. Hartman (ed.), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1963) 481.

² Abraham M. Antony, "Before a Vulnerable and Listening God-Worshipfully", *Mission Today*, XVIII (2016) 260.

heart and a 'not yet' because the crowning glory is still to come.³ In Jesus' preaching, present and future, although distinguished are essentially bound together. The focus is certainly on the future.⁴ Admission to the kingdom demands that one becomes as a child (cf. Mt 18:3; Mk10:15), that one exhibits righteousness (cf. Mt 5:20), does the will of the Father (cf. Mt 7:21) and abandons one's wealth (cf. Mt 19:23). The kingdom belongs to the poor and the lowly and those who suffer for righteousness (cf. Mt 5:3, 10; Mk 10:14; Lk 6:20).⁵ So, undoubtedly the significance of the "Kingdom of God" is a clarion call of the hour if not audibly at least in the heart of the people. Here we examine a few scenarios of the time where God's reign needs to become a relevant reality, the saving presence of God active and encouraging. It is the saving presence of God which takes concrete form above all; in justice and peaceful relationships, among individuals and groups, in the appearance of sickness, injustice and oppression and in the restoration of life in all that is dead and dying.

An analysis on the present situation can lead us to understand the urgent need to take up the mission of Jesus to instill the values of God's Kingdom in the hearts of all people.

1. Deteriorating Values in the Families

Today, technology, scientific growth, materialism, consumerism and individualism have crept into families deteriorating the edifices of values, relationships and its dignity. We can see this drastic change in the current families as they make incredible choices for their daily needs of life.⁶ An emerging global neo-liberal culture

³ James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971) 53.

⁴ Jose M. deMesa, *Doing Christology* (Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1993) 149.

⁵ John L. McKenzie, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*, 481.

⁶ Ramil D. Marcos, "Christianity and the Crisis of Culture", *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 52 (2015) 3, 272.

propelled by individualism, selfishness and greed, with lifestyles and mindsets inspired by materialism and secularism poses a threat to the family.⁷ No wonder why relationships become suspicious and inauthentic especially in families. Pope Francis speaks in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: 'today humanity is experiencing a turning point in its history in matters of progress and development of various fields (52).' Yet, he admits that the joy of living together frequently fades and families are scattered with varied interests and live like sheep without the shepherd.

Individualism weakens the relationship among the individuals and spoils the stability of the family. It is through pastoral care that the meaning of family bonds can be brought. Therefore, Pope Francis writes, "The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds."⁸ "Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will."⁹ The sacredness of mutual communion and the bond is ignored. At this juncture, one needs to remember that, "the strength of the family lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love. For all a family's problems, it can always grow, beginning with love."¹⁰

⁷ James H. Kroeger, "Message of 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC, 17-23 August 2004", *Mission Today*, 7 (2005) 1.

⁸ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013). 67

⁹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 66.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016) 53.

2. Poverty and Injustice

The very plight of the poor people compartmentalized in the railway stations, slums and the streets in our own context gives the very idea of the extensive growth of poverty and injustice around us. They are easily prone to become victims of social evil. At this juncture, morality, justice, uprightness, values and human dignity are nothing but a big question mark. Thus we see how human dignity is eclipsed from the human world as if the moral values have become irrelevant. The vast gap between the poor and the rich in our society today continues to be the same. Justice is not meted out in a proper measure by the socio-economic system, thus paving way to poverty, injustice and violence at length. An instrument, if you use it with artistic skill, is a thing of art; but if you are lacking in skill, it reaps the benefit of your unmusical nature, though not itself responsible. Wealth too is an instrument of the same kind. If the wealth is used rightly, it ministers to righteousness. But if one uses it wrongly, it is found to be a minister of wrong.¹¹ Riches in itself are not a wrong thing, but the way it is utilized becomes wrong and leads to poverty and injustice. Jesus went throughout the cities and villages and encountered the people from all walks of life. He welcomed the company of the poor as well as the rich. He accepted to be a guest in the houses of Zacchaeus and Mathew, wealthy men and tax-gatherers and he does not bid them give up their riches. On the contrary, having enjoyed the just and set aside the unjust employment of them, he proclaims, 'Today salvation has come into this house' (Lk 19:9).

Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* 68 speaks about the urgency of inculturating the faith as there is degradation of moral resources and loss of values in the society. He looks at the importance of a

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, "The Rich Man's Salvation", Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy and Allen Verhey (eds.), *From Christ to the World* (Grand Rapids: Willim B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) 452.

culture marked by faith, which cannot be overlooked. Commitment to the liberation and dignity of the poor as the operative principle of moral praxis needs to be clarified by an analytical knowledge of the poor and a holistic approach to the total transformation of persons and communities. By it, we discern the moral imperatives of human behavior - personal, inter-personal, socio-economic, political and cultural. Thus, the context embraces the relations between communities and nations, relations of persons and communities with nature and the cosmos etc., all of which have religio-cultural, socio-economic and political expressions.¹² Today we see a trend, which reduces the core of Jesus' message of the values of the kingdom more along the lines of political ideologies than of the gospel.

3. Exclusion and exploitation

Poverty and injustice are the daily experiences of the poor in our society today. It gradually results in violence and we hear calls for greater security. However, until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples is eliminated, it will be impossible to end violence. The poor and the poorer are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 59). Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil which is injustice tends to expand its baneful influence. 'The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us' (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 54). This exclusion and inequality causes lack of employment and a lack of the proper means of life. It shows selfish ideologies, which ignores the feelings and concerns of the poor and marginalized.

¹² S. Arokiasamy, *Life for All: Ethics in Context*, Michael Amaladoss (ed.) (Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2012).

Modern culture is an affirmation of human persons and the liberation of human creativity and potentiality, especially through science and technology, which can lead to a new world. Nevertheless, these positive and creative forces are misused and a distinction between majority and minority is created. The materialistic and individualistic consumer mentality causes a great deal of destruction of communities and the exclusion and exploitation of people in various sectors.¹³

4. Secularism and the Loss of the Sense of God

Secularism is a trend to reduce the faith and the church to a private and personal phenomenon. It results in a weakening of ethics and a loss of the sense of personal and collective sin and a steady increase in relativism (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 65). The rapid, profound, varied and revolutionary changes brought by secularism affect the society especially the life and service of believers and ministers in all contexts of Christian life.¹⁴ The idea of idolatry is at work in our modern economic system.¹⁵ Forces like secularization, globalization, modernization and fundamentalism increasingly compel people to live immersed in the present rather than oriented to a supernatural future. Christian values and ethical norms which were generally accepted gradually become, to a large extent loss in their function as leading ideas, as well as their influence and importance in society.¹⁶ The loss of the sense of the Transcendent in the lives of people today is a fundamental issue for the church, which has called for a new evangelization. The seed of faith can sprout and grow only in the good soil. It means

¹³ Michael Amaladoss, "The Mission of Religious Today", *Theology Digest*, 43 (1996) 4, 351.

¹⁴ Walter Kasper, *That they may all be One: The Call to Unity Today* (New York: Burnes and Oates, 2004) 173.

¹⁵ Ulrich Duchrow and Gehard Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 106.

¹⁶ Walter Kasper, *That They may all be One: The Call to Unity Today*, 173.

where there is openness and receptivity to the Word of God, there is solutions to the great questions and problems of humanity.¹⁷

Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* points out that secularism has taken over societies. Catholic Church is considered as an authentic institution, which could play an important role in helping the needy, being the messenger of peace and harmony, a defender of life and of fundamental rights. Pope Francis also points out how the Christians need to face the challenges of today and inspire others by their respect to others, by healing the wounds, strengthening the relationships and helping each other. "Today too, various associations for the defense of rights and the pursuit of noble goals are being founded. This is the desire of many people to contribute to social and cultural progress."¹⁸ Some of the factors in the weakening of religious faith are - advances in science and technology, the widening of individual freedom and lifestyle choices, profound economic changes, the mixing of cultures and ethnic groups brought about by migration and the growing interdependence among peoples. Such changes have brought about benefits for many, but they have often been accompanied by a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred.¹⁹

5. Increasing Growth of the Poor and Marginalized

The growth of the poor and marginalized is on the increase each day especially on the basis of political, economic, social and cultural identities. They seem to be undervalued and suffer inequality, poverty, and injustice. These sections of the society are made to feel that their cry for survival is unheard by anyone. How are

¹⁷ The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, Lineamenta (Vatican City: Lebreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012) n.1.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 67.

¹⁹ James H. Kroeger, "Exploring New Evangelization including brief Asian Echoes", *Mission Today*, 14, (2012) 3, 196.

they to encounter God and his kingdom where love, peace, justice and joy dwell?

If we think that God is powerful, majestic, mighty and splendid, God is also poor like the people in the slums, helpless like the people who lost their dear ones and He is like the oppressed. He is helpless like a farmer whose lands are confiscated by the landlord; He is like women, girls and children who have become victims of social evil. Hence, seeing these current trends, Pope Francis condemns the growing gap between rich and poor which he sees as the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace, creating a new tyranny which in fact imposes its own laws and rules. Behind this new idolatry, Pope sees 'a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God'.²⁰ This certainly did affect families in and out. Therefore, God's mercy and grace is the only hope for such families to get back to Him.

