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Going beyond …
Reaching out to the "Peripheries"

MISSIONARY ANIMATION CENTRE

HOUSE TOP: MSMHC Missionary Journal
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CONTENTS

1. Foreword 5
2. Message 7
3. Editorial 9
4. Bishop Stephen Ferrando:
   A Missionary without Frontiers 11
   -Sr. Rosita Joseph msmhc
5. Responding to the call of the Peripheries 22
   -Sr. Rose Paite msmhc
6. Reaching out to the Peripheries in need of
   the Light of the Gospel 34
   -Sr. Viji John msmhc
7. Empowering Youth of Today for a better Tomorrow 41
   -Sr. Irene Zosiami msmhc
8. Spiritual Accompaniment:
   An Integral Part of Evangelization and Catechesis 51
   -Sr. Ligi James msmhc
9. Letting God's Compassion Visible
   through Healing Ministry 65
   -Sr. Sindhu George msmhc
10. Proclamation of Christ:
    Centrality of Church's Mission 81
    -Sr. Nycy Joseph msmhc
11. Mind of the Church on Educating the Young
    in the Classroom and Beyond 88
    -Sr. Manju George msmhc
12. Mission Encounters 123
    -Sr. Angela Tirkey msmhc
13. Book Review - 'Breathing Under Water' 127
    -Sr. Shiji James msmhc

"Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel."
(Evangelii Gaudium, 20)

Foreword

Going to the Peripheries, the Need of the Hour!

Most people today consider Pope Francis as the "Pope of the Peripheries" because of his constant insistence on the need to reach out to various types of peripheries. In his talk to the pre-conclave General Congregation of the Cardinals he said: "The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery." (Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, March 2013). This intervention sheds light upon Pope Francis' vision for the Church's mission of evangelization. It continues to reecho from every nook and corner of the universal Church, inviting all who tend to settle down in a safe and comfortable state of existence in the Church, to move out of the comfort zone, 'to dirty one's hands', 'to get the smell of the sheep' by getting involved in the lives of those living in various types of peripheries. It challenges us, the MSMHC, who have been called to be full time missionaries by our vocation and mission, to retrospect on how we had been fairing as 'missionary disciples.' It calls us to look into our missionary options and priorities, our missionary methods and undertakings. We need to ask ourselves if geographical and existential peripheries find a pride of place in our missionary options and priorities as individuals, communities and as a missionary congregation. Or do they remain as mere subjects of discourses, seminars and documents? As missionaries, we need to think and act in line with the universal Church and everyone desires to do so. However, at times, there could be an abyss existing between our holy and radical desires and the actualization of the same.

When we notice this inconsistency in and around us, we need not feel discouraged or pessimistic; instead we need to remotivate ourselves, acknowledging our frailties, limits and even negligence and start afresh with faith, hope and love. Moving to the peripheries will be possible and delightful only to those who recognize themselves as God's people, specially chosen, loved and honored by Him. The primary reason for moving out of our comfort zones to the peripheries is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever great love of Him, a love that impels us to make Him known. An ardent longing to share of what/whom we have seen, heard and experienced (Cf. 1 Jh 1:3). As St. Paul puts it: "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5: 14). Pope Francis says: "the best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach the Gospel with love its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us and then we will be urged to move out to the peripheries to share this love experience (Cf. *Evengelii Gaudium,* 264). Once we are gripped by this personal love of a personal God, we cannot continue nesting in our comfort zones for this love will make us restless and 'outward and forward moving' persons. Then we will be in search of opportunities to share the good news with those who have never heard of the news or encountered the Good News personified: Jesus Christ. To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover the joy in doing it, because evangelizing mission is at the same time 'a passion for Jesus and passion for his people' (Cf. *Evengelii Gaudium*, 268). May we rediscover this double passion within us and be fired by the Spirit to move out to the existential peripheries around us!

Sr. Philomena Mathew MSMHC
Superior General

Message

Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5).

Christ's teaching to his apostles, "Go to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15) can be accomplished only if we have lived and experienced the geographical and existential periphery. This is how we can follow Jesus, who was born in the geographical periphery, not in Rome, but in Nazareth, which one of the disciples (Nathanael) questioned in disbelief: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Moreover, Jesus lived in the periphery for 30 years and during his ministry, he never lost sight of society's existential periphery - the poor, the lost sheep, the abandoned, the discarded, the prostitutes, the troubled women, etc.

The Son of God entered into human history as helpless, homeless, poor with nothing, the poorest of the poor. We hear in the Gospel of Luke that the angels told the shepherds, "You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12). God, in Jesus, wanted to identify with those who are the poorest in our society that He could lift them up and proclaim the Good News to them. As we are called and chosen to be his disciples to imitate Him, let the same mind be in us that of Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5). We need to reach out to those that are on the edge, the marginalized, the hungry, and be with them. We need to invite them to our important family events, such as Christmas and New Year, Jubilee and feast days' celebrations, etc., and share with them generously the blessings we receive from God. Let us follow the direction that God has given us when Jesus was born; and let us take the opportunity to let the poor experience the love of God through us.

Pope Francis talks quite frequently about the need for the Church, the need for all of us to go to the peripheries, the margins. For him, the church is called to come out of herself and go to the ends of the earth, to the peripheries, which are in need of the light of the Gospel. We must go to the periphery not only because the Word was sent out first to the shepherds, those on the periphery, but also because Jesus became part of them. Paul talks about Jesus, the Son of God, who, though he was divine, did not think it necessary to cling to his divinity, but emptied himself and became one of us, and became the poorest of the poor, gave himself over to death, even death on the cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8).

If we desire to find Jesus in our world today, we must do what Pope Francis does. We must take time to be with the poor, the homeless and the refugees. It is there that we will discover Jesus most of all. If we read Matthew's Gospel of the Christmas account (cf. Mt 2:1-13), we learn that Jesus too became a refugee. When Herod was killing all the infants in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph fled with the child Jesus to Egypt. Again, they became homeless and were dependent on others. They went to a place for safety and become refugees. We are aware of the terrible plight of refugees in our world today. Are we ready to reach out to them by doing what we can? Jesus is present in the poor, the desperately needy and those suffering from war and persecution. If we are to celebrate Christmas truly and really welcome Jesus into our midst at this moment in our history, we must find the way to go to the peripheries to find Jesus in the poor, the homeless, and the refugees, the forsaken. When we do that, we can truly celebrate with great joy because the promise that the angels sang in their song will begin to happen. God's peace will come upon the earth and upon all people of goodwill.

Sr. Bridget Diengdoh MSMHC
General Councillor for Evangelization

Editorial

Embracing Periphery

Keeping those in periphery at the core of his mission, Pope Francis called on the people of God to make their way to reach out to those in the fringes of the society. He wanted the Church to become the Gospel in action by reflecting the compassionate face of the Father and continuing the salvific work of the Son. His commitment to the poor and abandoned moved him to leave aside the comfort zones. His convictions and approach to life set a new precedent for the papacy, which in fact, made an impact to the entire Church.

The term 'periphery' is a widely used term to denote the margins, which are distant from the centre. It being the outlying area gets less attention and often those living in there feel left behind, neglected and even deserted. Comprehending the meaning of periphery in relation to social and ecclesial terms helps to have a wider understanding of various groups that form part of the periphery. In Pope Francis' view, the idea of periphery holds broader and deeper notions of exclusion, alienation and expulsion as it relates more with human persons and their life situations. Even though the world is gaining its momentum in its advancement at all fronts, the ever-increasing number of poor living around shows that the gap between the centre and the periphery is on the increase. The perplexing reality of poverty exists everywhere: the rich enjoys material affluence but many of them remains deprived of spiritual comfort; the poor stays back dejected and oppressed with unsurmountable problems, needs and wants.

The peripheries are in existence everywhere. The call of the hour is to reach out to those with genuine love and care. It is not always the success or the number that counts but the impact made in the lives of individuals and groups. Mother Theresa once said, "Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearer to you." Opportunities to reach out to others comes at any moment. The need of the hour is to find people who are committed to the cause of humanity, willing to give without counting the cost, expecting nothing in return. It demands good will and readiness to walk the extra mile with people who find themselves relegated to the periphery of the society due to various reasons.

Pope Francis wishes to see the Church taking the side of those in the periphery. He invites everyone to have the experience of living on the periphery in order to gain a better understanding of the life situation of the people there. He makes every effort to reflect the compassionate face of the Father to the poor, the disadvantaged, the excluded, and the vulnerable. His endeavours are focused on making Church's mission alive by calling everyone to serve Christ in the poor. The core of Church's mission remains the same at all times and everywhere. Hence, it is the bounden duty of everyone who is called to pay heed to the clarion call to become agents of change, making Christ's presence in the world a reality for all.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC

Bishop Stephen Ferrando: A Missionary without Frontiers

Sr. Rosita Joseph MSMHC

Introduction

Bishop Stephen Ferrando's missionary life was a continuous call to be at the frontiers of mission. His zeal for preaching Christ was so passionate that no obstacles or setbacks of daily life could diminish his missionary fervour. He would often repeat to himself the words of Jesus: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12: 32). In his mission report he states: "With patience and constancy we must open new ways to the hearts and homes of numerous tribes so that the project of Christ 'to go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature' (Mk 16:15) will be accomplished."[1] Through the person of Bishop Ferrando, Christ continued his mission as the Good Samaritan, whose only desire was to seek out those souls living in darkness and in ignorance, who otherwise would be lost. He shared the transformative presence and joy of Christ with the people in villages uniting them as one tribe and community in their multicultural context. He undertook hazardous missionary journeys among various tribal groups in the hills and plains, who in their thirst for Christ, waited patiently for missionaries to visit them. His life as a missionary bishop was a constant movement towards the peripheries inhabited by numerous tribes. As we are nearing the 100th anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's 1919 apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* on the propagation of the

[1] ASPF No. 5317/ 1950, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 29.11.1950, p. 546.

faith throughout the world, this article throws light on the daring missionary life of Bishop Ferrando as the shepherd of the Assam missions from 1923 to 1969.

Leaving things behind

Bishop Ferrando in his ordinary life as a missionary, left behind the yearning for status and power, structures and wealth that were obstacles for proclaiming the Gospel. He gave up all worldly success that swells the heart and the security of a Bishop's house, to be with the people in villages and be close to the poor and the outcasts in the margins of the society. His life was a constant reflection of the mission of Jesus Christ and therefore his focus on his needy brothers and sisters in the mission. He directed his resources, money and energy to the cause of the poor and the marginalised, and freely moved into places where the unevangelised, the untouchables and the unaffiliated lived.[2] He wrote in his book *Nella terra incomparabile*: "The numerous hill tribes of the region created varieties of religion. As of now only very few are liberated, because they embrace the teachings of Christ."[3] As a disciple of Christ, Bishop Ferrando's conviction was that a missionary could not be in the frontiers of mission unless one is fired with passion for Christ and willing to face the dangers he might have to encounter.

Even in the midst of struggles, misunderstandings, experiences of want and deprivations, he bore witness in a passionate way to the joy of following Christ in full measure. He left behind what weighed down his heart and emptied himself of material comforts in order to usher in salvation for his sisters and brothers. Fr. Àngel Fernandez Artime, the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco aptly said of Bishop Ferrando: "A car he could have used but he

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2 Cf. J. Viegas, "Testimony", 10.2.2005, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, pp.515-516.

3 S. Ferrando, *Nella Terra incomparabile*, pp. 10-13.

preferred to go on foot. This in fact allowed him to meet people, stop and talk to them to share their lives. Such a direct contact with people was one of the main resources of the fecundity of his Gospel proclamation: humility, simplicity, meekness, fearless pastoral visits to the remotest places of the diocese, his love for the poor prompted many people to request for baptism."[4]

Leaving things behind can be for many reasons: for the sake of our own vocational fulfilment; for taking radical steps to make a strategic decision; for trusting completely in God's hands; and for being obedient by forgetting oneself. Leaving things behind is to move away from self-centredness and become open hearted and sensitive to care for others. He was renewed in heart every day and that gave him consistency in his relationship with God, and he experienced a true liberty to serve others. In his leaving behind, he found two treasures in life: God and neighbour. In the words of St. Paul: It is easier to pay attention to the concerns, interests and needs of people (cf. Phil 2: 3-4) when our own interests no longer consume us. One of the theologians at the canonical process said of Bishop Ferrando: "He lived a richer life with God by becoming more generous with others, reaching out to the poor people with love and joy. He was a real pastor who went out to search for the lost sheep, protected them from all dangers while spending his life for them and thinking of his mission land, Northeast India until the last breath."[5]

The Word of God was his Strength

In the life of Bishop Ferrando, the Word of God was living and active, sharper than any double- edged sword (Heb 4:12) and that transformed him from within in the spirit of Jesus Christ the missionary of the Father. God's word listened to and celebrated

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4 A. F. Artime, "Letter of the Rector Major, on the occasion of the Venerability of the Servant of God, Msgr. Stefano Ferrando", p. 2.

5 *Relatio et Vota, Congressus Peculiaris Super Virtutibus die* 5 Martii *an.* 2015 *Habiti*, Romae 2015. Voto II, p. 97.

daily in the Holy Eucharist enabled him to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in his life. Holiness of life and works of charity directed him to mission *ad gentes* and catechesis with its foundation in God's word. He spread a sense of duty towards the missions by his own life and example in his clergy and missionaries. The words of the Second Vatican Council made a deep impact on his life as a missionary. Evangelising is indeed the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity; the Church exists in fact to evangelise.[6] As a missionary, the fundamental duty and obligation of Bishop Ferrando was to preach and teach the Word of God, so that all people come to know Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. One could easily notice that the secret of Bishop Ferrando's life as a missionary was his rich interior life, which had its foundation in the Word of God and in his deep union with God. For him God was not a distant reality or an occasional presence but was an ever-present person in every moment of his life.[7]

Pope Francis reiterates in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* that goodness always tends to spread. "Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others."[8] Bishop Ferrando as a 'missionary disciple' attained perfection because he gave himself in the service to others. His overall demeanour as a missionary was very simple, fatherly, compassionate, comforting and aglow with missionary fervour. He who has tasted the joy of the Gospel and experienced God's saving love in his life, was urged to proclaim that love to the poor and needy in the villages. He implored daily for grace at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist for a fresh

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6 Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, in *AAS* 68 (1976) no. 14.

7 *Relatio et Vota*, p. 102.

8 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, in *AAS* 105 (2013) no. 9.

flow of energy in order to live his missionary and priestly life. John the evangelist says that he that believes in me as the scripture says, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water (Jn 7: 38).

In Jesus he found the meaning of his life; the God who gave him the strength to give of himself in service to others. Bishop Ferrando was not a person who preached the commandments, but one who lived them in his life without lukewarmness and without calculation; he lived them with the passion to risk everything to win all souls to Christ. Gregory Sootinck in his testimony says that Bishop Ferrando was gifted with ardent zeal for the missions. He acquired it by his personal communion with Jesus and daily reading and reflection on the Word of God. He went on foot to visit souls in the villages spread across the mountainous terrains where Christian communities lived.[9] He built a manual of faith in action by merging his daily experiences with the Word of God, faith sustained by prayer; faith in obedience and submission to superiors; faith in the crucified Lord; faith in the Holy Eucharist and filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Proclamation through Witness

One of the most powerful ways to evangelise is through the witness offered by the lives of believers. Bishop Ferrando was convinced that he cannot be a witness unless he is among the people. His zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel helped the Christian communities to grow in Gospel zeal and to transcend the distinctions of race and tribe. In preaching the Gospel he acted as a leaven that promoted unity, peace and integrity with people of every condition especially the poor and the afflicted. He was not merely working for the material progress of the people, but teaching them religious and moral truths that would enhance their approach to

[9] Cf. G. Sootinck, "Testimony", 27.11.2004, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, p. 501.

God.[10] His life manifested that Gospel is a way and a lifestyle shown to us by Jesus and the saints and his very life brought Christ to people. His life as a missionary bishop was to go to the peripheries not only geographically but those in existential margins of pain, sicknesses, poverty, sin, injustice, ignorance and indifference to religion, superstitions and all kinds of misery.

His life was a continuous exposure to the villages of the poor people and this helped him to establish personal relationship with everyone, be it Christians or followers of other religions. He made use of the opportunities to meet people in their huts, in the work places of farmers and at times in market places and in shops. God had been so lavish in giving Bishop Ferrando many occasions to share his love and mercy through active and interpersonal evangelisation. His top priority was to bring Jesus to the whole of Northeast India. The virtues of gentleness and meekness, which were the special traits of his character, helped him to be a well-adjusted person. He willingly put the needs of others before his own, he forgave those who hurt him, prayed for those who did not like him, and this is what has really brought growth to the Church and changed the mentality of people.[11]

All Christians and particularly the missionaries are called to be '*alter Christus*' another Christ in the world, to be his witnesses, to be the bearer of Christ to other people. Our illustrious missionaries of the past have intensely devoted themselves to the announcement of the Gospel especially through mission '*ad gentes'* and works of charity. The life of Bishop Ferrando could be compared to a tiny mustard seed: through active charity towards others and zeal for God's Word he brought the Spirit of the Lord to the lives of hundreds

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10 Cf. Albinus S. Kharmawlong, "Testimony", 31.3.20045 Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, pp. 589-590.

11 Cf. A. Lorenzelli, "Testimony", 16.6.2006, Genova, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 8, p. 2610; M.C. Thomas, "Testimony", 7.4.2005, Genova, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, p. 609.

of people in the villages. His spirit lives on even today, inspiring and inviting us to be with the people in the mission, to sow the love of God in their hearts. His life was very simple. He was available and docile to God through active charity towards the needy and this brought the Kingdom alive in people.

Encounter with Jesus in the Marginalised

The Assam mission was a remarkable and fertile land for the Gospel to take root in the lives and hearts of hundreds of our brothers and sisters. Christopher Becker writes, "In Assam mission we have wonderful tribes and peoples, with a variety of philological and anthropological treasure unheard of elsewhere."[12] The mountainous terrains were inhabited by numerous aboriginal tribes and the plains by different religions who were lost in their colossal ignorance and worship of many deities.[13] Bishop Ferrando writes, "The religion of the hill tribes is classified under one name 'animism.' It rests on the foundation of fear of unknown forces or spirits who can do them harm. They believed that the spirits too could cause sicknesses, therefore tried to appease them with sacrifices and offerings in return for their continuous protection. The Hindus lost in their class distinctions and caste system had several deities for their worship, whereas for the Muslims, the hour of God had not yet come."[14] His mission as the Bishop of the diocese was a time of encountering people where they were, accompanying and walking with them even when they were lost.

He appreciated the cultures and traditions of the people so that through them the life of the Church will be enriched and bring

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12 Fr. Christopher Becker SDS was a German Salvatorian Missionary in Assam from 1905 to 1915. His work *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1915* is an invaluable source of information on the history and culture of the native people of Northeastern Indian indigenous population. Cf. C. Becker, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1915*, p. 254.

13 Cf. S. Ferrando, *Nella Terra incomparabile*, pp. 10-13.

14 S. Ferrando, *Nella Terra incomparabile*. 13.

about communion among the faithful and growth in Christian communities. The cultural milieu of the region was so dissimilar from the rest of India, with its religious beliefs and cultic practices. His unique aim as a missionary bishop was to present to people an image of a God who is loving, caring and compassionate. Confronted with the daily realities of life among the poor and marginalised, he became increasingly aware that if he had to walk in the footsteps of Jesus he had to be in solidarity with the people, the sick and disadvantaged. He took initiatives to establish leprosy centres in Tura and Nongpoh for the unfortunate victims who were considered outcasts by the society. Often he could hear the words of Jesus beckoning him in his heart to fulfil his mission through the arduous path of sufferings and deprivations.