The new situation like the phenomenon of urbanization and the emergence of huge urban conglomerations, often with large depressed areas where organized crime, terrorism, prostitution and the exploitation of the weaker sections cause streams of homeless people to move from place to place. They are driven by poverty, war and ethnic conflicts or the denial of human rights and basic freedom. The establishment of giant nuclear power plants and industrial complexes too displaces many and turn them into uprooted humanity, resulting in the elimination of family values, safety of peoples and the integrity of the environment. The phenomenon of tourism, population growth, influences of communication media the terrible reality of poverty, the violation of the dignity and rights of women, the fate of millions of indigenous or tribal peoples, economic boom and financial crisis have thrown many to the margins of the society today.²¹

²⁰ Joseph Puthenpurakal, "Asian Realities and the Church's Response", *Mission Today*, 2 (2000) 3, 367.

²¹ Joseph Puthenpurakal, "Asian Realities and the Church's Response", *Mission Today*, 367.

Relevance of Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as having arrived with Him. It had become a present reality and no longer a far distant hope, but reachable for everyone who wanted to enter it. To the question of how one could enter in it or make it one's own, it is realized that Jesus demanded a conversion, a turning towards Him and the message He proclaimed. The analysis of the present situation makes clear that the creation is really groaning for the coming of God's Kingdom in every sphere of human life. Hence, there is a greater need today to present the gospel message as humble servants of the Kingdom of God, by being sensitive to the socio- economic, religious and cultural traditions of the people where the spirit leads one to make Jesus known and present. As per the belief, every baptized person is called to play a role that helps in preparing the ground for proclaiming the good news and acceptance of the message of Jesus. The specific vocation of every member in the church, especially with regard to MSMHC is seen in the way various ministries and roles carried out for the mission of evangelization.

Conclusion

God has sown the seeds of His Kingdom in this world through His Son Jesus Christ who accomplished His mission of preaching, teaching and healing. The work of God is continued even today through the working of the Holy Spirit who inspires, leads and guides the believers, especially those chosen to follow Jesus closely. The completion of the work of establishing the Kingdom can be realized only when every person in this world accepts and lives its values. As the harvest is plenty and the labourers are few, the need of the hour is to have more evangelizers.

Missionary Discipleship

A call for transformation

Sr. Viji John MSMHC

Introduction

The Church from its very inception is missionary. She has witnessed her missionary nature in every aspect of her life. As the time passed by, she has given various faces to this endeavour of being a missionary Church. In this modern era, Pope Francis has a new dimension on this mission. He calls for “Missionary Discipleship” in his recent post-Synodal apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG 24, Mt 28:19). It calls for personal involvement of all the members of the People of God in the joyful sharing of their encounter and experience of Jesus.

In line with the traditional teaching of the Church on the missionary vocation of every baptized Christian, Pope Francis affirms also that through baptism one becomes a member of the Church, which is a community of missionary disciples. As a member of the community of missionary disciples, one becomes the agent of evangelization.¹

For Pope Francis, each baptised Christian is a missionary disciple to continue the mission, a mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. The Church is no more considered only as a sanctuary or arc of salvation but as a Church that is going out to the people. He dreams of a Church that is so

¹ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013: AAS (2013), nos. 119-121.

near to the lives of the people and a Church that cultivates a culture of encounter with the culture, religions, and other believers. In addition, he wishes that Catholic Church should become mother with an open heart keeping her doors open to embrace everyone who comes to her. So that the Church which “goes forth” into the world can show forth the mercy of God.

Disciple and Missionary: A Comprehensive Understanding

The word ‘disciple’ occurs more than 250 times in the New Testament. The Greek word *mathetes* comes from the verb *mathaeino*, means “to learn”. The Latin word *discipulus* (learner) comes from the verb *discere*, it also means “to learn”. The disciple is one who learns, who constantly sits at the feet of the teacher, who is constantly on the journey of wisdom and knowledge as the teacher teaches him or her. In Indian tradition, it is meant as the *Guru-Shihya* relationship. It is the tradition of spiritual relationship and mentoring, where teachings are transmitted from a *Guru* (teacher) to a *Shisya* (disciple). Here the knowledge is imparted through developing relationship between the teacher and the disciple. The disciple accompanies the teacher, follows the teacher, imitates the teacher, practices what the teacher does, learns from her or his mistakes as she or he slowly and gradually learns the teacher’s wisdom, integrity, and way of life.

In Christian context, being a Christian disciple entails the developing a relationship with Jesus. It is the following of Jesus on the way, entering into a deeper relationship with Christ, taking on his attitudes, his openness, his holiness, his honesty, his gentleness and tenderness. The goal of this relationship is to enjoy being with him and become like him (Lk6:40).

The word ‘missionary’ as such is nowhere to be found in the English Bible. The word ‘missionary’ comes from the Latin word *mittere* which means ‘to send’ and the Greek word *apostello* meaning “being send” and from it comes the word for apostle

(*apostolos*) which means “sent one”. The Greek word implies that there is an authority over the sent one, there is a sender. The messenger is only a representative of the authority. A missionary is someone who is being sent. A missionary is a messenger or an envoy who is sent out on a special mission. The Vatican II’s document on the missionary activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, traces the origin of the mission of the church to the sending by the Father of the Son and the Holy Spirit in order to bring about God’s universal plan of salvation (AG 1-2, 9). Christian Missionary is the one who is being sent by Jesus. The Lord Jesus set apart twelve of his disciples as ‘apostles’ and sent them out (Mk 4:12; Mt 19:1-6). Missionary is a witness to Christ and his Kingdom. Faithful obedience to the command and the call to be Christ’s witnesses in the world is the mission of every Christian missionary.

What is Missionary Discipleship?

The evangelists present the picture of Jesus calling his disciples and forming them to be missionaries. He gives them the missionary command to make disciples. “Go therefore” he tells them, “and make disciples of all the nations” (Mt 28: 19). Thus forming the disciples seems to be part of the mission project of Jesus. Today we do not see discipleship and mission separately but as a joint venture. Pope Francis, influenced by the *Aparecida V* document, an important document from the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, introduces the term “Missionary Discipleship”.

Pope Francis uses the term ‘Missionary Discipleship’ in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG 24, Mt 28:19) as the new face of evangelization. According to Pope Francis, all the baptized, whatever their position in the church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather

that we are always “missionary disciples” (EG 120). Therefore, deep experience of God in one’s life is very important for a missionary above all other learning. It is the joyful proclamation of that love of God, which has been touched and experienced in the personal life, gives meaning to his or her life. It is also an invitation to personal involvement of all the members of the people of God in the joyful mission of new evangelization by sharing their encounter and experience of Jesus.² Missionary discipleship calls for becoming Christ to others.

Who are Missionary Disciples?

A missionary disciple is both a disciple and a missionary. Disciple and missionary are contrary in their literal sense. On the one hand, “disciple” implies being with, remaining with: involves passivity, contemplation. On the other hand, mission implies just the opposite, being sent, going out, going forth: activity, work, doing, etc.³ Divine intimacy is always accompanied by a call to mission. The Christian disciple understands that baptism initiates a communion with Christ that is so real, and that not only we receive sonship in the father (through adoption), but his mission is also to be personally accepted. So, every one of us who are baptized are missionary disciples.

Pope Francis while catechising a pilgrimage group states that, “the more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the centre of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the centre and opens you to others.”⁴ The life of a missionary disciple is shaped by a desire for encounter with God and a longing to express the implications of that divine

² Cf. S. Pinto, “The Concept of ‘Missionary Disciple’ and its Implications”, in *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol.51 June 2014, no. 2. 189..

³ Cf. B. Bursa, «”Being with” Vs “Being Sent”»: Missionary Discipleship in the writings of Pope Benedict VI», in *The Catechetical Review*, 3. 2 (2017) 2.

⁴ Francis, *Address to Participants in the pilgrimage of catechesis, International Congress on Catechesis*, September 27, 2013.

encounter by generously loving others. The appeal of Mother Teresa to people of faith, and of no faith, was that she was a flesh and blood disciple of Jesus Christ. She helped all those who came to her to restore meaning and a sense of purpose in life. She was true to the words of Pope Paul VI, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses” (EN 41).⁵ The life of Mother Teresa calls each individual Christian with a particular challenge to transmit a way of life that connects with the person of Jesus.

Purpose of Missionary Discipleship

A fundamental way to be like Jesus in giving our life as a ransom is to be “a missionary disciple”. As Pope Francis reminds us in EG “In all the baptized, from the first to the last, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization.”⁶ Therefore, our deepest desire must be, like Christ, to give of ourselves, in proclaiming the Good News of God’s saving love and in inviting everyone we meet, especially by our daily witness of life to come to Jesus.

Just as the Divine Word pitched his tent among us, so also the missionary disciple is expected to pitch his or her tent among the people or wherever he or she is living.⁷ It is a fundamental equality of every follower of Jesus. It is a person’s discipleship, and not her or his being a layperson, a person consecrated by religious vows, or by ordination that distinguishes a person as a Christian. For Pope Francis, the church is best described as ‘a community of missionary disciples’ and such discipleship is the result not of

⁵ S. Aquila, “From the Shepherds: Discipleship goes Beyond Information”, in *The Catechetical Review*, 3.2, (2017), 16.

⁶ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120

⁷ P. Antonio, “The State of Mission Today”, in *VERBUM SVD*, Vol. 55, 1 (2014), 17.

any special ordination or commissioning.⁸ The basis of the mission is the Joy of the gospel, a joy which is a missionary joy, and a joy which excludes no one, for it is a joy for all people (cf. EG 20-23). Thus the Pope says, “all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ who are in need of the light of the gospel” (EG 20).

Transforming Discipleship

God in his fullness of grace invites women and men, who are made in His image to join in with the Holy Spirit and work as partners for the redemption and fulfilment in Christ. As we read in Gal 5: 25, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” despite the chaos of human disunity in the world, there are many signs of the Spirit giving life and creating hope in the minds of people. As disciples we are being transformed and called to transform the world. We are called to be disciples, constantly open to being transformed. Discipleship calls us for constant conversion and spiritual growth. Moreover, it is a personal commitment to be actively engaged in continuing Jesus’ mission of proclaiming and restoring fullness of life (cf. Jn 10:10). Thus, we become sharers in God’s mission and we are called to be agents of transformation. As Christians we are privileged to join in the mission of the Holy Spirit, working together towards life, living out values of the kingdom of God.⁹

Pope Francis dreams of a church that is actively involved in the mission of Jesus. He speaks of the need to have “a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her preservation” (EG 27). John

⁸ S. Bevans, “Transforming Discipleship: Missiological Reflections”, in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 105, 1 (July 2016) 77.

⁹ Cf. S. Bevans, “Transforming Discipleship: Missiological Reflections”, 78.

Paul II also expressed the similar idea when he spoke about “new methods” and “new expressions” in the evangelization of sharing the joy of the gospel, which results in the growth of the Church by attraction.¹⁰

Inculturation of the gospel is a powerful method, leading to new expressions that engage and attract people. Culture has a great effect in the lives of people. Incarnation of the gospel in the cultures give life to the cultures. The missionary church aims at giving fullness of life to everyone and work for justice and identity to all cultures. As missionary disciples engaged in evangelization and inculturation we commit ourselves to promote life and human dignity and to transform the chaos of darkness, sinfulness, violence, and hatred into the creation of beauty and harmony that is God’s purpose.

Conclusion

This article tries to give an overall understanding of Missionary discipleship outlined by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, a concept that embraces a communal state of being for every Christian rather than an individualistic stance. It is a call for each individual Christian to commit oneself to become a missionary disciple. Therefore, it is the task of missionary disciples to communicate the love and the joy of the gospel through evangelization. Evangelization leads to transformation of persons, cultures and society; the mission of the church promotes life and newness. Mission of missionary disciples calls for a commitment on discipleship to be missionaries. The tremendous missionary power involving every Christian’s personal involvement in the mission of the church can certainly be a great contribution in the church that goes forth for the transformation.

¹⁰ Cf. S. Bevens, “New Evangelization or Missionary Church?”, in *VERBUM SVD*, Vol. 55, 1 (2014), 171.

Mission of Education: Building a Just Society

Sr. Manju George MSMHC

Introduction

The world keeps changing and the changes come even before one realizes it. Nothing endures or stays the same for a long time. While changes can bring good tidings and favour to some, it might mean just the opposite for others. Here, education is an age-old tiding, which has the potential to transform one's life and the world's future for the long term. So, it is a must to understand deeply and clearly the kind of education one receives and gives. Education enables a person to achieve self-realization and helps in the task of fullest expression of one's personality. The process of education continues from birth to death. It includes all the influences which act upon an individual during one's passage from the cradle to the grave. Everything which influences human behavior and personality is education. It attempts to develop one's personality and makes one a useful member of human society. Just as the face is the mirror of the heart of a person, the level of education reflects the status of a nation, a society and one's own personality. It is needed to fulfill religious and spiritual responsibilities. The mission of education must be directed toward the development of each child's personality and full potential, preparing the child to participate in society and to do work that is rewarding and reasonably remunerative, and to continue learning throughout life, enabling him/her to fulfil the purpose of life.

1. Meaning of Education

Etymologically, the term education is an English derivation of the Latin, *educare* or *educere*; the former signifies to ‘bring up’, ‘to rear’ and the latter denotes ‘to lead out’. It is to draw out from the pupils the potentials that they have and true education does not aim at loading the memory with knowledge, but it is drawing out or developing the faculties of mind and inculcating social, moral and religious values.¹ It covers a wide array of formative activities with adults, youth and children.² Education plays a key role in the sustainable human resource development of people in all walks of life. When one looks at the importance of a human person, one recognizes the truth that a human being has to be taught according to the stages of life. A child cannot be taught like an adult; a teenager cannot be taught like a small child, because each stage of life demands various types of education. Education is an indispensable condition for the individual development and makes a person fit for the tasks of citizenship.³ Thus education is a constant search to be absorbed with something new that which helps a person to make an inward journey and bring out the best from within. It is by means of education that the latent potentialities that one has is discovered and made fruitful.⁴ Education is the deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities in the life of learners and to inculcate in them the values to live as good

¹ Cf. Joy Kachappilly, “Evangelizing Through Education,” *Mission Today*, XVI, 2 (2014), 110.

² Cf. Jerome Vallabaraj, *Catholic Schools and faith Education: A Pastoral – Empirical Exploratory Research on the Effectives of Faith Education in the Catholic High Secondary Schools in Tamil Nadu* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyothi Publications, 2000), 3.

³ Cf. “Independence Through Education,” *The Telegraph* (Guwahati), 15 August 2016, Advertisement Feature.

⁴ Cf. Sita Ram Jayaswal, *Principles of Education: A Sociological Approach* (Bombay: Vora and Co. Publishers, 1966), 3.

citizens. Education is a gradual process of growth - intellectual, moral and physical - which can contribute towards good character formation and mobility in social status. As a result of it, there can arise social reformations and reawakenings among peoples.⁵ Education is a never-ending process of inner growth and development and its period stretches from cradle to grave. It is the process of humanizing humanity, making life progressive, cultured and civilized. It is a dynamic and continuous process by which human beings begin to develop their thinking and reasoning, problem solving and creativity, intelligence, positive sentiments, life copying skills and attitudes.⁶ The Indian thinker Swami Vivekananda says, "Through education, character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's feet." So the very word education has so much to do with one's life and an individual evaluation of his or her quality or virtue can be measured with the type of education one has received.

2. The Relevance of Education

The role and relevance of education is vital. A teacher affects eternity. The ripple effect is immeasurable. Education ought to teach not only to make a living but also to know how to live.⁷ Education is the key to change. An educated man adjusts with personal and social problems far better than the uneducated. Education however cannot be identified with literacy. It is the basic formation which creates capable and enlightened society free from discrimination and dehumanizing evils. Education fosters

⁵ Cf. M.P. Raju, *Education: A Mission in Jeopardy* (Delhi: Media House, 2005), 18.

⁶ Cf. Mary Joseph and Thomas P.J., *Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education* (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Training College, 2008), 1.

⁷ Cf. A. Anthonimuthu, *Salt of the Earth* (Bangalore: J&P Print Allied Industries, 2008), 57.

tolerance in social life and helps to root out addictive and dehumanizing habits from individual living. It helps one to distinguish the good from the evil and foster the good for a better living.

Education is life-oriented and need-based formation which leads to an integral development and maturing of the various dimensions of one's personality and then contributes to the general betterment of the society.⁸ Education does not mean possessing a degree but it means the total development of a person.⁹ It is an attempt on the part of the members of human society to shape the development of the coming generation in accordance with its own ideals of life.¹⁰ Speaking about the relevance of education as a mission, it must familiarize the child in the initial stages with the surroundings, the environment, the beauties of nature, and the happenings all around through an understanding of living beings in their various forms, stages and settings. Thus, focus in education must change towards the making of a person, who would contribute not only with information and knowledge but also with understanding in spite of the ever-evolving process of human growth and development.¹¹

3. Aims and Goals of Education

The goal of education is the full development of the human personality and a deep sense of human dignity and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental

⁸ Cf. Thomas Anchukandam, and Jose Kuttianimattathil, eds., *Grow Free Live Free: A Source Book for Value Education*, 2nd ed. (Bangalore: Kristu Jyothi Publications, 1998), 145.

⁹ Cf. Pascal Malngiang, *Faith Education in the family, Yesterday and Today*, in *Faith Building in North East India*, ed. Barnes L. Mawrie, vol.1 (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2007), 82.

¹⁰ Cf. Vidya Ratna Taneja, *Educational Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986), 4.

¹¹ Cf. Dhananjay Joshi, *value education in Global Perspective* (New Delhi: Lotus Press, 2007), 130.

freedom. It enables persons to participate effectively in a free society and to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups. Education is a systematic process through which a child or an adult acquires knowledge, experience, learn skills and sound attitudes. It makes an individual civilized, refined, cultured and educated. For a civilized and socialized society, education is the only means. Its goal is to make an individual perfect. Every society gives importance to education because it is a panacea for all evils. It is the key to solve the various problems of life. Education is the process of learning and acquiring knowledge at school from a teacher, receiving knowledge at home from a parent, a family member, and even an acquaintance. Education is a key that allows people to move up in the world, seek better jobs, and succeed in life. Education is one factor that affects job positions people hold, further progress in their career, the income they make, and the title they hold. So, the aim of education is to develop valuable personality and spiritual individuality.¹²

Education is necessary for the survival of the society. Having an aim for any activity enables one to act with meaning and it gives direction to the activity. Absence of an aim in education makes it a blind alley.¹³ The social aim of education is to be familiar with social traditions, manners, mores and customs. The subjective idealistic aim of education invites the person to know that the reality is within the individual and not beyond.¹⁴ Above all, the comprehensive aim is “Education for complete living” and to have a disciplined and well-ordered mind. The English Education Reform

¹² Cf. Nazeerali M.K., ed., *Education: Philosophy, Sociology and Economics* (Malappuram: NAS Publishers, 2013), 22.