Many times during his pastoral visits, he came across the real face of Christianity in the poor people of different religions and castes.[15] His approach to the untouchables (*intoccabili*) of Sunderban in the diocese of Krishnagar was another episode of his compassion to the poor and marginalised. He wrote that only Christianity with the compassion of Christ and universal approach could bring dignity and honour to such people. He was very much convinced that the poor are the ones to be clothed, fed and visited (cf. Mt 25:36); in doing so, Christ will find his way to their hearts and they will enjoy the salvation brought by Jesus. He wrote to Fr. Peter Ricaldone SDB that the poor people in their simplicity and poverty would become the real wealth of the Catholic Church.[16] He crossed new boundaries and beyond to meet people in their distress in order to take care of the poor who were at the peripheries. Even though he worked in a critical situation of cultural, religious and social shock, he dedicated himself untiringly to stay close to the

15 S. Ferrando, "Un viaggio nel Sunderban", in *Gioventù Missionaria* 4 (1936) pp. 55-56.

16 Cf. ASC B7090521, Ferrando to P. Ricaldone "Un Viaggio apostolico nel Sunderban", 13.3.1935; *Copia Publica*, Vol. 5, pp. 1435-1437.

people entrusted to him working with zeal in the vast diocese that comprised the entire region of Northeast India.[17]

Missionary in Full Measure

Bishop Ferrando's missionary life was a relentless call to *go forth,* being at the service of the Church wherever God sent him until his final journey. The pride of place in his life was given to preaching the Gospel and was deeply convinced that our faith is strengthened when it is given to others. Animated by deep conviction of his duty as a missionary he walked the path of poverty, obedience and self-sacrifice, imbued with the all-pervading pastoral charity of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Bishop Ferrando spread holiness by his own life of sanctity and good works.[18] His commitment to embrace new frontiers of mission implied not only entry to new villages and ethnic groups but also to address the new challenges of the people.[19] He was present in those situations where people perceived the absence of God and was close to people who suffered, lost properties due to calamities and war or in any way or form they had to encounter suffering.

In reading the signs of the times, he was attentive to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. As a missionary, he understood well that new situations require new answers; he was creative in responding to the needs of his time. The most significant expression of responding to the needs of the time was the founding of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in 1942. His life was a reflection of the creative fidelity to the missionary charisma of Don Bosco. The heroic life and testimony of the Salesian saints were models that inspired him in his apostolic

17 Á. Fernandez Artime, "Letter on the occasion of the Venerability of the Servant of God Msgr. Stefano Ferrando", p.1.

18 Cf. Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, 30 November 1919: *AAS* 11 (1919), 445

19 Cf. E. Plathottam, "Testimony", 15.4.2004, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, p. 388.

choices. Rooted in the experiences of daily life, his life and motto 'Apostle of Christ' was a life of heroic deeds, witness and courage to serve God in the downtrodden and the poor. He followed the example of the Blessed Virgin and humbly adhered to the will of God and followed Jesus on the way of service, the royal but narrow road that leads to heaven.

Bishop Ferrando was a tireless proclaimer of the Gospel, among the humble and the forgotten. He placed God at the centre of his life and the Gospel was his daily nourishment. He had good contact with people in the villages and was connected to everyone. His life as a missionary and apostle of charity bore courageous witness in every situation. Jesus the Good Shepherd was the source of his apostolic strength who constantly drew him to the joy of the Gospel. Speaking to the newly appointed Bishops on 13 September 2018, Pope Francis said, "I would like to approach you with the touch of Christ, the Gospel of God which *warms the heart*, reopens our ears and loosens the tongue to the joy that never fails nor wanes because it is never purchased nor deserved; indeed it is pure grace."[20] As a true shepherd, Bishop Ferrando was convinced that his most urgent task was to strive after holiness and serve God day and night in order to make Him favourable to people in the missions. He could offer nothing greater, more effective, more precious and more necessary to the people than his holiness of life reflected in his compassionate missionary approach. His life was a total dedication and a courageous preaching of the Gospel of grace and mercy to people who long for hope and love. Nothing could divert him from his mission, because he surrendered himself to God daily like a weaned child in its mother's arms (Ps. 131:2).

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[20] Pope Francis, "Audience with recently appointed Bishops", in *L'Osservatore Romano* 38 (21 September 2018), p. 9.

Conclusion

There was no decrease in the zeal for preaching the Gospel in Bishop Ferrando. Daily he drew strength and inspiration from the Gospel and from it he discovered afresh the direction for his journey.[21] In today's world so often torn and damaged by selfishness and power, the Word of God gave him the power and strength to withstand all perils. His generosity through works of charity in the service of the mission, stands as powerful witness to Christ and the Gospel. A re-living of the missionary fervour of Bishop Ferrando can enable us the Missionary Sisters to renew our awareness of the rich charism of the congregation. God had chosen Bishop Ferrando in a special way to teach people how to seek God in the ordinary situations of their daily life. In him, we see a missionary who spoke with tenderness, listened without pre-judgement and accepted others with mercy. He possessed a perennial joy that emanated from authentic sanctity, which no one could rob him of till the end of his life. The beatitudes became a reality in his life and the mission entrusted to him was his passion. In 1975, while meeting a group of missionaries from Northeast India in Genova-Quarto Bishop Ferrando said, "How I long to bury my bones in the Ri Khasi-Pnar (Khasi hills)."[22] His only desire was to make himself one with the people of Northeast India in life and in death.

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21 Cf. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010, in *AAS* 102 (2010) no. 51.

22 Bishop Ferrando's speech to the people of Northeast India, especially to the Khasi-Pnar people was recorded by Archbishop T. Resto Phanrang SDB, the fourth bishop of Shillong, at Genova-Quarto in 1975. He visited Bishop Ferrando along with Fr. Alexius Sanglura SDB and Elias Kerketta SDB who were returning to Northeast India after their studies in Rome. Cf. T. Resto, *Stephen Ferrando: A Great Missionary and Pastor*, p. 18.

Responding to the call of the Peripheries

Sr. Rose Paite MSMHC

Introduction

The mission of Jesus "to bring Good News to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to free the oppressed" (Lk 4: 18) is a call to serve especially those at the peripheries. It is a special invitation to all Christians and for those called to follow Jesus in religious life in particular. The example of Pope Francis in what he does and say, how he goes to the periphery to find Jesus - Jesus present in the poor, the desperately needy, those suffering from war and persecution [1] is also the way they are called to go to the peripheries to find Jesus in the poor and serve him. The periphery, both geographical and existential is what Pope Francis and St. Mother Teresa of Kolkata have in common. Mother Teresa devoted her life to the geographical and existential peripheries of the society while Pope Francis is vigorously trying to bring the periphery to the center. He is energizing the Church to go beyond her comfort zone and to embrace the periphery.[2] Venerable Bishop Stephen Ferrando who came to the peripheries of Northeast India way back in 1923 did the same by founding the indigenous congregation, Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC).

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1 Gumbleton T., *We must go to the periphery - that's what God does*. www.ncronline.org/blogs/peace-pulpit/we-must-go-periphery-thats-what-god-does Accessed on 14 December 2018.

2 Murzaku, I.A., *Centered in the Periphery – Pope Francis and Mother Teresa* http://saltandlighttv.org/blogfeed/getpost.php?id=71693 Accessed on 15 December 2018.

Bishop Ferrando was able to recognize Jesus in the poor and the periphery. He had a special predilection for the poor, needy, children, women and the sick. We find it frequently mentioned in his writings and talks as follows: "… work for the poor children"; "… love the poor"; "… take special care of the poor and needy children"[3]; "… I recommend to you always to love the poor children, the sick"[4]; "So you must be very glad to go to villages where there are so many poor children, so many needy people, so many poor women, ignorant people who know nothing about our holy religion."[5] Realizing this great spirit of the Founder, the MSMHC is convinced that it is to these most poor women, girls and children that they are sent in a special way and they remain the first beneficiaries of their mission[6]. The constitutions clearly points out how the MSMHC is expected to go to the peripheries to serve Jesus in the poor. It states, "We care for the children who are poor, abandoned, marginalized, victims of various forms of exploitation, and at risk. We assist them to liberate themselves from oppressive structures, restore their self-worth and dignity, integrate them into the society an enable them to become agents of the Gospel values, good citizens and useful members of society."[7]

Recognizing the Peripheries

Pope Francis made the theology of the periphery a landmark of his pontificate. But what is "the periphery"? Christ's teaching to his apostles, "Go to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15) can be accomplished only if one has lived and experienced the geographical and existential periphery.

3 Ferrando, Letters: 11 May 1971, 133, 137; 22 May 1974, 138; 28 November 1974, 140.
4 Ferrando, Talk 2 February 1978, 181.
5 Ferrando, Talk on 11 April 1973.
6 Cf. MSMHC Constitutions, 87.
7 Ibid 87, para 2.

If we are going to find Jesus in our world today, we the MSMHC must go to the peripheries and do what Jesus, Our Founder, pioneers and Pope Francis have done. We must take time to be with the poor and that is where we will discover Jesus. The most desperate among the poor are domestic workers and their children, drug addicts and alcoholics, women in distress, children at risk and in domestic workers, trafficked victims, disruptive youth, dysfunctional families, persons with multiple disabilities, the voiceless and those deprived of their rights and dignity.

To the Peripheries through Social Apostolate

The MSMHC reaches out to the peripheries through different apostolate in the provinces targeting the development of people at various levels. In Shillong Province; Ferrando Transit Shelter Home, Mawlai- Mawdatbaki serves as the coordinating office and takes care of the works in Jaintia Hills, Mizoram and Khasi Hills. In Tinsukia Province, Ferrando Niketan, Loonpuria, Tinsukia serves as the coordinating office, taking care of all the social initiatives of the province in upper Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal. Tezpur Province has its coordinating office in Udalguri BTAD and takes care of all the social development activities of lower Assam and Arunachal. Bangalore Province has its social development office at Mariapuram, Telangana catering services to rural women and children who are mostly orphaned. The Provinces of Kolkata and Guwahati are yet to set up their respective coordinating offices.

Centre for Development Initiatives (CDI) is the social development wing of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC). It's Administrative Head Office is based at Guwahati, Bullapar, near Airport. It is a National Organization dedicated to the service of the marginalized communities, with special focus on women, girls and children. It is a nonprofit organization, registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI 1860 KAM/

240/A-15/816 of 2008. Since then, CDI has been coordinating its satellite social work wings to all the provinces by way of facilitation, coordination, animation, guidance, monitoring, evaluation services, and by providing proficiency to do the rightful to those in the periphery of all forms. The organization is spearheading valuable services throughout India and overseas with her humble approach to serve the marginalized in the society.

Pope Francis said, "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."[8] CDI undertakes need based and issue based development programmes with focus on the most disadvantaged section of the society. The following sheds light into the various activities that are undertaken by the Organization.

Empowerment of Women and Promotion of their Rights

It is the desire of the congregation to reach out to as many women as possible with the purpose of empowering them; to claim their rights, restore their dignity and acquire fair treatment in the society. Through various interventions, the most vulnerable groups of women like the domestic workers, the rural poor and low income groups, the farmers, the alcoholic, the drug users, the disabled, the sick and the chronically ill especially the HIV infected, the old and aged are given priority attention in the mission. Today the MSMHC through CDI with its partners is carrying out services and empowering activities to more than 21000 domestic workers and migrants across North East India in 12 cities. It is bringing equitable standard of civilization by continuous bridging of ladder to help them obtain recognition, justice, and dignity towards a purposeful life.

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8 *Evangelii Gaudium,* 49

In Southern Africa, Swaziland, the MSMHC takes care of 20 to 30 HIV infected persons and AIDS patients every day, providing the best facilities, medical care and spiritual support. At Peace Home in Mizoram, the Province of Shillong had cared for many women drug users, alcoholics, HIV infected and sex workers, bringing physical, emotional and spiritual healing and restoring them to a life of dignity and purpose. In Mariapuram, Telangana, the province of Bangalore caters services to more than 5000 women by introducing them to entrepreneurship programs to improve their livelihood through formation of SHGs and capacity building. These groups are encouraged to take up individual initiatives by which they become self-reliant and independent, gaining dignity and self-respect.

Child Rights and Child Protection

Jesus' concern and his approach to protect the vulnerable children is depicted in the way he rebuked the disciples for their attitude towards children who were brought to Jesus by their mothers for His blessings: "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs… and he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them." (Mk 10:13-16) The MSMHC cares for a good number of children through education in the schools and boarding houses just as Jesus would recommend the disciples. To reach out to the poor and needy children, the MSMHC has started the education and community based rehabilitation of the differently abled children in 1991. It reaches out to people with disability in the three regions namely: Shillong, Tura and Agartala. Besides these, it also caters its services to children on the streets and at risks, children orphaned by conflict and violence, children with HIV infected and the deprived. The children out of schools are also their special concern and therefore CDI facilitates 'Back to Schools' and tuition centres catering to more than 1000 children and mainstream them to normal schools. It is a means of claiming their rights for quality education, building their future and shaping their lives.

Healing Ministry through Health Care Centres

Healing ministry is the 5th Gospel according to Founder and it occupies an important place in social ministry. For MSMHCs "….. care of the sick is our 'fifth Gospel' and through healing the body we try to heal the soul"[9]. From the very inception, the congregation has given priority to healing ministry and health care of women, girls and children in rural areas. It reaches out to disease prone areas and war stricken victims in times of emergency and crisis. A good number of nurses have been trained and healing services have been provided through health centres and community health programs. Rural women and adolescent girls are being taught health education to improve health and hygiene to promote good health and prevent diseases. At present there are 43 centres dedicated to the healing ministry of the Church in small and big ways and 113 trained nurses are committed to responding to the needs of the sick and ailing in the society. Care for the aged is also our focus area. The MSMHC runs Homes for the aged which provide care and love for the aged and where the abandoned ones recuperate and experience healing and peace amidst peaceful environment.

Enhancement of skills for school drop outs

Vocational training centres are run to cater services to the school dropout boys and girls. The constitution of the MSMHC states, "We run vocational training centres with the aim of promoting human advancement and mission *ad gentes*. The focus of these centres are to equip women and girls with employable and productive skills to become self- reliant, form their character and deepen their faith."[10] When we bring young girls to vocational centres they are also prevented from the menace of unsafe migration and human trafficking especially from the tea garden

9 Cf. MSMHC Constitutions, 86.

10 Ibid. 114

areas of Assam. The intervention through vocational training centres reaches out to more than 60,000 families every year directly or indirectly (neighbors, friends, comrades etc.) and about 50 crises have been handled to restore trafficked victims especially among the domestic workers and the vulnerable girls from tea gardens. The column below shows areas of interventions in the peripheries through some of the established centres of the MSMHC under Social Apostolate:

MSMHC Centres catering services to people in the peripheries

Provinces	**Centres**	**Areas of Intervention**
Shillong	Transit centre cum Shelter Home Mawlai	Reaching out to women in crisis and children in need of care and protection as well as intervene among Domestic Workers and organizing them.
	Ferrando Integrated Women Development Centres Aizawl	Reaching to women addicted to drugs and alcohol, rehabilitating the HIV infected and sex workers- providing them skill training and caring for children in need of care and protection. Organizes Domestic Workers and involves in Community based rehabilitation for persons with disabilities.

	Mawkyrwat	Reaches to the village farmers of the most remote areas for climate Change Adaptation and Livelihood Promotion for 10 villages
Tezpur	Bongaigaon, Barpeta Road, Tezpur	Reaches out to Domestic workers and their children.
	Bengtol, Udalguri, Barpeta Road	Reaching out through vocational Training centre to the poor rural youth for preventing them from human trafficking and unsafe migration.
Tinsukia	Loonpuria, Sarupather, Imphal, Kohima	Intervention among Domestic Workers and their children organizing them to a life dignity and claim their rights.
	Golaghat, Sarupathar	Human Trafficking prevention, vocational training
Guwahati	Nandanagar, Tura	Intervention among Domestic Workers and their organization
	Barapani, ZERO	Children with disabilities and their education, vocational training

Kolkata	Maayer Asha-Howrah, Baltikuri, Ferrando Home, Bandel, Boropahari	Reaching to thousands of children at risk and on the streets; educating, rehabilitating and providing hope for the future.
Bangalore	Mariapuram-WORD, Pasara, Mulugu, Nemikkal	Empowering 5000 Women and facilitating Self Help groups for sustainable livelihood.
	Roshini-Mysore, Sahaya Matha-Karaikal	Community based empowerment of poor women, girls and children in the slums and villages.Home for Orphans, Karaikkal, Pondicherry.
	Surakshita-Ravulapalam	Surakshita, A home for women and girls in distressHome for the aged
Swaziland	Hope House	For care of HIV and AIDS
Delegation	Rossiglione, Pietrine, Moretta, Pancalieri, Gallarate and Bonn in Germany	Care for the old and the uncared in various homes and giving hope to them, preparing them for their final journey.
South Sudan	Tonj in South Sudan	Reaches out to poorest of the poor through Hospitals, care of lepers, distributing food and clothes and empowering them through various animation programs

Hawaii	Honolulu	Reaching out the needy through Hospice assisting the dying, working for refugees and migrants in the form of food distribution to homeless, homebound and migrants.
Lesotho-South Africa	Maputo	Offering services to the children with multiple disabilities especially to the cerebral palsy through education, and special care.

Conclusion:

The MSMHC as a women congregation with more than a thousand members makes significant contribution to the society, bringing difference to the lives of people. As agents of social transformation, its members focus on reaching out to people in the peripheries and regaining human dignity by bringing back the lost, the least and the last. They strive to find means and ways to take concrete steps and respond to the emerging needs of these sections of the society who are vulnerable to all sorts of social evils. Their missionary enthusiasm, love and compassion for the poor and needy with total commitment coupled with untiring and patient hard works pave the way for change. Their endeavour to reach out to the peripheries aims at bringing the desired effect through a paradigm shift: change in mind-set, attitude and thinking pattern so that the younger generation will see:

* Many women and girls becoming empowered, learning to live and manage their life independently putting away gender disparity in the society.

* Aiming to find women participation at all levels as it becomes one of the areas of our concern. It is to enable women to become politically empowered to lead the country as the saying goes, 'women sweep and clean the house better.' It encourages to see women becoming part of decision making body at all levels.

* That domestic workers, the most discriminated sections of the society are recognized, treated with dignity and are respected for the work they do. It will be a true revolution that the domestic workers and their children become educated, know their rights and are able to speak for themselves and decide for their welfare.

* Children will no more be employed as domestic workers. All the children of domestic workers will have access to quality education and get the opportunity to participate like any other children.

* The Ecclesiastical institutions practice justice and pay just wage to the domestic workers and work towards 'Stop Child Labour' in the country.

"And how I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor," was the heartfelt desire of Pope Francis during his audience to the journalists on 16 March 2013. Our response to the periphery is a "reality seen not from the center, but rather from the periphery moving the Church from security to risk-taking, "from inward looking to outward looking," from the center to society's edges.[11] In the same manner, Pope Francis when speaking to the members of the Pre-conclave General of the Congregation of Cardinals in March 2013 firmly stated his priority by saying that he prefers the

[11] Scott Timothy, *Pope Francis and the Periphery*, CRC Bulletin, Vol. 11, Issue no. 1, 2014

periphery than the centre, to go out than to get absorbed in self referentiality, to avoid spiritual disease rather than a Church that is sick and weak. [12] The MSMHC's option for the poor and the marginalized is a befitting response to the call of the periphery: reaching out to the unreached, walking extra miles, going beyond the comfort zones, risking one's life to bring God's kingdom to humankind.

[12] Catholic Herald, https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/03/17/handwritten-speech-delivered-by-pope-during-2013-conclave-is-released/ Accessed on 21 December 2018.

Reaching out to the Peripheries in need of the Light of the Gospel

Sr. Viji John MSMHC

Introduction

A recurring theme for Pope Francis since his election as a Pope has been what he calls "the periphery." He calls the Church to move out from the centre to the peripheries. In his Apostolic Letter, *Evangelii Gaudium* he writes, 'each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, and all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the gospel.'[1] All believers are called to the peripheries to spread the message of the Good News. Pope Francis wants a Church "whose doors are open" (EG 46). He desires the Church to be more welcoming, friendly and compassionate, creating an environment that accepts all, regardless of their background, perspectives, life style and weaknesses. He thinks further and wants the doors to be open so that those within the church may venture out. He asks everyone to step out of the offices and the walls of comfort zones to go out to the world to bring saving love of Jesus Christ to those on the edges of the society.[2]

"Going out" to the "Peripheries"

"Peripheries" is a word that takes us to the vision of Pope Francis for the Church's life and mission. Pope Francis, in fact, most

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1 Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20

2 Cf. Edward Sri, *Rediscovering the Heart of a Disciple*: Pope Francis and the Joy of the Gospel, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. Huntington, Indiana, 2014, 33.

frequently talks about the present need of the Church to go to the peripheries, the margins. It is significant to know what does he mean by the peripheries; where they are; who lives there; what does it mean etc. and how can the perspectives of the peripheries help us to read the signs of the times and our mission of proclaiming the Gospel. He says, "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security"[3]. His words expresses his deep desire to see everyone of us going out to the peripheries, finding where the poor are, relating with them very personally and serving them. He wants us to find in them Jesus who was poor for our sake.

"Going out" implicates talking about our faith to strangers, be it during a journey with a person sitting next to us in the bus or on the roadside. Moreover, if we are involved in an outreach ministry, we will surely look out for opportunities to speak of our faith to strangers. The missionary activities that MSMHCs undertake: family visit, village tour, catechetical instruction to various groups etc. offer us golden chances for "going out". Pope Francis invites us to invest our lives in other people, removing our sandals "before the sacred ground of the other" (EG 169).[4] This is possible for those who have encountered Christ. It involves compassionate listening, getting to know others, serving them and sharing with them the joy and consolation that comes from the friendship with Jesus Christ.

Context of our Mission Today - the Peripheries

Our modern world is still a victim of extreme poverty, ecological degradation, violent conflicts and war, consequent mega-migration and human trafficking. So many people are hungry, persecuted,

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3 *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49

4 Cf. Edward Sri, *Rediscovering the Heart of a Disciple*, 36.

driven out and marginalized; children are abused, sold, and discriminated on the basis of caste, gender, religion and place of origin; the modern forms of slavery are on the rise and religious fundamentalism is destroying the people and nations. The mission of the Church is ever more challenged to have solidarity with the suffering world. Genuine solidarity requires heart-level understanding of our prophetic call and a total commitment to the call for integral liberation of every human person.[5] Peripheries are more than a physical location or a social category, they are places where poverty is not only material but also spiritual.

We live in a globalized and commercialized society and the rhythms of life seem to get faster with each passing year. Advances in technology, in computerization, in communication, in transportation etc. are driving deep changes in the way we work, in our economies, politics, families and even in our interior lives. In fact, the process of globalization is not bringing us closer together but driving us farther and farther apart; our lives seem to be more fragmented and more isolated from others.

Pope Francis has highlighted the worldwide crisis of migrants and refugees.[6] The people are being forced to leave their homelands to escape from violence, to find safety or to find their livelihood and to provide for their families. Pope Francis wants us to go out to meet them and to accompany them in their life journey and to be in proximity to understand them and let them know that the doors of the Church and God's mercy are always open to them. We should not be waiting for people to come where we are, instead like a good shepherded who goes out to find the lost sheep, we need to be going out to encounter people wherever they may be,

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5 Mary Sujita, "Solidarity for Life on the Periphery", in a Talk given to the Assembly at *UISG*, Rome on 09-13.05.2016.

6 Cf. V. M. Fernandes, *The Francis Project- Where He Wants to Take the Church*, Populist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, 2014, 25.

in the circumstances of their lives and situations. We need to reach those places of darkness and deserts of hunger and thirst, of indifference and abandonment, of spiritual poverty where God has been forgotten.[7] Pope Francis in his very first audience at St. Peter's square said, "Following Jesus means learning to come out of ourselves in order to go to meet the other, to go to the outskirts of existence, to be the first to take the step towards our brothers and sisters.[8]

Preferential Option for the Poor

The peripheries are the place of the poor. The call to have solidarity with the poor pervades the whole Bible and the teachings of the Church.[9] Pope Francis says, "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor and enabling them to be fully part of society."[10] The central idea of Pope Francis' call for a transformed Church is his emphasis on the Church's need to care spiritually and materially the poor. He says, "I want a Church that is poor and for the poor,"[11] a Church for the poor rather than a Church with the poor.[12] The 'poor' he mentioned points out those deprived of their basic rights and been pushed to the edge of the society.[13] For Pope Francis the poor are the homeless, the addicted, refugees and the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned.[14]

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7 Cf. Edward Sri, *Rediscovering the Heart of a Disciple*, 99.

8 Cf. D. O'donnell, *Joyfully Sharing the Gospel an Introduction to Evangelii Gaudium*, The Colmba Press, Dublin 2014, 55.

9 Cf. V. M. Fernandes, *The Francis Project Where He Wants to Take the Church* , 94.

10 EG 187.

11 EG 198.

12 Cf. D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission:Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Book, Maryknoll 1991,436.

13 Cf. D,O'donnell, *Joyfully Sharing the Gospel an Introduction to Evangelii Gaudium*,The Colmba Press, Dublin, 2014, 55.

14 LG 210.

He asks us to identify ourselves with these people in the society by participating in the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ as a prophet who has a great task towards the liberation and justice in the society.[15]

Poverty is spiritual and material, existential and social. The saints always remind us that, the greatest poverty is not to know God, not to experience his tender mercy, his beautiful plan of love for our lives. As missionaries called and chosen by God to make known the love and tender mercy of God, we need to urge ourselves to recommit our vision of mission to reach out to the marginalised, immigrants and refugees. Pope Francis has called the lack of solidarity with the migrants and refugees as the globalization of indifference. This makes a person insensitive to the cry of the poor.[16] Catholic teaching is founded on the conviction that all of us belong to one human family, and hence, we have the obligation to promote the rights and development of all people, irrespective of national boundaries. Dignity and intrinsic worth of persons cannot be understood in terms of an individualistic right in isolation, but only in the context of the obligations to human community as a whole. There is a duty of solidarity in the face of tragedies, conflicts, persecutions and violence, that take the lives of so many people. Therefore, the virtue of solidarity demands us to feel one with the weakest, the poorest and most vulnerable.

Conclusion

Pope Francis was motivated and inspired by cardinal Claudio Hummes, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the clergy in the vision of a poor Church and a Church for the poor. He focused much on the concept of divesting self of material goods, renunciation and following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, in other

15 LG 187.

16 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 54.

words casting off the trappings of this world - the spirit of the worldliness. Henri de Lubac writes that the greatest temptation of the Church today is the temptation of a worldliness of the mind.[17] It is a spirit of seeking privileges and power, rather than service to the kingdom. It is a spirit that seeks for terms like "career", "success", "convenience" or "fame" to enter the Church as legitimate points of reference. Nobody is wholly immune from this sort of evil. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* characterizes spiritual worldliness as seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being[18]. We also need to remember that spiritual worldliness can make us build comfort zones.

We need to search for the relevance and implications of the call to go to the "peripheries" in our life and mission. Jesus went around in solidarity with the poor and the out caste; He related to all around him as brothers and sisters. In intimacy with Christ, we too can accept others as our brothers and sisters. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. *1 Jn* 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. It is going out to "the fringes of humanity."[19]

The Church's commitment to the poor is realized in commitment to their total well-being, in restoring their dignity and in helping them to meet their basic human needs. The Church needs to raise a prophetic voice to address the issues of social justice as a dimension of its mission to the world. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own,

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17 Sedmak Clemens, *A Church of the Poor, Pope Francis and the Transformation of Orthodoxy,* Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2016, 10.

18 Cf. Evangelii *Gaudium*, 93.

19 Ibid. 40.

as he kneels to wash their own feet. He tells his disciples "you will be blessed if you do this" (Jn. 13:17). MSMHC was born in the peripheries to go the peripheries. Therefore, let us get involved by our word and deed in people's daily lives; to bridge distances and to embrace human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ by serving others. We need to evangelize the poor by word and life. Like Jesus, we are to go out to everyone without exception, favouring those far away, the suffering, the sick and those discarded by the society.

Empowering Youth of Today for a Better Tomorrow

Sr. Irene Zosiami msmhc

Introduction

Talking on youth, one often hears the popular statement which says that youth are the leaders of tomorrow and the pillars of the society. On them lies a bulk of expectations, hope and fulfillment of the vision. However, as much as youth are everything of tomorrow, but also of today as, "Youth is not only the future, but God's gift to the Church and society today."[1] Building the youth of today is laying the foundation of the dream world of tomorrow. While the general picture of youth is that of vibrancy, health, abundance, adventure, full of wonder and joy, it is also true that all is not so well for every one as many of them are vulnerable and are plagued by various personal and social ills that hamper their growth and vitality. As God himself has concern about the suffering of His people (Ex 3:7), care for these vulnerable ones is most essential for a healthy society and a better future.

Youthfulness: The heart of the human season

Upon reading the poem *The Human Season* by John Keats, one can define youthfulness as the best and most beautiful time and the heart of the human season in the cycle of life. It is a season of abundance, vigour, beauty and freshness. It's the phase of life

[1] Youth is God's gift to the Church and society today, http://worldyouthday.com/youth-is-gods-gift-to-the-church-and-society-today, accessed on 14 Dec. 2018

when one is bestowed with physical, emotional and intellectual power, creativity and joy. While living day to day life, youth are full of hope, good will and zest for life. Their dreams are high so much so it's 'nearest unto heaven' as Keats would pen it. Hence, the crux of the matter is to let them be their best by giving a space, opportunities, encouragement and guidance so that they can soar high to realize their dreams. Pope Francis encourages the young not to bury their talents and God given gifts and not to be afraid 'to dream of great things', instead 'put them at the service of others'.[2] However, while focusing on their abilities and talents through various activities and academic performance, it is equally important to put the cursor on refining their characters and on educating their hearts with 'the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that make your talents fruitful'.[3]

Amidst complex realities

Young people today are faced with much more complex realities due to the constant change and development in all spheres of life. It's like falling down the rabbit hole and there, left to explore the wonderland of absurdities, unknown places and uncertainties as in *Alice in the Wonderland*. It takes courage to constantly challenge the realities; involves risk and requires wisdom for a right choice to come out of it victorious. There lies the need for a pointer, signboards that will lead and guide through the tunnel and the crossroads of life. Opportunities, guidance and motivations are offered for the young in different institutions through life skilled program, career guidance, awareness program on different topics and issues. The church takes care of the growth of faith through catechism classes, retreats and prayers. Many lives have been shaped and moulded through these spiritual and motivational programmes. However, there are many who are not fortunate

2 Pope Francis, General Audience, St. Peter's Square, 24 April 2014
3 Ibid

enough to receive guidance and motivations when faced with challenges, difficulties and pressures. Therefore, due to the wrong choices they make, they are often drowned in a pool of confusion and despair. The need to escape the harsh realities of life pushes them to abuse of substance, alcoholism and addiction.

Empowering the Youth for Now

Though youth are at the heart of family, society and are at the zenith of life, adults are still skeptical in their ability to take forward situations and responsibilities. In fact, they are often considered too young, incompetent, lacking wisdom and inexperienced to handle complex issues and greater tasks. Even the youth themselves slightly feel likewise. However, in the call of Jeremiah, it is evident that God does not belittle the young, but empowers when he said, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak." (Jeremiah 1:7) Again in the letter of St. Paul to Timothy it is said, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example…" (1 Timothy 4: 12) The Church believes in the power of youth and is fully aware that they are the strength and hope of the church as Pope Francis said, "You young people need to know that someone truly believes in you; please know that the Pope has confidence in you, that the Church has confidence in you!"[4] Pope John Paul II vigorously built up a rapport with the youth of his time and initiated the new tradition with the institution of World Youth Day, the legacy of which is continued till today. [5] Pope Francis in his address to the young people expresses his belief and trust in the potentials of the youth when he said, "A better world can be built also as a result of your efforts, your desire to change and your generousity… St.

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4 Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Thirty Third World Youth Day, 11 Feb 2018

5 Cf. World youth day, http://worldyouthday.com/about-wyd/wyd-history, accessed on 14 Dec. 2018

Benedict urged the abbots to consult, even the young, before any important decision, because, 'the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best.'(Rule of St. Benedict, III, 3)."[6] Learning to trust the young and in their ability, beliefs, values and attitudes with gestures of encouragement, accompaniment and assurance is an important step to empowerment.

Young people today form the major chunk of the population and the manner they are engaged and integrated in the family, society and various organizations including the church will definitely determine life in the future. They make tangible contributions in various socio-political arenas as entrepreneurs, agents of peace and change as active members of civil society. At the same time, they remain paralyzed, unable to unleash their full potential due to various complex barriers, traditions and structures in the society. Tapping the best of their potential and utilizing them for change and development entails opening the door of opportunities for the young, involving them and supporting their active participation in all spheres of life. While developing their talents and abilities, the adults need to trust and empower them to be leaders with wider scope of involvement and encouragement. Focus on today's youth and empowering them for the now is the key to the making of tomorrow's leaders and society. The vibrant youth of today will create the vibrant world of tomorrow, therefore, it is essential to establish youth - centered and youth led- society and organizations to build the future on sure and strong foundation.

Education: A key to enhancing life

It is undeniable fact that education is the road to success, development and changes. It is fundamental in bringing continuous transformation in the life of individual and society. It is a powerful tool in enriching the human mind, values beliefs and attitudes.

[6] Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, Pre-Synodal Meeting Rome, 19-24 March, 2018

Education can rightly be termed as a window to a wider horizons of life that enables one to see and understand the world in a broader perspective. It is a powerful tool in tapping the innate qualities of a person, bringing out the best and refining character of a person imbued with human and universal values. It helps one to live a life of dignity and integrity. One gains wisdom, knowledge, competence and distinct personalities through education and qualifies for professional careers and leadership. Education not only confers degrees and qualifications, it confers dignity, value and respect to the person. Hence, education is the key to enhancing the life of youth and the means to empower them to participate in the mainstream activities of the society and contribute for its growth and development. Therefore, education for all especially the young must be the vision of all those working for bettering the society.

Focus on the disadvantaged youth

An empowered youth become instrumental in bringing change and development; they become leaders, inspirers and motivators, paving the way for a better future. Empowered by skills, knowledge and potentials, they become fearless, taking risks and breaking the glass ceilings to achieve their goal.

Empowerment also ensures that youth have the competence and necessary skills to manage their lives and sustain a livelihood, thus preventing them from adopting the path of anti-social behaviours. Today, almost every society and nation has to deal with anti - social elements churned out by youth who are not empowered academically, emotionally, morally and financially.[7] Young susceptible minds are often entrapped in ideologies and activities that are detrimental to peace and traditional values. Therefore, it is essential to address the needs of youth who are at

[7] Cf. Silky Jain, "Importance of Youth Empowerment," 31 Jan 2017, https://yourstory.com/mystory/d4c4e32c0d-importance-of-youth-empowerment, accessed on 13 Dec. 2018

- risk of negative influences so as to help them form a right conscious, intellectual and emotional intelligence to make a proper and correct choice of living.

Youth are vulnerable as they are exposed to stress, challenges, uncertainties, competitions and pressures from the family and society and due to their own ambitions in life. The most vulnerable are those who are from economically backward classes, unhealthy environment, who are deprived of their rights due to ethnic differences, immigrants, persons with disability, the alcoholics, HIV/ AIDS patients. Many youths get derailed, disoriented and disillusioned due to lack of social opportunities to achieve their dreams, guidance and help. It affects their choices.

Failure to address these disadvantaged group of youth can lead further to isolation, exclusion and anti- social activities. Therefore, it is vital to focus on those at the periphery, help the disconnected young people to wholeness and discover their innate potentials to achieve their goals. Empowering the young at- risk can indeed be a useful strategy of combating crimes. However, looking at the fast changing and competitive world today, "the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life."[8] In working for the youth at risk, Christ who "was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members." [9]

Champion for the cause of poor youth

Enchained by the unfavourable conditions of life and environment, the poor and disadvantaged group of youth are unable to unleash

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8 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, 24 November, 2013, 209

9 Ibid, 186

their potentials and the power of youthfulness goes wasted. They remain cornered at the periphery of the society without opportunities to dream high until and unless someone finds a way out for them from their misery. The 19th century has given the world an outstanding stalwart in Don Bosco who was committed to the cause of the youth especially the most disadvantaged group of his time who had to bear the brunt of the negative impact of industrialization. Being born to a peasant family facing hard times without the father who died when he was still at his tender age, Don Bosco could easily identify himself with poor youngsters and personally feel the need for fatherly guidance.[10] The sad plight of the troubled youth who existed on the margins due to their anti-social activities convinced him of the urgency in intervening in the life of the young people. [11] His first youth ministry at Turin's juvenile prisons and the experience he had inspired him with the need of 'preventive' system of education as he said, "If these lads only had someone to guide them they would not be here!" The youth at - risk and the homeless were given a safe haven in his oratory where Don Bosco provided education and skills with a blend of moral and spiritual guidance with wholesome recreation that catered to the all-round development of the young.[12] Today, St. John Bosco is popularly known as the father, friend and teacher of the young. His dedicated work to the poor youth has been zealously continued by his followers, the Salesians of Don Bosco which spread worldwide, helping thousands of young people,

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10 Cf. Fabian Mangion, "St. John Bosco: the father of poor youth," https:// www.timesofmalta.com/ st-john-bosco-the-father-of-poor-youth. , accessed on 14 Dec. 2018

11 Cf. Joseph Boenzi sdb, Don Bosco and the conditions of pre-industrial youth in his times https://www.google.com/ Don Bosco and the conditions of pre-industrial youth in his times, accessed on 14 Dec. 2018

12 Cf. Fabian Mangion, "St. John Bosco: the father of poor youth," https:// www.timesofmalta.com/ st-john-bosco-the-father-of-poor-youth. , accessed on 14 Dec. 2018

providing livelihood and dignity, saving souls by preventing them from doing evils. Being a part of the Salesian family, the MSMHC (Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians) too focuses on the youth through various apostolates especially in the field of education. They organize oratories and 'take care of children and young people… where Preventive System is lived and sanctity is proposed to young people.'[13]

MSMHC: A friend on the journey

Having spread out to numerous mission stations and working closely with the youth in the church, in the schools, boardings, vocational training centres, shelter home, rehabilitation centres and in the society at large, the MSMHCs play the role of mentors, supporters, guides and loving companions to many young souls especially in circumstances beyond their control. The MSMHCs can easily identify themselves with the poor youth and the marginalized keeping in mind the backdrop of the congregation and its humble beginning in the aftermath of World War II. With the missionary nature and vision of the congregation, the MSMHCs "have as their aim the salvation of souls, the spread of the Gospel, and the integral development of the human person,"[14] and share the Church's pastoral concern especially for the disadvantaged section of the society. Those who are at the fringes of the society are the poor, poor in different forms. Jesus goes out to the poor and the poor has a special place in his heart as he himself 'became poor' (2 Cor 8: 9) and identifies himself as one of them, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Mt 25:40) So, serving the poor is serving Christ.

Sparking a link with the young people, understanding their attitude, interest and recognizing their abilities is essentially important when

13 Const. 2013, article 77
14 Const. 2013, article 3

working with the youth. The Church fully acknowledges the power of youth to accomplish great things and they are in fact at the heart of the church, the strength of the church and the hope of the church. So also in the society. The MSMHCs befriend the young and 'take special care of the young, like "Small Apostles"' to make them agents of evangelization and change in the family, friends and society at large.[15] The Young Apostles of Christ (YAC) now has been a part of the great family of the MSMHC and their involvement and contributions in the missionary evangelization has been tremendous and inspiring. Together with the young, the MSMHC scales new heights in the field of evangelization.