¹³ Cf. Vidya Ratna Taneja, *Educational Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986), 24.

¹⁴ Cf. Sita Ram Jayaswal, *Principles of Education: A Sociological Approach* (Bombay: Vora and Co. Publishers, 1966), 10.

act of 1988 specifies the general aim of education as to promote spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society and to prepare such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experience of adult life.¹⁵ Following are some of the goals of education:

4. Functions of Education

The first function of education is progressive development of innate powers, such as love, affection, curiosity, and reasoning and secondly all round development of personality, which includes the physical, mental, emotional and social development, because these innate powers makes man a perfect human being in the society. The third function of education is to create a good and dynamic citizenship with the qualities of responsibility, fellow feelings, co-operation, love, service, sense of duty and qualities of leadership. Education is the creative process, which prepares and develops these qualities in citizens. Education also has the function of preserving the culture and civilization.¹⁶ Education empowers people to free the poor from the clutches of poverty and to enjoy the opportunities to engage in meaningful employment.¹⁷

5. Nature of Education

Education is a life-long process. It starts from the womb of the mother and continues till death. It is the process of development from infancy to maturity. It includes the effect of everything which influences human personality. Education is a systematic process through which constructive elements are added to human life for the establishment of a just society. Education is for modification

¹⁵ Cf. Jane Francis, "Evangelizing Aspect of education," *House Top* (Guwahati: MSMHC Publications, 2009), 5.

¹⁶ Cf. Mary Joseph and Thomas P.J., *Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education* (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Training College, 2008), 7.

¹⁷ Cf. Paul Bhatti, "Education Guarantees Religious Freedom" (5-11 November 2013): *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), 6 December 2013, 14.

of behavior. It is a continuous reconstruction of our experiences. As per the definition of John Dewey, education reconstructs and remodels our experiences towards socially desirable ways. Education is balanced development and it is concerned with the development of all faculties of the child. It fine-tunes the physical, mental, aesthetic, moral, economic, spiritual development of the individual so that the individual may get rid of his animal instincts by sublimating the same so that he becomes a civilized person. Therefore, education is a must for the perfection of a human being and the human society. It is necessary for every society and nation to bring holistic happiness and prosperity to its individuals.¹⁸

6. Education for Human Personal Development

Education has to be much more than literacy and acquiring knowledge on a cerebral level. It has to be an education of the heart as well as the head; education for character as well as competence.¹⁹ Every citizen should have at least as much education as it may enable him to weigh, judge, choose, and decide for himself.²⁰ Education as the development of the person seems to be deep-rooted within the aspirations of the human being. Education can be seen as a process that provokes the depth and breadth of understanding that aids self-integration. The process is unique, since to be educated, is to learn to be a person with values and culture.²¹ It demands all round development of the individual and through this, a well-balanced personality has to be developed.

¹⁸ Cf. John Parankimakil, "Meaning and Aims of Education," <http://www.meaningofeducation.com>, accessed June 2, 2016.

¹⁹ Cf. Loretto Pinto, *Holistic Education*, (Indore: Dharma Bharathi National Movement, 2003), 1.

²⁰ Cf. "Independence through Education," Advertisement Feature, *The Telegraph* (Guwahati), 15 August 2016.

²¹ Cf. Jerome Vallabharaj, *Catholic Schools and faith Education: A Pastoral – Empirical Exploratory Research on the Effectives of Faith Education in the Catholic High Secondary Schools in Tamil Nadu* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyothi Publications, 2000), 25.

It gives warning against one-sided development.²² The goal of education is not merely to turn out efficient producers for an ever widening and ever-diversifying market or consumers to stimulate the current economy, but perfection of a world that is eminently human. It is to help persons to work for their human development.²³

7. Education for Knowledge

Knowledge is wealth and acquisition of knowledge is seen as a core dimension of education. Knowledge gives power to the weaker intellect and satisfies the hunger of the stronger intellect. Human progress through the ages has been made possible through the increase and diffusion of knowledge.²⁴ Knowledge of life comes through intellectual training, which results in power to understand the world. Man becomes resourceful through knowledge. It fits the mind for anything, everything and all things. Acquisition of knowledge can lead a human being to live a virtue based life and to become a role model to be looked upon and imitated. One who has true knowledge cannot be but virtuous. The true knowledge will enable the person to have deeper convictions in life. It is knowledge, which makes a realist a visionary. It is knowledge, which ensures success in any profession, vocation or calling. But, one must know that knowledge gathering is not the whole aim of life of a person. It is indispensable but it is not the whole. True education is the art of utilizing the knowledge gained. Men with knowledge and wisdom should not become egoists in the sense of enjoying the bliss and aroma of knowledge by themselves.²⁵

²² Cf. Mary Joseph and Thomas P.J., *Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education* (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Training College, 2008), 5.

²³ Cf. Joy Kachappilly, "Evangelizing Through Education," *Mission Today*, 16, 2 (2014), 110.

²⁴ Cf. Mary Joseph and Thomas P.J., *Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education* (Mannanam: St. Joseph's Training College, 2008), 5.

²⁵ Cf. Vidya Ratna Taneja, *Educational Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986), 30.

8. Education for Culture

Education has the capacity to generate a spirit of enquiry and questioning of accepted truths. Education to knowledge will lead to culture. Culture means something cultivated, as a result of long experience of the race, something ripened. It is receptiveness to beauty and human feelings. One essential and binding feature of human relationship is to be a man of culture. A man of culture is an invaluable asset to a society. A cultured person is neither too assertive nor too dogmatic and aggressive. He is never thoughtless, meaningless and flippant in his remarks. All these virtues are inculcated by education. Therefore, the goal of education should produce men who possess both knowledge and culture.²⁶ Education operates as a powerful weapon to abolish the old cultural and ideological superstructure and to build a structure with peace and harmony.²⁷

9. Education for Character

If one succeeds in building the character of the individual, society will take care of itself. Character includes thinking, feeling and behavior. Therefore, the teacher's ultimate concern is to cultivate, not wealth of muscle, nor fullness of knowledge, nor refinement of feelings, but strength and purity of character. Education finds its real meaning and value when its aim is character building. A teacher must touch the hearts of her students. So the students imbibe more from the teacher's own life than they do from the books. This is because a student first learns his/her lessons from the gestures of their teacher. If the teacher is the owner of good character, the student automatically gets attuned with a good character. Character gets its shape through the instrumentality of

²⁶ Cf. Vidya Ratna Taneja, *Educational Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986), 31.

²⁷ Cf. Loretto Pinto, *Holistic Education*, (Indore: Dharma Bharathi National Movement, 2003), 12.

teachers. If teachers impart all the knowledge in the world to their students but do not inculcate the components of true character, they will have betrayed them.²⁸ Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and in return, give respect, for the person who taught them to love. It is essential to recognize the fact that character education should enable the students to develop their intrinsic motivations and they, in turn, must feel the sense of responsibility toward their own character formation.²⁹

10. Education for Spiritual Life

“The goal of education is neither national efficiency nor world solidarity, but making the individual feel that he has within himself something deeper than intellect, call it spirit if you like”, said Dr. Radha Krishnan while emphasizing the importance of education for Spiritual Life. There can be no true education without strong emphasis on the fundamental importance of its spiritual basis. Life in this world should be based on ethical values. These ethical values result from religious education. Spirituality is a way of life and the true spiritual education will enable the student to live well his/her vocation in life meaningfully and fruitfully. The spiritual concept one has will enable to bring to light the infinite worth of the person and one’s radical orientation towards God.³⁰

11. Education for Leadership

Leadership is very vital in any sector of life, be it in the family, or village, or an organization, or in the Church. Every unit needs

²⁸ Cf. APJ Abdul Kalam, *Indomitable Spirit* (Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 2006), 18.

²⁹ Cf. Loretto Pinto, *Holistic Education*, (Indore: Dharma Bharathi National Movement, 2003), 3.

³⁰ Cf. Vidya Ratna Taneja, *Educational Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986), 36.

animating and a life giving leadership.³¹ Being educated is the most important thing not only for success in one's life, but to play an important role in making a nation more successful and well rounded. A well-educated person represents a well-secured, well-developed and strong nation.³² The right education given to the young forms their minds and shapes their future by providing them with a conducive ethos.³³ The ultimate effectiveness of education is measured by the effectiveness of its product, i.e. the student after training.³⁴ In order to achieve this effectiveness, the youth must have a combination of knowledge, enthusiasm and hard work and it is a great dynamic power for transforming the nation. The leaders are creators of new organizations of excellence. Quality leaders are like magnets that attract the best people to build a team for an organization.³⁵

Leadership begins when a God - revealed mission captures a person and vision is a leader's unique rendering of the mission.³⁶ The youth of today need to have a clear vision of their mission. The vision must become the mission. The spirit of excellence should lead them to meet new challenges with new ways of dealing with

³¹ Cf. Telesphore P. Toppo, "Pastoral Reflections on Indian Church – Leadership of Tomorrow," *Jeevadhara*, XLIV, 259 (2014), 5.

³² Cf. Ezine, "Education Today" <http://www.ezinearticles.com>, accessed June 4, 2016.

³³ Cf. C.D. Sebastian, "Forming the Minds of students and Shaping the Future," *Mission Today*, XV, 1 (2013), 77.

³⁴ Cf. Manfred Waldumar Kohl and A.N. Lal Senanayake, ed., *Educating for Tomorrow: Theological Leadership for the Asian Context* (Bangalore: SAIACS Publications, 2002), 71.

³⁵ Cf. APJ Abdul Kalam, *Indomitable Spirit* (Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 2006), 216.

³⁶ Cf. C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Discovering the Secrets of Servant Leadership from the Life of Christ*, with a foreword by Calvin Miller (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2008), 19.

³⁷ Cf. Arul Gnanapragasam, "My Vision for Youth," *New Leader*, 16-28 February, 2011, 29.

things.³⁷ The vision is the most potent weapon in a leader's arsenal and this weapon unleashes the power of the Church.³⁸ The core of a leader's vision is a positive belief and conviction that life can and will be made better by taking a new path. A vision is not mere a fantasy or naive idealism. A vision directs one towards the future, but it is experienced in the present. It focuses on the future, but it is rooted in today's reality.³⁹ Leadership is to have an unshakeable faith in one's vision and an unrelenting confidence in the power to make positive changes to happen.⁴⁰ Everyone must be open to serve and lead in whatever apostolate or mission that one recognizes as most beneficial to the church and actualize them within the limits of the personnel who are available ⁴¹ for the expansion of God's kingdom.

12. Impact of Education in the Society

Every society has its own cultures and traditions and it is proud of its cultural heritage. Education plays a leading role in the preservation of the values and traditions of a society. One of the impacts of education is social awakening, because through education one becomes aware of the social values and norms, which are essential for a peaceful society. The second impact is the political awareness, where one encounters various political ideologies operating in the world and their impact in the society. Thirdly, through education one is able to contribute for the economic growth of the society. Education plays a vital role in the new

³⁸ Cf. Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Secunderabad: OM Authentic Books, 2002), 50

³⁹ Cf. Anthony A. D'Souza, *Leaders for Today Hope for Tomorrow: Empowering and Empowered Leadership* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2002), 93.

⁴⁰ Cf. Robin Sharma, *The Leader who had no Title* (Mumbai: Jaico Publications, 2010), 51.

⁴¹ Cf. Ann Carey, *Sisters in Crisis: Revisited from Unraveling to Reform and Renewal* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 50.

inventions and discoveries and for the advancement of the technology. Lastly, one learns to think, to reason out, to question, to reflect, to care, to feel concern and to act.⁴² Above all, the quality education provided in the society fabricates leaders who own personal responsibility, who has a mission and vision, and who will possess optimism and a positive self-image for one's own growth and for the betterment of the society.

Conclusion

We have come to an understanding that education has a key role in the building up of every individual, society, and of nation. To educate means to engage a person in such a way as to guarantee the development of a persons' faculties and to teach is always to educate, but educating is not automatically equivalent to teaching. The essential element of education is to enable every individual, alone and with others, to confront through culture in particular, the challenges of their existence as individuals or as groups.⁴³ Socrates' mission as a teacher was to free his pupil's mind from confusion and dogma in order that it should be able to find and recognize the truth about whatever is good and virtuous. Plato recommended that education be employed as the chief method of reforming both the individual's character and the state. The purpose of their education was to produce people who will advance the happiness of the community. So too, let the mission of education by the MSMHC pave a way to find a future for the new generation.

⁴² Cf. Nazeerali M.K., ed., *Education: Philosophy, Sociology and Economics* (Malappuram: NAS Publishers, 2013), 285.

⁴³ Cf. Jean-Louis Tauran, "Education: Human Wisdom and the Wisdom of God" (21 June 2010): *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), 14 July 2010, 6.

Infusing the Spirit of Optimism into Life and Mission

Understanding the Spirituality of Optimism in Francis De Sales

Sr. Mary Sangma MSMHC

Introduction

The search for spirituality of integration in life is imperative in the culture of the twenty-first century, where the world and the individual within its culture appear so widely fragmented. We find that the spiritual experience is fundamental to all. Sandra Schneider sees spirituality as “a human experience of a search for meaning, a purpose and direction in life. It fulfils human beings’ need to have a foundation for living, a path or a way of life in the light of a larger human condition.” This search can also manifest as returning to the source, who is God the creative power. Therefore, spirituality is concrete and real, when it encompasses all the ways, beliefs and attitudes people ever have regarding the development of the human spirit in its collective as well as particular forms. At the heart of this contemporary interest in spirituality is the idea of personal journeying and positive change. People desire to explore themselves deeper, but they are left with no proper orientation to this authentic aspiration to merge the divine and human while they are immersed with the concerns of their own lives. It is here that the insights from Francis de Sales’ spirituality of optimism based on Christian hope and love and the dignity of the human person becomes relevant. His optimistic thinking, convictions, humanistic stance and in-depth knowledge and personal relationship with God, human beings and the world, particularly his creative pastoral

approach to his people are ever relevant ideals to incorporate with a new paradigm in today's context.

The teachings of Francis de Sales as a priest and a bishop finds an echo in the human heart and has an affinity with the deepest human aspirations particularly in the context of the young people, searching for integration of spirituality and secular life. It comes close with Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, which invites all people for the universal call to live holy lives with a new, fresh approach to life. The teachings of Francis de Sales intends to lead one to God in the most ordinary way but with an extraordinarily optimistic outlook to life. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out how Francis de Sales' spirituality proposed an appeal to the laity and to all those who seek the perfection of holiness.

One can certainly learn from Francis de Sales who embodied several meanings of the spirituality of optimism, which denotes 'humanity' which, today as yesterday, can stand for culture and courtesy, liberty and tenderness, nobility and solidarity, love and charity - spirituality capable of transforming the human person and the society. Though Francis de Sales formed his convictions and attitude in Christian context, his attitudes and relationships are more inclusive and accommodative. The spirit of Francis de Sales continues to challenge us to the ideals of a reconciled humanity, harmony between action in the world and prayer, between the secular state and the pursuit of perfection, with the help of God's grace. Therefore, the spirituality of optimism in Francis de Sales finds its relevance today.

Optimism in Francis de Sales' Teachings

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) enjoys a well-deserved reputation as one of the most attractive saints and spiritual writers in the history of Christian Spirituality. He lived at a time of social and religious upheaval of sixteen and early seventeenth century. He

became noted for his deep faith and his gentle approach to the religious divisions in France, resulting from the Protestant Reformation and the socio-historical, political milieu of his time. The doctrine taught by St. Francis de Sales was not new, but he did present spiritual teaching in an original manner.

His two major works the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God* expounds the spiritual wisdom in him. The optimism of Francis de Sales is focused along the Biblical line in the very first book of the account of creation where God sees everything He created as good and praise worthy (Gen 1:31). The book of Genesis hence can be distinguished as the foundation of Christian optimism.¹ Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, states that while human beings are imperfect they are fundamentally good because they were made in the image of the good Creator. He says, “God has placed you in the world not because he has some need of you, but solely to manifest His goodness for you.”² Thus, the goodness of human being is in close dependence upon the goodness of God.

Francis de Sales had a profound crisis that drove him to question his eternal salvation and God’s predestination in his respect, thus suffering as a true spiritual drama that were the principal theological questions of his time. He found peace in the radical and liberating reality of the love of God. He was deeply convinced that God who loved the world so much would not have intended human being for hell. Human persons are destined for heaven and therefore human beings are “basically good.”³ Michael Muller describes this crisis as “the birthday of that joyous outlook on life

¹ Claude Morel, “Christian Joy and Optimism” *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, vol.7 no. 2 (June, 1994): 184.

² Francis De Sales, *Introduction to Devout Life*, trans and ed. Antony Mookenthattaam, Armind Nazareth, Antony Kollenchery (Bangalore: S.F.S Publications, 2015), 53. (Here after IDL).

³ Ibid. 47.

which was inseparable from Francis de Sales spirituality.”⁴ Francis thus emerged to be a profound optimist. The spirit of optimism in Francis Sales stems from his deep-seated understanding of God’s love and goodness woven into the language of God, in and through his creation.

Optimism Founded on a Deep Rooted Love of God

Francis de Sales’ approach to Christian life is guided by this fundamental belief in the dignity of human being who is filled with a tremendous capacity to love. Just as God created human person in his image and likeness, (Gen 1:26) so also He ordained for human being love in the image and likeness of the love due to his divinity. Francis de Sales surrendered himself at the sheer love of God after he received deliverance from his disturbing notion of predestination, and this was the secret of his life, which would shine in his principal work, *Treatise on the Love of God* (TLG).