Conclusion

Young people have miles to journey, dreams to accomplish, hope for an ideal life, the bucket list to do things. God himself has a plan for them as he said, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11) What is crucial is accompaniment in their journey of life which at times can be rugged and to remind that they have someone to lean on in Christ who walks along side of them as He did to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. (Lk 24:15) Yes, young people need someone to lean on, someone to walk beside. It's important to make them feel that they are truly loved and cared for. Winning their hearts is winning their souls. The look of compassion, a gentle whisper of wisdom, a pat at the back and a simple smile can be the wind beneath their wings that enable them to soar high above and beyond.

15 Ibid, 78

"The human heart desires joy. We all desire joy, every family, every people aspires to happiness. But what is the joy that the Christian is called to live out and bear witness to? It is the joy that comes from the closeness of God, from his presence in our life. From the moment Jesus entered into history, with his birth in Bethlehem, humanity received the seed of the Kingdom of God, like the soil receives the seed, the promise of a future harvest."

(Pope Francis)

Spiritual Accompaniment: An integral part of Evangelization and Catechesis

Sr. Ligi James MSMHC

The quest for sanctity of life, spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with God are central to Christian life. The life in Christ is beyond the mere adherence to the doctrines and rituals. It is grounded in a personal relationship with Jesus. Therefore, a deep spirituality is fundamental to every aspect of evangelization and catechesis. It underlines the fact that the faith formation is much more than a structured format of instructions and teaching of doctrines and beliefs. It is an accompaniment in the journey of faith touching the core realities of human existence. It calls for a profound interiority and a deeper awareness of the existence of God. In this digital age, where one is bombarded with ideas and information, definitions and theories, people often forget the fact that within every human being there is a sacred space, which experiences the divine stirrings. The presence and the accompaniment of a mature adult Christian is essential for anyone who wants to grow spiritually. The present article attempts to bring out the significant role that spiritual accompaniment plays in evangelization and catechesis. After explaining what spiritual accompaniment is and its biblical foundation, the article goes on to describe the various dynamics of spiritual accompaniment and the significant role it plays in evangelization and catechesis.

1. The Meaning of Spiritual Accompaniment

Spiritual accompaniment was traditionally understood as spiritual direction. But in recent times, from its narrow understanding as

'soul care,' spiritual accompaniment is now understood as journeying spiritually together. The need for spiritual accompaniment stems from one's deep desire for God. The grace of Christian faith, which is given at baptism is to sprout, grow and expand gradually in all dimensions of one's being. It is a life movement, which experiences tension and growth. It includes all aspects of human life. Spiritual accompaniment is a fraternal helping relationship centred on God and it lends itself seamlessly to the action of God. The spiritual discernment and the sensitivity to the Spirit allow a person to perceive the works of God.[1] The principal objective of spiritual direction is to discern the signs of God's will for our journey of vocation, prayer and perfection in our daily life for carrying out the fraternal mission.[2] It is a journey together in search of the divine will. It is often difficult to discern the desire that springs from the depths of divine life by oneself alone and hence requires the ministry of fraternal relationship of help.[3] Spiritual accompaniment is a journey of deep healing and an affirmation of holiness, the sacred, and the mystery of all of life.[4]

One needs to differentiate spiritual accompaniment from other forms of helping relationships that are meant for human development. Spiritual accompaniment is not a spiritual friendship. It is not same as the sacrament of confession, which provides forgiveness of one's sins. It is not psycho-therapy or counselling

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1 Cf. A. Louf, *Generated by the Spirit: Spiritual Accompaniment Today*, Magnano-Bose, Qiqajon, 1994, 42-43.

2 Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*, Rome, Libreria Edirice Vaticana, 2011, no.78.

3 Cf. A. Louf, *Generated by the Spirit: Spiritual Accompaniment Today*, 42-53.

4 Cf. Isabell, *The Spiritual Director: A Practical Guide*, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1976, 11-12.

in which the focus is on a particular problem. However, one may use the counselling skills as an aid to spiritual accompaniment. God is at the centre of the Christian spiritual accompaniment.

2. Spiritual Accompaniment: A Biblical Perspective

There are many Scriptural passages that point towards the importance of spiritual accompaniment in the process of responding to the call of God. In the Old Testament, the role of Eli in helping the young Samuel to listen to the voice of God is a clear example (1Sam 3:1-19). The story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8: 32-33, reveals the role of a human agent in understanding of the mystery of Christian life. This incident is, in fact, a continuation of the risen Christ interpreting the Scriptures for his disciples (Lk 24: 27, 44-45).[5] The Ethiopian eunuch came from the ends of the earth to Jerusalem. On his return, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah and the Hellenist Philip helped to interpret the prophet in order to explain the person of Christ. Philip's activity is entirely Spirit directed. The most instructive parallel with this story is that of the journey of the risen Jesus with the two disciples to Emmaus in which beginning with Moses and all the prophets he taught them that it was necessary for Christ to suffer the agony of the cross in order to enter into his glory before revealing himself to them in the breaking of bread. His instruction continues using the Scriptures, which correctly understood and proclaimed, will lead people to faith in the person of Jesus and to the eventual acceptance through the reception of baptism.[6]

We notice that in addition to the Bible, a human teacher was needed for the Ethiopian eunuch to understand the way to salvation in

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5 Cf. R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, New York, Double Day, 1997, 297.

6 Cf. J. Crowe, *The Acts: New Testament Message*, vol. 8, Wilmington, Michael Glazier, 1979, 60.

Jesus Christ. Scripture is more than a literary text. The invitation to Philip to join him in the chariot implies the spiritual discernment on the part of the eunuch in accepting this stranger as his theological mentor, someone authorized by God to provide him with commentary on this biblical prophecy. The need of *kerygma* or proclamation at a personal level is emphasised here. The Apostolic *Kerygma* is handed down to us today.[7] It points towards the roles as witnessing, interpreting and mediating on the part of the spiritual director. The role of Ananias in the conversion story of St. Paul is another example of the guidance of a human being in the full revelation of the plan of God in an individual.

3. Spiritual Accompaniment: A Charismatic Ministry in the Church

Spiritual accompaniment is an ancient monastic practice, which has brought fruits of holiness in Christian tradition. From the middle ages, it was part of various schools of spirituality. St John Paul II underlines the relevance of it when he says: "It is necessary to rediscover the great tradition of personal spiritual guidance which has always brought great and precious fruits to the Church's life."[8] It is not an exclusive charism of the hierarchy or a ministry reserved only for the priests or the consecrated. It is in fact a charism of the laity. In early the monastic period, there were many lay people who were great spiritual directors.[9] Pope Francis expresses it clearly in *Evangelii Gaudium*, when he wrote: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity

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7 Cf. C.S.C. Williams, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Longdom, Adam & Charles Black, 1957, 119.

8 John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis: The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day*, 25 March 1992, in *AAS* 84 (1992) no. 40.

9 Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Consecrated Men and Women of the Diocese of Rome, 16 May 2015.

– into this "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (Cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life."[10]

The devout life or the path of sanctity is an open path for all. It is an error to exclude any one from this noble path of true devotion to the Lord. The way each one experiences the Lord and growing in intimate union with Him will be diverse according to the state of one's life.[11] The children, youth, young adults, or the elderly can grow in holiness. Each one in the particular state of life and the vocation to which one is called can live the life of interiority. The single, married or consecrated live their lives of devotion to the Lord in diverse manner. St John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* speaks of it, when he wrote: "Every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the 'places in time' where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of God and service of others"[12] similarly, Pope Benedict XVI says: "…the Church continues to recommend the practice of spiritual direction, not only to all those who wish to follow the Lord closely, but to every Christian who wishes to live responsibility his baptism, that is, the new life in Christ. Every one… needs to be supported personally by a sure guide in doctrine and an expert in the things

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10 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*: *Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, 24 November 2013, in *AAS* 105 (2013) no. 169.

11 Cf. Francis De Sales, *Pholothea*, Roma, Citta Nuova Editice, 2009, Book I, Chapter 3.

12 John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*: *Post Synodal Exhortation on the Role of Laity in the Church*, 30 December 1988, in AAS 81(1989) no. 59.

of God."[13] He recommends that "everyone - priests, religious, laypeople…and especially youth, should have a spiritual director to help them in the Christian life [in order to lead them] to union with the Lord...We cannot do it with our reflections alone."[14]

The Synod on *Young People: The Faith and Vocational Discernment*, which was concluded recently, has affirmed once again the importance of spiritual accompaniment. The Synod's working document describes a mentor as "a confidant without judgment" who "should not lead young people as passive followers but walk alongside them."[15] Therefore, being accompanied in one's own spiritual growth and accompanying the other in their spiritual journey is a ministry for anyone who is willing to be a disciple and an apostle of Christ.

3. The Identity of the Spiritual Director: A Disciple and an Apostle

A spiritual director is both a disciple and an apostle of Jesus. As a disciple, he/she has to respond to the invitation to an intimate personal relationship with Jesus. The intimacy with the Lord is a dynamic process, an ongoing process, a process of radicalisation of discipleship. A continued following of Jesus is the characteristic feature of a disciple of Jesus. The disciple has to follow the Lord with a sustained fidelity and should have a deep and personal commitment to the person of Jesus by sharing in His life and destiny. Spiritual direction is a matter of establishing that same personal relationship that the Lord had with His disciples, that special bond with which He led them to embrace the will of the

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13 Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Teresianum, Rome, 19 May 2011.

14 Benedict XVI, General Audience, Rome, 16 September, 2009.

15 Sinodo Dei Vescovi: I Giovani, La Fede e il Discernimento Vocazionale, *Instrumentum Laboris*, Rome, San Paolo, 2018, no.132.

Father.[16] Therefore, spiritual accompaniment is an invitation to this discipleship in Jesus. It is an act of leading someone to be a disciple of the Lord. Call to discipleship is not limited only to those who choose to live the evangelical counsels. Instead, every Christian is called to discipleship. By virtue of baptism, we become disciples who are missionaries.[17]

The spiritual director is also an apostle who proclaims the Lord fearlessly. There exists an indissoluble bond between the *mystical* and the *missionary* dimension of the Christian vocation, as both are rooted in baptism.[18] An apostle is a delegate of Christ. He/she is not someone who speaks about a particular doctrine or delivers a message, but someone who gives testimony of something he or she has experienced. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says of the spiritual director thus: "Holy Spirit gives [some of the faithful] the gifts of wisdom, faith, and discernment for the sake of the common good which is prayer. In other words, mature Christians with these gifts are able to help others grow closer to God through prayer."[19]

The role of the spiritual director as an apostle is one of witnessing and interpreting. The challenge before anyone who is in the ministry of spiritual accompaniment is to become a true witness of Christ and to his values. By this very fact one communicates the message with the authenticity of life.[20] The spiritual directors are the active interpreters of God's grace in the life of the individuals. Continuous

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16 Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Teresianum, Rome, 19 May 2011.

17 Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120.

18 Cf. Pope Francis, General Audience, Rome, 15 January 2014.

19 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2690.

20 Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*: *The Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*, 7 December 1990, in *AAS* 82 (1990) no. 42- 43.

flow of God's grace through myriad ways need to be recognized and interpreted. The events of life are to be seen in the light of grace. When Jesus explains the Scriptures to the disillusioned and discouraged disciples travelling to Emmaus, they feel their hearts burn as He enlightens and reinterprets their experience. Understanding their particular experiences within the larger context of the eternal plan of God, they could not but share their experience with others.

4. Dynamics of Spiritual Accompaniment in the context of Evangelization and Catechesis

Having explained the meaning and the biblical foundations of spiritual accompaniment, we shall now discuss its various facets in the context of evangelization and catechesis, which are so important in furthering and nourishing the faith of the people.

4. 1 An Emerging Process than a Method

Spiritual accompaniment, in the context of evangelization and catechetics, is a process that evolves. Pope Francis affirms it when he says: "Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization."[21] It is not about having a particular approach with all in one method or in a skilled intervention from an office. An informal accompaniment happens and develops in the context of evangelization and catechesis. It can be in the villages, in the schools, in the streets, in the parishes, in the care homes or in the dispensaries. It begins by journeying together with persons having various levels of faith. It can be the accompaniment given to the children while they are being prepared for receiving the sacraments of initiation. It could be the guidance that is given in their adolescent crisis and vocational discernment. It may be in the accompaniment of the neophytes who are in the period of catechumenate in their

[21] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 173.

journey to new life in Christ. Through this accompaniment, they are led to a deeper experience of God. The young couples who are being prepared for the sacrament of matrimony can be accompanied to enter into a life of fidelity. The families can be helped to find God and grow in sanctity in their ordinary life situation. The poor and the abandoned can be helped and supported to experience the love and mercy of God. The sick and the aged can be helped to find meaning in their suffering by participating in the passion of Jesus. Very often the Small Christian Communities are accompanied in their deeper experience of God through their Gospel sharing so that they can express concretely their faith through a life of service to the humanity. Therefore, spiritual accompaniment can begin and flourish in the missionary context in the varied life situations of the faithful.

4.2 Holy Spirit: The Prime Agent in Spiritual Accompaniment

The Magisterium of the Church has always underlined the irreplaceable role the Holy Spirit plays in the life and mission of the Church. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of the entire missionary activity of the Church.[22] "The techniques of evangelization are good, but not even the most perfect ones could substitute the discrete action of the Holy Spirit,"[23] affirms Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Likewise, no amount of training in skills, methods and techniques can replace the action of the Holy Spirit, in spiritual accompaniment. Holy spirit is the perfect companion, helper and advocate in the life journey of every Christian. Holy spirit alone is capable of moving the hearts. Holy Spirit has assumed complete possession of us becoming breath of

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22 Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 21-30

23 Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: *The Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World*, 8 December 1975, in *AAS* 68 (1976) no.75.

our breath and spirit of our spirit.[24] It is the Holy spirit who makes one capable of calling God Abba, Father (Rom 8:15). The spiritual journey and the gradual growth in faith is a work of God and a gift of grace. God works in and through the fragile human beings who are willing to listen to His voice and follow His inspirations.

The missionary activities of the apostles were the effects of the working of the Holy Spirit in them and in their listeners. The pioneer missionaries who enkindled the faith in tens of thousands of people and accompanied them in their journey to Christ had nothing to claim for themselves except an unshakable faith in God. It is God who worked through them and led the people to a deeper experience of the love and the mercy of God. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of spiritual accompaniment. The role of the spiritual guide is to facilitate the unfolding of the life of the Spirit in the individual.

4.3 Orientation and Setting Priorities: The Initial Moment

In the context of the initial encounter with Christ through the intervention of an evangelizer or a catechist, one may desire to grow closer to Christ and live a new life. One may seek a personal guidance and direction in the journey ahead. An initial moment of orientation and setting priorities is the beginning of the journey of faith. The state of life, particular vocation, the charism, the individual contexts and the responsibilities, the family, work, etc. are taken into consideration. It may begin with a general revision of one's life. It includes the relationship with God, fraternal relationship, family and responsibility, personal struggles and difficulties, desires and goals, successes and failures, the methods of prayer and the practice of virtues one is set to follow. It is a guided journey to self and an opportune moment to identify in order to root out and

[24] Cf. A. Louf, *Teach us to Pray: Learning a Little about God*, New York, Paulist Press, 1974, 19.

to re-plant.[25] The false images, inconsistency, aridity, superficial and transitory enthusiasm, etc. can be addressed at this stage.

4.4 Towards a Renewed Encounter with Christ

From the initial moment of orientation, there is a gradual movement into progress and advancement in spiritual growth. The spiritual accompaniment is aimed at moving from an initial knowledge of Christ and the faith to a deepened personal encounter and intimacy with Him. The following of Christ is an experience of relationship. It is a personal experience of the living God. Pope Francis observes: "It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise."[26] At this stage the focus is on the interior life, deepening of the virtues and growth in prayer. There is also gradual growth in charity and greater involvement in the social life and issues.

4.5 Continuous Dialectic between the Ideal and the Real

The spiritual experience and the growth in prayer is contextualized in one's daily life and responsibilities. The spiritual growth is never a completed reality. There is no mathematical formula for spiritual growth. On the one hand, there are the heightened spiritual experiences and on the other hand, there are the stark realities of

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[25] Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*, nos. 88-89.

[26] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 266.

the personal weaknesses and difficulties arising from family or community issues and social problems. Therefore, growing in holiness and to lead a virtuous life are daily struggles. But the state of life and the life situations of each individual is diverse. A continuous dialogue between the ideal and the real is important. The role of the spiritual animator is to help the person to grow in holiness in the life situations in which one lives. It is helping the person to face the realities of self and the external life situations. It is never an escape from the life responsibilities. It is also not a compromise with the spiritual principles. It is a continuous dialogue between the principles and the life situations. One can grow in spiritual life only by facing oneself. It is the transitioning from the mountain-top experience to the valley of reality.[27]

4.6 Centrality of Sacraments and Growth in Sanctity

Growing in holiness is nothing but growth in Christ. The ultimate aim of spiritual accompaniment is to attain a close union with God, which is deepened in and through the Church. The Church sanctifies its members and leads them to a close intimacy with Christ. It is an ongoing spiritual growth while being grounded in the Church through prayer, reading and reflection of the Word of God, catechetical formation and the frequent reception of the sacraments. The Sacraments are the fountains of grace, which makes the Christian life grow and bear fruits. The irreplaceable role of a liturgical and sacramental life is underlined in the spiritual accompaniment. The Eucharistic Lord inspires, guides, heals and directs the person who is in his/her pilgrim journey towards the intimate union with him. The sacrament of penance becomes an eminent means of living in a state of grace.[28] Making oneself

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[27] Cf. T. Merton, *Life and Holiness*, New York, Image Books, 1964, 64.

[28] Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*, 92.

familiar with the lives of the saints too helps the person to long for such heroic practice of the virtues.

4.7 Process of Discernment

Discerning the will of God is an important element in spiritual growth. There are numerous occasions when one needs to know the will of God. Other than the important choices one needs to make while choosing a vocation, there can also arise doubts and confusion with regard to prayer, relationship with others, carrying out responsibilities, the mode of practising the virtues, life of abnegation, etc. The spiritual masters suggest a number of methods like intense prayer, reflection, discussions, gentle listening to the Word of God and the like. But it is important to grow in prayer and intimacy with God by which the spiritual discernment becomes a natural process of living in union with God at all circumstances of life and of being under the guidance and the direction of the Holy Spirit in all activities one performs. Therefore, the aim of spiritual direction is not just to teach certain methods of discernment but to lead the person to an intimate union with God, by which one is able to know what God wants of him/her in every situation. It is a continuous life style. One judges habitually the way God wants. It can be also an intense and an extra-ordinary moment. It requires an intense recollection and prayer to listen to the heart and to recognize the signs of the inner promptings of the Spirit. The prayerful moments spent in deep union with God makes one to be in touch with the divine inspirations. John of the Cross affirms that science and discretion are not enough but the directors must have experience of what is most sublime, a deep experience of God.

Conclusion

The work of evangelization and catechesis is incomplete without a deep faith experience and growth in spiritual life. A personal intimacy with Jesus alone can bring changes in each individual, in

families, in communities and in the society at large. "Without Christ, the Church's mission is just social activism. The condition of every mission is that we are united to the Risen Christ,"[29] affirms Pope Francis. Spiritual accompaniment is an integral part and a form of evangelization and catechesis. Today there is an urgent need to have persons who are willing and available to enter into the sacred space of the other, helping them to recognize the divine interventions. The priests, religious, catechists and lay people need to be prepared for this noble task, which requires holiness of life, authenticity and commitment much more than the human skills and the scientific knowledge.