Francis’ Optimism is deeply rooted in the experience of being loved by God. To understand the love of God, where he says: “when it comes to loving God, we are moved in this way ...faith teaches us that godhead is an inexhaustible mine of every perfection, a goodness that is supremely infinite.”⁵ We see this in St. Paul who in speaking of love led by spontaneous association to mention faith and hope as well: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and the angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol, and If I have prophetic power and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” (1Cor 12: 1-2).

⁴ Mookenthottam Antony, *The Crisis in Paris Amidst Trial and Problems* (Vishakhapatnam: S.F.S Publications, 1978), 9.

⁵ Francis de Sales, *The Love of God: A Treatise by Saint Francis de Sales*, trans and intro, by Vincent Kerns, (Bangalore: S.F.S Publications, 1982). (Here after TLG).

For this reason, love of God is the end, the perfection, and the excellence of the universe.⁶ For Francis de Sales the dynamics of love of God in human is the movement of God towards the humankind and the movements of the human person towards God and the union of the human hearts with each other for the love of God. Love embraces the whole existence in each of its dimension, including the dimension of time and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed, the discovery of God.

All by Love and not by Force

Everything by love and nothing by force is the hallmark of Salesian Spirituality. Freedom is fundamental to human beings. According to Francis de Sales, liberty is the richest possession of human beings; it is the life of the heart and the most precious gift, God has endowed on human beings. They are created in God's image and likeness and have received the wonderful gift of free will. God leaves them free to choose their response to His inspirations and commands, to the trials and tribulations as well as to the joys and delights which He permits.⁷ He says in his letter to St. Jane of Chantal, "Here is the general rule of our Obedience; do all through love, nothing through constraint; I want you to have the spirit of liberty, but the liberty that excludes constraint, anxiety and scruples"⁸. At the origin of many paths of pedagogy and spirituality of the present time, the stamp of this teacher is rediscovered, whose inspiration many saints have trod, like St. John Bosco and the heroic "little way" of St. Therese of Lemieux.

⁶ Antony D'Souza, *Enabling and Enobling Love: An In-depth Study of St. Francis de Sales, The Love of God* (Bangalore: S.F.S Publications, 1993), 70.

⁷ Francis Moget, *The Choice of Love and its Consequences in the Treatise on the Love of God* (Bangalore: S.F.S Publications, 1992), 108.

⁸ William C. Marceau, "St. Francis de Sales and His doctrine of Love," *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, vol. 21, no. 9 (1996): 54.

How can one understand this love? Francis de Sales gives the answer when he says, “we do not know what it is to love God. Love does not consist in even the greatest sweetness nor in sentiments, but in even the greatest and finest resolution and desire to please God in all things” (TLG.10:12). Therefore, Francis suggests that the practice of humility towards God and sweetness towards the neighbor is the best way to imitate Jesus Christ who was humble. That is why humility is an acknowledgement of truth; and in humility one can do all by love and not by force.

Presence of God as the Reason to be Optimistic

Francis de Sales believes that the presence of God in lives is a reason to be hopeful and to remain joyful. He uses an analogy to describe the presence of God when he says, “The sun’s rays give both light and warmth together; this ray of grace is a light which shows us the way and a warmth which stimulates us to respond. Without this light and warmth our lives would be hopeless and colourless.”⁹ The presence of Christ permeates our everyday life because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom.5:5). It invites us to believe that “*the Lord’s delight is in those who put their hope in His unfailing love*” (Ps 147:11). Francis thus tells that this promise is forever.

The foundation for optimism is the presence of the Divine Love. The Gospel of Mathew gives the assurance of Jesus’ parting promise and spiritual presence to His disciples when he says, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Mt. 28:20) It is important therefore to believe in God’s goodness and know that we are the recipient of God’s undying presence. For those who are open to God’s presence, it is a relationship with God that gives life, consistent joy and confidence for which humanity was designed. God is present not only in the place where one is, but that He is

⁹ Michael Hollings, ed. *A Thirst for God: Daily Readings with St. Francis de Sales* (London:Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), 75.

present in a special way in the person's heart and in the very centre of his/her spirit. He enlivens and animates it by his divine presence, being there as the heart of heart and the spirit of spirit.

His Optimistic Approach

Francis de Sales was a man of synthesis and harmony. He achieved a wonderful harmony in his own life, thought and teachings. His approach with everyone was that of kindness. He was appealing in his demeanor that he won the hearts of people from all walks of life. He situated himself according to the time and people. Endowed with great discernment in individual encounter, Francis de Sales also entered in debates of his times with moderation that invited confidence.¹⁰ Human person in Francis de Sales and his spiritual thoughts blended harmoniously in him.

His Optimistic Vision of “Spirituality for All”

Francis de Sales brought about a revolutionary stand against the popular notion of the time that holiness is only for clergy and religious who were capable and worthy of leading truly holy lives. He expounded the forgotten but eternal truth that holiness is open to all and is founded in the scriptures,¹¹ “Sanctify yourself therefore and be holy” (Lev 11:44). His understanding of sanctity springs from his optimistic view of human person who has the divine spark of God's image and the capacity to love God and to be perfected. He enunciated this vision in a particularly unique and straightforward manner in his spiritual classic: *Introduction to the Devout Life*, meant for all people. He strongly opposes those who wish to make spirituality or ‘devotion’ as he calls it, the monopoly of experts, which is within the reach of only religious;

¹⁰ John Sankarathil, “Pope John Paul and Saint Francis de Sales” *Indian Journal of Spirituality*, vol. XVIII, no.2 (April -June 2005): 196.

¹¹ Paul VI, *Sabaudiae Gemma: Apostolic letter on the Occasion of 400th Anniversary of the Birth Centenary of the birth of St. Francis de Sales*, Rome, (29 January 1967): 6.

he says that, “devotion is to be practiced differently by the nobleman, the workman, the servant, the prince, the widow, the young girl, the wife. Even more than the practice, devotion has to be adapted to the strength of life situation and duties of each individual.”(IDL.3.40.) Hence, to be holy and to be connected to God is everybody’s concern and everybody’s destiny. Francis de Sales suggests a spirituality according to their own state of life, which is practically genuine and oriented towards God. According to him, people who are engaged in public affairs can also be united with God. Pope Paul VI noted that, no one more than St. Francis de Sales anticipated the deliberations and decisions of the Second Vatican Council nearly 400 years before, in the waning shadow of the Middle Ages and in the midst of the Counter-Reformation of his time with such a keen and progressive insight.¹² He stated, “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”¹³

Optimistic Ecumenist

Francis de Sales lived during a period of religious controversy and conflict due to Protestant Reformation. He was a man of unity amidst divisions in the Church. Religious controversy was not his main interest; he reserved first place for the teaching of charity, love and respect to Catholics and Protestants alike. This is evident in his life as a missionary sent to Chablais in Geneva, a strong hold of Calvinists. Francis’ approach to the refuting Calvinists were that of engaged conversation and debate in public meetings and private homes, clarifying mistaken notions of Catholic faith, and pointing out erroneous ones of Calvinists.¹⁴ His compelling ministry and personal charisma of gentleness, equanimity and

¹² Vatican II, Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no.40 (21 November, 1964): 361.

¹³ Pope Paul VI, *Sabaudiae Gemma*.9.

¹⁴ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 15.

optimistic attitude were instrumental in re-converting thousands of Chablais back from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism.

The sphere of spirituality today is often viewed as a fertile ground for an emerging ecumenism. There is a growing awareness that, it is the differences of doctrines and philosophies of religion that have created logically-irreconcilable differences; apart from that we are “one in the Spirit.”¹⁵ Our experience of God and one another is more important than a rational understanding of God and His ways.

Today the difference in reality is the hallmark of existence. It is this differences that causes repulsion and dissention to many people.¹⁶ The result is one remaining apart from each other in its narrow-mindedness. Francis de Sales, exercised tremendous influence both within, and far beyond with his cheerful spirit that animated his love for God. Today, religious harmony is a principle that underscores the necessity of different communities within a given society that is called to live together peacefully as one community.

His Attitude towards Modern Day Youth

Francis de Sales was a person uniquely gentle and optimistic to all things and to all people. As a priest and the Bishop of Geneva he touched people in all walks of life - the children and adults, the fragile and the strong, the poor and the rich, the nobleman and the peasants. Although he had not worked particularly for the youth; yet some of his writings show his concern and open-mindedness and down to earth understanding of the nature of youth, particularly his attitude towards little follies with regards to fashion, make-up

¹⁵ M.D. Thomas, “Harmony Among Religious Traditions” *Third Millennium: Indian Journal of Evangelization*, vol. XVIII no. 1 (January – March 2015): 84.

¹⁶ Joseph Mendes, “Human Concerns in the Counsels of St. Francis de Sales to the Laity” *Studies in Salesian Spirituality*,” no.3 (1March 1984): 137.

and vanities of youth. He encouraged in them all that is beautiful in a healthy way and appreciated the elegance and beauty of youthfulness. His attitude towards them was that of pastoral concern. He writes: “they (youth) feel innate need to be pleasing to others; it is quiet licit of them to wish to please.”¹⁷ He captured the heart of the youth as he had a special charisma of understanding the state of every person.