[29] Pope Francis, Address to the members of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, Rome, 29 October 2018.

Letting God's Compassion Visible through Healing Ministry

Sr. Sindhu George MSMHC

Introduction

There is a vital desire in everyone to live long. While it is desirable to live long, it is imperative to live healthy and happy. Jesus the Divine Saviour wants everyone to be happy and healthy and so, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness" (Mt. 9:35). Health involves a proper working of all the organs of the body, because an ailing body will always create mental tensions of its own. Therefore, it is important to take care of the body, mind and soul of a person. Health does not mean the absence of illness or pain. Health must be highly treasured, but it is not an absolute value. Real health is the 'wholeness of a human being, in all its various aspects: physical, mental, emotional and psychological. Health is an invaluable part of a human life. Without it, people can be uninspired, de-motivated and unable to lead a happy life.

Wholeness through Healing

The verbal form of the word healing is 'to heal.' In its transitive usage, to heal means *"Free from disease or ailment, make whole, sound bodily condition*."[1] It is a life free from all ailments. Healing means wholeness, which is taken for granted to be the

[1] Lesley Brown, "Heal," in *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol.1, 6th ed., A-M (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 1220.

order and promises, wholeness of the person. It is closely and fundamentally supported by the primordial vision of well – being and directed towards an eschatological wholeness.[2] Although people are aware of the limits of physical cure, they passionately desire for caring and healing.[3] Everyone longs to be healed and want to live a happy life. Paulachan points out in *Evangelization as Celebration*, "The Indian term used for the science of medicine is *ayurveda*, meaning science of life."[4]

Healing relates to life; therefore, it illustrates the life-giving dimension of healing. God who gave life wants his/her life to be restored in wholeness. For He said, "For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord" (Jer. 30:17). Healing is the strategy of managing sickness by dealing with the symptoms in some satisfying way and by regaining new life.[5] People always strife for complete physical, psychological and social well-being, and not just the absence of illness. In *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling* Graham states, "Healing is the process of being restored to bodily wholeness, emotional wellbeing, mental functioning and spiritual aliveness."[6] Sound body and mind is the essential aspect of human happiness and people strive for happiness irrespective of their status of life.

Health and Wholeness: Primary Values

Today with the advancement of science and technology, modern doctors alleviate the pain and cure of many sicknesses which once considered incurable. That is the advancement and

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2 Cf. Paulachan Kochappilly, *Evangelization as Celebration* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2002) 133.

3 Ibid. 129.

4 Ibid. 136.

5 Cf. John J. Pilch, "Healing," in *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 414.

6 L. K. Graham, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 497.

achievements of the current world. A person is composed of various dimensions: mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. Health is a positive condition, which everyone should aim to achieve.[7] The World Health Organization (WHO) rightly defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity. Health and wholeness are primary values for human beings. They are considered as the basic conditions for human happiness.[8]

Everyone desires to be contented and fit and therefore, search remedies and curative methods. Human beings wish that their physical, emotional, mental, psychic, spiritual and social dimensions should be in perfect harmony. When health or wholeness is absent, people seek an explanation, if not medication.[9] Science has made considerable progress in this regard. According to a contemporary Social Science, sickness is the human experience of non-wellbeing. It is a biological disorder caused by a germ or virus.[10] Life is a gift from the Lord and He gives it in full measure. Human beings are mortal beings and God is the ultimate life giver.[11] For Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). Visiting the sick and aged are occasions when one can touch the hearts of people more aptly than any other times.[12] He

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7 Cf. Peter B. Clarke, "Healing," in *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, ed., Peter B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 2006) 231.

8 Cf. Robert L. Kinast, "Healing," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed., Michael Downey (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995) 466.

9 Ibid. 466.

10 Cf. John J. Pilch, "Healing," in *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed., Carrol Stuhlmueller (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2005) 414.

11 Cf. C.M. Griffin, "Life/Aliveness," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, gen. ed., Rodney J. Hunter (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2007) 647.

12 Cf. J. Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission* (Shillong: BBCIC Publications, 2008) 248.

gave life to people in order that they may keep it healthy and protect it.

Reaching out to bring Healing

The desire for health and the need for healing are universal phenomena in human experience. People need sound health to live life meaningfully. A proper working of all the organs of the body is essential for health. Considering the importance of restoring health, Jesus went around healing many people who were ill. Mathew's Gospel narrates, "Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at His feet, and He cured them" (Mt. 15:30).

In Christian living one need to see one's needy neighbour who desires healing. Pope Francis rightly brought to light in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, "Sometimes we are tempted to be that kind of Christians who keep the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others."[13]At this juncture, people need healing that can bring them back to a love relationship with their loved ones.

Jesus' Ministry of Healing

There are numerous instances where one finds the healing touch of God to humanity in the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. One becomes aware of God as the Divine and perfect Healer. One reads in *CCC*, "Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life."[14] The word of God points out that healing is inevitable in the lives of human being. For the Lord said, "I am the Lord who heals you" (Ex. 15:26). Christ's compassion for the sick and His

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13 Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing House, 2013) n. 270.

14 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New Delhi: Theological Publications in India, 2006) 1500.

many healings are signs that God still loves the world. He confirmed it by saying, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). Jesus guaranteed our destiny by these above words.

The Word of God itself is a means for restoring health; Jesus Himself is the Word. St. John says, "The Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). The Book of Wisdom affirms thus, "For neither herb nor poultice cured them, but it was your Word, O Lord, that heals all people" (Wis. 16:12). The Church has received the charge of healing the sick and strives to carry out this responsibility by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with her prayer of intercession.[15] Pope Francis affirms this by saying, "great men and women of God were great intercessors."[16] God becomes compassionate by the intercessory prayers of His people. It softens the heart of God. He commands them, "Heal the Sick" (Mt. 10:80). The closer one comes to God, who is all light, the clearer become ones' dark side which come to light. Yet God is not a light that burns but, rather, a light that heals.[17]

Health: A Blessing from the Lord

In the Old Testament sickness was experienced as a sign of weakness and the consequence of sin. Thus, sickness was seen in the presence of God from whom people implored healing.[18] People experienced the healing power of God and sought His help in time of sickness. But beginning of the fourth century, body began to be seen as less important than the spirit. Therefore, illness

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15 Cf. *CCC*, 1509.

16 *EG*, n. 282.

17 Cf. *Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church*, with the forward by Pope Benedict XVI, trans., Michael J Miller, 134.

18 Cf. Conference of Catholic Bishop of India, *Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2006) 313.

was increasingly regarded as a result of divine chastisement and discipline.[19] So people did not consider healing as foreseeable but a way of teaching them self-control.

Healing includes liberation, has meaning in the Bible that covers the whole person: physical, emotional and spiritual.[20] In the Old Testament one sees Prophets like Elijah (1Kgs. 17:17-24) and Elisha (2Kgs. 5:1-19) acted on God's behalf in healing the sick people. For Christians, concern for healing has its roots in the Old Testament and health was viewed as a blessing from God, a reward for righteousness and faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant, illness was often for transgression.[21]

Establishing God's Kingdom through Healing

Jesus performed many physical healings throughout his public ministry. About one third of the Gospel describes various healings performed by Jesus. God created human being healthy and wanted them to enjoy good health. The New Testament regards healing as an indication of the presence of the Kingdom of God. By which reinstatement of bodily wholeness, emotional well-being and mental functioning take place in the context of a spiritual advancement.[22]

The New Testament portrays Jesus as vitally concerned with healing the physical, moral and mental diseases of persons, and commanding his disciples to do the same.[23] St. Mathew says,

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19 Cf. L. K. Graham, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 498.

20 Cf. Joseph Aymanathil, *Healing and Deliverance* (Kolkata: Salesians of Don Bosco, 2014) 4.

21 Cf. L. K. Graham, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 497.

22 Cf. L. K. Graham, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 498.

23 Cf. L. K. Graham, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 498.

"Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness" (Mt.10:1). St. Luke also stated, "So He went about all Galilee and Judea preaching the Gospel and healing all kinds of infirmities" (Lk. 6: 17-19). In the early Church there were people those who had the power to heal. To affirm this St. Paul argues saying, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, to another gift of healing by the one Spirit" (1Cor. 12:7-9).

Church's Emphasis on Healing Mission

The Church throughout the centuries in one form or another exhorts the followers of Christ to bear fruit: fruits of love, pardon, sacrifice, services of different kinds (such as education, medical care, human promotion and developmental works).[24] The health service of the Church should be measured by the effort to control common diseases and finally to eradicate them and not by the high-tech facilities they provide for the treatment of rare diseases.[25]

Rerum Ecclesiae, the Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Catholic Missions whichwas published on 28 February 1926 at Rome boldly declares that the only one and noble method of the Divine Teacher is healing the sick. Therefore, one must follow the same method of the Divine Teacher used while He was on earth. He began to preach to the crowds, only after healing the sick: "and all that were sick he healed; and many followed him, and he healed them all: he had compassion on them and healed their sickness" (Mt. 8:16; Mt. 12:15; Mt. 14: 14). He commanded the apostles to do likewise and gave them power of healing: "Whenever you enter a town cure the sick

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24 Cf. J. Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission*, 42.

25 Cf. Peter Hoakip, "Mission Among the Tribals," in *Breaking New Ground in Mission*, eds., Paul Vadakumpadan and Others (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2002) 214.

who are there and say to them: The Kingdom of God has come near to you." (Lk. 10:8, 9) Even the gentiles gained affection for the Church because they looked after the health of the natives and cared for the sick or who show a true love for their infants and children. From this, one can understand that human heart responds to love and to kindness.[26]

Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on Promotion of Catholic Mission, *Evangelii Praecones* released on 2 June 1951 at Rome highlights the importance of praising the noble act of taking care of the sick such as infirm and afflicted of every kind, hospitals, leprosaria, dispensaries and homes for the aged, maternity cases and orphanages.[27] These dignified acts provide us the vision of the Divine Redeemer Himself who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed. They are like the fairest flowers of missionary endeavour.[28] Such outstanding works of charity are undoubtedly in highest esteem in preparing souls of non-Christians and drawing them to the Faith and to the practice of Christianity. Pope Pius had highest esteem for the persons who took care of the sick.[29]

The article eight of *Lumen Gentium,* the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church published on 21November 1964 speaks about the need to care for the sick, for Christ entrusted this task to the Church. It says, "The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace

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26 Pope Pius XI, Encyclicals, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, http:// www.vatican.va / holy father/pius xi/encyclicals/documents/hf p- xi enc 28021926 rerum-ecclesiae en.html, accessed on 17 July 2015, no. 30.

27 Cf. Pius XII, Encyclicals, *Evangelii Praecones*, http:/www.vatican.va/ holy father/ pius/ Xii/ encyclicals/ documents/ hf/ p-xii enc 02061951 Evangelii Praecones en.html, accessed on 17July 2015,n.45.

28 Cf. *EP*, n. 45.

29 Ibid. 46.

to all men"[30] Christ is the intermediary between God and people. Therefore, He takes the initiative in healing people. Church is called to follow the same path just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, to communicate the fruits of salvation to men.[31]

Christ was sent by the Father, to bring Good News to the poor to heal the contrite of heart (cf. Lk. 4:18), to seek and to save what was lost (cf. Lk. 19:10).[32] God the Father entrusted Jesus to take care of the world and to save what was lost. Jesus carried this responsibility as perfect as He could like an obedient Son. "Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder."[33] Empowered by the Risen Lord, the Church is called to carry out the task of healing, bringing wholeness to Christ.

The document, *Redemptoris Missio,* published on 7 December 1990 on the 25th anniversary of the publication of the Conciliar Decree *ad gentes* reflects on the missionary concerns of the Church as the mission of Christ the Redeemer. Through this, Pope encourages everyone who is engaged in the pastoral care of the sick to teach them about the efficiency of suffering and to encourage them to offer their sufferings to God for missionaries.[34]

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30 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. I, gen, ed., Austin Flannery (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2013) n. 8. Hence forth it is mentioned as *LG*. In this thesis, details of the Church documents will be given in the first citing and later the short forms of the documents will be used with numbers.

31 Cf. *LG*, n. 8.

32 Ibid. 8.

33 *LG*, n. 8.

34 Cf. John Paul, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1992) n. 78.

Pope encourages the people saying that by making such an offering, the sick themselves become missionaries, which have emerged among and for them.[35] He acknowledges the contribution of the missionaries by their presence and humble service for the integral development of individuals and of society through schools, health-care centre, leprosaria, homes for the handicapped and the elderly.[36] Commenting on the righteous tasks undertaken by the members of the Church, Pope John Paul rightly affirms, "It is in fact these "works of charity" that reveal the soul of all the missionary activity."[37]

Article eighty-three of *Vita Consecrata*, the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of St. John Paul II, published on 25 March 1996 speaks clearly about care of the sick. It also made emphasis on the mission to evangelize the health care centres. It says that many consecrated persons especially women carry out their apostolate in the field of health care according to the charism of their particular Institutions.[38] They share the compassionate nature of Jesus to the sick. Down the centuries consecrated persons give up their life for the sake of giving life for the victims of contagious diseases.[39] Following the footsteps of their master, the Divine Samaritan, they carry out the ministry of taking care of the sick with love and understanding. The Church makes greater emphasis on giving special preferences for the poorest and most abandoned among the sick. They are the elderly, handicapped, marginalised, terminally ill, the victims of drug abuse and the new contagious diseases. Consecrated persons are to become a channel through which the sick should be encouraged to take the

35 Cf. *RM*, n. 78.
36 Ibid. 60.
37 *RM*, n. 60.
38 Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*(Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2011) n. 83.
39 Cf. *VC*, n. 83.

cross of suffering for the salvation of all.[40] Furthermore, Pope cautions the consecrated men and women to evangelize the healthcare centres in which they work as it is a means through which the sick will be able to inculcate the Gospel values. He insists on equipping them with the knowledge of medicines, and above all, to cultivate real sense of love and respect for all.[41] Many are healed through the tender, loving care and concern of the consecrated persons. Love has the capacity to cure the sick people faster than the medicines.

Ecclesia In Asia, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on 6 November 1999 encourages all the consecrated people to follow the footsteps of Jesus who has love and compassion for all and cured all kinds of sickness and diseases (cf. Mt. 9:35). The Church in Asia is committed to involve in the care of the sick. It is a vital part of her mission of offering the saving grace of Christ to the people.[42] The mission of the Church is to get involved in the saving mission of Christ. Like the Good Samaritan of the parable (cf. Lk. 10:29-37), the Church wants to care for the sick and disabled in a tangible way to the people who are deprived of elementary medical care as a result of poverty and marginalization.[43] Pope says that he is deeply moved by the numerous instances where the Church in different parts of the world engaged in bearing witness by the religious, Christians, consecrated persons, doctors, nurses, and other health workers, especially those working with the handicapped, or in the field of terminal care, or contending with the spread of new diseases such as AIDS.[44] He says that the victims of drug addiction and AIDS

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia In Asia* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2003) n. 36.

43 Cf. *EA*, n. 36.

44 Ibid.

are often despised and abandoned by the society and therefore, there is a need from the part of the health workers to be generous and self-giving in nursing them.[45] He cautioned saying, there is a pressure from public health care policies, which are not based on Christian principles. They should ensure Christian values and ethics into the health care system so that there should be transformation from within. They face ever increasing financial difficulties in this regard. Despite these problems, the health workers remain exemplary by their self-giving love and dedicated professionalism.[46] It is important to note that these men and women carry out the salvific mission of Christ; their dedicated service to the community is obligatory to be appreciated and admired. The health workers are to be encouraged and supported for the good works they do as they impart God's unfailing love.

Huminum Dolores in Vatican II document based on the introduction to the Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick brought out on 7 December 1972 says that down through the centuries people have always had to bear heavy and paradoxical burden of illness and pain. Faith in God and awareness about Christ's love for the sick helped the Christians to bear pain and illness meaningfully.[47] Christ Himself was without sin, yet, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, He underwent His own passion and came to know human sorrow (cf. Isa. 53:4-5).[48] Furthermore, the document speaks about the responsibility to remind others that through the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection the mortal life of the sick is given back.[49] It was Christ's intention that

45 Cf. *EA*, n. 36.

46 Ibid.

47 Cf. Second Vatican Council, Introduction to the Rite of Anointing and to the Pastoral Care of the Sick, *Huminum Dolores*, in *Vatican Council II: More Post-Councilor Documents*, Vol. II, gen, ed., Austin Flannery (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2007) n. 1.

48 Cf. *HD*, 2.

49 Ibid. 3.

the sick receive both physical relief and spiritual comfort.[50] Hence, persons who are seriously ill gets special need of the help of Divine grace; Christ strengthens and supports them with the sacrament of anointing.[51] The sacrament gives to the sick person the grace of the Holy Spirit by which the whole person is made healthy. They are encouraged to trust in God and are given the strength to resist the temptations of the evil one and avoid yielding to anxiety about death.[52] The Church gives the reception of the Sacraments for every believer to have an experience of the Risen Christ.

Article thirty-one of *Deus Caritas Est*, the Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI on 25 December 2005 focuses on the elements of Church's charitable activity. It explains that, Christian charity is a simple response to immediate needs and specific situations, like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick.[53] Individuals who are engaged in caring for others should be competent. They should be well equipped in what and how to do. They should be committed to pursue the caring. Caring the sick is genial act where one deals with human beings.[54] Human beings need proper care not merely for a moment, but they should dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern. Pope invites everyone to take into consideration these facts of taking care of the sick. He says that, those who are occupied in the works of charity need a formation of the heart meaning to say that they need the heart of Jesus who is kind and compassionate towards others.[55]

Verbum Domini, the post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI on the Word of God on 30 September 2010 tells

50 Ibid. 4.
51 Ibid. 5.
52 Ibid. 6.
53 Cf. *DCE*, n. 31.
54 Ibid.
55 Cf. *DCE*, n. 31.

that Eucharist is central to the relationship between the Word of God and the sacraments. It stresses on to give importance to Sacred Scriptures in the sacraments, especially the sacrament of healing, the sacrament of Reconciliation and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The sacrament of the Anointing of the sick has the healing power of the Word of God. It calls to the listeners' personal conversion. Sacred Scripture speaks of the consolation, support and healing of God to the people.[56] God's Incarnate Word shouldered everyone's pain and suffered till the end out of love for humanity. Explaining further on administering the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, Pope tells about the need to give greater space to the celebration of the Word that the sick may be helped to endure the suffering in faith in union with the redemptive sacrifice of Christ who delivers everyone from evil.[57]

Conclusion

The Book of Wisdom says that God created human beings in His own image (2:23) and in the Book of Sirach (17:2) it is written that God created them out of earth, and turned them back to it again and endowed them with strength like his own. It speaks of the special value of human life, which need to be understood in the right sense. As God's images, they are to reflect His very nature and find His image in others. Even though they are created in God's image, they have both physical as well as spiritual nature; the former is subject to illness, old age and final death, whereas the latter continues to live on in eternity. During the course of earthly journey, people carry with them a lot of emotional baggage including hurt feelings, guilt, emptiness and failure. Time and again, from the cradle to the grave, human beings are plagued by suffering and pain. Much of the suffering in the world is caused by human beings themselves but they are unaware of these facts and go on

56 Cf. *VD*, n. 61.
57 Ibid.

searching remedy outside where they cannot find the solutions. It is in this situation, God's Word can bear fruit in their lives, bringing inspiration, comfort and healing. The Church is to lead them to Jesus who is the ultimate healer, capable of healing all the sickness. He is the best doctor par excellence ever lived and there will never be another doctor who can cure the sickness as Christ did.

"Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness,
but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and
suffices for the journey. To those who suffer,
God does not provide arguments which explain
everything; rather, his response is that of
an accompanying presence, a history of
goodness which touches every story of
suffering and opens up a ray of light."
(Pope Francis)

Proclamation of Christ: Centrality of Church's Mission

Sr. Nycy Joseph MSMHC

The various charisms in the church are like the functional differentiations made within a group that shares a common mission. The different functions in the church – clerical, lay, religious should not be seen only independently, or in their mutual relationship within the church, but also in relationship to the church's mission.[1] The entire community, the people of God, is bearer of the mission. The mission is the witness of their life itself based on the values of God's kingdom. *Redemptoris Missio* speaks of the importance of sharing one's faith. It reminds, "Preaching constitutes the Church's first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the kingdom in individuals and in human society."[2] It calls the Church to bring the Good news into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new[3]. It is to build the human society by liberating individuals from the clutches of evils and drawing them closer to the living God. This task is to be carried out with the unity of purpose, seeking to reveal the unconditional love of God to all people.

1. Transformation of Culture

In this sphere of society today, the religious and the laity have got a greater role to play to create a sense of responsibility for the

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

2 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 20.

3 Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18.

other and stewardship over God's creation. The proclamation of God's kingdom is a call to repentance. Usually one speaks about repentance as a personal process. However, the realization of God's kingdom also means that sinful social structures must change worldviews, behaviour and value systems. In order to change society one must also change these cultural structures without becoming fanatical and ideological. The joyous message does not offer an economic and political blueprint for a new world. What it proposes is a new way of looking at God, people and the world. It is not so much directed against an economic system as against an ethic and cultural system.[4]

The lifestyle of the clergy and laity might mean being part of contemplative communities, being involved with the poor or fully engaged in cultural forces like education, health care, art and the media. All these can be a witness, a challenge and an encouragement for cultural change. Although the entire church is called to be a counter-cultural community (cf. Acts 2: 42-47), the members of the church are called to concretize this dimension in a special symbolic way.[5]

2 A Dialogical Approach to Religions

In this aspect, we look at Jesus, a missionary par excellence who proclaimed the kingdom of God by his very life. Jesus was at best in dialoguing with all no matter whether sinners, outcasts or even with those opposed to him. His dialogue with many brought a total transformation of their lives and drew them closer to God. Dialogue demands a deep spirituality which enables man, as did Jesus Christ, to cling on to his faith in God's love, even when everything seems to fall apart. Dialogue demands a total Christ like self-emptying so that led by the spirit, we may be more effective instruments in

4 Michael Amaladoss, *Theology Digest*, 351.
5 Ibid.

building up the kingdom.[6] The Christians are asked to "acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-christians" (*Nostra Aetate* 2). The church recognizes that there are seeds of the Word which lie hidden in these religions (*Ad Gentes* 11). In the fulfillment of the evangelizing mission the church has to adopt a dialogical approach to other religions. Interreligious dialogue is not a new tactic for evangelization, but a new expression of it. The dialogical method is based on the following principles:

a) Mutual respect where each person respects the socio-cultural and religious status of the other.

b) A spirit of give and take where each side is ready to recognize the positive values in the other and is ready to learn from the other.[7]

Dialogue is the term used today to characterize mutual and positive encounters between persons and groups having different faiths or ideologies. Dialogue is necessary to avoid confrontation and to establish peace, because people in the world will have to learn more and more to share one single living-space. The aim of dialogue is not to criticize but to understand, not to judge but to pay heed to the commands of God to dictate our lives and talents to his service and the service of all creatures in his honour.[8]

3 Inculturation

Following the methodology of incarnation, which is the paradigm for every missionary activity, inculturation becomes an essential element in the fulfilment of the mission of the church. There is

6 James H. Kroeger, "Walking with My Neighbour in Faith", *Word and Worship*, 39 (2006) 5.

7 Barnes L. Mawrie, *Missionary Catechesis* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2013) 88.

8 Sebastian Vempany, "Towards Religious Harmony", *Third Millennium: Indian Journal of Evangelization*, 7 (2002) 28.

a close relationship between culture and the gospel. When this relationship is not properly expressed, the ultimate goal of evangelization, which is the coming of the kingdom of God in our world, will not be adequately realized. That is why Pope Paul VI speaking of the proclamation of the gospel in the modern world says, "the rift between gospel and the culture is undoubtedly an unhappy circumstance of our times just as it has been in other eras" (cf. *Evangeli Nuntiandi* 20).[9] The Gospel must be born into a culture, not superimposed on it. The essence of the Gospel message must take flesh and blood in a given culture.[10] It is because the Gospel is a leaven that can renew all cultures and should not itself be restricted to one culture alone.

In this way the Kingdom of God renews reality radically, ushering in a new era of peace, love and justice where the will of God is respected. The Kingdom challenges every value that is not in keeping with its own values.[11] Knowing the fact that the Kingdom of God is the will of God, the role played by the clergy and laity become relevant and it confers joy. At the same time it is different from that of the world and may even appear to be opposed to worldly happiness.

4. Catechesis

Proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus is central to evangelization and an invitation to the Kingdom of God. The essence of the good news is centered on the person of Jesus Christ. The proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom are the purpose of Jesus' mission: "I was sent for this purpose"

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9 Paul Puthanangady, "A New Way of Being Church According to Ecclesia in Asia", *Mission Today*, 2 (2002) 17.

10 Paul Vadakumpadan, *Missionaries of Christ* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications) 2008.

11 Ibid. 110.

(cf. Lk 4:43)[12] The purpose with which Jesus calls the clergy and laity are today for missionary catechesis. It implies that in the proclamation of the good news attention is given to the socio-cultural context of the people to whom it is directed. This way of doing has to prepare the ground for accepting the gospel by purifying judgments, sentiments, the conscious and sub-conscious impressions and attitudes which will help people to give a fuller and decisive response to the Gospel of Christ.[13]

Pope Francis speaks, to evanagelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in the world. The service of charity is also a constituent element of the church's mission and an indispensable expression of her very being.[14] The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed the just ordering of the society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics, the church cannot and must not remain on the side-lines in the fight for justice. All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building up of a better world.[15] Catechesis is concerned with the transmission of faith which should culminate in a personal and a communitarian experience of Christ. In this process, like education, it needs to utilize the different methods of communicating the content. The three years public ministry of Jesus were years of teaching and catechizing. As a creative teacher, he used proverbs, parables, symbolic actions, objective lessons, paradox etc. in his mission.[16] His method was never a one-way communication. He involved the listeners in the arguments by asking them probing questions and dares from them correct answers.

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12 John Fuellenback, *Throw Fire*, (Indoor: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1999) 339.

13 Barnes L. Mawrie, *Missionary Catechesis*, 85.

14 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, (Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing House, 2013) 180.

15 Ibid. 186.

16 Barnes L. Mawrie, *Missionary Catechesis*, 47

Catechesis is a shared but differentiated responsibility. Bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful play their parts, each according to his or her respective responsibility and charism. Catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community in the sense that those who have specific roles of leadership act not their own but in the name of the church.[17]

5. Faith Sharing

Faith is something very personal and when shared, it deepens the faith of the other. It is also true that faith is strengthened when it is given to others.[18] The more one realizes that it is a gratuitous gift of God, an experience arising from a loving encounter with him, and something that gives deep meaning to one's life, the more will be the happiness of sharing it with others. Just as reason shares knowledge, faith shares its own peculiar knowledge and great is the joy of both the one who shares and the one who receives it.[19] Christian faith sharing frees people from sin and death. Sharing of our faith in Christ can be one of the best expressions and contributions to human welfare in as much as it helps to formation of human conscience.

Conclusion

All Christian activity is in some way a sharing in the sanctifying, teaching, and ruling mission of Christ the priest, prophet and king. As sharers in the priesthood of Christ, every baptized cooperates in the sanctifying mission to the world. The task of the religious today is to look at the world, interpret the signs of the times and acknowledge the challenges that confront us. All the ministries of

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17 Gilbert Choondal, "Towards a Holistic Catechesis: Challenges and Tasks", *Word and Worship*, 38 (2005) 4.

18 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

19 Joseph Puthenpurackal, "Sharing the Faith" in Paul Vadakumpadan & Jose Varickasseril (eds.) "*Apostle of* Christ" (Vendrame Institute Publications, Shillong, 2003) 248.

the Church to reach every section of the society should enable in proclaiming the good news and the centrality of Christ in an authentic and efficacious way, because proclamation of Christ is always a permanent priority of Church's mission.

Mind of the Church on Educating the Young in the Classroom and Beyond

Sr. Manju George MSMHC

Introduction

A good education guides pupils to become humane and well disposed. The system of education that students pursue decides the success and values of the nation. This twenty first century is an era of information technology where a large amount of communication is done through media. Education has taken human beings into a world of secularism and relativism; they are in search of life's meaning, happiness and fulfilment in the technological world, without giving heed to the voice of true wisdom and knowledge. The wisdom of the ages has become a forgotten factor in the lives of the young; they are on the lookout for newness and change. In this complex world, education can play a significant role by helping to bring the new generations to a dynamic way of knowing that will enable them to manage complex systems and to acquire new aptitudes for work and for their very life.[1] In order to make the young good citizens and Christians, the Church, the society and the family play a key role and make every effort to give them an understanding on the need to uphold right value in life. While promoting education and instruction, both public and private institutions should respect the inherent rights of the Church

[1] Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines* (New Delhi: Commission for Education and Culture, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, 2003), 5.

and of the family concerning Christian education.[2] Education has a special role in the building of a peaceful and united world as it enables individuals to live freely and act spontaneously in the society. Besides contributing to the society for its well-being, education also places emphasis on availing to the young, right knowledge and noble thoughts through which they are formed to become collaborators in the building up of God's kingdom.

The Church has been carrying out the task of instructing and educating from the very beginning. Its contribution in education is both long and noble, especially among the underprivileged sections of the society. Its emphasis on its principles to reach out to the society with education is vividly expressed in its writings. The Church documents on education duly highlight the value of education and gives guidelines that would serve to motivate both the educator and the educand and support them in today's educational mission. The Church looks at the young as the builders of tomorrow. The following details give the readers a detailed understanding of the Church towards education.

1. Church's Right to Educate

The Church has received the mission of education from her divine founder Jesus Christ in the following words, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to you. Go therefore; 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 that I have commanded you (Mt. 28:19-20)". Education is an essential feature of Church's mission. Just like the parents who take care of the natural life of a child, the Church takes care of the supernatural life of the child. She is a true educator, because she educates and prepares her children for the next life.[3] The

[2] Cf. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, 61-63.

[3] Cf. Pazhayampallil T., *Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, (Bangalore: Kristi Jyoti Publications) 697.

Catholic Church is endowed with persons who have made differences and brought about reformation for its better functioning. Down through the centuries, the wisdom of the ages has played a vital role in the fine structuring of the Church. So, she has the due duty of educating her children because Christ has entrusted her with the mission and the supreme authority to teach (Cf. Mt.28:18-20). The Church generates, nurtures, and educates souls in the divine life of grace with her sacraments and her doctrines. The Church faithfully continues the mission of teaching, instructing, forming, informing and transforming the children of God; she draws souls to Christ, and schools and institutions have become medium through which she sanctifies the members of the Church. It is also an inalienable right and indispensable duty of the Church to watch over the entire education of her children.[4] However, the particular aspect of the educational work of the Mother Church is to teach her children to be human, charitable and kind to one another and to the whole of creation. So the Church's teaching on the works of mercy enable her children to focus on the essential. She does not get lost in details but passes on what really matters so that students can find the meaning and the joy of life. The Church does not teach theoretical lessons on love and mercy. She does not spread to the world a philosophy of abstract things. But, she follows the methods of Jesus in teaching her pupils and sets out an example of love and kindness in her words and deeds. She generates positive attitudes towards her children and illumines their mind with her words of wisdom.[5] Finally, the mission of the church can be summarized through the words of St. Paul, "My children, I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you" (Cf. Gal. 4:19). The connection

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4 Cf. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, 53-58.

5 Pope Francis, "In the School of Mercy," Message to the General Audience (10 September 2014): *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), 12 September 2014, 1.

between the Christian message and the educational experience leads to the development of a pedagogical doctrine. So today, educating Christ's way resounds as a prophetic task that the church is entrusted with and she hands over the same task to the whole of humanity.[6]

2. Christian Perfection through Education

Human beings are created by God in His own image and likeness and they are provided with a little of heaven in his earthly life. Hence, being a masterpiece of the Creator, every human being is expected to see the divine mission of the Church, which must take precedence over all other concerns in the matter of education. So the catholic education must maintain families, the state and the church. Thus, the Catholic Church calls for intellectual excellence, social responsibility and spiritual perfection.[7] They seek to acquire this perfection by means of education. Education aims at knowing the true and perfect God who made them out of infinite goodness and passionate love.[8] In fact, education consists essentially in preparing them for what they must be and for what they must do here below. The perfection of the family, the Church and the Society ultimately depends upon the perfection of each human being who composes it.[9]

An educational institution achieves its perfection by the presence of eminent educators whose very presence witness to Christ the true educator of all time. An educator becomes worthy of honour and admiration when he/she is prepared and well- grounded in

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6 Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Proclaim* (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 128.

7 Cf. V.P. Lannie, "Philosophy of Education," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. Berard L. Marthaler (New York: Thomson Gale, 2002), 95.

8 Cf. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri*, 56.

9 Ibid., 100.

the matter they have to teach. The educator must realize that no finished product comes to them for help, but the young are still fragile, incomplete and imperfect and they come to the educator to be shaped and formed for a greater cause.[10] The effort of the teachers should aim at assisting the students to perfect themselves in their being and in their doing. Christian education takes in the whole aggregate of human life - physical and spiritual, intellectual and moral, individual, domestic and social - in order to elevate, regulate and perfect it in accordance with the example and teaching of Christ. Hence, in a true Christian education, the educator reflects the heart of Jesus the great educator who acted justly, thought prudently and judged wisely. Here the educator is being guided by the supernatural light, which enables one to have right reasoning, in other words a perfect educator is a person of character.[11]

3. Conciliar Documents on Revitalising the Mission of Education

There are several Conciliar Documents brought out during the Second Vatican Council concerning missionary evangelization. These documents speak about new ways and means by which one can carry out the mission of education in the Church and in the present world. They stress the importance of education for every Christian.

3.1 *Gravissimum Educationsis*

The Conciliar document *Gravissimum Educationsis* is the declaration on Christian education. This document was promulgated on 28 October 1965 during the time of Vatican II. The sacred ecumenical council has given a careful consideration to the paramount importance of education in the life of men and

10 Ibid., 99
11 Ibid.

women and its ever growing influence on the social progress. It speaks about the wider sphere of Christian education.

3.1.1 Necessity of Education

"Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit."[12] Every man, whatever may be his race, condition, and age is endowed with the dignity of a person and he has the inalienable right to an education corresponding to his proper destiny.[13] Knowing the future of the society and reading the mind of the future generation, the Holy Catholic Church has taken a long step to put education as part of human and Christian life. Indeed, the circumstances of the present time have made it easier and at once more urgent to educate young people and to continue the education of adults. As men grew in intellect and knowledge, they became aware of the growing need of their indispensable place in the society and the need of education for the smooth running of the political and economical matters. In the process of development and technological growth, there arose the need among various organizations and people at all levels to create a relational bond. They realized that relationship or a spiritual bond can be better facilitated through the help of technological communication and through the mode of scientific help. Moreover, education was one of the indispensable means to establish relationships and true sense human and humane qualities; and thus every attempt is being made to promote education and to facilitate the modes of communication through a long-term education.[14]The civil and Church law admits the right to education

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12 Cf. Pazhayampallil T., *Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, (Bangalore: Kristi Jyoti Publications) 727.

13 Ibid., 692.

14 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declarations on Christian Education, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 2013), 1. Henceforth it is mentioned as *Gravissimum Educationis* with Article Number.

as one's birth right.[15] Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit new creatures in Jesus Christ, they are all truly children of God and hence the Church upholds the right of every Christian for a Christian education.[16] As a result of it, in number of places, the pupils rapidly increased, schools were multiplied and expanded far and wide and other educational institutions were established. This is to fulfil the mandate which the Church has received from her divine founder Jesus Christ, to proclaim the mystery of salvation to all and to restore all things in Jesus Christ. Therefore, she has a role in the progress and development of education.

Irrespective of the state or country, colour or creed, male or female, rich or poor, every child has the right to eliminate the darkness of ignorance from his or her mind and to equip his or her life with a proper education. The vast horizon of education should open up before them a path that would lead them to achieve their ultimate goal. According to *Gravissimum Educationsis* true education should aim at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.[17] Keeping in mind the necessity of education, the children and the young must be provided with sufficient opportunities to equip themselves in arts and science and different modes of education so that they might build up a harmonious society. When they become aware of their role in the society, naturally they will become responsible persons who acquire a sense of belongingness to the family, to the society and to the Church. Added to this social and external input, awareness of the sexual dimension and its sacredness with regard to human existence on

15 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.
16 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.
17 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.

earth must form part and parcel of education and this will help all concerned to become good citizens and to promote the good of the society at large in which they live and work.[18]

3.1.2 Value Based Education

Right and true education would lead the young to develop their physical, moral, intellectual, spiritual and emotional dimensions of life; it is far beyond mere knowledge.[19] Merely secular education will not help the child to achieve moral values, good principles and right conscience. So it is the need of the hour to inculcate in them a deeper knowledge and love of God. The church document emphasizes on a cultured and civilized family living, which is the foundation of everything. It speaks about the prime duty of the family with regard to education since the family is the first school of faith and moral values. When parents transmit the faith to their children, they manifest their active faith. When the parents give witness to Christ through their lives, then it is an expression of what they believe. Parents are the first teachers helping the members to live with mutual respect and love. It is in the family that the human dignity is fostered and respected. As parents, they have the obligation to educate their offspring and therefore the parents must be recognized as the primary and principal educators.[20] Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence, the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. In order to give a holistic education, the Holy Church has recourse to various means. For example, the Church gives great emphasis to catechetical instruction. It

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18 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis,* 3-5.

19 Cf. Pazhayampallil T., *Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, (Bangalore: Kristi Jyoti Publications), 695.

20 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis,* 6.

enlightens and strengthens the faith, nourishes life according to the spirit of Christ, leads to intelligent and active participation in the liturgical mystery and gives motivation for apostolic activity.[21] In education, the Church, under guidance, exposes the young to the whole gamut of social media and communications with a purpose that the young may be kept in touch with the world and its developments and that in the process they may also learn to use the media uprightly and for the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Among all educational instruments, the Church gives special place to the establishment and animation of schools. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, and to prepare them for professional life. The document declares that the parents who have the ultimate right to educate the children will also have the right in the choice of their school.[22] Therefore, parents must protect the right of children to an adequate school education, check on the ability of teachers and the excellence of their training. However, education of the intellect alone will not make a perfect man. The present scenario demands the need of having a moral and religious education, which would mould them to be good citizens.

Catholic Church has come a long way in making wider changes in the field of education. No less than other schools do the Catholic schools pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth.[23] However, proper function of Catholic schools is to create for the school community, a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity. It aims at helping the youth to grow in their being as new creatures they are created to be through the

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21 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 6.
22 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 7.
23 Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 6.

sacrament of baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the good news of salvation, so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and humankind might be illumined by faith. Since, the Catholic schools can be such an aid to the fulfilment of the mission of the people of God and to the fostering of the dialogue between the Church and humankind to the benefit of both, it retains even in our present circumstances the utmost importance.[24]

4. Post-Conciliar Documents on Education and Formation of Young

4.1 Ad normam decreti

Ad normam decreti, the General Catechetical Directory was published on 11 April 1971. It has six parts, each part carrying specific chapters. The directory touches on the actual problem, the ministry of the Word, the Christian message, principles of methodology, Catechesis by age level and pastoral action and the Ministry of the Word. More focus is given to part five which speaks about Catechesis by age level, where one must give importance to the education of children.

4.1.1 Faith Formation of the Young

Every family is a sub-unit of the Church and it consists of parents and their children. The first light of faith and faith education and formation that the children receive is from their parents and this helps them to make choices between good and evil in the light of reason enlightened by faith. When they go to school, they become part of the society, which is wider than their families and they are initiated into the company of adults.[25] The environment and the

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[24] Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 6-12.

[25] Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Norman Decreti*, General Catechetical Directory, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1971), 79.

society have so much to do with the education of a child. He or she can be easily influenced by the adults and other movements in their surroundings. Children are easily influenced by the situations to which they are exposed and especially, they are very vulnerable to evil influences from the society.

Access to ever widening spheres of knowledge and growth in technology, media and social communications have affected the lives of the young in a way that distances them from a life of faith and Christ-centeredness. [26] Such a situation calls for efforts to reawaken in everyone, the life of faith and love for the Gospel and to live it in an ideal manner. On the other hand, well trained in faith and prayer, young people can become effective apostles of youth. The Church places its total trust and confidence on their contribution [27] and look forward to their active participation in every movement, because they are energetic, vibrant and enthused with a spirit of fire. The Church cares not only for the formative development of the young, but also for the quality of knowledge, which the educators should have in forming the young. Educators should have deep knowledge of the Bible and its cultural implications.[28] The teachers are to be trained well for the religious education of the young. The young become deeply rooted in their faith through the religious education that they receive from their teachers.[29]

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[26] Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntaiandi,* Apostolic Exhortations on Evangelization in the Modern World (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 72.

[27] Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntaiandi,* Apostolic Exhortations on Evangelization in the Modern World (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1992), 72.

[28] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini,* Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2010), 111.

[29] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini,* Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2010), 111.

4.2 Malgre les Declarations

Malgre les Declarations by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education was issued on 24 June 1977. This document is the result of the awareness of the Sacred Congregation of the serious problems, which are inseparable from Christian education in a pluralistic society. It focuses on the nature and distinctive characteristics of a school, which would present itself as Catholic. Through this document, the Sacred Congregation looks forward to an opportune moment to offer its own contribution for the Catholic school. Through this document, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education seeks to achieve an effective system of education at all levels. This document is addressed to all those who are responsible for education and urges them to pool all their resources and means at their disposal to enable Catholic schools to provide a service which is civic and apostolic.[30]

4.2.1 Purpose of Christian School

Education is for living wisely. It does not make any sense if the people of today and tomorrow cannot even co-exist peacefully, learn to accept each other and work together for a more human and humane community.[31] In this complex world, it is natural that education and the school should assume a crucial role. Education is to bring the new generations a dynamic way of knowing that can prepare them to manage complex systems and enable the young to acquire new aptitude for work. The Church establishes schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed.[32] A child learns minimum from

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30 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Malgre Les Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bandra: St. Pauls Publications, 2005), 1-4.

31 Cf. Angelo Fernandes, *Vatican Two Revisited* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1997), 121.

the family, because the period of time he remains at home is limited. But the atmosphere of school gives an ambience of seeing, reflecting, questioning, learning and unfolding the doubts that has clouded in his/her mind. Having a deeper study on the schools and the education that they impart, one might say that the Christian education can sometime run into the danger of a so-called proselytism of imparting a one-sided outlook. This can happen only when Christian educators misunderstand the nature and method of Christian education. However, complete education necessarily includes a religious dimension. [33] But Catholic schools are accused of not knowing how to form convinced and articulate Christians who can take their place in the socio-political life. The document declares that the general purpose of a school is to have integral formation by means of systematic and critical assimilation of culture. School is a place in which a living encounter with a cultural inheritance and integral formation occurs. This can happen through personal contacts and commitments. The school must stimulate the pupil to exercise his intelligence through the dynamics of understanding to attain clarity and inventiveness. [34]

The purpose of education is to have development of human person from within, freeing him from that conditioning which would prevent him from becoming a fully integrated being. It is through education that the young gradually learn to open themselves to life and create in themselves attitudes that are open to life. Education offers not only intellectual values, but also other values that are transmitted through inter-personal and sincere relationships.[35] The Church Fathers and the Doctors of the Church understood the necessity

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32 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Malgre Les Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bandra: St. Pauls Publications, 2005), 8.

33 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Malgre Les Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bandra: St. Pauls Publications, 2005), 19.

34 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Malgre Les Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bandra: St. Pauls Publications, 2005), 27.

and the value of schools. From their Christian wisdom, they gathered their knowledge and with the passing of centuries schools were established. The fitting places for the schools were the adjacent places of Cathedrals and monasteries. The intention of making these schools was to impart both ecclesiastical doctrine and divine wisdom.[36] A Catholic school is a place for human and Christian formation. In comparison with other Schools, the Catholic schools can never remain less zealous in promoting culture and human formation. Catholic schools must have the spirit and atmosphere of liberty and charity and they must help the young to develop their personality.[37] A well-integrated education must enable the students to overcome egoism and grow in authentic love. The quality of education becomes poorer if it limits itself merely giving information and setting aside the great question of truth. It must strive to find a right balance between freedom and discipline. Successful education is the formation to the right use of freedom. One can say that, because of the quality of education, the Catholic education becomes a service of great value to all the people. The mother Church promotes Catholic education and cares for the full development of the human person, for the welfare of the earthly society and building up of a human world.[38]

4.2.2 Religious Education among the Young

The Church is still youthful and the Holy Spirit is always with her and Jesus Christ is living with her.[39] So in her youthful spirit she

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35 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Malgre Les Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bandra: St. Pauls Publications, 2005), 32.

36 Cf. John Paul II, *Sapientia Christiana*, Apostolic Constitutions (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 190.

37 Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), 259.

38 Cf. Pazhayampallil T., *Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, (Bangalore: Kristi Jyoti Publications) 695.

39 Cf. Louis Laravoire Morrow, *Our Catholic Faith* (Krishnagar, n.p., 2002), 221.

takes initiatives to teach her youth the lessons of faith through the members of Church authority. It is the duty of everyone concerned to make sure that Catholic schools nurture the Catholic students in their faith. Whatever may be the level of academic excellence and prestige a Catholic School holds in the eyes of the public, it should never compromise with imparting Christian education and faith.[40] The special character of the Catholic school, and the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils. An integral part of Catholic Schools' education is to inform, enlighten and form the conscience of the students that they are able to follow their conscience with right freedom. The students are to be made to understand that, although God's call to serve Him in spirit and truth, in accordance with the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, does not apply constraint, it is nevertheless binding in conscience.[41]

The young people are to be formed in a Christian way through their true and lasting friendship with the Lord. The youthful failings can be overcome through a firm friendship with the Jesus.[42] Personal prayer and the frequent sacraments will enable the young to cultivate their friendship with the Lord. True relationship with Jesus will enable the young to build a society with human dignity, equality and justice. The young must not hesitate to take initiatives that would strengthen their faith in the Lord.[43] For every little faith that they have, they are indebted to their parents, who are

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40 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, An Apostolic Exhortations on Catechesis in Our Time, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 72.

41 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, An Apostolic Exhortations on Catechesis in Our Time, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 72.

42 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, Church in the Middle East (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), 63.

43 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, Church in the Middle East (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), 64.

the donors of faith in their children. They have taken pains to educate their children with human, Christian and intellectual education. So the young are called to live their Christian way of life in the families, in the schools and in the society. There should be an ambience in the family to grow in faith, because family is the first school of catechesis.[44]

4.2.3 Key Role of the School

School plays a key role in the life of the young. Apart from the school, many other elements of life help in influencing the mentality of the young, for instance, recreation, social background and work surroundings. School years are the decisive period in the formation of the human personality and also Christian personality.[45] The students are bound to bear the stamp of their studies, especially the stamp of the cultural and moral values that they have imbibed from the atmosphere of the establishment and the many ideas that they have met within the school.[46] It is important for catechesis to take full account of this effect of the school on the pupils in order to create appropriate learning conditions in such a way that the Gospel values might impregnate the mentality of the pupils in the field of their learning, paving the way for a harmonization of their life with their culture in the light of faith.[47] School must give careful attention to the intellectual growth, creativity and aesthetic faculties of the human person. School is responsible in training the students to make correct judgments on the things that are around them, cultivating in them values of affectivity, just attitudes

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44 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, Church in the Middle East (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), 65.

45 Cf. Pazhayampallil T., *Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, (Bangalore: Kristi Jyoti Publications) 702.

46 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, An Apostolic Exhortations on Catechesis in Our Time, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 72.

47 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, An Apostolic Exhortations on Catechesis in Our Time, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 72.

and prudent behaviour and introducing them to the cultural patrimony handed down from the previous generations, which would be an ample help for their future.[48] Above all, the Catholic school has a particular obligation to create an atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit and its values and freedom which would affect positively the development of their personality. Catholic schools must aim at the human and social formation of the young.[49] As a whole, education will come to its fullness with a faith and value based life which is useful for one's own well being and for the well being of others.

4.2.4 Role of Parents in the Field of Education

Family is the oldest institution on earth and it has a vital role in shaping and transforming human society. It is a divine institution founded on marriage as willed by the creator (Cf. Gen. 2: 18-24)[50] and their offspring are the gift of God. The very institution of marriage and their love for each other is for the procreation and education of the offspring.[51] Parental love finds fulfillment in the task of education as it completes and perfects its service of life. Parents' love is an animating principle and it inspires the lives of their children.[52] The parents and educators have the duty and the responsibility to instill into the minds of their children the need to be involved and to be living and active members of the people of God. Educating children is essential and it is inevitable too.

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48 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Les Laics Catholiques*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 2005), 12.

49 Cf. *Code of Canon of the Eastern Churches: Latin – English Edition* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995), 639.

50 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, Church in the Middle East (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), 58.

51 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastroal Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 2013), 48.

52 Cf.*Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, 696.

This task lies primarily on the married couples, who have the role of giving birth and bringing up. Parents play a vital role in the all-round development of the child.[53] Parents do their sanctifying work through their conjugal life in the Christian spirit and through the light of this spirit, they educate their children. It is in the family that a child learns to channel its instincts, feelings and passions toward appropriate cultural forms. It is the most privileged setting for the formation of identity as persons.[54] Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues, which every society needs. The basic element that qualifies the educational role of parents, is parental love, which finds fulfilment in the task of education as it completes and perfects its service of life, the parents' love is also the animating principle and therefore the norm inspiring and guiding all concrete educational activity, enriching it with the values of kindness, constancy, goodness, service, disinterestedness and self-sacrifice that are the most precious fruit of love.[55] Thus, this Apostolic Exhortation clearly explains the role of parents and the genuine love through which they should bring up their children.

Education is a unique process for which the mutual communion of persons has immense importance. The educator is a person who begets spiritual sense. Education is a reciprocal offering on the part of both parents. Parents have a key role in the educational development of their children.[56] Their relationship within the family

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53 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio,* An Apostolic Exhortation on The Role of Christian Family in the World, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 36.

54 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2006), 902.

55 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio,* Apostolic Exhortations on The Role of Christian Family in the World, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), 36.

56 Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1994), 16.

members brings out resemblance of feelings for one another, affection[57] and as a result their children will be matured in love and sympathy towards others. They are the first and most important educators of their children. This mission of education is always carried out in accordance with the proper application of the principle of subsidiarity. Parents help their children to become persons with a civilization of love and this civilization also can be termed as culture. That is, an educated person becomes a cultured person with civilization of love and integrity. [58] This document stresses the fact that parents are the primary educators of their children. The witnessing life lived by the parents will be reflected in the lives of their children. As a result of this witnessing, children will show respect and tenderness towards their parents. Through the sacrament of matrimony, parents receive the grace and the ministry of Christian education of their children. Parents are called to transmit and bear witness to human and religious values. Thus, this activity becomes true ministry.[59] In order for children to grow in faith, they should grow up in a family that lives in conviction and the young must see their parents praying. The young should experience the love of God, through their parents, who would take them to church and for other faith activities. The young imperceptibly pick up certain fundamental attitudes and values from the life and example of their parents. For example, when parents extend their charity to others, it is most likely that the young imbibe that very spirit of charity in their relationship with others.[60] In particular, the young people who are going through a

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57 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2006), 2206.

58 Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1994), 16.

59 Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), 227.

60 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, Church in the Middle East (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2012), 65.

period, which is so complex, rich and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith.[61] Therefore, the children are to be educated in the context of a Christian family illumined by faith and animated by mutual love and piety towards God and neighbor.[62]

4.3 *Les Laics Catholiques*

Les Laics Catholiques, the document by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education is for the lay Catholics in the school. The document describes in depth the richness and the characteristics of the lay vocation. The Church believes that for an integral education of children and young people both religious and lay Catholics are needed in schools. Because, both play an inevitable role in the lives of the young to make them socially integrated persons. This document make known to the entire faithful that the Catholic school is a genuine sign of the time and this channel has to be made use for the proclamation of God's love. The document sees the mind of the Catholic Church and invites everyone to pay more attention to the role of lay Catholics as witnesses to the faith.[63] The document also deals with the following matters.

4.3.1 Role of a Catholic Educator

An educator is not seen as someone who embodies an authority to transmit immutable categories, but as someone offering a dialogue or an inter-personal relationship through various means through which a child or the young can adapt to make his/her own

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61 Cf. Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, Encyclical Letter on The Light of Faith (Trivandrum: Carmel Publishing House, 2013), 53.

62 Cf. *Code of Canon of the Eastern Churches: Latin – English Edition* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995), 627.

63 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Les Laics Catholiques*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 2005), 1-4.

life. An educator or a teacher does not perfect the so-called name 'educator' by mere qualification or by profession. Nevertheless, the name educator comes to its completion when he/she is able to bring out human personality, values and moral principles from the students. The task of an educator is beyond 'teaching'; it is a process of chiselling to bring out the best and formation of mind, soul and body. This human formation includes development of all the human faculties. They must be prepared for professional life, must be imbued with social and ethical sense and be a person of truth. The educator has the duty of teaching Catholic truths, putting their trust in the ultimate truth. A Catholic educator must take keen interest in making the students aware of their social and political responsibility. They are to guide and form the young to grow into adults who are upright citizens imbued with a civilization of love. In short, a Catholic educator is given a specific mission by the Catholic Church to live the faith, to teach the faith and to promote faith.[64] Catholic educators must be true witnesses of the Gospel, their life, an example; and their professional competence must inspire others for a better living.

5. Emphasis of Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortations on Educating the Young

5.1 Christifideles Laici

Christifideles Laici, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of His holiness John Paul II was decreed on 30 December 1988. This exhortation specially addressed to Bishops, priests, deacons, women and men religious and all the lay faithful speaks about the vocation and the mission of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. This document explains in detail about the dignity of the lay faithful in the Church as mystery, the participation of the

[64] Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Les Laics Catholiques*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 2005), 16-24.

lay faithful in the life of Church as communion, the co-responsibility of the lay faithful in the Church as mission and good stewards of God's varied grace, the formation of the lay faithful in the lay state. Among these, the author gives importance to the faith education in the life of the youth. This particular apostolic exhortation invites the young to realize their own identity as the members of the church and value the preciousness of their life to the world.

5.1.1 Impact of Faith Education in the life of Youth

The very identity as youth makes a difference in the society. God the Father loved His children and educated them in many ways and he kept in touch with them through his educative instruction. In the human education too, the educand is always connected with his father and mother, from where the Christian formation gets its origin.[65] The Church sees her reflection in the youth and she continues to enjoy her youthfulness which is the result of Christ's Spirit. The mother Church sees her youth as her hope for tomorrow. The Church is ever joyful to speak about the youth and the youth has so much to share with the Church. The youth is always looked upon with a sense of confidence and love.[66]

The Synod Fathers were particularly sensitive to the theme of youth in the Church. The Church keeps on reminding its youth about the responsibility that they have towards the society and the Church. The young people are the agents of mission and carriers of the Good News. In order to carry out this mission, the young have to experience the real pastoral care from the mother Church. The fraternal love, care and formation can be handed down to the young through the Catholic schools since they play a vital role in

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65 Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortations (Bomaby: Pauline Publications, 2002), 61.

66 Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortations (Bomaby: Pauline Publications, 2002), 46.

providing all round formation of the young. True discipleship and human qualities are required for spreading the mission and this can be achieved by following a formation education process True friendships can be developed among the youth through organized youth apostolate and youth clubs. The various other movements in the Church will enable the young to become professionals in their life.[67]

5.2 *Amoris Laetitia*

Amoris Laetitia, the latest Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis, decreed on 19 March 2016 was addressed to all the bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated persons, Christian married couples and all the lay faithful. This document 'Joy of Love' gives a detailed explanation on family life. The nine chapters of this document give a clear sketch design of a model family. Love is the focal point of this document and the centrality is given equally to father, mother and children. The following are the few key points of this document discussing the education of children.

5.2.1 Ethical and Educative Formation of Children

The Educational Institutions provide only basic instructions for the children. So parents should not count on schools to provide a complete moral formation of their children. The ethical formation is always grounded on experience, in which the children can trust their parents and those who are closely associated with them.[68] Parents, the first educators teach their children with affection, with their witnessing life and teach them in a responsible manner by instilling love and respect to forge ahead with hope and trust for one another. The children grow into maturity when they are loved, cared, understood, noticed and accepted by their parents.

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67 Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia,* Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Bombay: Pauline Publications, 2003), 47.

68 Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia,* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 263.

Lack of these basic elements leave them with hurt feelings and with certain emptiness and they continue to grow old as immature persons.[69]

Parents take an important role in shaping the will of their children, fostering good habits to be well-mannered and respectful. Children ought to be taught the moral value of foregoing immediate and momentary pleasures for the sake of lasting and permanent values and ordered life in the future. The moral formation can be given through a medium of language that the children can understand by active methods and dialogue. Instead of imposing absolute and unquestionable truths, the children should imbibe on their own, through guidance and example, the importance of values, principles and norms in their personal lives. A person who has received good ethical formation shows interest in doing what is right.[70] Good habits are part of good ethical formation and the children should have an interior disposition to express good manners at the appropriate time. In order to build up the moral conduct, one should strengthen a positive will, with a good conscience and with a positive attitude. "Virtue is a conviction that has become a steadfast inner principle of operation. The virtuous life thus builds, strengthens and shapes freedom, lest we become slaves of dehumanizing and anti-social inclinations."[71]

5.2.2 Importance of Correction as Motivation

A correction on time will help the children to avoid many wrong doings. When they have gone against moral values, it is good to

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69 Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 263.

70 Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 264-265.

71 Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 267.

make them acknowledge their mistakes and wrong doings which have affected not only themselves but also the lives of others. As children grow up knowing good and bad, they should be made aware of cultivating the virtue of seeking forgiveness from the one they have caused pain. Corrections become an incentive when the children feel that they are appreciated, understood and trusted by their parents. Parents should make sure that the children are not carried away by anger. When a child does mistake he/she must be corrected with love and concern. They should not be treated as enemies or perpetual wrongdoers. Discipline is essential, but it should not be a measure that would lead the children into discouragement and despair. Constructive discipline will enable the children to be mature, effective and it will bear fruits in their life. They have to be taught to strike a balance between their freedom and the disciplined life they are called to live.[72]

5.2.3 Inevitable need of Sex Education

The time is passing and the world is changing before even we realize it. Media, money, sex, pleasure, relativism, hedonism, individualism are the key words of the young and the school going children. Here, a positive and prudent attitude to sex has to be communicated to the children. Schools should provide ample opportunity to create in them sensitivity to different expressions of love, mutual concern and care. Sex education given to the children and the young must be in keeping with their age and the level of their maturity.[73] In the area of sexuality, love and growth, the young are bombarded with messages that are often not

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[72] Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia,* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 268-270.