Source of his Optimistic Vision

Francis de Sales, a truly profound optimist vividly expressed the fundamental principle to see God as goodness itself around which he bases his optimism. The illuminative way of Francis de Sales’ Spirituality of optimism, expressed in being and action has much to offer today in the stringent deepening internal and external crisis of spiritual discontentment and the many forces or the elements that are affecting the manifold areas of human life. The fundamental question is, how do we respond to these concerns? It is here that we are disposed to a favorable view of events with an optimistic outlook of Francis de Sales that God designed us to live with hope. In the *Introduction to Devout Life*, he states that God has given existence to human beings from nothingness. Humanity must therefore work together with the forces of God in creating a universe with less evil and more good.

The Church continues to radiate Christian optimism in its reflection and in its mission. The Church document *Gaudium et Spes* is hailed as the document of optimism. It breathes with an “astonishing optimism” which holds that nothing is impossible if the Church and humankind work together.¹⁸ In his apostolic exhortations, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites men and women to radiate

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 380.

¹⁸ Francis de Sales, “Letter to President Brulart, Annecy, 18 February,” *Oeuvres* XII, no. 16 (1605): 1892.

the core of optimism. He says, “Joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.” Francis de Sales emphasizes that God is the origin and end of human beings. In affirming the greatness and importance of the human person Francis de Sales gives human being their due position and ensures the saving grace of Christ, through his incarnation, death and resurrection.

A Holistic Approach to the Culture of Optimism

Every culture expresses its identity through solidarity and affirmation of the visible harmony with God, nature and the other. Francis de Sales’ spirituality is oriented towards the optimistic view of life, of God’s goodness and creative presence in the world. God is the God of joy, better still, in God himself everything is joy since everything is gift.¹⁹ The exposition of the spirituality of joy and optimism in Francis de Sales proclaims God’s creative power, the great reality of divine-human encounter with the cultures.

Sharing joy is an act of spirit, the source and fruit of commitment, which involves fostering certain optimistic values. It is an attitude of admiring and enjoying the good things the creator has placed on our way, like the nature, silence, and achievements, sufferings and acceptance of life in a most positive manner.

The holistic approach to the culture of optimism is to rediscover the true spirit of joy and optimism in the concrete life situations. As Francis de Sales says, “unity of essence is the distinction of persons, bathed in infinite brilliance; added to this, an inexpressible harmony by which every perfection of action and movement is wonderfully included.” (TLG. 1, 4) It is an invitation to look

¹⁹ Katherine Brégy, *The Story of Saint Francis de Sales: Patron of Catholic Writers* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1958), 26.

holistically to the whole reality of life. It is to recognize one's natural assets and know the goodness one possesses while being aware of one's own capacity and weakness.

Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the Twenty-Seventh World Youth says, "A yearning for joy lurks within the heart of every man and woman. Far more than immediate and fleeting feelings of satisfaction, our hearts seek a perfect, full and lasting joy capable of giving "flavour" to our existence." The true imitation of Francis de Sales in his optimistic approach to life, would require that joy and optimism be presented in the close connections of life. People's experience of faith should have its objective - the fulfillment of humanity in its fullness.

Encountering God in Everyday Life

The optimistic spirituality of Francis de Sales proposes a practical everyday spirituality for living in the modern world. His spirituality gives expression to one who embraces the duties of one's state of life. God is best discovered not in the withdrawal from everyday life, but in the act of living it, where one finds God in the circumstances of one's life, in the daily experiences of life which touch the very core of lives both joys and difficulties. An all-embracing, down-to-earth spirituality that makes sense to the lives of people.

Finding meaning in life includes the awareness of physical self, spirit and mind in relation to God, self and others and the wakefulness of the whole reality of life - commitment to self, family, neighbors, community and the larger society. The potential for becoming a truly spiritual person is located in the depth and intentionality of ordinary living. It is the conscious presence of God, of self within and the demands of everyday existence.

Francis de Sales taught that holiness should infuse anything and everything one does, whether big or small and to perform it

enthusiastically and well. Most especially in the day-to-day responsibilities that one's personal vocation entails.²⁰ It is the invitation to belong completely to God's presence in the world and the tasks of one's state in fullness²¹ to consecrate temporal things and sanctify the everyday life. The experience of encountering God leads to transformation of lives by getting in touch with the deepest self and the whole gamut of life. It is a spirituality of lived experience.

Optimism Leading to Transformative Spirituality

The ultimate value, which generates the horizon of any spirituality relates to the one who lives that spirituality to the whole reality in some particular way.²² Francis de Sales contends that spirituality is not only the pious practices of devotion but it is something that calls the person to go beyond oneself. Hence, spirituality enables a person to consider the meaning of one's actions, enabling persons to comprehend the complexity of one's motives and the impact they have on the world. It is also the capacity to experience passion for a cause, compassion for others and forgiveness of self. It is a process of becoming, but never as an achievement.²³ Spirituality is finding the truth of one's existence and discovering the fire within. It is an integrated relationship with the Divine, fellow human beings and the creation.

Spirituality Encompasses Peace and Reconciliation

The Hebrew word that encompasses peace is *shalom* which has rich overtones of wholeness, completeness, tranquility and

²⁰ Wendy Wright and Joseph Power, ed., *Introduction to Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction, Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 1988), 34.

²¹ Phillip Sheldrake, ed., *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*.1.

²² Rico Palaca Ponce, *Transformative Spirituality: A Breath of Fire* (Manila: WCC Press Release of 22 March, 2012).

²³ Elisabeth Stopp, "The Context of Ecumenism," in *Essays and Talks on St. Francis de Sales*, no.7 (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 1997), 199.

prosperity. This prospect of peace is a thrilling hope but the reality of present conflicts and suffering continues to assault this hope with pain. Peace with God does not exhaust the potentiality of peace which connects people. The advent of Jesus into the world was heralded with peace on earth to people of good will. (Lk 2:14) Again, St. Paul says, “let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual up building.” (Rom 14:19) If divine peace reigns within each one, it should touch the lives of people, especially reconciled peace among families, friends, foes and our broken society.

Williston Walker observes, “Francis de Sales can be called as a model of peace and reconciliation through his persevering and relentless work of reconciliation among the Chablais.”²⁴ His friendly approach, message of the love of God and one another was a process of peace and reconciliation. A fundamental source of inspiration today in the process of reconciliation is done through hopeful optimism towards restoration of peace within the families, communities and the political governance. Here the approach would be of “complete trust in the goodness of God, who did not condemn humankind but sent His son Jesus to offer human beings salvation and fullness of life.”²⁵

Respecting the Differences: Towards Unity and Harmony

In today’s context of religious pluralism, one may feel a call to be involved in ecumenical relationships. For some Christians, the word “ecumenism,” as used in its proper sense, has overtones of relativism.²⁶ This is sometimes expressed as “we all share the

²⁴ Cf. Renty Keitzar, *In Search of Relevant Gospel Message* (Guwahati: 1995), 195.

²⁵ Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus and Ann Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 245.

²⁶ Susanne A. Kjekshus Koch, *Saint Francis de Sales and the Theology of Hearts: The Dynamics Of Love* (London: Harper Collins Publishers 1995), 58. See also, John Abruzzese, *The Theology of Hearts in the Writings of St. Francis de Sales* (Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1985), 112.

same God so these differences between Christians are not that important.” Some consider that it involves conversations with anyone who is not of the same faith - whether Hindus, Muslims, Protestant, Orthodox, or the adherent of an Eastern religion. Ecumenism concerns itself with our relationships with the followers of other faith and our search for unity in diversity.

A mature and committed Christian can be a vital force of the community’s voice through mutually respectful, friendly dialogue towards building unity and harmony. Various Religious groups can help to bridge the gap of the fractional religious groups by working in collaboration with various religious leaders. In the context of this ecumenical process, Francis de Sales’ spirit of openness and humility can be an inspiration. His optimistic attitude can be emphasized today as the spiritual weapon to move consciences of people. The fruitful interactions with other groups with this attitude can enable in bringing understanding on the essence of living harmoniously with different religious faith.

Becoming Sensitive to the Disadvantaged Poor

Francis de Sales claims that people’s answer to the invitation of God’s love cannot be limited to prayer and meditation. It has to result in concrete acts of love as well.²⁷ The longing of humankind is towards the goal of unity with God, but this cannot be accomplished without the acts of love, for God is love. He says that loving God is inseparable from loving neighbor. In the modern world to be optimistically spiritual would mean openness and responsibility to reality. To promote the building of a new community requires affirming the dignity of one another, bringing justice to the forgotten ones and raising hope for the people

²⁷ Claude Morel, *Gaze of Joy and Optimism* .trans. Ivo Carneiro (Bangalore: S.F.S Publications, 1991), 179.

concretely. God who is present in every event demands the right relationship and liberation of all.

Spirituality of Care for the Earth's Resources

Francis de Sales had an admirable stance for God's creation, which is the basis of his optimistic view of God and human person. Everything that God created was good and venerable. Speaking about the nature to one of his correspondents he expresses his admiration for nature: "I found God so suave and gentle, among our roughest mountains where many simple souls adored and worshiped Him in sincerity and truth. Only a few words of their language but it seemed to me that they were saying something beautiful."²⁸

Ecological spirituality is in living gently with the earth, our common home. For Christians to get closer to nature means to become aware of creation, animate and inanimate which is interconnected by the creator. The image of God consists of knowledge and righteousness, and expresses itself in creative human stewardship. (Gen1:26) Our stewardship implies that we are morally accountable to God for treating creation.²⁹

Caring the environment affects the quality of our relationship with God, with other human beings and with creation itself. We need to be deeply concerned about the need for liberation of ecology. Pope Francis through his prophetic Encyclical which can be called the *Magna Carta* of the Church's social teaching *Laudato Si* says, "Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with the capacity for wonder which takes

²⁸ David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 285.

²⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home*, no.225 (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2015), 173.

us to the deeper understanding of life.”³⁰ If every particle is suffused with the divine, then every part of this earth is sacred, and we are part of this earth, and the earth is part of us. This is in an aspect of optimistic spirituality, being connected to the world around us.

Conclusion

Francis de Sales remains a spiritual treasure in the history of our time inviting us to look at life with the same optimistic attitude. He prompts us to discover in the daily cares of life the valid motives for hope and optimism of an authentic joy. An optimistic spiritual reality is all embracing, which includes all aspects of life, beginning from person to community, nature and God.

Achieving a holistic spirituality, one capable of articulating the hopes and aspirations of the worlds’ diverse needs of the people is a challenge to be reflected. It integrates the potential growth of a person. The forces of ethno centrism, racism, sexism and the oppression of others, in all its forms will give way to the comprehensive unity of the human family. Spirituality capable of embracing wide extremes of human experience can only be rooted in the deepest human longing for communion with the ultimate personal source of all meaning and values.

Francis de Sales’ spirituality of optimism brings to the fore a perennial value and a truly relevant spirituality to the contemporary society. For him a missionary is a confident optimist who is aware that God is present in his life, in his community and in the events of history.

³⁰ J. Charles Davis, “Rayan’s Vision of New Society “ in *The Vision of New Church and a New Society* ed. Kurien Kunnumpuram(New Delhi:Christian World Imprints, 2016), 172.

Enhancing Church's Mission through Media

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC

Introduction

Proclamation of the Kingdom of God is central to the church's mission. We see how Jesus commissioned his apostles to reach out to all nations with the message of Good News (Mt. 28: 18-10). He founded the church on solid foundation (Eph. 2:20) and willed that the mission be continued through His followers. Though the situation keeps changing, the core concept of the mission remains the same. What makes the mission of the church bear fruit is its ability to adapt to newness, making it relevant for all. One of the means to make the mission effective is to make use of the various means of communication that are available. The Church's decree *Inter Mirifica* promulgated on 4 December 1963 underlines the importance of communication for the effectiveness of various ministries. Proper use of media can help to contribute to the wellbeing of the people and support to further the spread of the Kingdom of God.¹ Considering the importance media holds in the society, the Church is to use this means in the pursuit of heralding the message of salvation.

1. Media and Society

Today the society is undergoing many changes due to the advancement in science and technology. It has brought innumerable advantages to people everywhere, opening up the possibility of

¹ *Inter Mirifica*, 2.

going beyond time and space, providing opportunities to communicate to individuals instantly. This revolution in communication technology is transforming social orders and cultures around the world.² The rapid growth of communication media lead to greater enhancement of interpersonal exchange of ideas and information. It also provides greater flexibility and access for sending and receiving messages in different forms with clarity and precision.

1.1. Media Representation

Media is central to what ultimately come to represent the social realities today. It has the power to influence public through its portrayals and interpretation of the reality. Through representations, media connects the world to individuals and reproduces the image of society³. Here, the perceived reality is translated or re-produced through a medium that is selective, foregrounding some truths and backgrounding others. When objectivity is given primary importance there is no chance for shadowing the truth, but when subjectivity takes upper hand there can be misrepresentation and falsification. Very often different media centres have diverse interpretations of a common situation or event. Therefore, it is important for everyone to understand the underpinnings of the media to become its prudent users.

1.2. Role of Social Media

Today much emphasis is laid on social media, which is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, making the entire communication system revolutionized. There are numerous digital

² Baran, S.J. & Davis, D. K. (2008). *Mass communication theory: Foundations, ferment and future*. USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

³ Brooks. & Hebert. (2006). Gender, Race and Media Representation. In *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Communication*, p.297. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006.

media and social networking sites, each having its own unique manoeuvre, distinctive features and purpose. Its availability and handiness keeps capturing the attention of many that these are used extensively for the purpose of communication and entertainment in both domestic and professional spaces. One of the most important advantages of the use of these interactive media is the possibility of online sharing of knowledge and information among the different groups of people. This online sharing of information also promotes the increase in the communication skills among the people especially those sharing the similar kind of profession.

2. Relevance of Media in Church's Ministry

Media has become one of the most powerful means of communication for every section of the society today. It provides tools for effective communication that enables to improve participation and coordination. "The Church" is the People that God gathers in the whole world⁴. It's universality finds expression not only in the diversity of its members but also in its mission which embraces the whole humanity in service. Every ministry carried out in the church aims at fulfilling this mission and it involves people from all walks of life. In this context, the necessity of using appropriate media remains paramount important. Effective use of media can enhance the ministries in the Church as it helps to bring newness and vibrancy. Any ministry that aims at benefitting people has to look out for maximising opportunities for growth. A ministry becomes more useful and favourable when it is given a serious thought to understand the interest and context of the people who are the beneficiaries. In this regard, the means of communication used has to be carefully chosen to gain better acceptance. It is not how much or what is done that matters most but how it is done. Therefore choosing an appropriate method has

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 752

to be given right emphasis before executing the task. As the present-day advancement in technology gives numerous choices, changing from traditional to modern means can be done easily.

Understanding the need of the hour and using the media correctly and competently helps to communicate the message with understanding. Greater is the effectiveness when the message communicated is done through an appropriate medium that is prevalent.

2.1. Mission of the Church

The mission of the church is at the very heart of Christ. It is in the church that Christ fulfills and reveals his own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: "to unite all things in him."⁵ The ultimate plan of God to save everyone is realised through Him. Growing in the knowledge of Christ and His Word leads to a deeper understanding of the mission of the church.

The mission of the Church finds clarity in the great command of Jesus to His disciples. He commissioned them saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mat. 28:19-20). The Church is universal in every aspect of its nature and ministry. Its ultimate aim is to continue the good works of Jesus and to lead everyone to the truth. It is called to be an inclusive community that respects every individual person, seeking to reach out to all in service. Today, besides the proclamation of the good news, it is engaged in several of works charity. This mission of the Church is realised through various individuals and groups of persons who are its close collaborators. As the Church's multi-

⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 772

faceted mission involves a large number of persons who network, it has to evolve a system that ensures unity of purpose.

2.2. Enhancing Ministry through Media

All the ministries carried out in the Church aim at giving emphasis to the values of the Kingdom by communicating God's unconditional love and goodness. In all circumstances even if the strategies are changed, the fundamentals remain the same. With the passing of time, the situation around keeps changing and it calls for bringing newness in the method of carrying out the mission. One of the best ways to respond to the call of the hour is to understand the culture of media driven society today. While technology provides maximum possibilities for communicating, it unlocks the doors of new possibilities and gives opportunities for the furthering of God's Kingdom.

One of the means to reach the hearts of today's generation, especially the young people of our time is through media. Pointing out the bearing media has on society today, Pope John II states, "Since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications."⁶ It underlines the need to bring effectiveness in the mission of the Church by utilising the various available communication technologies. Because, it is important to understand that the choice of medium is an essential element for reaching the target group; the reception of the message in today's context largely depends on the medium used.

Information processed through media supply the matter for developing new concepts and ideas. It can greatly influence in

⁶ *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 37

shaping the mind of individuals. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the content of the message communicated through media. It is time to flee away from creating mere impressions that are fleeting, paying attention to the essential aspects.

Conclusion

The present day society is well advanced in the use of media. The connections established through media help its members to be inter-connected and interdependent. There is a growing interest in everyone to explore into the world of media, which offers them new vistas of knowledge and experience. Besides familiarising them to a wider world, media enables in developing their technical skills as the offer of various new applications are made easily available. As these are apt and handy, individuals spend much time in networking and establishing connections. The possibilities created by the technological progression have brought tremendous changes in the lifestyle of people. In this context, it is good to pause a while to understand the impact it makes in the church's domain. Even though efforts are being made to become aware of its significance since Vatican II, it has not done much to promote its use. One of the reasons could be its conventional thinking, which often has not encouraged in bringing changes.

The effectiveness of media reaches beyond national boundaries and has an impact on individual members of the whole human family.⁷ Therefore, understanding the opportunities and challenges it offers, the Church is called to promote the use of media to enhance its various ministries that aim at serving all God's people.

⁷ *Inter Mirifica*, 22.

MSMHC MISIONARY ANIMATION CENTRE

Missionary Animation Centre (MAC) launched in the year 2000 facilitates training of leaders, animators, retreat preachers and resource personnel for the various ministries of the congregation. It organizes seminars and conferences on various topics that are relevant and timely, conducts biblical, ecclesial and catechetical studies, refresher courses for sisters engaged in pastoral ministry, Young Apostles of Christ (YAC), Women Apostles for Catechesis (WAC) and other collaborators in the mission of the Congregation. It has also an active department of social communication to publish journals, periodicals, missionary magazine and literature on evangelization and catechesis, translation of literature in different languages and production of audio visuals.



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