[73] Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia,* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 280-281.

beneficial to their growth and maturity. Sex education would help the young to recover a sense of modesty, a relic of bygone era. In fact, deeper understanding of sexuality in terms of modesty and affection would make the young capable of true love. Sexual education includes respect and appreciation for differences, being open to others and accepting others as they are in their life.[74]

5.2.4 Enkindling the Faith

Home is a place where children learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of faith and where they learn to pray and develop a sense of service. Children begin their journey to faith through the consecration of baptism. Parents are the channels through which the children learn to re-energize, re-live and re-kindle their faith. The hearts of children are drawn towards God through the faith education they receive from their mothers. The lived faith becomes a testimony of witness and it influences the lives of the children. The witness of life of the parents, their prayer life, their edifying relationship with their neighbours, the example of their faith-life as a whole would pay the way for their children to nurture their own faith and trust in the Lord. When the family becomes an agent of pastoral charity, automatically the children are inculcated with essential elements of pastoral charity and missionary zeal.[75]

6. Apostolic Letters

6.1 Dilecti Amici

The document *Dilecti Amici* was issued on 31 March 1985 to the Youth of the world on the occasion of International Youth Year.

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74 Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 282-285.

75 Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Joy of Love (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2016), 287-290.

The entire document is built upon a single passage of the Bible: the story of the rich young man (Mk.10: 17-22). It focuses on the various dimensions of the youth, the treasure and builder of the future society.

6.1.1 The Young: Educators of the Future

The youth are not only the future of the Church, but they are the present powerful source in the Church. They are ought to become the prime and direct apostles of the youth, exercising the apostolate among themselves and through themselves reckoning with the social environment in which they live.[76] The Church attributes great importance to the youth; they are of the family, society, nation and humanity, and above all they are the youth of the Church. The youth who are in full vigour and dynamism are not the personal belonging of their family or to their nearest kin, but they are the epitome of Christ who was vibrant and zealous in his ministry. Hence, the Church plays hope in the young, because the future belongs to the young.[77] In order to make the future bright and prosperous, the young must take the responsibility of learning, because education is a work of hope, work of love, work of prayer and above all, it is a way of life.[78] When the young are educated with a right motive, their endeavours will flourish and the walls of isolation and indifference will break down.

6.1.2 Youth: A Special Treasure

The very word 'youth' indicates something hopeful and this name vibrates a positive energy to others. The youth of all times are a

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76 Cf. R.J. Raja, "Youth According to Vatican II," *New Leader*, 1-15 January 2011, 37.

77 Cf. John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 1.

78 Cf. Pazhayampallil T., *Pastoral Guide*, vol.3, (Bangalore: Kristi Jyoti Publications), 695.

special treasure and they are to be appreciated and cherished by others. The youthfulness of one's life is a period of time in which one can contribute so much to the family, society and to the church. It is a period, which is certainly distinguished from the period of childhood, just as it is also distinguished from the period of full maturity. For, the period of youth is a time of particularly intense discovery of the human 'I' and of the properties and capacities connected with it. Before the inner gaze of the developing personality of the young man or woman, there is a gradual and successive revelation of a specific, sensible, unique and unrepeatable potentiality of a concrete humanity, in which is inscribed the whole plan of future life. Life presents itself as the carrying out of that plan as 'self-fulfillment'.[79]

When the young recognize and realize their own treasure, i.e. their potentials and talents, they are faced with a decision to use or misuse this 'treasure'. This decision-making is rather important for their future and for the personal dimension and formation of their existence. At the same time, these decisions are of considerable social importance. The young man in the Gospel who had great wealth was precisely in this existential phase, as one can deduce from the questions he asks in his conversation with Jesus. Here, for the young man of the Gospel the treasure was his wealth, whereas the treasure of the present young people are their potentials and the very 'youthfulness' itself. The decision of the young man to go away from Christ was definitively influenced only by external riches what the young man possessed, not by what he was. The interior treasure of 'the youthfulness' in him led him to Jesus and it is this 'youthfulness' within that impelled him to ask those questions which in the clearest way concern the

[79] Cf. John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 3.

plan for the whole of life: What must I do to inherit eternal life? What must I do so that my life may have full value and full meaning? (Cf. Mk. 10: 17-22)

When the treasure of one's life is being recognized and channelized for a noble cause, they are able to find an answer for the above questions. These questions may require a valid reply that concerns the whole of life, that embraces the whole of human existence. It seems that here Christ alone is the competent one to ask, the one whom no one can fully replace. He alone can tell the young about the preciousness of their treasure. The young are called to experience the loving gaze of Jesus as the young man experienced in the Gospel: "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him" (Mk.10:21). As a result of his gaze, the young are expected to look at the world with love, truth and kindness. The Church invites the youth to discover the look of Christ and experience it in all its depth. [80]

6.1.3 Self-Education and Related Threats among the Youth

The young people themselves are challenged to rise up to their responsibilities according to the expectations of the Church and the society. The youth are called to rise up from their lethargy and march ahead towards the morrow with enthusiasm and vigor. The family educates the children and so too the school teaches and educates. , However, both the action of the family and that of the school will remain incomplete unless the young people undertake the work of their own education. Education in the family and at school can only provide the young with a certain number of elements for the work of self-education. Self-education will enable one to know the truth, the truth which will set free to (Cf. Jn.8:32) know the eternal truth. Young people must have an inborn sense of truth. And truth must be used for freedom: young people also have a

[80] Cf. John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 3.

spontaneous desire for freedom. And what does it mean to be free? It means to know how to use one's freedom in truth-to be truly free. To be truly free does not at all mean doing everything that pleases to one's own self, or doing what one wants to do. Freedom contains in itself the criterion of truth, the discipline of truth. To be truly free means to use one's own freedom for what is a true good. In fact, to be truly free means to be a person of upright conscience, to be responsible, to be a person 'for others'. All this constitutes the very kernel of what we call education, and especially what we call self-education. Self-education is an interior structure where 'the truth makes us free', cannot be built only 'from outside'. Each individual must build this structure 'from within,' build it with effort, perseverance and patience. And it is precisely this structure which is called self-education. [81]

In the hearts of the young, there is a strong desire for genuine brotherhood between all people, without divisions, conflicts or discrimination. So when the young cherish a desire for brotherhood, this means that 'the word of God abides in them'. There abides in them the teaching which Christ brought, and which is rightly called the "Good News". In addition, on their lips, or at least in the depths of their hearts, there must be a prayer to rise above the indifferences and discriminations that exist in the society. The prayer must reveal the mystery of the trinity to the people, and at the same time confirm that people are brothers and sisters to one another. The prayer must lead the young to wipe away from their hearts enmity, hatred, violence, terrorism and discrimination, and the situations in which human dignity and human rights are trampled upon.[82]

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81 Cf. John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 13.

82 Cf. John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 15.

The young also faces a struggle: not a struggle of one against another in the name of some ideology or practice separated from the very roots of the Gospel, but a struggle against evil, against everything that offends God, against every injustice and exploitation, against every falsehood and deceit, against everything that insults and humiliates, against everything that profanes human society and human relationships, against every crime against life: against every sin.[83] Sometimes when one looks at the young, with the problems and weaknesses that characterize them in contemporary society, one may tend to be pessimistic. However, everyone is called to be optimistic and to develop a broader understanding of the mind-set up of the young.[84]

7. Canon Law

The Code of canon Law sought to integrate the vision of Vatican II within the stability of canonical prescriptions. Pope John XXIII had taken a great effort to bring out the Code of Canon Law, but it became a reality only in the year 1983. The Code of Canon Law contains norms, rules and directives of the Church.[85] It is also the official authoritative interpretation given by the law maker. It asserts a principle of strict or narrow interpretation. The salvation of souls is always the supreme law of the Church. The law is to be applied to the spiritual benefit of the people.[86] The

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83 Cf. John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici*, Apostolic Letter to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), 15.

84 Cf. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Nuent*, Apostolic Letter (Bombay: Pauline Publication, 2001), 9.

85 Cf. Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, *The Foundations of Religious Life: Revisiting the Vision* (Bandra: Pauline Sisters of Bombay Society, 2009), 303.

86 Cf. James Coridon, "*Canon Law," Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, gen. ed. Richard P. Mcbrien (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995), 220-221.

Canon law gives an important place for education in the lives of the people and it stresses the role of parents in educating the children to become good citizens.

Education is an inevitable fact that one must accept for the well being of one's future. Parents and those who take their place have the obligation and the duty to educate the children. Since parents give life to their children, they have the most serious obligation and the right to educate their children. Christian parents should ensure Christian education to their children according to the teaching of the Church.[87] Parents also must avail themselves in assisting their children in their faith journey. The school also plays a great role in educating the young and education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person, so that everyone will able to achieve their eternal goal. An educated person will able to promote the common good of the society[88]. The young must be given sufficient care and their whole personality must be nurtured for the full the development of intellectual, physical and emotional growth. Their wider knowledge on life will enable them to have a sense of responsibility and will help them to have a right use of freedom.[89] Parents must have great regard for schools. There must be collaboration and cooperation between parents and teachers since they have entrusted their children to the teachers to educate. In order to form and educate the students in Catholic faith, the teachers must be outstanding and professional with the subject which is to be taught to the students. The teacher's competency and efficiency on Catholic doctrines will enable the young to become persons with Catholic faith and uprightness in

87 Cf. *The Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 2005), 226.

88 Cf. *The Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 2000), 793.

89 Cf. *The Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 2000), 794-795.

life.[90] By means of education, the Church enables the young to become evangelizers and they proclaim the mystery of salvation to all people and renew all things in Christ.[91] From the part of students they must be educated in various disciplines. This will help them to prepare themselves in various ministries and they might in turn inculcate such discipline in others too.[92]

8. Holistic Approach of Church towards School Education

In the present scenario, the schools are marked with great troubles of widespread weariness on the part of teachers who feel unmotivated and frustrated in their educational task. There is a disturbing sign of violence at schools among the young. The core of the problems of the school is obscure. There is a loss of meaning which is linked with loss of values. Thus education is suffering from the evils of widespread subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. Schools become merely instructive, which is capable of providing only cognitive instruments. Here the Catholic Church takes the initiative and forcefully reaffirms the centrality of the human person in the educational process. The Church forms strong and responsible personalities capable of making free and responsible moral choices. The Church provides an education which makes the young people to open to the reality and help them to develop a strong healthy concept of life which is spiritual, religious and human.[93] Growing in the midst of various realities of

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90 Cf. *The Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 2000), 796-803.

91 Cf. *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2004), 794.

92 Cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995), 647.

93 Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines* (New Delhi: Commission for Education and Culture, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, 2003), 6.

life, children are able to withstand all odds of life. When the Church takes risks in educating the child with a motive of his all round development, he/she becomes a true citizen who is molded and shaped by the divine architect.

9. Pope Francis' View on Education

In a world with so many technological advances, the number of children today who are illiterate is an injustice; many children suffer from lack of education; it's a condition of great injustice that affects the very dignity of the person. Without education, one easily becomes prey to exploitation and to different forms of social hardship. The Church has always worked to combat these injustices, noting how since the beginning, the Church has committed herself to educating, especially because the evangelizing mission of the Church entails the commitment to restore dignity to the poorest. The parents should have the right to choose a "moral and religious education" for their children. In today's ever-changing, technological world, the children are bombarded with so much information that it's difficult to filter through it. Because of this, the families and teachers must guide students to critical thinking and to have a moral compass.[94] That is exactly where a faith-based education comes in. True mission of the teacher and the goal of education is to prepare hearts that the Lord might manifest Himself in them. An educator must not be contented with just teaching the assigned curriculum but must go beyond to teach values and customs of life to create harmony in society.

Drawing inspiration from St. John Bosco's "emergency education" in response to the Masonic threat in northern Italy in the 19th century, Pope Francis said, "There are three languages: the

[94] Cf. ZENIT Staff, "Pope Francis on Catholic Education" http://www.generalaudienceoneducation.com, accessed December 19, 2016.

language of the head, the language of the heart, and the language of the hands; education must go forward by these three ways; instructing in how to think, helping students to feel well; accompanying students as they do."[95] He also spoke of the importance of its harmony that the child, the student think, feel and do which he thinks and feels. Christian teachers should look to Don Bosco to animate a school from within and every school, whether it is state run or private, it needs credible educators and witnesses of a mature and complete humanity.[96]

Conclusion

Education has been and still is one of the areas for which the Catholic Church is highly esteemed. Through its institutions the Church has been rendering her services for the education of all people. The Church's view on education emphasizes the need of education and the role of parents in giving quality education to their children to make them good citizens. The Church recognizes the purpose of education as the development of human beings from within, freeing them from that conditioning which prevents them from becoming fully integrated persons. The teachings of the Church mirror the mind of the Church. As the challenges of education today is enormous, the Church looks out for means and ways to inculcate values and morals into the lives of the young. The aim of educative mission will achieve its fullness when it begins to make its journey through faith. When education is accompanied by faith it gives meaning, bearing fruits in due season.

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95 Pope Francis, http://news.salesians.org.au/pope-francis-educate-openness-to-transcendence-practice-of-mercy/

96 Cf. Deborah Castellano Lubov, "General Audience on Education" http://www.generalaudienceoneducation.com, accessed December 19, 2016.



Sr. Angela Tirkey by her witnessing life has brought many people to true faith. What is remarkable in her life is her simplicity and untiring zeal for winning souls for Christ. By her preaching and friendly dealings with people she was even able to bring very staunch Hindus to Catholic faith. Her list includes Pujaris who discarded their Puja articles and embraced Christianity. Having been a religious for fifty-two years in the religious life, she has much to say about the way God led her to share His love with others as a missionary.

Convinced of my call to be a missionary, I was eager to share the good news with as many people as I could. I never longed to become a great preacher, but desired to be a true messenger of the one who gave me life and chose me to be his own. I was happy to undertake the work of evangelization throughout my religious life. The Lord blessed me with His graces in plenty that I always found the doors opened as I went about in my missionary journey. When I was in Naharkatia, I carried on with my entrusted task, availed every opportunity to tour villages, visit families and meet people. My cordiality and friendliness with the people increased my acceptance and I was able to be in touch with many. There I came across one of the village headmen who was also a staunch Hindu. I made it a point to talk to him whenever I met him. Whenever sisters organized touring programme in their village, his children were happy to be with others and they used to attend the catechism classes. They also accompanied the sisters as they visited houses and prayed with the family members. They showed the same interest when they organised family rosary in the month

of May. The instructions they received in the catechism class through the Bible stories, life story of saints, practical tips for building up good personality and family life etc. touched their innocent hearts; they began to experience change of heart and longed to become Catholics. Their great enthusiasm and eagerness to embrace Catholic faith grew day by day. Driven by a compelling desire to give their father who is the headman of the village, an understanding on Catholic faith, they expressed their wish and invited him to meet the sisters and attend the catechism classes. As the children's insistence began to grow stronger, he looked out for chances to meet the sisters and invited them to his house. After several visits and long hours of meeting, he consented to allow his children to receive Baptism. We, sisters continued visiting the family and followed them up with prayers and timely instructions to help them live a faithful life. One fine day, the father surprised the sisters as he expressed his desire to become a catholic. All the arrangements were made and without further delay, he along with his wife received baptism. The news about the headman of the village and his family becoming Catholics began to spread all over and several others too followed him, embracing catholic faith. He remained convinced of the choice he made, practiced Christian virtues, propagated his faith in Jesus and Mary and extended his help and guidance to everyone in the village.

Another experience that I had was at Rangapara, Tarajuli Tea Estate during a programme. Majority of the people over there were Hindus. Without any hesitation and making no distinction, I approached the people and engaged in casual conversation, enquiring about their whereabouts. They happily welcomed me and responded to me. The acceptance I received in their circle gave me chance to speak to them matters of their interest and welfare. Once they began to listen to me, I invited them to come to the church in the evening. When they came to church I told them Bible stories, showed them pictures of Jesus, Mary etc.

They were touched by my personal God experience and began to show their eagerness to know more. Their keenness encouraged me to speak to them about Jesus, His unconditional love and care for humanity. Gradually they began to change their ways and expressed their longing to be part of the Church. Many accepted faith and became Catholics within one month of my programme over there. Seeing the drastic change in the village the parish priest remarked, "Oh, if you would extend the programme for one more month the entire Tarajuli would become Catholics".

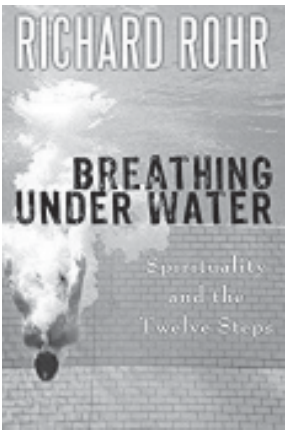
During the past years of my ministry among the people I have tried my best to identify families with problems: conflicts, unhealthy competitions, unforgiveness, clashes between husband and wife, break ups and every kind of problems. I made sure to spent time with the family members, listening to them and guiding them. Today, I have the joy of having helped many families to mend their brokenness. Settling the issues of the families became easier for me as the people became friendly with me through my regular visits. They were open and frank in sharing their problems and that enabled me to counsel them to find peace. I thank Jesus for making His instrument of peace and leading me to bring reconciliation and reunion in families.

(*Excerpts from the interview by Sr. Lisy Augustine MSMHC*)

Sr. Angela Tirkey joined the Congregation on 10 November 1962 and made her first profession on 6 January 1967. She has been a vibrant missionary at various mission stations of Assam throughout her active religious life. Presently she is at Jyoti Bhavan, Tezpur, spending her time in prayer.

"… you cannot heal what you do not acknowledge,
and what you do not consciously acknowledge
will remain in control of you from within,
festering and destroying you and those around you."
(Richard Rohr)





Breathing Under Water

Breathing Under Water authored by Richard Rohr is one of the best books I have read so far. It suggests a twelve-step spiritual exercise for all those desiring to be freed from any sort of addiction in life. It is not only meant for those habituated to alcohol or drugs but also those who are chained to other compulsions and behaviours. Rohr presents the book drawing ideas from the talks he has given for more than twenty years to recovery groups and from his own experience of counselling addicts. The very title of the book, *Breathing Under Water* speaks of the approach we have towards life, reeling under the water of our own untested assumptions, cultural blindness and inborn compulsiveness and behaviours which are made as part of our unique personality. It is to this reality Rohr tells, "As long as you stay "underwater" you will not breathe, but you will drown instead - while not calling it drowning but presume it is "living." Most peoples' initial level of free response is very limited. While thinking they are surely "doing their own thing," they are almost totally programmed, conditioned, and addicted to everybody else's thing and everybody else's wounding."

Rohr specifies that every person is addicted in some way and it is in learning to identify one's addiction, embracing brokenness and

surrendering to God that one begins to bring healing to self and others. The process of healing starts with an awakening to understand the real self. The well thought out twelve steps of the spiritual exercise form the twelve chapters of the 176-page book with aptly described and sound headings. It is a unique guide to understand and live the Christian principles based on God's unconditional love and compassion and is a best choice for all who desire to lead a happy and contented life. The first step - "Powerlessness" prepares the required setting to have the experience and acceptance of one's powerlessness and this important point marks the beginning of this spiritual inward journey. Sustained effort to dwell on each step makes certain of gaining rich insight, divine love, healing and harmony within. What is remarkable in the entire process is the way each step begins with meaningful Bible quotations that helps in connecting to God.

The twelve step spiritual journey offers a path that leads to rejuvenation and transformation. The series of reflections, recollections and interiorisation guide one to make an inward journey. In the process comes greater awareness of self, leading to acceptance of self and every aspect of life. Once there is understanding of the truth, one resolves to break down all unhelpful things - compulsive behaviour and addictions. The entire programme aims at providing opportunities to experience God's unconditional love and compassion and to enable individuals to become capable of healing themselves and others around them.

The author of the book, Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, author of several books, is a globally recognized ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition. He is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC