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Mission: Sharing the Transformative Power and Joy of Christ and His Word

MISSIONARY ANIMATION CENTRE

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"The mission of the Christian in the world is a mission for all, a mission of service, which excludes no-one; it requires great generosity and in particular the gaze and heart turned heavenward to invoke the Lord's help. There is so much need for Christians who bear witness to the Gospel with joy in everyday life. The disciples, sent by Jesus, 'returned with joy'. When we do this, our heart fills with joy."

(Pope Francis, Angelus, July 3, 2016)

Foreword

Witnesses of the Gospel

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16). We are living in a challenging time where we need to stand up with renewed courage as witnesses of the Gospel, the true power of God for salvation. 'To be' or 'not to be' ashamed of the Gospel in today's context of fast growing secularism, religious intolerance and indifference, is indeed a challenging choice. It is challenging because we are living at a period of history where credibility is stressed as a necessary condition for the effectiveness of all what we do or say as disciples of the Lord. We are also aware that today more than ever our credibility is suspected and our relevance challenged, due to numerous internal and external factors. In this context, it calls for courage and conviction, commitment and heroism to be true witnesses of 'the joy of the Gospel'. We ought to transcend the natural human tendency to move with flow, and learn to swim against the current by conquering our indifferences, and tiding over our feelings of shame and fear. Nothing can substitute the strength, courage and conviction that comes from our personal encounter with Jesus and His word which indeed is 'sharper than any double edged sword' (Cf. Heb 4:12). When we experience the living Jesus in His word, we experience the power of God's salvation, which in turn removes from us all traces of fear and shame and makes us bold witnesses of the Gospel 'in season and out of season' (Cf. 2 Tim 4:2). When this happens to us we will no longer consider evangelizing mission as a mere nominal or decorative profession attached to our religious commitment. It will rather become part of our **'core identity'** as disciples of

Jesus, whom we have encountered very personally. In other words, the transforming power of the Word of God which we have personally experienced will urge us to be humble agents and facilitators of same transformation in others, by offering our total availability to the Spirit of God who does his work of moulding, shaping and transforming 'hearts of stone into hearts of flesh' (Cf. Ez 36:26).

As missionaries we need to be always aware of one of the basic challenges of the of the Word of God which constantly reminds us of the merciful love of the Father who calls his children to live in love. The life of Jesus is the full and perfect expression of this divine love, which holds nothing back but offers itself to all with out reserve. The importance of being guided by the Word of God is clearly evidenced in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where we find a valuable teaching. When both Lazarus and the rich man die, the latter, seeing the poor man Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, asks that Lazarus be sent to his brothers to warn them to love their neighbour, lest they also experience his torment. Abraham's answer is sharp: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Lk 16:29). This parable clearly explains to us that as followers of Jesus we are expected not only to listen to the Word of God but to practise mercy: this is the great challenge before us in life. God's Word has the power to open our eyes and to enable us to renounce a stifling and barren individualism and to embark on a new path of sharing and solidarity. We just cannot remain closed in own selves, refusing to see the needs of our fellow being (Cf. Francis, *AperuitIllis*, 13). We need to take God's word seriously and act on it so that we will not be mere hearers of the Word of God but doers of the Word of God who builds their houses on the solid rock so that no storms will ever destroy that house (Cf. Mt 7: 24-27). May God's Word be our food and may we experience its 'sweetness' (Ez 3:3) because the sweetness of

God's Word leads us to share it with all those whom we encounter in this life and to proclaim the sure hope that it contains (cf.1 Pet 3:15-16). Similarly, may we also discover the bitterness of God's Word (Rev 10:10) as we make every effort to live by it, because the bitterness of God's Word often comes from our realization of how difficult it is to live God's Word consistently. We also experience its bitterness when we see it being rejected as worthless and meaningless for life (Cf. Francis, *AperuitIllis*, 12). May our Blessed Mother who pondered on God's word teach us to relish God's Word until it becomes flesh in us. May we never take God's Word for granted but allow it to bear abundant fruits in our lives.

Sr. Philomena Mathew
Superior General

Message

Proclamation: A Programme of Life

An opportunity to deepen our own faith, and evangelize, is here and now. This is an opportune time for us to encounter, to 'share', to 'point' and to 'invite' others *joyfully* to Christ's banquet, in a spirit of worship and truth. Pope Francis invites all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord." (*Evangelii Gaudium* 3).There is no doubt that the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are sustained by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress, is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity (cf. *EN* 1).

To proclaim the Gospel to the people is our prime duty as baptized Christians. This duty is for us a daily preoccupation, a program of life and action. This fundamental commitment to proclaim the Gospel is, all the more noble and necessary when it is a matter of encouraging one another in our mission as evangelizers, in order that, in this time of uncertainty and confusion, we may accomplish this task of proclaiming the Gospel with ever increasing love, zeal and joy. It is Jesus Christ himself who, from within, impels us.

Pope Paul VI has pointed out that the Church, "striving to proclaim the Gospel to all people," [cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, 1: AAS 58 (1966), p. 947], has had the single aim of fulfilling her duty of being the messenger of the Good News of Jesus Christ - the Good News proclaimed through two fundamental commands: "Put on the new self," (Cf. Eph 4:24, 2:15; Col 3:10; Gal 3:27; Rom

13:114; 2 Cor 5:17), and "Be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5:20)[cf. *EN* 2].The witness that the Lord gives of Himself and that St. Luke gathered together in his Gospel:"I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God" (Lk 4:43), without doubt has enormous consequences, for it sums up the whole mission of Jesus: "That is what I was sent to do." (Lk 4:43). [*EN* 6].

Pope Francis reminds us that everyone is meant to evangelize. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in Evangelization. Indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. (*Evangelii Gaudium*120).In his Homily Mass with Seminarians and Novices, on July 7, 2013, Pope Francis said, "Evangelization starts with our own relationship with Jesus. The spread of the Gospel is not guaranteed either by the number of persons, or by the prestige of the institution, or by the quantity of available resources. What counts is to be permeated by the love of Christ, to let oneself be led by the Holy Spirit and to graft one's own life onto the tree of life, which is the Lord's Cross." (Homily, Mass with Seminarians and Novices, July 7, 2013).

We must witness the faith with our lives. It will be our witness that brings the restlessness on which the Holy Spirit works, says Pope Francis in his homily at Santa Martha [Homily, *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, February 27, 2014]. He also reminds us, that everyone needs to be evangelized. Jesus teaches us that the Good News, which He brings, is not reserved to one part of humanity; it is to be communicated to everyone.[Angelus, January 26, 2014].

An Evangelizer must be Joyful. It is indeed with a humble and joyful confidence that we must proclaim the Gospel. It is joy that lies at the beginning and at the end of evangelization. "Joy is at the heart of the Christian experience," declared Pope Benedict XVI to the youth of the whole world as he asked them to be "missionaries of joy": "Go and tell other young people about your

joy at finding the precious treasure which is Jesus himself. We cannot keep the joy of faith to ourselves. If we are to keep it, we must give it away."[Benedict XVI, Message for XXVII World Youth Day (2012) 7.]

It is to this joy that we are called; this is what Pope Paul VI called "the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing." (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 80). May it mean the great joy of our offered lives. And as Pope Francis writes, "May the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient, or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world."(Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 80: *AAS* 68 (1976) 75).

Let us turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Star of the New Evangelization, and implore her maternal intercession. In her we see exemplified all the elements needed for a new proclamation of the Gospel in our world today. With her fiat, she entered into an intimate personal encounter with the Lord Jesus that would continue throughout her life. She lived a life of faith-filled fellowship, first within the Holy Family, and then with her Son's disciples. She recognized her own "lowliness" (cf. Lk 1.48) before God, yet did not hesitate to offer her life in humble service of others. Her humble and joyful confidence is evident in the bold words she still speaks to us today: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2.5). May the example and prayers of the Mother of God continue to inspire us to joyfully proclaim the Gospel in today's world.

Sr. Bridget Diengdoh MSMHC
General Councillor for Evangelization

Editorial

Reviving and Reliving

The primary reason of Church's existence is the mission of God, which needs to be carried forward. The centrality of God's mission consists of gathering everyone in a single fold, where there is perfect unity. This mission of God with its ultimate aim to unite everyone forms the core of Church's life and mission. All those who respond to the call to become members of the Church, share the work of God. St. Paul rightly says, "… for we are all God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9). What holds importance here is our fellowship with God for the execution of the mission, which has its implications on us. Therefore, it is very essential to gain a deeper understanding of the responsibility we are to undertake in furthering the mission of God.

Pope Francis, while affirming God's love for each person, tells that each of us is a mission to the world, for each of us is the fruit of God's love. He keeps reminding all missionaries and every believer to venture out to the peripheries, where they can encounter people and share their faith. The month of October this year was particularly meant to renew our commitment to the missionary mandate of Christ. It was an occasion for us to deepen our faith and to give expression to it by our journey together with the entire people of God. Pope Francis underlines the significance of it saying, "Celebrating this month will help us first to rediscover the missionary dimension of our faith in Jesus Christ, a faith graciously bestowed on us in baptism." He tells that our filial relationship with God is not something simply private, but always in relation to

the Church, where we receive a new life, together with so many of our other brothers and sisters. It is the membership in the Church we received through the sacrament of baptism that assures new life and surety of salvation, which is made possible through Jesus Christ. Strengthened by the ever-present reality of our Saviour Jesus, we are to strive on towards the goal of making God's Kingdom a reality in this world.

Our life of faith has to be lived every day that we are enabled to encounter every situation in the right perspective. Our faith gets strengthened when we rely on God's power and allow Him to work in us. In the process, we enter into a deeper relationship and it results in joyful trust, leading to greater peace.This approach to life would not only transform our lives but also the lives of those around us.

Today, as the world progresses in numerous ways, we are challenged to go forward with our missionary mandate. We shouldn't be waiting for a favourable time to carry out our mission. Considering the urgency of the mission, we need to seize every opportunity for the execution of the task. While we seek out to do our best in collaborating with the Church to further the mission, we have a perfect example in Mary. Pope Francis describes, "In union with her Son, from the moment of the Incarnation the Blessed Virgin set out on her pilgrim way. She was fully involved in the mission of Jesus, a mission that became her own at the foot of the Cross: the mission of cooperating, as Mother of the Church, in bringing new sons and daughters of God to birth in the Spirit and in faith."

May we always find meaning and joy in collaborating with the Church to advance God's Kingdom.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC

The Urgency of Mission *ad Gentes*

Sr. Bridget Diengdoh MSMHC

Introduction

Before He returned to His Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ addressed to His disciples these words: "Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation." (Mark 16:15). With these words He committed to them a duty, a historic and a holy charge, that was not to lapse with the death of the Apostles but would bind their successors, one after another, until the end of the world, that is, - as long, as there remained on this earth men and women whom the truth might set free. Entrusted with this mandate, "the apostles went forth and preached the word of God everywhere" (Mark 16:20), so that "through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message" (Psalm 18:5). From that time on, as the centuries have passed, the Church has never forgotten that command God gave her, and never yet has she ceased to dispatch to every corner of the world her couriers of the doctrine He entrusted to her, and her ministers of the eternal salvation that was delivered through Christ to human race (*Maximum Illud* 1).

Even in the first three centuries, when persecution after persecution, inspired by Hell, fell upon the infant Church in a raging attempt to crush her, even then when the whole of civilization was flooded with Christian blood, out on the far frontiers of the Empire the heralds of the Gospel journeyed, announcing their tidings. (*Maximum Illud* 2). Then, after peace and religious

freedom had been officially granted to the Church, her apostolate to the world made far greater progress (*Maximum Illud* 3)**.** Very many of those missionaries, while they were working for the salvation of their brethren, themselves attained the heights of sanctity, just as the Apostles did before them. And many of them too, crowned their apostolate with the glory of martyrdom, establishing the Faith at the cost of their blood.

Anyone who studies the facts of this great story cannot help being profoundly impressed by them, by all the amazing hardships our missionaries have undergone in extending the Faith, the magnificent devotion they have shown, and the overwhelming examples of fearless endurance they have given us. And to anyone who considers these facts the realization must come as a shock that right now, there still remain in the world immense multitudes of people who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. Millions of souls have not accepted Christ. (*Maximum Illud* 6).

The Urgency of the Mission

The Mission is very urgent. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God is so urgent. “Leave the dead bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God.” (cf. LK 9:60). “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (cf. Lk 9:62).”Greet no one on the road” (cf. Lk 10:4) for a disciple is not to waste time on the road on useless talk as the mission to proclaim the Gospel is so urgent.”Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that we may proclaim the message there also; for that is what we came to do.” (cf. Mk 1:38).”We must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also; for we were sent for this purpose.” (cf. Lk 4:43). “Let us go out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.” (cf. Lk 9:2). “Let us go out so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond us.” (cf. 2 Cor 10:16).”Let us go into

all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. (cf. Mk 16:15).

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart"(Rom 10:8); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved(cf. Rom 10:9). For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved (cf. Rom 10:10). Together with St. Paul let's say, "Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the Good News (Rom 15:20). St. Paul said, that Christ sent him to proclaim the Gospel not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of power" (1Cor 1:17). Like St. Paul we place our trust in Christ and surrender all our limitation and our inability to him so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of power to help us.

The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of missionary evangelization is obvious, for God "wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth." (1 *Tim* 2: 4). Everyone has the right to know Christ. "The same Lord is the Lord of all, and his generosity is offered to all who appeal to him, for all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. But as Paul said "How are they to call on the one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in the one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? (cf. Rom 10: 14). Hence, no believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples. (cf. *RM* 3).

Who has to Proclaim or Preach Christ?

"Because of the one dignity we received from baptism, every baptized person shares a responsibility in the Church's mission." (Pope John Paul II). Hence, every baptized Christian has the right and duty to preach Christ. No believer in Christ,no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty 'to proclaim Christ' to all peoples everywhere "that they may be saved."(Rom 10:1). The moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to *mission ad gentes* and to a new evangelization.Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ(RM 3). We cannot selfishly keep for ourselves the words of eternal life, which we received in our personally encountering Jesus Christ. They are destined for each and every person. Each person today, whether he knows it or not, needs this proclamation. (*Lineamenta* 25). To be unaware of this need, creates a desert and an emptiness.

Thus, all Christians are called to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the mission of Christ the Redeemer. It is the Spirit who impels me to proclaim the great works of God: "… Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9: 16); (RM 1). Every baptized Christian should feel it as an urgent duty to repeat this cry of St. Paul. Our direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ should have convinced us even more of the *urgency of missionary activity*. With an innovative ways of St. Paul, we go to villages and cities of the region, even to the ends of the earth to show this missionary concern.

The admonition of Benedict XV to the Missionaries throughout the world thus, laid special emphasis on *mission ad gentes*, employing the concepts and language of the time, in an effort to revive, a sense of duty towards the missions. To the Missionaries he writes:

> Now we turn to you, beloved sons and daughters, the workingmen and women of the Lord's vineyard. In your hands lies the immediate responsibility for disseminating the wisdom of Christ, and with this responsibility the salvation of innumerable souls. Our first admonition is this: never for a moment forget the lofty and splendid character of the task to which you have devoted yourselves. Your task is a divine one, a task far beyond the feeble reach of human reasoning. You have been called to carry light to people who lie in the shadow of death and to open the way to heaven for souls that are hurtling to destruction. Assure yourselves that God was speaking to you, to each one of you, when He said: "Forget your people and your father's house" (Psalm 44:11). Remember that your duty is not the extension of a human realm, but of Christ's; and remember too that your goal is the acquisition of citizens for a heavenly-fatherland, and not for an earthly one. (*Maximum Illud*18).

Activities aimed at promoting interest in the missions must always be geared to these specific goals; namely, informing and forming the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting *misio ad gentes* and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization. It is not right to give an incomplete picture of missionary activity, as if it consisted principally in helping the poor, contributing to the liberation of the oppressed, promoting development or defending human rights. The missionary Church is certainly involved on these fronts, but her primary task lies elsewhere: the poor are hungry for God, not just for bread and freedom. Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ, and establish local churches which then become means of liberation in every sense. (cf. RM 83).

Faith must be Offered to All

Faith must be offered to all, for salvation in Christ is offered to all. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all (cf. RM 10). In other words, "Christ must be proclaimed to all because the "multitudes have the right to know Christ and the riches of the mystery of Christ-riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unimagined fullness of life and truth. (cf. *RM* 8).

Do people of other religions attain salvation? It is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Gospel revelation or enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of His Sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free cooperation. (RM 10).God is opening before us the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. The moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to *mission ad gentes*.

The Mission of Christ should be Enlarged

The mission of Christ should be enlarged. St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "… our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you"(2Cor 10: 15-16).These texts tell us that as the faith of the Christians of one area increases our sphere of action should be greatly enlarged so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond.

St. Paul strongly encouraged his Christians to be ready to proclaim the Gospel. He exhorts, "As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15). He urged Timothy, to "proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching(2 Tim 4:2).

In the words of St. Peter,"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light(1 Peter 2:9).

In his vision St. John "Saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, with an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people (Rev 14:6). Those who proclaim the Gospel are angels. The Gospel they proclaim brings eternal life for themselves as well as for those who received it. When we proclaim the Gospel we need have no fear or worry of anything, because God's springs run over, and his grace will not fail. (cf. 4 Esdras 2:32). We read in in 4 Esdras 2:32, "Embrace your children until I come, and proclaim mercy to them; "because my springs run over, and my grace will not fail." What we need to have is only trust in God. Hence, as we await in hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ let us tirelessly commit ourselves to the work of proclaiming the Gospel. Let us be the first to go to the people with the Good News of Christ. Thus we must be able to say like St. Paul, "We were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ" (2Cor 10:15). Those who take the Great Commission of Christ seriously realize that enlarging the Mission of Christis crucial.At the heart of the Great Commission is the task of "making disciples of all Nations."

Approach to Evangelization

We need to focus on the objective of leading people to faith, not on specific methods we have been taught. Think outside the box, asking God for creative approaches to building trust in the lives of others.

*Knowledge of Language:*Among the attainments necessary for our life as missionaries a place of paramount importance must obviously be granted to the language of the people to whose salvation we will devote ourselves. We should not be content with a little of the language, but should be able to speak it readily and competently. The advantage of learning of the language of the people gives us in the task of winning the confidence of the public. There will also be occasions when, in our position as representative and interpreter of our holy Faith, we will have to associate with the dignitaries of the district. Or we may be invited to appear at scholarly gatherings. How will we maintain our dignity under these circumstances if we cannot make ourselves understood because we do not know the language? (cf. *Maximum Illud* 24).Learning the country's official language is very important for the missionaries.

*Empowering and equipping:*Empowering and equipping lay faithful in Proclaiming the Gospel; in Catechizing and strengthening the faith of the people in towns and villages; Accompanying the needy especially women, girls, youth and children in their struggles of life; Preparing people to receive worthily the various Sacraments are of great importance.

*Village Tour and Family Visit:*Missionaries who move from village to village,and from house to house meeting people, listening to them, building bridges of love and trust, and giving them faith formation is indeed the best evangelizers, who renew and deepen the people's relationship with God and leads them to faith in Christ. Often such friendly visits pave the way to new contacts and open

up the path for the strayed ones to return to faith. And while visiting their villages and families they set time for preaching the word of God, giving retreats, seminars, instructions of religion and the Church, and conducting prayer service, etc. In this way people are reminded of their faith and are called to conversion. Personal contact in spreading the faith is still relevant today and in fact even more. Village apostolate and family visit are very essential for the scattering of the seed of faith to non-Christians and the deepening of faith of the Christians. Perhaps, despite the modern techniques of evangelization, personal contact through family visits is still the best technique of evangelization.

Witnessing life: "You will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end" (Acts 1:8).

Christians must always remember their duty to bear witness to the Gospel. We are to keep in mind what the Church in Asia declares: "To bear witness to Jesus Christ is the supreme service which the Church can offer to the peoples of Asia, for it responds to their profound longing for the Absolute and it unveils the truths and values which will ensure their integral human development**."***(EA*, 20).

Let us seeks to give credible witness to Christ. Let our one ambition be to continue his mission of service and love, so that all people 'may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn. 10:10), (*EA*, 50).The need of the time is proclamation not so much by word as by witness; more by the example of life rather than by preaching and teaching. We are called to live a witnessing life, evangelizing primarily by the living witness of fidelity to Jesus Christ.

Proclamation of Faith / the Word: The best gift to give to others is the Word of God. Proclaiming the faith or the Word means to create in every place a way which lead to this encounter between the person and Jesus Christ. The proclamation of faith or of the

Word is the proclamation of Jesus. It is the center and the primary element of evangelization without which all other elements will lose their solidity and validity. (FABC Papers, No. 84, p. 10). The proclamation of the cross and resurrection as the mystery of universal redemption is the bedrock which sustains Christian faith. We are to make the greatest possible contribution to the proclamation of Christ. Faith strengthens when it is given away! (*RM* 3). The more we grow in our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, the more we realized that he is calling us to holiness in and through the definite choices by which we respond to his love in our lives, taking up tasks and ministries which help to build up the kingdom of God. The Church exists to proclaim the mystery of Christ to the whole world until the end of time. (Cf. RM, Chapter I, titled "Jesus Christ, the only Saviour."). This involves placing before each and every human being the challenge of the truth of Christ and calling every human being to repentance and to the obedience of faith.

Dialogue with Our Brothers and Sisters of Other Religions: Our missionary activity is not limited only to those who are already converted, but is devoted also to the evangelization of non-Christians and non-Catholic. St. John Paul II wrote to the bishops of Asia:

> Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is 'the way, and the truth and the life.'The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people. (*Letter* to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops' Conferences (June 23, 1990), 4: *L'Osservatore Romano*, July).

Indeed, Christ himself "while expressly insisting on the need for faith and baptism, at the same time confirmed the need for the Church, into which people enter through Baptism as through a door." Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinarymeans of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation. (RM 55).

"Faith demands a free adherence on the part of a person, but at the same time faith must also be offered to him/her, because the "multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ-riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unimagined fullness, everything that it is searching for, concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth." (RM 8).

Promote Christian Unity: The prayer of Jesus: "that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (Jn 17:21). We must be willing to meet the members of other Christian churches and other religions, and to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. Above all, there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*. Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church's missionary thrust toward non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all of us. For in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith. (*RM* 2).

B*e Around non-Christians:* Find ways that fit your personality to become involved with people who believe differently about Jesus than you do. Don't feel like you intentional sharing have to share the gospel with them initially. Just build friendships.

Be Available: Some of us aren't made to recruit; we're made to respond. I need to develop my relationship with God and prepare

for encounters he brings into my path. Then I don't have to panic when the conversation turns to spiritual things; I can simply be fully present with the other person during that time, listen carefully, and share my ideas without feeling threatened.

*Be Directional:*In our missionary activities, we need to shift the direction of focus from ourselves on to God. Our role is to point people's focus toward him, not toward us. If they're focusing on being like us, they'll be "looking for love in all the wrong places." But if our lives help them turn their eyes toward God, God will have the opportunity to impact their lives.

That principle is a great approach to evangelization: get people's eyes on Christ instead of on us. That enables us to simply be facilitators to get people looking in the right direction, and then we step out of the way and let God do his work.

Be Polite in Communicating Christian Values: A good Missionary needs to know how to communicate Christian values through her words, deeds and her very life. She also needs to be a well-integrated person at all levels. She needs to think positively and develop a positive attitude towards herself, and towards others. She needs to have a good image of herself so that she doesn't feel the need to pull down others or be jealous of others. Having a good self-confidence helps her to look at the problems in an objective manner and look for the right solutions without being carried away by emotions or personal gains. A high self-image will help a person to accept criticisms and negative remarks without adversely affecting her apostolic effectiveness. Choose your words carefully. A person who says whatever she likes usually ends up hearing what she doesn't like. Words can hurt feelings and destroy relationships. Excessive talking does not mean communication. Talk less and say more. A fool speaks before thinking, a wise person thinks before speaking. Spoken words can't be retrieved. Be constructive in your criticism. Constructive criticism means to

offer solutions in your criticism. Criticize the behaviour and not the person. Be specific when you criticize; don't over criticize.

*Gratitude:*Let us be grateful to God for having trusted us so as to entrust to us with this mega mission of saving souls. Let us live in awareness of the generous daily miracles provided by God. We need to learn to be grateful to God. We must thank God for the good things as well as for not so good things.

*Generosity:*If we want to be at the service of people, we need to start the mission with generosity. Weshould be ready to give to people all that we can. There is a great joy in giving. Many are afraid to give, to lose and as a result never experience the joy of giving. By giving we become real. God is tremendously generous. Mt 20:1-16. By giving I receive. By teaching I learn. "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it"(Mt 10:39).I can make my life meaningful only if I am ready to lose my health, time, prestige, talents, friendship, etc. Generosity is contagious. It invites others to be more generous. Lk 19:1-10, the Story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus finds his salvation in his willingness to share. One cannot experience salvation, if he pays attention only on prayer and novenas. How much are we willing to share our time, talents and ourselves with the people who need our help to be saved.

*Be A Good listener:*In our missionary evangelization to be a good listener is very important and very essential. Some characteristics of non-listeners are: they disagree with the first thing you say, they interrupt you at every step, they are physically present but mentally absent, and they come to conclusions even before you finish. Listening shows caring. When you show a caring attitude toward another person, that person feels important and s/he is more motivated and more receptive to your ideas. An open ear is the only believable sign of an open heart.

Be enthusiastic: We approach the new evangelization with a sense of enthusiasm. We will learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing, even at times when proclamation might seem like a seed sown among tears (cf. *Ps* 126:6). "May it mean for us - as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history - an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world." (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 80: *AAS* 68 (1976) 75).

Love for the Apostolate

Venerable Stephen Ferrando said that to each one of us Jesus says as He said to His Apostles: "I have chosen you that you should go, and bring forth fruit" (cf. Jn 15:16)**.**And what is this Fruit that Jesus refers to? Venerable Stephen Ferrando says, "They are souls saved through our own zeal." (From the heart of the Father, 53). He further says, "If only we could realize the value of an immortal soul, made in the image and the likeness of God, redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus watched over by one of heaven's Angels, destined for glory in Paradise ... O, how zealously we would labour to save souls!"(From the heart of the Father, 53).

St. John Chrysostom tells us that nothing is more acceptable to God than the salvation of Souls. St. Lawrence Justinian says: "You wish to honour God; you can do no better than labour on behalf of

the salvation of Souls." For as St. Bernard says: "A Soul is more valuable than the whole world in the eyes of God." That is why Jesus once said to one of His Servants: Labour for the salvation of sinners, for this is what is most pleasing to Me."(From the heart of the Father, 53).

Those who labour for the salvation of Souls, not only give great pleasure to God, but they also render their own salvation secure, and moreover obtain a greater reward in Heaven: "In saving souls you have predestined your own" says the Holy Doctor, St. Augustine. And long before him St. James, the Apostle said: "One must know that he who caused a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins." (From the heart of the Father, 54).

St. Gregory says that the more souls a sinner shall have converted from their sins the sooner shall he be absolved from his transgressions. And St. Alphonsus is of the opinion that those who have the good fortune of being employed in converting sinners have a great mark of predestination. (From the heart of the Father, 54). This thought should be a source of great comfort to us and make us truly zealous in labouring for the salvation of souls.

Regarding the great reward that those who labour for souls shall receive, Daniel the Prophet says: "They shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Daniel 12:3). May God grant us then the true spirit of apostolate and enable us to save many souls for him. These souls will form our crown of glory in Heaven through all eternity. (From the heart of the Father, 54).

Conclusion

Activities aimed at promoting interest in the missions must always be geared to these specific goals; namely, informing and forming

the People of God to share in the Church's universal mission, promoting *mission ad gentes* and encouraging cooperation in the work of evangelization. It is not right to give an incomplete picture of missionary activity, as if it consisted principally in helping the poor, contributing to the liberation of the oppressed, promoting development or defending human rights. The missionary Church is certainly involved on these fronts but her primary task lies elsewhere: the poor are hungry for God, not just for bread and freedom. Missionary activity must first of all bear witness to and proclaim salvation in Christ, and establish local churches which then become means of liberation in every sense. (cf. *RM* 83).

In our hands lies the immediate responsibility for making Christ known and distributing His wisdomto the people; and with this responsibility the salvation of innumerable souls. Let us never for a moment forget the lofty and splendid character of the task to which we have devoted ourselves. Our task is a divine one, a task far beyond the feeble reach of human reasoning. We have been called to carry the light to people who lie in the shadow of death, and to open the way to heaven for souls that are racing to destruction. Let us assure ourselves that God was speaking to us, to each one of us, when He said: "Forget your people and your father's house." (Psalm 44:11). Remember that our duty is not the extension of a human realm, but of Christ. Our life here on earth is so short, like the flowers that bloomed in the morning and faded in the evening. God will ask us "through your life, how many souls you have saved for me?" Let us be proud of our Mission and love our vocation. We need to be real messenger of Jesus. Jesus wants 100 percent of his flock to come back to Him.

Bishop Stephen Ferrando: An Ambassador of Christ

Sr. Rosita Joseph MSMHC

Introduction

All Christians are ambassadors for Christ and his representatives to this world (2 Cor 5:20). The ambassador's duty is to represent the leader and faithfully pass along the message as commissioned by the leader. As an ambassador of Christ, Bishop Ferrando loyally represented Christ the King and shared the Good News of the Gospel to his flock and brought an increase of faith in the Church. His personal attachment to Jesus the great King, invited others to taste and see the goodness of God's Kingdom through him so that they might become the citizens of the community of God and the family/ community in which they live.Cardinal Angelo Rossi said about Bishop Ferrando: "I was edified by Bishop Ferrando's zealous and exemplary missionary life undertaken without any personal selfinterest as an ambassador of Christ and a true son of Don Bosco."[1] The grace of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit disposed him to give his best in mission *ad gentes*, intense works of charity,in heroic goodness and steadfast in compassion till the end of his life (cf. Jn 6: 45). He gave primacy of God in his life, incorporated himself into the universal mission of the Church and lived in fidelity to the spiritual heritage of the Salesian congregation.

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[1] Angelo Rossi to Hubert D' Rosario, "Condolence Message," 13. 7.1978, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 7, p. 2165.

1. Life in accordance with God's Word

In spite of his religious and ecclesiastical duties Bishop Ferrando lived faithfully his episcopal motto 'Apostle of Christ', and shared his missionary spirit with the collaborators in mission and the religious congregation he founded. In accordance with God's word and in obedience to the teachings of the Church he fulfilled his mission.He visited far-flung villages to be with people, attended their *Sabhas*, *Jingiasengs* and prayer gatherings, formed Catholic associations, built schools for the education of the young in the villages, dispensaries for the sick, organized oratories, refugee camps for the migrants, established technical and agricultural schools for boys and vocational training centers for girls. He was a father to his people and he conversed with people in their language, moved around to see the poor in their huts, field of work and went out to meet to those in the margins of society. As stated by Fr. Orestes Paviotti sdb: Bishop Ferrando was constantly on the move to meet the smallest, the marginalized, the aged and the sick in the remote areas of the region. His visit was eagerly awaited by his people.[2] Following Christ closely made it easy for him to face life with faith and courage, trusting in the powerful guidance of Mary Help of Christians. He was known for integrity of life, daring and undaunted spirit and persistence to hold on in the face of all difficulties. Fr. Egidio Viganò, the former Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco lauded Ferrando in these words: "A priest rich in zeal and animated by Salesian pastoral charity *da mihi animas*, untiring missionary on foot, daring like St. Paul and an iron soldier."[3]

2. Radical Living of the Evangelical Counsels

Bishop Ferrando lived a convincing and witnessing life under the authority of God, In keeping with the teachings of the Church and the

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2 Cf. Orestes Paviotti, *The Work of his Hands* (Shillong: Don Bosco Press), 1987, p.181

3 Egidio Viganò, "Mons. Stefano Ferrando," in ASC B7090201.

Salesian congregation he firmly believed that surrendering himself to God whom he loves above all else, makes him an ambassador for Christ, willing and ready to carry out his mandate.[4] In the evangelical counsels he realised the ideal proposed by Christ. "You must be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5: 48). The vows enabled him to live an integral Christian and religious life, inclined to piety, simplicity of life and obedience.[5] Living the counsels implied a manner of life that is convincing and credible, to be concerned about the affairs of the Lord in a total dedication of one's life for the Kingdom. He lived his religious life as a covenant of mutual love and fidelity, of communion and mission for the salvation of souls and experienced a transformational relationship with Christ.[6] He was dependent on God, loved him above all, disposed himself at the service of the mission and joyfully lived the missionary mandate of Christ.

2.1 Chastity

Chastity was a special characteristic that adorned the personality of Bishop Ferrando.One of the testimonies for the diocesan process of Bishop Ferrando says: "Chastity made Ferrando a very loving person to everyone, be it with people in the villages, children in schools, oratory or orphanage or with Sisters, he was a loving father towards all. His single minded dedication to the love of God was the strength of his heart."[7] The solid Salesian formation, built on the rich spirituality of Don Bosco, laid a strong foundation for his life of chastity. He was held in high esteem for his attitude of transparency in evangelical life.[8] With undivided love, Bishop

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4 Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, C. 60.

5 Cf. ASC B7090138, P. Ricaldone to Propaganda Fide, "Presentazione al candidato Stefano Ferrando," 14.4.1934.

6 Cf. EgidioViganò, "Mons. Stefano Ferrando," in ASC B7090201.

7 Teresa Kunnath, "Testimony," 5.1.2004, Shillong, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 4, p. 491.

8 Cf. P. Ricaldone, "Vitae curriculum-Stefano Ferrando", in ASPF No. 4668, 20.4.934, p. 770.

Ferrando served our Lord Jesus Christ in the people of the mission, faithful to the tradition of prudence, vigilance and prayer, a prerequisite for Christ's ambassador.

2.2 Poverty

The community of Genova Quarto where Bishop Ferrando lived in his last years observes: "The quality most dear to the heart of Ferrando was simplicity of life and the virtue of poverty which united him to God and detachment from material goods."[9]His life of poverty had its foundation in the spirituality of untiring and self-sacrificing work, the concrete expression of the poverty of Don Bosco and had its end in the love of God and people. The life of poverty he professed helped him to maintain the right level of relationship with all categories of people in his diocese. Some of the expressions of his poverty are: tireless work, simplicity of life, concern for the poor and the marginalised, detachment of the heart, availability for people, sharing of his time, energy and financial resources for the good of people. He was very human in his dealings with others, always irradiated wherever he went the Father's love, being mindful of he was representing Christ in whatever he did. As Christ's ambassador he was loyal, guarded his conduct so that nothing would hinder people from coming to the Kingdom of God.

2.3 Obedience

Bishop Ferrando was an ambassador of Christ in Northeast India. Under the authority of Jesus Christ and in obedience to his superiors he carried out his mission. Obediencewas his safest road to sanctity and religious perfection.[10] The promises he made

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9 Panizzi Gaetano, "Testimony,", 16.6.2006, Genova, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 8, p. 2617.

10 Cf. S. Ferrando, "Letter to Sisters and novices," 21.12.1948, in *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, p. 25.

for himself on his appointment as the Bishop of Krishnagar was to remain under the authority of the Holy See and to his legitimate superiors.[11] His obedience was oriented and directed in a spontaneous response to listening to the voice of God expressed through the will of his authority. He called 'surprises from the Lord' the obedience he received from his superiors and ecclesiastical authorities on various occasions in his life.[12] The type of obedience he practiced enabled him to shed his ego and pride, give due respect to everyone and live worthy of the Gospel.[13] His obedience was heroic, he accepted the dispositions of his superiors with all serenity and availability and conformed himself more closely to Jesus Christ and the reign of his Kingdom.[14]

3. Community Builder

Community life was a powerful and useful support for Bishop Ferrando to live his vocation as a representative of Christ. In the community Bishop Ferrando found response to the deepest aspirations of his heart to fulfill his mission. He was a community builder and promoter of true family spirit through his various responsibilities: catechist, novice master, rector, bishop and founder. Fr. Luigi Jellici who lived with Fr. Ferrando when he was the novice master states: "He treated the novices, confreres and the people with loving kindness and with great concern. He had a special charism to build community in the spirit of a family and there existed a real father-son relationship."[15]

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11 Cf. ASPF No. 3886, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 9.9.1934, p. 445.

12 S. Ferrando, "Talk to the Missionary Sisters on obedience," 11.4.1973, in *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, pp. 174-175.

13 Cf. Alberto Lorenzelli, "Testimony," 16.6.2006, Genova, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 8, p. 2610.

14 Cf. Angelo Rossi, "Condolence message to the diocese of Shillong at the passing away of Mons. S. Ferrando," 13.7.1978, in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 7, p. 2165.

15 Luigi Jellici, "Testimony," Shillong, 28.11.2003, in *CopiaPublica*, Vol.1, p. 194.

His community life was animated by the Gospel spirit, nourished by prayer and distinguished by a loving relationship with God and one another. Be it in formation house or Bishop's house, there reigned among the members a spirit of piety, inimitable enthusiasm, mutual understanding and apostolic spirit. He was an icon of hard work, hospitality, joviality, gentleness and remarkable optimism.[16]As a true community builder he was a faithful follower of Salesian traditions. The joyful sharing of life between superiors and the young, the mutual love and respect, the welcoming attitude of the community, meeting together at the Lord's feet in prayer and at table etc. were some of the manifestations.[17] The vast diocese of Northeast India was his community comprised of all categories of people: the poor, needy and the marginalized, young who needed constant accompaniment, sick and the aged, women, girls and children who needed immediate attention. In the midst of different activities, he voluntarily restricted his freedom because he was representing Christ to the community.

4. Deeply Spiritual

Bishop Ferrando's spiritual world included Jesus Christ, Immaculate Virgin Help of Christians, Word of God, saints, angels and his brothers and sisters whom he served selflessly as a poor missionary. The spiritual practices and community exercises and sacramental life enabled him to keep a constant check on himself. The practice of union with God (grace of unity), asceticism of tireless activity, piety and joy enriched by prayer, enhanced his spiritual life. He acquired spiritual depth through hard work and active charity nourished by prayer. What impressed thepeople about Bishop Ferrando is his witness of life, intense and selfless

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16 Cf. Elizabeth Packumala, "Ferrando Novice Master and Rector of Our Lady's House,"in *Copia Publica*, Vol. 2, pp. 676-677.

17 Cf. Archimede Pianazzi, *Dare and Hope*, H. McGlinchey, tr., (Madras: Salesian Publications, 1979), p. 85.

work nourished by prayer and untiring missionary devotion, hallmark of an ambassador of Christ.[18]

When tragedies pressed him down, he would not give into discouragement. He was certain that God whom he is representing was in control of everything.[19] The fulcrum of his spiritual lifewas union with God and active charity that made him a holy and compassionate ambassador. He believed that holiness is achieved through the practice of virtue, especially concerted effort in the practice of kindness, tolerance, patience, compassion and concern for others. Life with the Salesians from a tender age of nine taught him that holiness consist in being cheerful and optimistic which leads to serene tranquility.What marks his unique spiritual life is his love for Jesus in the Eucharist, devotion to Mary, love for the Church and the Pope, concern for others and sanctification of self through sincere and committed work.

5. Apostolic Passion

Living for Christ in daily life and in challenging situations made Bishop Ferrando an ambassador for Christ. Deeply absorbed in the spirituality of Don Bosco, Ferrando became a passionate lover of souls and an apostle of the poor as Don Bosco became a father and teacher of the young. Don Bosco's apostolic project of *da mihi animas, cetera tolle* (give me souls, take away the rest) became for Bishop Ferrando a commitment of generosity, self-denial and real giving of oneself for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. His apostolic passion had its essence in the pastoral charity of Jesus the Good Shepherd. His attitude of availability and mobility urged him to go to the geographical and existential peripheries of the people in Northeast India. Passion for souls moved Bishop Ferrando to be at the service of mission *ad gentes*, at the service of what is

[18] Cf. Paschal Malngiang, "Testimony," 18.10.2003, Shillong, in *CopiaPublica*, Vol. 1, p. 82.

[19] Cf. ASC A8910219, Peter Ricaldone to Ferrando, 15.9.1936.

essential. As an ambassador of Christ his only desire was to win all souls to Christ, that all may experience the love of the merciful Father. Fr. Àngel Fernandez Artime, the Rector Major of the Salesians aptly said of Bishop Ferrando: "A car he could have used, he preferred walking on foot; this in fact allowed him to meet people, stop and talk to them to share their lives; such a direct contact with the lives of people was one of the main resources of the fecundity of his Gospel proclamation."[20]

6. Perfection of Charity

The life of Bishop Ferrando was endowed with all the elements of spiritual life that could lead him to the perfection of charity. The vast region of Northeast India with numerous tribes that inhabited the hills and plains were the flock entrusted to his care. Writing to one of the priests of his home town Rossiglione, he once said: Charity and good works are the best tools we use to win souls for God and attain eternal salvation.[21] His life was the blending of the two precepts of charity: Love of God and love of neighbor. He shepherded his flock, stood as a mediator between God and people (1 Tim 2:5; Deut 5:1) offering his prayers, supplications and sacrifices of his life for the sake of his people. He wrote to the Missionary Sisters: The only purpose for which God created you was to love and serve him in this life and attain Christian perfection, by practicing charity towards God and neighbor.[22] The greater the love of God, the more did he practice virtues towards others and identified more with Christ.

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20 Angel FernandesArtime, "Letter of the Rector Major on the occasion of the Venerability of the Servant of God, Stephen Ferrando," p. 2.

21 Cf. Stephen Ferrando, "Letter to G. Ferrando," 1.1.1935.

22 Cf. S. Ferrando, "Letter to Missionary Sisters," 24.4.1952, in *From the Heart of a Father Who Loves You*, p. 44.

7. Missionary Life as God's Ambassador

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and authentic witness of life, Bishop Ferrando trusted unconditionally in the providence of God. In testing times, he was able to see the will of God. He did what is good and right as God's representative and trusted firmly in God.[23] As a bishop for 36 years he lived an absolutely self-effacing life despite his office as the ecclesiastical head of the region. In all his apostolic undertakings he kept up his Salesian identity and conducted himself in a manner worthy of the Gospel. He was chosen to be the bishop because of his exemplary Christian life and endearing priestly qualities. Some of the outstanding traits of his personality as Christ's ambassador are: prompt and joyful obedience to superiors, love and respect for the Church and the Pope, predilection for the poor, zeal for the salvation of souls, family spirit, piety, hard work and temperance, meekness and patience, adaptability and availability, simplicity of life, ability to do things with exactitude and zeal and readiness to undergo any deprivations for the sake of Christ.[24]

He lived his missionary life with the rich essence of the pastoral charity of Jesus. What is most admirable in him was his persevering efforts and constancy to live Christ's teachings. He embodied in himself the virtues of the Kingdom he served and was always ready to avail chances in order to represent Christ and would not easily back away from a challenge or an opportunity. The last nine years he spent in retirement at the Salesian house in Genova Quarto could be summed up in the following: *In everything and for everything the will of the Good God*.[25] Fr. Pierluigi Cameroni, the Postulator General of the Salesians of Don

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23 Egidio Viganò, "Mons. Stefano Ferrando", in ASC B7090201.

24 ASPF No. 2777, PeterRicaldone to Propaganda Fide, "Vitae Curriculum: Stefano Ferrando," pp. 13-18.

25 Cf. ASPF No. 4822, Ferrando to Propaganda Fide, 12.10.1968; ASC B7090331, Ferrando to A. Fedrigotti, 21.11.1968.

Bosco says: Bishop Ferrando was a shining example of authentic Christian life, an interpreter of the charism of Don Bosco in the various cultures of Northeast India through tireless missionary activity performed in love of God and neighbour.[26]

Conclusion

As an ambassador of Christ, Bishop Ferrando yielded to the Lord, loved him with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. His very life spoke more to people, he manifested goodness and love in difficult situations that brought hope to others who were longing for it. As a missionary, he represented and communicated God's message through his holy and exemplary life. His zeal, knowledge, activity and sacrifice set him apart as an exceptional example of Christian living. His exemplary ambassadorship fostered good relationship among the missionaries and people that brought many into a relationship with God through Christ Jesus.His simplicity, humility and obedience marked his demeanour. He placed the good of others at the forefront of everything and was concerned for the interest of others. Honest and transparent, confident and daring he would not retreat from challenges or difficulties which are genuine qualities of an ambassador. The Archbishop of Turin, Cesare Nosiglia recalls: As a Salesian of Don Bosco, Ferrando's life was a powerful testimony of the tenderness of God, which we call today God's mercy. He never excluded anyone from the love of a father. The 'four loves' of Don Bosco: The Holy Eucharist, the Madonna, the young and the Pope remained always the center of his life in the midst of people. He committed his entire life for the mission to which God called him and leaves for all of us a powerful testimony of a holy and virtuous life.[27]

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[26] Cf. P. Cameroni, *Come stelle nel cielo: Figure di santità in compagnia di Don Bosco* (Torino: Editrice Velar, 2015), p. 5.

[27] Cf. Homily of the Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Cesare Nosiglia,16.4.2016.

The Gift of Discernment: An Indispensable Spiritual Attitude for Missionaries Today

Sr. Theresi Zoremsangi MSMHC

Introduction

Today, the world witness dramatic changes in the progress of civilization. The fast-paced technological development of modern times, communication revolution, and globalization produced a new style of living moulding the cultural pattern. These pulls and pressures are supplemented with enticing invitations of all sorts of immense possibilities that are in fact peripheral and fraud in reality. The world through its deceptive medium, technique, and mechanism presents all of them as valid and good. This has various ill-effects in the life of human beings; one such destructive upshot is the deception of the senses. The information technology has obscured our vision, impaired our hearing, and have manipulated our mind-set and judgement. The information circulated most often is designed to make us think in a certain way, which means that they are most often devious and void of truth! And so are deceptive. This has rightly been articulated by Pope Francis on World Communication Day in 2014 as thus:

The speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgement, and this does not make for more balanced and proper forms of self-expression. The variety of opinions being aired can be seen as helpful, but it enables people to barricade themselves behind all sources of information which only confirm their own wishes or ideas, or political and economic

interests. The world of communications can help us either to expand our knowledge or lose our bearings.[1]

The Old Testament warned us about the information revolution and the current malady of our world in the prophecy of Daniel 12:4: "*But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth (heavy travel), and evil shall increase (an increase of knowledge through social media)*." We now live in a time where this is literally coming true before our eyes – and ears! The internet, wireless communication, facebook, twitter, and so on and so forth, 24-hour cable news, explosion of the printed word, explosion of cults and false religions, etc. These are being pushed upon all of us and the increasing amount of available information along with the rapidity of the pace with which this information is circulated through social media is not only extraneous but also detrimental.

The counter result of this scenario produced by the marketplace and the information revolution is unrestrained consumerism and extreme individualism. This has greatly weakened the bond and unity of families, communities, churches, associations, and even the State on individual citizens. Individuals today have become more and more self-determining and autonomous. But then, what they have achieved in independence "they have lost in terms of principles, values, and vital reference points for human coexistence. Independence brings along a conviction that everything is permitted and everything is possible. The freedom of the marketplace is taken to its final consequences, which are turning out to be fatal."[2] This state of affairs brings in horrendous consequences. One outcome is a deep sense of loneliness and emptiness."The great danger in

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1 Message of Pope Francis for the 48th Word Communications Day, 2014.

2 Paul Achandy, "Consecrated Life in a Globlized Era,"*Consecrated Life for a Transformed World*, ed.,SajuChackalakal, (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016), 36.

today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience."[3]

The present reality is mirrored in what we see in 2 Tim 3:1-5 which says:

You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. [2] For people will be lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, [4]treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,[5] holding to the outward form of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid them!

1. A Call for Discernment

In the said context of the world today, it is disheartening to observe that, consecrated life which has ever remained counter-cultural to the existing culture of consumerism, affluence, and pomposity is, to some extent, adversely influenced by the fraudulence of the contemporary world. These external forces have anundesirable impact on the interior life of consecrated persons leading to materialism, individualism, complacency, spiritual sloth, etc. "Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend."[4] We live in this world and we are bound to be influenced by it both externally and internally. And so we need to be cautious and alert lest we are deceived by what is around us.When our interior life is caught up in its own interests, concerns, obsessions, and deceptions, God's voice is no longer heard.[5] If consecrated persons themselves who are called to be 'the moral conscience of

[3] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel (24 November 2013), 2.

[4] Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today's World (19 March 2018), 167.

[5] Francis, Evangelii*Gaudium*, 2.

the world' lack discernment and wisdom and engage themselves in the prevailing corruption, we undoubtedly would witness its ruin, which is already taking place. Unfortunately, the Church and the consecrated persons have become boundlessly permissive. Nowadays anything and everything is accepted. Worldly thinking pollutes the minds of consecrated persons. Ambiguity in perception and understanding is the consequence. It is depressing because today nothing is really black and white, nothing is really right and wrong. Lack of discernment, lack of spiritual discrimination is the problem that outstrips all other problems in the Church as well as in the world. Today Christianity itself is fighting for its very life. And our time cries out for people with discernment.

Hence, the right questions that we must ask are: "What should be the role and priorities of consecrated persons in this new culture? How should consecrated persons confront the deceptive operation of the world around us? What kind of prophetic counter-culture could be created by consecrated persons to be a challenge to the superficiality, worldliness, and deception that blurred the vision from seeing the real?

2. What is Discernment?

To be persons of discernment, first of all, we need to have a clear understanding of this concept. So what is discernment? Discernment is something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift, a spiritual endowment which we must implore.[6] The spiritual gift of discernment is also known as the gift of "discernment of spirits" or "distinguishing between spirits." The Greek word for the gift of discernment is *Diakrisis*. The word describes being able to distinguish, discern, judge or appraise a person, statement, situation, or environment. In the New Testament, it describes the ability to distinguish between spirits as

[6] Francis, *Gaudete etExsultate*, 166.

in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and to discern good and evil as in Hebrews 5:14.

InstrumentumLaboris, speaks of discernment as attunement to the action of the Spirit in true obedience and as a truly spiritual attitude which consists in listening:

> Discernment leads us to recognize - and become attuned with - the action of the Spirit, in true spiritual obedience. In this way, it becomes openness to new things, courage to move outwards and resistance to the temptation of reducing what is new to what we already know. Discernment is a truly spiritual attitude. Since it is obedience to the Spirit, discernment is listening, first and foremost, that can also become a driver for our actions, the ability to be creatively faithful to the one single mission the Church has always been entrusted with.[7]

In its simplest definition, discernment is the ability to judge things wisely in the right way. It is the ability to decide between truth and error, right and wrong. It is the process of making careful distinctions in our thinking. In order to judge things wisely, we need to have wisdom. We need discernment here because there are two kinds of wisdom: wisdom that comes from below and wisdom that comes from above.

The wisdom that comes from below is clearly expressed in James 3:13-18:

> [13]Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. [14]But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. [15]Such wisdom does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. [16]For where there are envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every

[7] Synod of Bishops: XV Ordinary General Assembly, *Instrumentum Laboris*, *(*Vatican: 2018), 2.

> kind. [17]But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. [18]And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

And so, the unbeliever or someone not born of the Spirit will not be able to discern or judge in a wise way or tell the difference between the two pearls of wisdom. Let's see what Scripture says about this in 1 Corinthians 2: 1-16:

> When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. [2]For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. [3]And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. [4]My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5]so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. [6]Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. [7]But we speak of God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. [8]None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. [9]But as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" –[10]these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. [11]For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. [12]Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, *so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God*. [13]And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. [14] *Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*[15]*Those who are*

> *spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.* [16]For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?" but we have the mind of Christ.

The wisdom from below can be very tricky and deceiving, just like the evil one, and this is what he wants. We can be misled into thinking that we are judging in the right way when in fact we are not. Proverbs 16:25 says: "*There is a way that seems to be right, but in the end, it is the way to death*."

The wisdom from above is excellent because it is perfect and from God our loving Father. Proverbs 16:21-24 shows us the difference between the two pearls of wisdom.

> [21]The wise of heart is called perceptive, and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness. [22]Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it, but folly is the punishment of fools. [23]The minds of the wise make their speech judicious and add persuasiveness to their lips. [24]Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

3. The Importance and Necessity of Discernment

We have witnessed and are witnessing constantly the malady that our world is going through. One who is attuned to the Spirit perceives an invisible conflict between the forces of light and darkness in this disorder and chaos. The tension between these two forces results in chaos. We are at war against the invisible forces of darkness. This is the reason why we should be concerned about wisdom, the need to discern. We are in the middle of a war zone. If we do not know how to differentiate a friend or the good from the foe or the bad we are going to be affected badly. The enemy definitely does not fight fair. In fact, they disguise themselves to look pleasing and attractive. Satan's game is deception. It has been his game from the very beginning. The secret weapon of the evil one are counterfeits and the best

counterfeit is one which is as close to the real thing as possible. This makes it hard to ascertain. Therefore, since we are each day wrestling with superior forces of evil and deception that are everywhere, we need a spiritual power in the form of wisdom and discernment to make our way through. Our choices either get us further in God's plan or move us away from His will. Discernment is the area where most of us stumble.

We ask ourselves: Are we compromising our faith and principles? The key to living a life void of compromise, the one marked by genuineness lies in one's ability to exercise discernment in every area of our life. The failure to distinguish between truth and error leads to unfruitful living, characterised by compromise leading to inauthenticity, having only "outward appearance of religion" (2 Tim 3:5).It leads one to the most dangerous spiritual state of being "whitewashed sepulchre" (Mathew 23: 27-28). And so, in order that we, consecrated persons, become pointers to the right path, we need the gift of discernment, the ability to think biblically about all areas of life. This weapon is provided in God's precious Truth! Without it, we are at the risk of being "tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

The book of Joel 2:28 says: *I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.* In this passage, we see the gift to which God is inviting us: the gift of wisdom and discernment. This can be realized through the art of listening. The one thing required to prepare ourselves for discernment is 'listening' to God speaking to us in the various events, persons and things of our life; to say like Samuel, "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening*" (1 Samuel 3:10).

4. Requirements for the Gift of Discernment

The Book of Daniel is one of the most important prophetic books and is incredibly insightful. A reflective reading of this book helps us to unearth inspiring lessons and enduring truths. We can dig out wonderful pieces of wisdom from it. One is amazed to see how prophecies from the sixth century BC are unfolding even today. Daniel the protagonist of this book is a distinguished personality, acclaimed for his wisdom and righteousness. In the light of what we discover from the personality of Daniel we gather four requirements one needs to possess in order to acquire the gift of discernment and wisdom. These are the qualities most essential in the missionaries of our times as credibility is what the world looks for in persons of God today.

4.1. Life of Purity

"But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself" (Daniel 1:8).The context of Daniel's decision was the Levitical Law concerning eating of unclean meat:

> For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves in the earth. For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy (Leviticus 11: 44-45).

Daniel 1:8 paints a picture of a deliberate decision.Daniel was seriously committed to maintaining himself pure even as he lived at the heart of a godless culture. He was determined to stick to his choice. His purity was beyond accusations. When the presidents and satraps tried to find grounds for complaints against him out of jealousy they could find none because he was faithful and no negligence or corruption could be found in him (Daniel 6:4). When

asked how he was delivered from the lions, Daniel said that the lions would not hurt him because he was found "blameless" before God and also before the king (Daniel 6:22). It is to souls who keep their hands pure, such as Daniel that the Lord would give rare gifts:

* "In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom" (Daniel 1:20).
* "Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him" (Daniel 6:3).
* "You are endowed with a spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery is too difficult for you" (Daniel 4:9).

Purity is an essential requirement, a prerequisite to acquiring wisdom. Only the pure, the genuine and those who keep their tongue from slander (Wisdom 1:11) can have wisdom that comes from above. "Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul or dwell in a body enslaved to sin. For the holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit" (Wisdom 1:4-5). Wisdom is the pure breath of the Spirit of God. It is living a life of values and principles with no compromise. The uncompromised faith-filled life of the three young men was indeed astounding even in the face of death. When they were asked to worship the golden statue they said: "We will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up" (Daniel 3:18). It was for this reason that they were thrown into the burning furnace. But God protected them and they remained unscathed. This amazed King Nebuchadnezzar and he even showered favours upon them. "When the ways of the people please the Lord, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them" (Proverbs 16:7).

> King Solomon's greatest strength was his unsurpassed wisdom, granted to him by God. Despite his great wisdom and the outpouring of blessings from the Lord, we see Solomon's downfall begin when he let lust rule his heart. He sealed many foreign agreements by marrying pagan women:

King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharoah: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, [2]fromthe nations concerning which the Lord had said to the Israelites, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods"; Solomon clung to these in love. [3]Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; his wives turned away his heart. [4]For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. [5]For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. [6]So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not completely follow the Lord, as his father David had done (1 Kings 11:1-6).

He gave in to detestable practices. He was lost in his own desires. How can this happen to such a wise man? The fall is obvious when one gives in to lust, possessions, and fame over God. Purity is a gem to be treasured and preserved if one wants to possess wisdom. Do we want that kind of supernatural favour that Daniel received? Many people want to have this favour but fail to have the purity that Daniel had.

4.2. Prudence

"*Then Daniel responded with prudence and discretion…*" (Daniel 2:14).

Prudence is learning the right judgement. It is doing the right thing in the right way. It is showing care and good sense when making a decision. It is shrewdness or sagacity in the management of

affairs."*The wisdom of the prudent is to thoughtfully consider his way, but the folly of fools misleads"* (Proverbs 14:8*)*. What makes a prudent man wise is the fact that he "thoughtfully considers his way." He seeks to understand who he is, where he is going, what he is doing. He has a moral standard and compass. He has moral and spiritual direction and discernment. This is in contrast to the fool who practices "folly" without comprehending how destructive it is and is self-deceived. "*The prudent do all things intelligently, but the fool displays folly*" (Proverbs 13:16). A prudent man "works with knowledge" as opposed to working against knowledge or without knowledge. He ascertains the facts, then he proceeds, and as he proceeds he is always ready and alert to absorb more knowledge and a greater depth of knowledge. This is in contrast to a fool who displays his folly. He unwittingly puts his foolishness on public display by the way he acts: he operates without the knowledge or in defiance of the truth, and the ridiculous consequence identifies him as a fool.[8] Likewise, Daniel was prudent and cautious which is evident in various instances. One such was when he asked the overseer to observe their appearance and the appearance of those youth who are having the king's choice food and to deal with them accordingly (Daniel 1:8-14). Daniel did not try to suit himself with the trend of society when it comes to the practice of his faith. He is a consistent servant of God. This consistency in his conduct gives him credibility. This brings glory and honour to his God and religion. The double-minded is unstable in all his ways. Daniel adopted the most prudent measures to accomplish the object he had in view. Though just a youth, he had already learned to be sober-minded, to act with humility, caution, and prudence.

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[8] Rev. Donald F. Ritsman, https://biblestudycourses.org/proverbs-bible-study-courses-section-3/prudence-a-valuable-attribute-exploring-the-passages/, 2019, accessed on 29/08/2019.

It is always in our best interest to maintain prudence just as Daniel did. In order to prepare for this gift, we need to have skill and learning. One of the best ways to attain skill and learning in this regard is reading the Word of God, particularly, Wisdom literature which consists of the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom, Sirach, and Psalms and the four Gospels where we have wisdom incarnate in the person of Jesus. God instructs us in precision with wisdom and knowledge in these books.

> The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: [2] For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, [3]for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity; [4]to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young –[5]Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill, [6]to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles (Proverbs 1:1-6).

4.3. Prayer and Praise

[17]*"Then Daniel went to his home and informed his companions, Hananiah, Mishael,* [18] *and Azariah, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning his mystery…*[19] *Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night, and Daniel blessed the God of heaven"* (Daniel 2:17-19). As they prayed for mercy revelation takes place. "*But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days*" (Daniel 2:28). And so, Daniel and his companions with the rest of the wise men of Babylon were saved from death. It was prayer, praise, and plea for mercy that worked wonders.

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[9] https://lifehopeandtruth.com/learning-center/youth-development/people-of-the-bible/daniel-man-of-prayer/, accessed on 29/08/2019

Daniel was a man of prayer. It was the habit of Daniel to pray three times a day, kneeling by a window in the privacy of his room (Daniel 6:10). While he is very diligent in performing his task as a loyal servant of the King, he always put God first and did not violate any of God's laws. He had official duties as a governor and a manager of the men who worked for him. This was particularly challenging because the King and his officials did not worship God or live by His laws.[9] Various revelations with regard to the issues concerning the kingdom were disclosed to him by God when he prayed. God loved Daniel and called him "greatly beloved" because he prayed regularly to Him (Daniel 10:11). God hears the prayer of this righteous man who sets his mind to gain understanding and is humble to plead for mercy (Daniel 10:12).

God speaks to us in a variety of ways, through persons, events, and things around us. However, long hours of silent prayer is recommended in order to hear him speaking to us. Prolonged prayer is a must as this will "enable us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light. In this way, we allow the birth of a new synthesis that springs from a life inspired by the Spirit."[10] Listening as we have mentioned in the introduction is very essential to discern God's will in our life. An atmosphere of silent prayer is conducive for listening. "Prayerful discernment has to be born of openness to listening – to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which always challenges us in new ways. Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas… In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but leads us to a better life."[11]

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10 Francis, *Gaudete etExsultate*, 171.

11 Francis, *Gaudete etExsultate*, 172.

Visiting the Blessed Sacrament, praying the *Angelus* three times a day, the Way of the Cross, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, daily examination of conscience, etc. are some of the means of spending time with God and remaining in his presence.

4.4. Practising the Art of Consulting God

"*Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God...*" (Daniel 9:3-4).

Daniel was certainly a man who depended on God, who consulted God for discernment particularly in the significant events of his life and in the life of the people. One is reminded of how David consulted God with regard to the Philistines in 2 Samuel 5:19: "David inquired the Lord, 'Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hands?' The Lord said to David, 'Go up; for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hands'." God is eager to speak to us. He himself will teach us what to do, how to act, how to conduct ourselves. A gift that God is pouring out to the Church is in abundance. When Paul asked the Lord what he would want him to do, he taught him what he should do in Acts 22:8-10: "Who are you, Lord? Then he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' …I asked, "what am I to do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.'" He teaches us in the silence of our hearts. We will hear Him only if we listen to him in silence. David learned the art of listening; likewise Daniel and St. Paul too. They were saints with contemplative hearts who listened to the Spirit.

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[12] Todd Alexander, http://www.heraldmag.org/2009/09ja_10.htm, accessed on 29/08/2019.

If Paul were not to pay heed to the 'Macedonian call' (Acts 16:6-10), we would not have Christianity in Europe today, which had been the centre of Christianity for seventeen centuries from the end of the New Testament till the rise of America. This was Paul's first European Church. In this 'Macedonian call,' we see God's way of bringing the gospel across the sea from Asia to Europe. It was God's way of opening a new chapter to expand the ministry. The gospel needed a culture that had prepared the people with the necessary reasoning faculties to receive it. The Greco-Roman rule of government, which provided the building blocks of democracy and the resulting intellectual culture, was the preferred environment for preaching the gospel. The fledgeling Church spread far and wide by the working of the Holy Spirit.[12]

We, Consecrated persons are called to consult God in every matter, even in matters which we thought to be insignificant because very often God speaks to us through simple things of life. The one thing required here is listening. We are called to listen to the promptings of the Spirit and set out of our comfort zone to spread the gospel. Like Paul we must be willing instruments of God who hear the 'Macedonian call' in our contemporary setting to heal the sick, to tend the dying, to serve in every possible way, meeting every sort of human need. We are called to meet the very deepest need of human beings: the need to be delivered from sin, to know the truth of Jesus Christ, and to find peace with God. Opportunities are open before us to spread the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth and to let it shine in dark places. We will be successful in this ministry if we cleanse ourselves from all defilements and impurities and follow the principles of righteousness. Then, with authenticity, we follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit. Like Paul, we are only earthen vesselsin the hands of God; we do all that we can in order to listen to the promptings of the Spirit and work earnestly to make His name known.

Conclusion

Discernment, the ability to distinguish between what is good and evilis one of the components of spiritual living, and most essential in our ministry in the context of our world today. Discernment intersects the Christian life at every point. And the Word of God provides us with the needed discernment about every issue of life. According to Peter, God "has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). It is through the true knowledge of Him that we have been given everything we need to live a Christian life in this fallen world. And how else do we have true knowledge of God but through the pages of His Word, the Bible? In fact, Peter goes on to say that such knowledge comes through God's granting to us "his precious and very great promises" (2 Peter 1:4) which is attainable when one obtains purity, prudence, the spirit of prayer and in the seeking of God's will.

Once we have learned the art of listening and have attained the gift of discernment and wisdom, we shall no more judge by what we see or decide by what we hear, but with righteousness as Isaiah says: *"He shall no more judge by what his eye sees, or decide by what his ear hear; but with righteousness"* (Isaiah11:3-4). Our senses sometimes deceive us. But once we are filled with wisdom we will gradually learn to take the secret path to truth and slowly begin to judge by wisdom, the gift of discernment. We need to ask the Lord to lead us to the mysteries of interior light. It is with the mystical touch of the divine that we become authentic and wise instruments of God which the world needs today.

Psycho-Spiritual Maturity for Pastoral Ministry

Sr. Jancy Joseph MSMHC

Introduction

We are living in an epoch marked by ever increasing possibilities of growth and advancement coupled with mounting challenges and crisis of all sorts. The advancement of science and technology and the subsequent communication system has made the world a global village. The reality of change has taken an accelerated speed that everything seems to be in a constant flux. This change brings about enormous challenges in every sphere of life.Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* enumerates some of the challenges of todays' world: a wide spread economy of exclusion and inequality that tends to promote the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest; a growing idolatry of money as a disguised form of 'worship of the golden calf', thus reducing human person to his need for consumption; a financial system that tends to 'rule rather than serve'; a culture of inequality that spawns violence. Besides the above challenges the Holy Father deals with numerous cultural challenges to pastoral ministry such as 'attacks on religious freedom, the prioritization of the outwardly, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional to the detriment of the internal, the permanent, the gradual and the real. The catholic faith is being challenged by the propagation of new religious movements some of which tends to fundamentalism while others propose a spirituality without God. Holy Father sees such trends as human reactions to

a materialistic and individualistic society and a means of exploiting the weakness of people living in poverty and on the fringes of the society who struggle to meet their basic needs. The evil effects of secularism which reduces faith and the church to the sphere of private and the personal, completely rejecting the transcendent, thus contributing greatly to a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin and a steady increase in relativism leading the young to a general sense of disorientation.[1]

Apart from the above mentioned global challenges, there are several pastoral challenges of the families which deserves a mention in this paper as we cater to families in our pastoral ministry as missionaries. The *Instrumentum Laboris* on the pastoral challenges of families in the context of evangelization presents the following actual challenges which are both challenges within the families and challenges that comes from external factors. Challenges within the families include: crisis of faith, difficulty in relationships and communication, the break-up and breakdown of families, violence and abuse, dependence on media and the social network. The external pressures of challenges include: the impact of work on the family, migration, poverty and the struggle for subsistence, consumerism and individualism, counter-witness in the church. Apart from the internal and external challenges, the document also points out challenges due to special situations such as the weight of societal expectations on the individual, the impact of wars, disparity of cult, and other various difficult situations which pauses new challenges that calls for new responses.[2]

To respond adequately to the present day pastoral challenges, those involved in pastoral ministry ought to attain certain psycho-

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1 Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nos. 53-64.

2 Synod of Bishops, III extraordinary assembly, *Pastoral challenges of family in the context of evangelization*, *Instrumentum Labories*, Nos. 61-79.

spiritual maturity. This presentation is a small effort to understand the concept of psych-spiritual maturity for pastoral ministry.

1. Maturity in General

According to Oxford advanced learner's dictionary 'maturity' is the quality of thinking and behaving in a sensible adult manner. Maturity of a person is also considered as the state of being fully grown.[3] Although the term human maturity is commonly used in biological, sociological, psychological and spiritual contexts, there does not exist a widely accepted set of criteria for determining its presence. In psychological literature the concept of "development" and "maturity" are closely related. Generally, maturity is regarded as an outcome of development, and development refers to the intrapsychic processes which bring about maturity. Because human development is an ongoing, dynamic process, it is more useful to think of maturity as a tendency, or general orientation, than a fixed point of measurement.[4] In psychology, maturity is the ability to respond to the environment in an appropriate manner. Maturity also encompasses being aware of the correct time and location to behave, and knowing when to act, according to the circumstances and the culture of the society one lives in. Adult development and maturity theories include the purpose in life concept, in which maturity emphasizes a clear comprehension of life's purpose, directedness, and intentionality, which contributes to the feeling that life is meaningful.[5]

The concept of maturity is also often compared to the ripeness of a fruit. A mature fruit is ready to be eaten or enjoyed by others. Similarly, a mature person is ready to offer oneself for the sake of others. Maturity therefore is related to one's ability for self-gift or

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3 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

4 Timothy Castello, *Forming Priestly identity*, (Editrice Pontificia Università Gergoriana, Roma, 2002) 30.

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maturity_(psychological), assessed on 7.4.19.

self-donation for the benefit of others. As an immature fruit is not enjoyable, so also the company of an immature person may have negative impact on others as his/her capacity for and quality of self-donation can be poor and limited. A similar the idea of maturity can be traced also in the tribal concept of human maturity. The popular saying among the tribal communities "a married man is a mature man" seems to underline the ability of an adult to offer oneself in self-donation, taking upon one's own shoulder the responsibility of tending the family not for a day or two but for a life time as a commitment.[6]

1. 1 Maturity as a Developmental Function

To understand the concept of maturity as a function of development we may look at it from the biological and sociological meaning. Maturity as an object of biology is to explain the process by which the growing organism develops structures and functions of increasing complexity. The end point of this biological growth is physical maturity which is marked by the capacity to adapt and reproduce both of which have implications for the survival of the individual and the species. Sociological theoriesof development and maturation situates the person especially in relation to society and culture. Considered within the framework of society and culture, maturity is seen as the outcome of a process of socialization aimed at creating individuals capable of making society function smoothly and effectively. Socialization includes all those processes by which the individual born with behaviour potentialities of a very wide range, is led to confine or adapt to the ways of a given society or subgroup. The relevance of these approaches can be summarized in three observations. First, the frame work of

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[6] Cf. Kuriakose Poovanthumkudy, "Human and Psycho-sexual aspects of formation" in *Transformative Pastoral Leadership*, eds., Kuriakose Poovathumkudy et. al., (Oriens Publication, Oriens Theological College, Shillong, 2012) 115.

biological growth is evidently too restricted in scope for explaining the complex and multi-faceted maturity required for personal priestly or religious identity. Second the socialization framework draws attention to the significance on what value basis adaptability should be determined. Also the sociological notion of maturity has no interest in the structures and process internal to the person which brings about the capacity for social adjustment. Third, both the biological and sociological approaches are limited by their exclusive focus on natural values and fail to take into account orientations which transcend the demands of history and cultures.[7] Besides these notion of maturity does not seem to consider that which goes beyond the empirical, the innate mystery hidden in the concept of maturity.

1.1.1 Three Parameters of Maturity

The concept of human maturity is rather complex and mysterious. Therefore, it is essential that we try to understand it using more familiar concepts. Therefore, we shall look at it through the three parameters of alterity, temporality and the reality of stages.

1.1.2 Maturity and Otherness

We cannot truly think of maturity without a reference to "otherness' because as social beings we are bound to interact with the other in varied forms. The question of maturity and otherness/ alterity presumes the formation of those basic psychic structures that enables the clear differentiation of boundaries between self and object, together with the psychic operations that result from this initial individuation. The absence of these basic structures in the self may indicate the presence of varying degrees of psychopathology.[8] The distinctive criteria for evaluating maturity in relation to 'otherness' is a respect for self and other.A mature

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7 Timothy Castello, *Forming Priestly identity*, 158-159.

8 Franco Imoda, *Human Development Psychology and Mystery*, 111-113.

person is capable of respecting self and the other. Here we need to bear in mind that 'the other' can take many forms: another person, the external environment, family, church or ultimate other who is God. The inability to cope with the tension of otherness tends to produce distortions that will be focussed around one pole or the other and are expressed as immature attitudes and behaviours.[9]

One distortion emphasizes the self at the expense of the other. This can range from mild form of selfishness to an aggravated form of subjectivism characterised by hostile attitude towards external reality and its demands. These forms of immaturity can be seen for example in the adolescent who tolerates no limitations on his personal freedom; in the exhibitionist whose actions are motivated by constant self-reference; and in the declared narcissist who sees interpersonal relationships only in terms of their utilitarian value.

Another distortion emphasises the other at the expense of the self. This is a tendency to devalue subjectivity with a corresponding exaltation of objectivity. It can operate at a personal level especially through unconscious needs such as abasement, avoidance and succorance all of which systematically undermine the integrity of the person as a subject. Other expressions of this immaturity are seen in a passive conformity to external demands; a heavy-handed authoritarianism and the exaggerated pursuit of rational objectivity.[10]

1.1.3 Maturity and Temporality

The criteria of maturity related to temporality is the capacity to establish a harmonious balance between demands arising from

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9 Cf. Franco Imoda, *Human Development Psychology and Mystery*, 111-113.

10 C.S Hall – G. Lindzey, *Theories of personality*, 218-219.

past, present and future. The temptation to reduce temporality to any one of its dimensions poses a constant threat to authentic development. The domination of one dimension over the others gives rise to different forms of immaturity.

A first form of immaturity is a fixation on the present moment. The person locked into immediacy easily loses a sense of perspective since the parameters of past and future are effectively disconnected. There is an immaturity seen for example in an impulsivity which may be tolerated in infants but which indicates infantile behaviour in adults. The over pampered childhood traces the long term developmental effects of over gratification on later adult's behaviour.[11] A second form of immaturity comes from being trapped in a past that represents security, familiarity, routine and that extraordinary conservatism which in order to maintain a conquest will close itself to the possibility of new horizons. It is manifested in nostalgia, rigid conservatism, the romanticization of past glories, and fear of the future. A third form of reality factors rooted in past experiences and present circumstances, risks becoming a world of fantasy, escapism and unrealistic dreams.[12]

There could be three basic attitudes, which correspond with a mature response to the mystery of temporality. The first is an attitude of **acceptance of the past**. This may seem to be an obvious response when confronted with the inevitability of past events and conditionings, yet it seems that the ability to embrace fully that which is "given" comes neither easily nor automatically.

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11 Some of the consequences of childhood over gratification in the adults include low frustration tolerance, difficulties in managing ambiguous situations, the harbouring of massive reservoirs of unchecked rage, especially in the face of possible limits being set on behaviours in sustaining intimate relationships, problems in expressing feelings for others, inability to maintain consistent employment, problems with authority figures who may restrict free acting out behaviour.

12 Timothy Castello, *Forming Priestly identity*, 162-163.

The second is an **attitude of responsibility for the future**. A sense of authentic subjectivity will lead a person to take charge of his life by personal initiative, confronting reality, and making realistic plans for the future. The third attitude is an awareness of call which involves a **synthesis of acceptance and responsibility**. This attitude has a personal religious dimension since it is a call not only to transcend past conditionings but the call that comes from another, God, to enter into a dialogue of partnership in faith.[13]

1.1.4 Maturity and Developmental Stages

The third parameter of 'stages' synthesizes the previous parameters of alterity and temporality, by rendering them more concrete and specific, relating each to the process of maturation. The third parameter resists the tendency to define maturity and identity in terms of any one dimension at the expense of the whole person. In virtue of the first parameter, maturity means resisting the temptation to make an absolute either of subject or object. In virtue of the second parameter maturity means denying any one temporal dimension domination over the others. In virtue of the third parameter, maturity means respecting a multiplicity of concrete mediations since human beings are complex phenomena and can be understood adequately only if a variety of metaphors are used.[14] Keeping in mind these general assumption on the concept of maturity we now take a quick look at psychological maturity.

2. Maturity and Three Dimensions

To understand the concept of three dimensions one needs to be reminded of the basic dialectic existing between the actual self and ideal self of a person (Cf. Rom 7: 15-20). This dialectic between the ideal and actual self finds expression in the three

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13 Franco Imoda, *Human Development Psychology and Mystery*, 83-84.

14 Cf.Timothy Castello, *Forming Priestly identity*, 164.

dispositions called the three dimensions.The dimensions are formed as the developing child encounters three kinds of values through his/her interaction with the environment: Self-transcendent values, Natural values, and both kinds of values in combination. The three dimensions can be explained as three ways of understanding a person's struggle to live with the tension inherent in self-transcendence, our ability to go beyond ourselves. It is also essential to understand that the three dimensions are characterized by a series of polar tensions where each dimension is created from the attraction exerted by opposing poles.

The first dimension: In the first dimension there is the positive pole of ***Virtue*** and negative pole of ***Sin***. The dynamic is characterized by a prevailing harmony between ideal self and that is part of the actual self which is prevalently conscious. Since in the first dimension the dialectic is largely conscious, the person has the capacity to make free and responsible choices in response to divine grace.

The second dimension: The second dimension consists of the positive pole of ***Real Good*** and negative pole of ***Apparent Good***. It is marked by the concomitant action of conscious and unconscious structures. Since the dialectic is partly conscious there is limited freedom and responsibility. One can also notice active presence of non-pathological unconscious forces in the second dimension.

The cause of dialectics in the second dimension is the presence of the moral-religious values which favour theocentric self-transcendence on the one hand, and the natural values which favour both egocentric and psychosocial transcendence on the other hand. Therefore, here the person is pulled in different directions. Besides,the unconscious innate needs which may be in conflict with consciously held values leaves the person psycho-dynamically divided. We can think of the many fragmentations we experience within ourselves in living our commitment to on the daily basis.

The third dimension: The third dimensionis made of the positive pole of ***Normality*** and negative pole of ***Pathology***. On the positive side one has the capacity to make free and responsible decisions concerning the directions of life. In the negative side, these capacities are found lacking in the person due to the presence of disorganization and psychopathology. The natural values are the motivating force in the third dimension. When we speak of dialectic in the third dimension we need to understand that here the person has difficulties in forming an ideal self which is both stable and non-contradictory. The dialectic arises due to the interaction between objective natural values and the basic dialectic in the self, which is more primitive and infantile.

2.1 Maturity in the Three Dimensions[15]

A quick look at the concept of maturity in the three dimensions can shed some light upon our general understanding of the psycho-spiritual maturity for pastoral ministry.

2.1.1 Maturity in the dimension: Structurally the first dimension is characterised by the prevalently conscious tension between the ideal self and manifest actual self, and has been aptly described as "the dimension of well-rooted ideals and effective freedom." The degree of maturity can be assessed in terms of the *strength and objectivity of moral-religious values*, and *number of non-defensive consistencies* in the motivational system. The stronger and more objective the values and more numerous the non-defensive consistencies, the greater the persons' first dimension maturity, and the weaker and less objective the values, and the more numerous the conscious inconsistencies, the greater the immaturity in the first dimension.

Existentially, maturity in the first dimension is a disposition to virtue where one has the effective freedom to centre his/her life around

[15] Cf. Timothy Castello, *Forming Priestly identity*, 224-226.

one's vocational values, that is to act in harmony with his/her vocational ideals. Immaturity in the first dimension means choosing to act against these same ideals knowingly and deliberately which at least in some instance may be sinful.

2.1.2 Maturity in the second Dimension: Structurally, the second dimension is characterised by the tension between the person's ideal self and actual self particularly as one encounters situations where natural and spiritual values are combined. Maturity on this dimension is measured in terms of strength of person's attitudes in respect to values, and the ratio of non-defensive consistencies over inconsistencies and defensive consistencies. The higher the ratio the greater the maturity and lower the ratio the greater the immaturity.

Maturity in the second dimension disposes the person to distinguish between **'the real good** from the **apparent good'** together with the interior freedom consistently to choose the real Good. Immaturity in this dimension will be manifested as an inability to recognize the nature of the choice or its implications, which increases the probability of choosing the lesser rather than the greater good.

2.1.4 Maturity in the third dimension: It is created by the tension experienced within the psyche as the person enters the world of natural values. Here maturity is related to the formation of basic structures of personality leading to normal and healthy human existence. The absence of maturity is described in terms of developmental fixations, regression, personality deficits, pathological symptomatology.

Existentially, third dimension maturity can be recognised in an integrated personality that demonstrates ego-qualities appropriate to the person's developmental stage which includes the capacity for basic trust, to undertake productive work, to

sustain stable interpersonal relationships, to assume responsibility for one's actions, to persevere in difficulties and the ability to live in reasonable degree of peace with oneself, one's companions, and one's work. Immaturity in the third dimension means that the person is oriented prevalently to unrealistic and self-defeating patterns of behaviour which when sufficiently marked, would be quickly recognised by most people as pathological.

3. Psychological Maturity

Psychological maturity could be considered as something deeply grounded in one's capacity for autonomy and decision-making ability. These abilities are deeply embedded not only in one's cognition, but also in lifelong processes of emotional, social and moral development. Psychological maturity could also be considered as one's ability to move out of the insecurity of one's childhood and adolescent age to attain the inner security of a mature adulthood which enables him or her to move beyond oneself to others; beyond one's egoistic attitude to genuine altruism. We call a person psychologically mature after he/she has reached a certain level of intelligence and emotional outlook. If the development of a person is undisturbed, biological and psychological maturation progress more or less parallel with each other. However, biological maturation proceeds ahead of emotional or psychological maturation. Therefore, at times we see that certain person's chronological age and psychological age does not correspond with each other.

3.1 General Indications of Maturity

No matter how one may define the concept of psychological maturity, or maturity in general there are few signs of maturity which seem to be universally accepted. Mention could be made of some of such indicators of maturity.

3.1.1 Ability to Take up Long-Term Commitments

One of the key signals of maturity is the ability to delay gratifications and peruse long term commitment. In other words, mature persons do not give up their commitment to a value for the sake of an immediate gratification their needs. Mature personsare able to stick to a commitment even when it fails to offer them immediate gratifications.

3.1.2 Ability to Remain Composed in the Face of Praise or Criticism

As persons mature, they begin to understand that nothing is as good as it seems and nothing is as bad as it seems. Thus mature persons can receive compliments or criticism without letting it ruin them or sway them into a distorted view of themselves. They are secure in their identity and do not allow themselves to be excessively affected by praise or criticism. They receive both with serenity and composure. Mature persons have neither a craving for praise nor a dread of criticism.

3.1.3 Ability to be Truly Humble

Mature persons manifest great humility because humility and maturity travel on parallel grounds. Here humility is not self-pity or demeaning oneself as good for nothing. It not about having a victim attitude but it is all about being able to accept oneself as one is. Truly humble personsare not consumed by the need to draw attention to themselves. They see how others have contributed to their success and can even sincerely give honour to the Creator who blessed them with numerous gifts and talents. True humility is opposed to pride and arrogance.

3.1.4 Ability to Make Decisions on the Basis of Values

Mature persons live by solid and lasting values. Their decisions are based on a value judgement or rational appraisal rather than

an emotional appraisal of reality. They are able to progress beyond the natural tendency to react to life situations and choose a proactive mentality.

3.1.5 Ability to be Grateful at all Circumstances

It is observed that the more persons mature, the more grateful they become. Mature personsare able to be grateful for both big and little things alike, never taking anything for granted. It is immaturity to think that one deserves everything and fail to acknowledge the services rendered, gifts received, graces bestowed.

3.1.6 Ability to Place Others before Oneself

It is said that are mature personsare the ones whose agenda revolves around others, rather than themselves. It is the ability to grow beyond the egoistic childish attitude towards an altruistic adult attitude of self-donation.

3.1.7 Ability to Seek Wisdom before Acting

Mature personsare always teachable as they remain open to learning. They do not presume that they all the answers. The wiser they become, the more they realize their need for more wisdom. They are not ashamed of seeking counsel from adults or from other sources. Only the wise seek wisdom.[16]

3.1.8 Ability for delay of gratification and impulse control

Finally, mature personsare capable of delaying the gratification of their needs and be guided by a deeper value orientation. They can control their impulses without giving into unbridled expressions.

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[16] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/artificial-maturity/201211/the-marks-maturity, assessed on 25 /03/2019.

They are capable of living and acting in consistency with their proclaimed values.[17]

4. Spiritual Maturity

What does it mean to be spiritually mature? Some think of spiritual maturity as 'spiritual depth', being persons with inner depth as opposed to superficiality. Richard Foster once said: "The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."[18] People with spiritual vision and depth are sought after as only they can counter act to an ever growing culture of superficiality and shallow witness. One is said to be spiritually mature when one learns to identify oneself with Christ through an ongoing process of *kenosis*, the very process through which Christ accomplished his mission as the saviour and redeemer of the world (Cf. Phi 2:6-11). We are called to put on the attitudes and values of Christ through a lifelong process of Spiritual maturity. St. Paul speaks of the journey of spiritual maturity as an ongoing process that will never end in this life. Therefore, he speaks of the need to forget what lies behind and keep our eyes fixed on the goal to win the prize for which God has called us in Christ Jesus (Cf. Phi 3: 12-14).

One can claim to be walking the path of spiritual maturity only when one consciously and radically tries to reorder one's priorities, changing over from pleasing self to pleasing God and learning to obey God. The key to maturity is consistency, and perseverance

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17 Cf. Gratian Carlo, "Significance of affective maturity in Human formation" in *Dynamics of Human Formation, a cultural perspective*, Kuriakose Poovathumhudy and Thomas Manjaly, (Oriens Publications, Oriens Theological College, Shillong, 2007), 106.

18 Gordon MacDonald, "What does it mean to be spiritually Mature", in *Christina Bible Studies*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/bible-answers/spirituallife/what-does-it-mean-to-be-spiritually-mature.html?start=3 assessed on 17/04/2019.

in doing those things we know will bring us closer to God. It calls for a commitment spiritual formation which includes various daily commitments such as study and reflection of the word of God, personal and community prayer, community life and fellowship among members of the believing community, service to the needy and stewardship. No matter how hard we might work on these things we will not grow in spiritual maturity unless we submit ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit and "walk by the spirit" (Cf. Gal 5:16). Spiritually mature persons will submit themselves to the control and direction of the Holy Spirit and produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives. As a tree is known by its fruits so the spiritually mature people and known by the fruits of the Holy Spirit they produce in their lives (Gal 5:22–23).

4.1 Spiritual formation for Spiritual Maturity

The primary role of the Church is the spiritual formation of its members, to confirm them into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29). Therefore, the primary exclusive goal of the Church should be in helping people grow spiritually mature, become more like Jesus in words, works and attitudes. As Christians and more so as consecrated persons we are given all we need for spiritual maturity. We need to be conscious of what we have been given as St. peter tells us: God's "divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). To this immense gift we have received, a responsibility is also attached, the responsibility to collaborate with it and fructify it in our lives by making a conscious choice to live by the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. It is a call to live a life of virtue, thus putting our faith into concrete actions as St. Peter once again exhorts us: "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with

godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5–8). Being effective and fruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and transforming the knowledge of Christ into a gradual identification with Him is the essence of spiritual maturity. This indeed is the scope of all spiritual formation which is defined as "training of individuals in the knowledge of God and to build his/her interior life, the core of which is the personal experience of Jesus in the individual's life and his/her integration to the Gospel values. It is a call to respond to the offer of intimate friendship with the Lord who continues to whisper to us: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends for all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you" (Jh 15: 15).[19]

The scope of spiritual formation carried out in varied forms is to lead the person to a more profound intimacy with the person of Jesus. Clarifying the scope of spiritual formation, Vatican II, decree on the training of priests states: "the exercises of piety which are recommended by the venerable practice of the Church should be strongly encouraged, but care must be taken that spiritual formation does not consist in these alone, nor develop religious sentiment merely. The students should learn, rather to live according to the standard of the gospel, to be firmly established in faith, hope, and charity so the practice of this virtues may develop in them a spirit of prayer, may strengthen and protect their vocation and invigorate their other virtues, intensifying their zeal for winning all men to Christ."[20] Spiritual formation is aimed at enabling us to live by the

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19 Cf. Jaime Emilio Gonzáles Magaña, "the Challenge in the formation of priesthood" in *Formation and transformation*, Sasi Vincent and Timothy Castello, (Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India, 2010), 90-91.

20 Vatican II, Decree on the training of priests, *Optatam Tutius*, no. 8.

standards of the gospel: the standards of the gospel is the standards of Jesus himself. Understanding and living by the standards of Jesus is the best of witness though which one is able to win others for Christ.

4.2 Spiritual Maturity and Pastoral Commitment

There is a close knit connection between spiritual maturity achieved through spiritual formation and pastoral commitment resultant of a sound pastoral formation. Pope John Paul II emphasizes that pastoral formation and spiritual formation are closely linked to each other. The acts of charity and the zeal for souls are the external signs of one's intimate communion and undivided love for God and identification with the sentiments and mission of Christ the good Shepherd.[21]

4.2.1 Formation for Psycho-Spiritual Maturity

The purpose of formation to priesthood and religious life is to enable a person to be another Christ as it is clearly spelled out in *Vita Consecrata*: "Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father."[22] A holistic approach to formation is essential so as to arrive at this end. A formation that aims at psycho-spiritual maturity for pastoral ministry should always bear in mind the complexity of this demanding task of formation, as its not merely a task of sharing information on the various dimensions of formation, rather it's all about getting involved in an ongoing process of learning, unlearning and relearning; indeed, a lifelong process of integration, internalization and transformation.

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21 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis,* no.57.

22 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 65.

4.2.2 Psycho-Spiritual Maturity as a Process of Integration

The expression '*Psycho-spiritual integration'* can be seen as another term for 'psycho-spiritual maturity or growth', because the process of maturation and growth is basically a process of integration wherein the parts are held together as a whole. In integration there is no fragmentation or compartmentalization, instead there is a harmonious blending of all the aspects of human person. Psycho-spiritual maturity is a state of being where a true sense of self is developed as differentiated from the false self which has been generated as a defence against the anxiety of 'being a true self. When one arrives at this desired integration one is capable of letting go the many masks that had been part of his/her developmental journey. The false self under the disguises often keeps the person bound to the infantile nature. In as far as one is able to be liberated from such infantile, regressive tendencies one embraces maturation, integration and growth.

It is therefore essential that those in formation to priesthood and religious life be helped to discover the truth about oneself, the other, and God because only truth can set them free (Cf. Jh 8: 32). The formators are called to share in the work of the Father, who through the spirit fashions the inner attitude of the Son in the hearts of the young men and women. They are to be familiar with the path of seeking God, so as to be able to accompany those entrusted to them. They are to remain open and sensitive to the action of grace to be able to point out those obstacles which are less obvious.[23] They ought to be first of all familiar with the process of integration in themselves so that they can identify those unintegrated emotional wounds and unidentified spiritual struggles in those they accompany.

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[23] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, no. 66.

4.2.3 The Psycho-Spiritual Maturity and the Polar Tension

As human persons all of us are confronted by the reality of 'polar tension', or 'the tension of the opposites' which creates ambivalences in us as we live our daily commitment as disciples of Jesus. We are challenged by an inner call to handle adequately the valid opposites: God and the world, vocational values (ideal self) and personal needs (actual self), pastoral demands and personal space, fidelity and creativity, rule of law and freedom of spirit, obedience and personal charism, institutionalization and call of the peripheries, celibacy/chastity and generativity, community routine and demands of mission. Psycho-spiritual maturity entails the ability to hold the opposites in healthy and creative tension with flexibility and discernment. This will ensure sufficient room for personal and pastoral initiatives, as it urges us to think out of the box, break out of the routine and reach out to the frontiers to meet new challenges of pastoral ministry in a fast challenging world.[24]

Formation to psycho-spiritual maturity enables one to learn the art of maintaining the optimum distance between the two poles of the *ideal self* and the *actual self.* Keeping the *optimum distance* is not as easy as one may think. It involves a very tedious and conscious process of overcoming the danger of an exaggerated distance and the absence of distance. It could be said that the distance between the poles (the actual self and the ideal self) is optimum, which from one side is *reachable and accessible,* and on the other saves the 'nature of good-value' which is by its very nature never completely attainable. The optimum distance is defined in a rapport of dynamic equilibrium between these two sets of opposites: accessible/unattainable; attractive/demanding.[25]

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[24] Cf. Julian Fernandes, *Spiritual leadership and discernment*, (Paper presented at the MSMHC inter Province Council Meeting, Bathel, Barapani, September, 2018).

[25] A. Cencini and A. Manenti, *Psychology and Formation*, (Pauline Publications, Mumbai, 1994), 161-162.

4.2.4 Psycho-Spiritual Maturity and Process of Internalization

The process of internalization of values is an integral part of psycho-spiritual maturity. Therefore, formation for pastoral ministry cannot but consider this important process as part of the formation programme. Formators need to be aware of the various processes of acquiring values. According to Kelman there are three process of acquiring values:

Compliance*:* One may accept a value without wanting to, actually refusing, consciously or unconsciously to be changed by this value. It might be based on reward or punishment controlled by a person or group. So the external acceptance is merely for the sake of the extrinsic incentives. The person makes an external adaptation to the situation and may appear to be a "good priest or religious" who is respectful and obedient towards superiors, but without any inner belief in the content of what he or she is doing (Cf. Jn 6, 26-29).[26]

Identification:The person accepts new attitudes or ideals not because they are important in themselves, but because they are important for the person. In Kelman's description the person who is identifying accepts internally what is proposed to him/her but does it because it satisfies or increases his self-esteem and self-image. He or she may follow the superior or follow a group because that is gratifying to his self-image and for similar reasons he/she may accept some role and live by it. It is important to note that such a *gratifying relationship* with another person or with a role, may be established by the individual in reality or in fantasy; identification with a religious group for example may take place because in the fantasy of the subject this identification improves

[26] L.M. Rulla, J. Ridick and F. Imoda, *Anthropology of Christian Vocation Vol. II,* (Gregorian University Press, Rome, 1989), 67.

his/her self-image.[27] It is important to distinguish the process of identification which does not lead to internalization (Non internalizing identification) from an identification which favours internalization (internalizing identification). The difference between the two can be discerned by seeing which part of the self is gratified in the relationship:

* to the extent to which the *part* of the self-image or self-esteem gratified by the relationship may be integrated with the objective vocational values, to that extent this leads to internalisation of vocational attitudes (internalised identification).
* to the extent that the *part* of the self-image gratified by the identifying relationship cannot be integrated with the vocational values or leads away from internalisation and towards compliance it is non-internalised identification.[28]

Internalization: A value is internalized insofar as the person is free and disposed to accept this value as leading to theocentric self-transcendence, as something by which the person is transformed so as to accept all this out of love for the intrinsic value of the Christian ideal chosen. With the ambiguities in the motivational system[29], one needs at least a moderate degree of

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27 Here it is important to note that persons with strong internal oppositions in the dialectics of the first or second dimension will be inclined to develop identification; such persons are vulnerable, consciously or unconsciously; and so they will need and search for some external relationship which will gratify them in the sense of keeping their self-image and self-esteem. L.M. Rulla, J. Ridick and F. Imoda, *Anthropology of Christian Vocation Vol. II,* 68.

28 Cf.L.M. Rulla, J. Ridick and F. Imoda, *Anthropology of Christian Vocation Vol. II,* 68.

29 In the motivational system of the normal person there are many intrinsic ambiguities affecting progress towards self-transcendence. These ambiguities involve needs, values, attitudes and the unconscious. Cf. L.M. Rulla, *Anthropology of Christian vocation*, Vol I, 165.

maturity in the first and second dimensions if one's expression of values and one's quest for knowledge are to be forces motivating a theocentric self-transcendence.[30] It call for an ongoing evaluation of the motivational forces behind all our pastoral involvement. As formators we should not merely be pleased with providing opportunities for pastoral involvement or preparing them for the future pastoral ministry by providing theoretical and practical inputs. We should have an eye for the process of internalization of those values which will really make the future priests and religious true shepherds after the heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd. A sheer adherence to priestly and religious *style of life* will neither promote perseverance not effectiveness in pastoral ministry. Therefore, care is to be taken during formation to lay a solid foundation to the process of internalization of those values of consecration and mission. That takes us to the final consideration: psycho-spiritual maturity as self-transcendence.

4.2.5 Psycho-Spiritual Maturity and Self-Transcendence

Psycho-spiritual maturity leads to self-transcendence. Every human person has the potential for transcending self, to go beyond himself. However, this human potential can be actualised with the help of God's grace and for the sake of His kingdom. As priests and religious we are called by God and so the response to this invitation is free. A free response to God's call implies a going beyond oneself, and in doing so we experience joy and fulfilment. Thus **Self-actualisation seen as a by-product of self-transcendence**, is particularly favoured by living the Christian and religious vocations. To become what we ought to be we must go beyond ourselves. As we attain self-transcendence we will also find our self-actualisation. So self-actualisation is not an end but only an effect. In living a religious or Christian vocation we

30 Cf. L.M. Rulla, *Anthropology of Christian vocation*, Vol I, 165.

make a free choice and this includes a choice to obey. We choose to subordinate to authority according to the particular religious institution. It is in accepting the will of God as our own that we find perfect fulfilment for we will then reach the transcendence that God has planned for us. In obedience to His will we will become that which we were destined to be. This self-transcendence then will bring the effect of self-actualisation. So the theological-ontological (Psycho-spiritual) dimensions may then foster self-transcendence.

Any exaggeration may separate the two. It will stress one at the expense of the other. In relating to the "Other", the others are also included. If one strives after self-actualisation one may want to study medicine because he is good at biology and thus realise his capacity (secular career). But in a religious vocation, one wants to study medicine because he wants to help others, it has a relation to others, and for the love of the Lord, and one may not attain it fully, but it is a process of self-transcendence. Only a self that is freed and integrated can transcend theo-centrically and it is in it's transcending that the true self is ultimately discovered. It is essential to bear in mind that during the process of a psycho-spiritual integration we need to be attentive to both the deeper spiritual realities in us as well as the psychological conflicts or problems that can interfere the process of integration and self-transcendence. Again, psychological growth is not always followed by spiritual growth as the individual may be too satisfied with the self-understanding achieved. It is therefore essential that the formators see that those in formation does not get stuck with self-actualization process (development of gifts, talents, skills etc.) but pass beyond it to self-transcendence in love. It is essential that we train them in the understanding of self-actualization as a by-product on the way to self-transcendence and surrender. The self-encapsulation and self-preoccupation resulting from sin and from psychopathology block the process of theocentric self-

transcendence and spiritual growth. Only when the false selves are seen for what they are can they be given up and the true self seen, when the need for surrender to God is understood. Both Christian spirituality and psychotherapy involve the crucifixion of the false self or self-centredness. Then God rather than the self can become the lord over life. Self-transcendence therefore is the real goal of our human existence and the result of psycho-spiritual maturity or integration. It urges us to go beyond ourselves to others and to the "Other". Self-transcendence calls for a self-donation. Our self-transcendence to God can take place when we transcend ourselves to relate to others who are made in his image and likeness.And self-donation is thus a visible sign of psycho-spiritual maturity and a prerequisite for effective pastoral ministry.

Conclusion

In conclusionwe can say that there is a correlation between one's psycho-spiritual maturity and effectiveness/fruitfulness in pastoral ministry. Only persons with strength of character and conviction, solid value system, unflustered attitude, psychological resilience and spiritual depth will be able to adequately respond to the mounting challenges of pastoral ministry today. In other words, we can say that psycho-spiritual maturity is a pre-requisite for effective or fruitful pastoral ministry. Therefore, the formation of future priests and religious may call for a greater attention to the aspects of psycho-spiritual integration which to some extend may respond to the ever growing challenges of pastoral ministry in the present day scenario.

Mission of the Universal Church: A Renewed Understanding

Sr. Celine Zosangpuii MSMHC

Introduction

The mission of the church is to proclaim the Good News and make disciples throughout the world. The Church exists to carry forward the mission of Jesus. In fact, what defines the Church is its mission. Hence, everyone in the Church is called to collaborate in the saving mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council laid emphasis on having a deeper understanding of the very nature of the Church. It revived and revitalized Church's life and mission and gave a thrust to the universal nature of the Church. It sees Church's missionary activity as an opportunity to reveal God's love to all people and encourages the unity of all Christians.This article tries to give insights on the documents of Second Vatican Council and the documents written afterwards.

1. Vatican II on Missionary Nature of the Church

With the intention of renewing the Church's life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world, the Second Vatican Council was proposed under the initiative of Pope John XXIII in 1961. With it, the wind of change entered in the Church, which renews the missionary fervour and activity of the Church. In fact, the main emphasis of the Council was the missionary nature of the Church. With it, there was a new out-look to mission and the involvement of all the baptized for the building up of the Church in every corner of the earth. The contents of the documents of the

Council are very relevant and practical as it give an in-depth understanding on the Church's mission today. They offer guidelines on how to go about while getting involved in the missionary activity of the Church.

1.1. *Lumen Gentium*

Lumen Gentium is a dogmatic constitution on the Church, consisting eight Chapters in all. This particular document provides the theological "backbone to the Church's mission theology."[1] The main highlights of the document is Christ as the "light of humanity,"[2] the Israelites as "Church of God,[3] and the Church as the "sacrament of salvation."[4] The document also stresses the importance of the hierarchical collegial structure of the Church, the call to holiness, which includes all Christians in any state of life,[5] and the role or function of the Blessed Virgin in the plan of salvation.[6]

The Church was born of the unity of the Holy Trinity. She, therefore, likewise functions in union with her members. Being sent by the Father, the Son Himself sent the Apostles (Jn 20:12) saying, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). The Church has received this solemn command of

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1 J. Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission* (Shillong: DBCIC Publications, 2008) 57.

2 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964 in *Vatican Council II: More Post-Conciliar Documents*, gen. ed., Austin Flannery (Mumbai: St.Pauls, 2007) n. 1. All the documents from Vatican II cited in this study are taken from this edition. Henceforth not repeated.

3 *LG*, n.9.

4 *LG*, n.48.

5 Cf. *LG*, n.40.

6 Cf. *LG*, n. 52-69.

Christ from the Apostles, and she must fulfill it to the very ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

By her proclamation of the Gospel, she draws her hearers to receive and profess the faith, she prepares them for baptism, snatches them from the slavery of error, and she incorporates them into Christ so that in love for him, they grow to full maturity.[7] In all her endeavours, the Church, mindful of the Lord's command, "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:16), takes zealous care to foster the missions[8] entrusted to her. That divine mission, which was committed by Christ to the Apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (Mt 28:20), since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the Church, the principle of all its life for all time.[9]

The task of announcing the Gospel in the whole world belongs to the body of pastors[10] through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church[11] and the bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men,[12] and the successors of the Apostles.[13] In them, the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and impart the strength of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). The faithful who by baptism are incorporated to Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.[14] The laity, as living members, has the vocation of applying themselves to the

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7 Cf. *LG*, n. 17.

8 *LG*, n. 16.

9 *LG*, n.20.

10 *LG*, n.23.

11 Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 18 November 1965, n. 8.

12 Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 7 December 1965, n. 4.

13 *LG*, n. 24.

14 *LG*, n. 31.

building up of the Church, because of the fact that the apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through baptism and confirmation, all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord Himself. Thus, every lay person is at once the witness and living instrument of the mission of the Church itself.[15]

1.2. *Dei Verbum*

The document of Vatican II *Dei Verbum*, 18 November 1965, on Divine Revelation consists of 8 Chapters, in which the centrality of the Word of God in the life and teaching of the Church is highlighted.

It was the will and plan of God that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit,[16] and thus become sharers in the divine nature (Eph 2:18; 2Pet 1:4). Throughout the ages, God prepared the way for the Gospel. From the time God called Abraham, Moses and the prophets, He revealed Himself in various ways and taught the nation to recognize Him as the only living and true God.[17] Finally, in these last days, He has spoken to us by a Son (Heb 1:1-2) and this is what every believer is called to proclaim that salvation is in and through Him, for it was the will of God that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:4). Therefore, Christ the Lord, in whom the entire revelation of the Most High God is summed up (2Cor 1:20; 3:16; 4:6) commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which He fulfilled in His own person and promulgated with His own lips. The divine revelation was then transmitted to the Apostles, who in turn handed on to their successors, the bishops, in order that full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church.[18]

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15 *LG*, n. 33.
16 *DV*, n. 2.
17 *DV*, n. 3.
18 Cf. *DV*, n. 7.

It is a common knowledge that among all the inspired writings, even among those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special place, and rightly so, because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate word, our Saviour[19] and because they are the foundation of our faith. It contains what Jesus, the Son of God, while He lived among men, really did and taught from the beginning until the day when He was taken up to heaven (Acts 1:1-2).[20] Faithful to the promise He made, Christ sent to the Apostles the Holy Spirit, the Counselor (Mt 28:20), who guided them into all truth (Jn 16:13) which is visibly seen in these writings. Therefore, the proclamation of the Gospel is all the more necessary because it is the duty charged by Jesus to the apostles, and which has been handed on to us in writing. Therefore, it is required of all the clerics, priests, deacons and catechists to immerse themselves in the scriptures by constant sacred reading and diligent study.[21]

1.3. *Ad gentes Divinitus*

Ad gentes Divinitus, the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity consists of 6 Chapters with 41 articles. It was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 7 December 1965.

The document speaks of the principles of Missionary activity that unite the efforts of all the faithful. By its very nature the Church is missionary and has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the plan of the Father.[22] What was once preached by the Lord, or fulfilled in Him for the salvation of mankind, must be proclaimed and spread to the ends of the earth (Cf. Acts 1:8), so that what was accomplished for the salvation of

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19 *DV*, n. 18.

20 *DV*, n. 19.

21 *DV*, n. 25.

22 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentesDivinitus*, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, n. 2.

all may, in the course of time, achieve its universal effect.[23] The mission of the Church is carried out by means of that activity through which, in obedience to Christ's command and moved by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, the Church makes itself fully present to all men and peoples in order to lead them to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ by the example of its life and teaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace. Its aim is to open up for all men a free and sure path to full participation in the mystery of Christ.[24]

The Church has an obligation to proclaim the faith and salvation which comes from Christ,[25] an obligation to preach the Gospel to all who are still outside. The document is very clear about the meaning of missions when it says:

The special undertakings in which preachers of the Gospel sent by the Church, and going into the whole world, carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among the people who do not yet believe in Christ, are generally called "missions." Such undertakings are accomplished by missionary activity and are, for the most part, carried out in defined territories recognized by the Holy See. The special end of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the implanting of the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root. The principal instrument in this work of implanting the Church is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was to announce thisGospel that the Lord sent His disciples into the whole world. It is clear therefore, that missionary activity flows immediately from the very nature of the Church. Missionary activity extends the saving faith of the Church. In case of new situation where direct proclamation of the Gospel is not possible, the missionaries, patiently, prudently, and with great faith, can and ought at least bear

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23 *AG*, n. 3.
24 *AG*, n. 5.
25 *AG*, n. 5.

witness to the love and kindness of Christ and thus prepare a way for the Lord, and in some way make Him present.[26]

By means of this missionary activity, God is fully glorified when men fully and consciously accept the work of salvation which he accomplished in Christ, and God's plan is realized, [27] a plan to unite all things in and through Christ (Cf. Col 1: 17-20).The Gospel must be preached to all people before the Lord comes (Cf. Mk 13:10), for the period between the first and the second coming of the Lord is the time of missionary activity, which is the manifestation of God's plan. By missionary activity, the mystical Body is enlarged until it reaches the mature fullness of Christ (Cf. Eph 4:13).[28] At the same time, the Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith, or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices; as it likewise strongly defends the right that no one should be frightened away from faith by unjust persecution.[29]

The document also speaks of the importance of the role of the catechists and the local Churches in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. As the local Church must represent the universal Church as perfectly as possible, it must remember that it has been sent to those who live in the same territory as itself, but do not believe in Christ so that it might be for them, by the example of the lives of the faithful and of the whole community, as a sign indicating Christ. The ministry of the word is also necessary so that the Gospel might reach all men. The Bishop should be, above all, a preacher of the faith who brings new disciples to Christ, and therefore, should give themselves generously to the work of evangelization. In fact, the principal duty of both men and women is to bear witness to Christ, and this they are obliged to do by their

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26 *AG*, n. 6.
27 Cf. *AG*, n. 7.
28 *AG*, n. 9.
29 *AG*, n. 13.

life and their words, in the family, in their social group, and in the sphere of their profession. The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. Therefore, from the foundation of a Church very special care must be taken to form a mature Christian laity. The seed which is the word of God grows out of good soil, watered by the divine dew, it absorbs moisture, transforms it, and makes it part of itself, so that eventually it bears much fruit.[30]

Although the obligation of spreading the faith falls individually on every disciple of Christ, still the Lord Jesus Christ has always called from the number of His disciples those whom He has chosen that they might be with Him so that He might send them to preach to the nations (Mk 3:13). So the Holy Spirit, who shares His gifts as He wills for the common good (1Cor 12:11), implants in the hearts of individuals a missionary vocation and at the same time raises up institutes in the Church who take on the duty of evangelization, which pertains to the whole Church, and make it as it were their own special task and are ready to undertake missionary work[31] which is the greatest and holiest duty of the Church.[32]

2. Post-Vatican Council on Rekindling Missionary Activity

The Second Vatican Council may be described as the hour of God in the annals of recent history.[33] Though the documents of the Pre-Vatican Council and the documents of the Second Vatican Council

30 Cf. *AG*, n. 20-22.

31 *AG*, n. 23.

32 Benedict XV, *Maximum Illud*, Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of Faith throughout the World, 30 November 1919, available at http://www.svdcuria.org/public/mission/docs/encycl/mi-en.htmn. 29.

33 Second Vatican Council, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, n. 4.

has done lot of good for the upheaval of missionary enthusiasm among the missionaries and in the Church, the documents of the Post-Vatican Council are in no doubt, the outcome of a careful study of the situation and the ever increasing need of the renewal of the missionary activity of the Church, especially in the present time. In fact, they are the better and deeper still in their contents.

2.1 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

The document *Evangelii Nuntiandi*on Evangelization in the Modern World consists of 82 articles in all. Rich in its content, it continues to shape the mission of the Church as its central theme is based on evangelization, which the primary task of the Church.

The document reaffirm that the proclamation of the Good News to men has been entrusted to the Church, and therefore, it is inherent in the very nature of the Church. It is a precious living heritage and must not be kept hidden but proclaim to all.[34] The whole problem of evangelization depends on our fidelity to the message of which we are servants, and to mankind to whom it is our duty to transmit that vital, universal message.[35] In fact, the Church is duty-bound to promulgate the Gospel message because it has been imposed on her by the Lord Jesus so that all may believe and achieve salvation.[36] Christ, as the herald of the Gospel, announces first of all the Kingdom of God to which everything else is subordinate.[37] Christ proclaims salvation as the outstanding element and, as it were, the central point of His Good News.[38]

The two words, kingdom and salvation may be regarded as the key to a full understanding of the evangelization of Jesus Christ.[39]

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34 *EN*, n. 15.
35 *EN*, n. 4.
36 Cf. *EN*, n. 5.
37 Cf. *EN*, n. 8.
38 *EN*, n. 9.
39 Cf. *EN*, n. 10.

This proclamation of the Kingdom of God by Christ is achieved by the assiduous preaching of the word- a word which is peerless,[40] unique, irreplaceable and necessary.[41] With St. Paul, she freely declares: "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1Cor 9:16). Therefore, the essential mission of the Church is to evangelize all men, as she exists to preach and teach the Word of God so that through her the gift of grace may be given to us, and sinners may be reconciled to God.[42]

The document also clearly states the meaning of evangelization as the carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race through an interior transformation of renewal by baptism and by a life lived in accordance with the Gospel.[43] In any matter, this work of evangelization must always take the human person as its starting point. At the same time, evangelization also includes culture; and the Gospel must impregnate the culture and the whole way of man's life.[44] Evangelizers who are sent forth are sent not to preach themselves or their personal ideas but rather the Gospel of which neither they nor the Church herself are the absolute masters. The task of evangelization was entrusted to the Church by Christ, the Church carries out the work of evangelization and this evangelization aim at leading all to Christ. In fact, the Church is born of the evangelizing work of Jesus and the Twelve.[45]

Another important aspect of the proclamation of the Good News is witness of life which will inevitably arouse a spirit of enquiry in those who see their way of life. It is the first step in the work of

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40 Cf. *EN*, n. 11.
41 Cf. *EN*, n. 5.
42 Cf. *EN*, n. 14.
43 Cf. *EN*, n. 17.
44 *EN*, n. 20.
45 Cf. *EN*, n. 15.

evangelization, and is an essential element and often the initial element in the work of evangelization. Witness of this kind constitutes in itself a proclamation of the Good News, which is silent, but strong and effective. All Christians are called to bear this witness and in this way they can be true evangelizers.[46] The witness of a person is clarified by preaching, clearly and unambiguously, the Lord Jesus. For there can be no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus are not proclaimed.[47] Evangelization, therefore, includes the preaching of the promises made by God through Jesus Christ, of the love of God for us and of our love for God, of fraternal love for all men, and of the mystery of evil and the active pursuit of good.[48] The proclamation of the Gospel should constantly relate to men's actual lives, personal and social, with the life of all nations, with peace, justice and progress in order to meet its purpose.[49]

The document places before us the means of evangelization without which the work of evangelization cannot be carried out in a fast changing world of today. The first and powerful means of evangelization is preaching, that is the verbal communication of the message which is always essential in the proclamation of the Good News because any spoken word has always its own excellence and efficacy. It is the word which is heard that leads to belief.[50] Catechetical instruction is another instrument of evangelization which must on no account be neglected.[51] It is a moment and aspect of evangelization,[52]

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46 Cf. *EN*, n. 21.
47 Cf. *EN*, n. 22.
48 Cf. *EN*, n. 28.
49 Cf. *EN*, n. 29.
50 Cf. *EN*, n. 42.
51 *EN*, n. 43.
52 Second Vatican Council**,** *CatechesiTradendae***,** Catechesis in our Time, 16 October 1979, n. 26.

which draws its content from the living source of the Word of God.[53] Mass media, when they are employed in the service of the Gospel, can disseminate the Word of God over a vast area and carry the message of salvation to millions of men.[54] Popular religiousity or piety which is expressive of the faith of the people and their search for God can make a constantly increasing contribution towards bringing the masses of our people into contact with God in Jesus Christ.[55]

Besides the method of evangelization, the document also explained clearly the universality of evangelization. It states that the work of evangelization knows no frontiers; persecution that dispersed the believers only broadens the region and led to the dissemination of the Gospel and the constant extension of the Church to distant regions.[56] From the day of Pentecost, the Church has recognized that her primary function, entrusted to her by her founder, was to reveal Jesus Christ and His Gospel to those who did not know Him.[57] The first proclamation, therefore, will be directed primarily towards those who have never heard the Good News of Jesus, and to the many people who have been baptized live lives entirely divorced from Christianity. It must be directed also to those simple people who have a certain measure of faith but know little even of its fundamental principles.[58]

Finally, it is therefore, very clear from the fact that the Church has been entrusted with the task of evangelization that the work of evangelization is not an individual activity; it is essentially ecclesial because all the missionary activities carried out by individual or group is always and everywhere done in the name of the Church and that anyone who is evangelizing in the name of the Church, by virtue of

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53 *CT*, n. 27.
54 *EN*, n. 45.
55 *EN*, n. 48.
56 Cf. *EN*, n. 49.
57 *EN*, n. 51.
58 Cf. *EN*, n. 52.

the mandate of the Lord, must do so in the closest communion with the Church and her pastors.[59] As a matter of fact, the whole Church is missionary and that the work of evangelization is a fundamental duty of the people of God.[60]

2.2 *Redemptoris Missio*

The document *Redemptoris Missio* was published on 7th December 1990 on the 25th anniversary of the publication of the Conciliar Decree *ad gentes.* It is the encyclical letter of John Paul II on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate. It contains 92 articles.

The main theme is the urgency of missionary activity which is specifically directed 'to the nations' (*ad gentes*) and it is a "matter for all Christians."[61] This activity is the mission of Christ, entrusted to the Church which is still very far from completion,[62] and is therefore, ever relevant and valid until all the people are brought to the knowledge of Christ, and finally to their salvation. Missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support. In fact, missionary evangelization is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity because of which it is an urgent appeal.[63]

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59 Cf. *EN*, n. 60.

60 *EN*, n. 59.

61 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, 7 December 1990 (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1991) n. 2.

62 *RM*, n. 1.

63 *RM*, n. 2.

Therefore, no believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this duty of proclaiming Christ to all peoples.[64] The proclamation of the Gospel is the result of one's faith in Jesus Christ; and therefore, the Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ and it is only in faith that the Church's mission can be understood and only in faith that it finds its basis.[65] Thus, faith is only strengthened when it is given to others.[66] And in fact, the Church's sign of vitality is seen in her missionary drive just as a sign of a crisis of faith is manifested in the absence of this drive.[67]

The document brings about the role of the Church in the salvation of human kind. She is the first beneficiary of salvation and Christ won her for himself at the price of his blood and made the Church his co-worker in the salvation of the world. He carries out his mission through her[68] and so, the Church is bound to proclaim the message of salvation which is granted to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all[69] for which the Church is a necessity.[70] The proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom are the purpose and mission of the Church as it is of Christ's. For Christ, the secret of the effectiveness of his message lies in his total identification with the message he announces (Cf. Lk 4:14-21), not only by word or actions but by what he is.[71] He endowed the Church, his Body, with the fullness of the benefits and means of

64 *RM*, n. 3.
65 Cf. *RM*, n. 4.
66 *RM*, n. 2.
67 *RM*, n. 2
68 Cf. *RM*, n. 9.
69 *RM*, n. 10.
70 Cf. *RM*, n. 9.
71 Cf. *RM*, n. 13.

salvation.[72] And as such, the Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind.[73]

In the Apostles, the Church received a universal missionand by virtue of Christ's universal mandate, a mission *ad gentes* knows no boundaries, which also implies a universal perspective. This mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose. A mission *ad gentes* is one of the Church's fundamental, essential and never-ending activities. She cannot withdraw from her permanent mission of bringing the Gospel to the multitudes who as yet do not know Christ. In fact, this is the missionary work which Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to His Church.[74]

Mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term deals with the context where Christ and his Gospelare not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. Secondly, it is directed to Christian communities who are fervent in the practice of their faith and bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. Thirdly, it is applied to the baptized who have lost a living sense of the faith, or no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is new evangelization or re-evangelization.[75]

In a way it is distinct from other ecclesial activities in as much as it is addressed to groups and settings which are non-Christian because the preaching of the Gospel and the presence of the Church are either absent or insufficient. It can thus be characterized as the work of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and

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72 *RM*, n. 18.
73 *RM*, n. 20.
74 *RM*, n. 31.
75 Cf. *RM*, n. 33.

promoting the values of the Kingdom. The specific nature of mission *ad gentes* consists in its being addressed to "non-Christians" for it is the first tasks of the Church which has been sent forth to all peoples and to the very ends of the earth, to establish new Churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist. Without the mission *ad gentes*, the Church's very missionary dimension would be deprived of its essential meaning and of the very activity that exemplifies it.[76] Therefore, the main objective of mission *ad gentes* is to found Christian communities and develop Churches to their full maturity. This is a central and determining goal of missionary activity.[77]

Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways.[78] Among these, the first and irreplaceable form of mission of evangelization is witness. Life of witness itself is more powerful than teachers, mere teaching or theories. The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family and of the ecclesial community, which reveals a new way of living. Simplicity of life after the example of Christ is a sign of God and of transcendent realities. In many cases this is the only possible way of being a missionary.[79] One of most appealing sign of witness in the face of the world is that of concern for people, and of charity towards the poor, the weak and those who suffer because these acts of generosity and kindness stands in marked contrast to human selfishness today.[80]

Another sign of the Gospel is fidelity to one's native land, people and culture; and yet again, the Church is called to bear witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of corruption of political or economic power; by not seeking her own glory and material wealth; by using her resources to serve the poor and by

76 Cf. *RM*, n.34.
77 *RM*, 48.
78 *RM*, n. 41.
79 Cf. *RM*, 42.
80 Cf. *RM*, 42.

imitating Christ's own simplicity of life. Above all, the Church is to bear the witness of humility, especially with regard to themselves which allows them to correct their behaviour whatever is contrary to the Gospel and disfigures the face of Christ.[81]

The proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. For evangelization will always contain a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ salvation is offered to all men. In fact, all forms of missionary activity are directed to this explicit proclamation[82] of the Good News, which is Christ himself.[83] Just as the whole economy of salvation has its center in Christ, so too, all the missionary activity is directed to the proclamation of His mystery.[84]

The document also brought out the characteristics required of a missionary such as being urged by zeal for souls, being a person of charity, being universal and profound love for the Church,[85] commits himself to the way of holiness,[86] being a person of contemplative in action and being a person of the beatitudes who expresses inner joy that comes from faith and true hope in Christ Jesus,[87] for joy is the characteristic of all those who encounter Jesus, and with him joy is constantly born anew.[88] Joy is never a useless ornament but a necessity[89] in the proclamation of the Gospel of joy and salvation.

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81 Cf. *RM*, n. 43.

82 Cf. *RM*, n. 44.

83 Cf. *RM*, n. 13.

84 *RM*, n. 44.

85 Cf. *RM*, n. 89.

86 Cf. *RM*, n. 90.

87 Cf. *RM*, n. 91.

88 Cf. Francis, *EvangeliiGaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, 24 November 2013 (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2013) n. 1.

89 Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice: Letter for the Year of Consecrated Life*, 2 February 2014(Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2014) n. 3.

2.3 *Evangelii Gaudium*

The document *Evangelii Gaudium,* the Joy of the Gospelis an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in today's World. It was issued on 24 November 2013 on the occasion of the conclusion of the Year of Faith. It is the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, written in response to the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held at Rome from 7th – 28th October 2012. It contains as many as 224 pages, and is summed up in five chapters. The main highlight of the document includes the Church's Missionary transformation, the proclamation of the Gospel, the social dimension of evangelization and the spirit-filled evangelizers; and today's many issues involving evangelization are also touched upon.

The document deals with the Church's mission of evangelization. The Pope speaks of the Church whose doors are always open,[90] the Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out in the streets;[91] and an evangelizers with the smell of a sheep.[92] It states that the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus[93] and this joy is to be shared and passed on to others, for the joy of the Gospel is for all people.[94] In fact, this exhortation aimed at encouraging the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come.[95] It invites the Christians to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ[96] with whom joy is constantly born anew.[97]

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90 Cf. *EG*, n. 46.
91 *EG*, n. 49.
92 Cf. *EG*, n. 24.
93 *EG*. n. 1.
94 *EG*, n. 23.
95 *EG*, n. 1.
96 *EG*, n. 3.
97 *EG*, n. 1.

Evangelization is the first and primary task of the Church. The three basic principal settings for new evangelization proposed by the Synod of Bishops (7-28 October 2012)[98] are firstly, the area of ordinary pastoral ministry which aims at helping the believers grow spiritually and inflaming the heart of the faithful who regularly participate in community worship so as to respond to God's love ever more fully in their lives. Secondly, it is the area of the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of baptism and who lacks a meaningful relationship to the Church. The Church wants to restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel. The third area of evangelization is turn to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who always rejected him. To them, every Christian faithful has the duty to proclaim the Gospel through the sharing of their joy, as someone who point to the horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet.[99] It is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear.[100]

Today, the command of Jesus to "go and make disciples" (Cf. Mt 28:19) echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization to which everyone is called to go forth from the comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel.[101] The situations are not the same as before and the means employed for evangelization differs from yesteryears. In the midst of these, the Churchis called again to go forth with her ministry of bringing the value of the Gospel in the world today. Evangelization takes place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

98 Cf. *EG*, n. 14.
99 Cf. *EG*, n. 15.
100 *EG*, n. 23.
101 Cf. *EG*, n. 20.

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). The risen Christ sent his followers to preach the Gospel in every time and place so that faith in him might spread to every corner of the earth.[102]

In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one is excluded.[103] In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization.[104] In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the people of God have become missionary disciples and agents of evangelization. It calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized.[105]It is a contemporary reality today that the hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, deprived of the joy of living and struggled to live a dignified life in the midst of injustice, fear, violence and inequality,[106] consumerism and feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.[107] It is in this scenario, the Churchis called upon to go forth from herself to seek the good of others.[108]

In this regard the Church seeks to experience a profound missionary renewal which is within the reach of every one of us and it comes as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel in our conversation with people we meet, or bringing the love of Jesus to others even in an odd events or circumstances.[109] There certainly is

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102 *EG*, n. 19.
103 *EG*, n. 23.
104 *EG*, n. 119.
105 *EG*, n. 120.
106 Cf. *EG*, n. 52.
107 Cf. *EG*, n. 2.
108 Cf. *EG*, n. 39.
109 Cf. *EG*, n. 127.

an urgency to proclaim the message of the Gospel which will be a basis for restoring the dignity of human life in our context today.[110] By the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, something new, goodness, and beauty springs up; values always tend to reappear under new guises and human beings have arisen from situations that seemed doomed. This is where every believer is called to be instrumental.[111]

Conclusion

As long as the Church exists, the mission continues. There is never enough of proclaiming the Good news to humankind. As early as the Church's existence it has been the work of the Holy Spirit to stir the hearts of the believers.As a result, even in the midst of persecution and suffering, the Church continues to march forward with boldness, establishingits presence in various parts of the globe. As a matter of fact, the proclamation of the Gospel today is a big challenge. Pope Francis underlines the importance of the mission of the Church today and calls everyone to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. He also makes it clear that spreading the message of salvation rests heavily upon the shoulders of those who experienced salvation themselves because the joy of being saved springs from one's encounter with Christ and the knowledge of his unconditional love.

110 Cf. *EG*, n. 75.
111 Cf. *EG*, n. 276.

Church's Mission Endeavors in NE India and the Role of Bishop Ferrando

Sr. Juliet Zothanpari MSMHC

Introduction

The Church in Northeast India was indeed the work of a number of missionaries who served and dedicated themselves to the cause of the Gospel with great zeal and enthusiasm. They contributed substantially to its remarkable establishment and growth in the region. The missionaries were a band of heroic men and women from the European countries whose spirit of endurance and perseverance paved the way to the implanting of the Gospel in this part of India. Bishop Ferrando took up the leadership of the vast diocese of Shillong with great trust and eagerness to lead the whole of Northeast India to Christ. He went about tirelessly visiting his folk and encoraging them to stand firm on the rock of hrist. He instilled interest in the hearts of his collaborators and every Christian for the cause of evangelization.

1. Diocese of Shillong in Meghalaya

The Catholic diocese of Shillong is one of the fifteen dioceses of Northeast India. Shillong is the capital city of Meghalaya state. It lies in the northeastern region of the country and is located between Bangladesh in the south and the Brahmaputra valley in the north. Meghalaya was previously part of the Assam state, but on 21 January 1972, the districts of Khasi, Garo and Jaintia hills became

a new state of Meghalaya.[1] Shillong, which is the capital of Meghalaya, is one of the most picturesque landscapes in the world.[2]

On 9 July 1934, the Holy See by a decree elevated the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam to a full-fledged diocese with the See in Shillong and nominated Bishop Louis Mathias (1887-1965) as its first bishop. The newly founded diocese comprised of Bhutan, the Brahmaputra Valley and the hills of Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya; the Prefecture Apostolic of Haflong served the Burma Valley, Mizoram and Tripura.[3]

1.1 Origin and Growth of the Diocese

The earliest Catholic contact with Northeast India was not one of a planned missionary undertaking specially meant for the indigenous people of the region. But the region served as a gateway to Tibet and China, which were the Missionary targets of the time. In 1870 the Holy See attached the region of Assam with the new Prefecture of Central Bengal with Krishnagar as the headquarter. It was entrusted to the *Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere* (PIME) or commonly known as Milan Foreign Mission Society. In 1872 the PIME superiors sent Fr. Iacopo Broi (1834-1900) of Venice to Assam. On 13 December 1889 the Apostolic Prefecture of Assam was created and with Shillong as its headquarter. It was entrusted to the German Catholic Teaching Society later to be known as the Society of the Divine Saviour (Salvatorian Fathers, SDS). With the

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1 Cf. B. M Mawrie, *The Khasis and their Natural Environment*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, Sacred Heart College, 2009, pp. 6-8.

2 The British colonists were so charmed by the scenic beauty that they referred to this land as the 'Scotland of the East'. In fact, Shillong was chosen by them as one of the best hill resorts in the country. Cf. Ibid., p. 6.

3 Cf. O. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, *The Work of His Hands, The story of the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati, 1934-1984*, Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 1987, pp.77-78.

outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) the German Salvatorian Fathers were forced to return to their country, and the Jesuits of Calcutta looked after the Assam Prefecture till it was entrusted to the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1921.

The Holy See by a decree dated 9 July 1934 elevated the Apostolic Prefecture of Assam to a full-fledged diocese with its See in Shillong, and nominated Bishop Louis Mathias as its first bishop. On the same date the *Propaganda Fide* announced Fr. Stefano Ferrando (1895-1978) as the Bishop of Krishnagar, West Bengal. The episcopal ordination of both the new bishops took place in Shillong on 10 November 1934 by His Grace Bishop Ferdinand Perier S.J, (1875-1968) the Archbishop of Calcutta.[4] Due to the transfer of Bishop Mathias to Madras, Bishop Stefano Ferrando SDB of Krishnagar diocese was transferred to Shillong diocese as its second Bishop.[5] Fr. Vincent Scuderi (1902-1982) the Salesian Provincial of North India, was appointed as the Apostolic Administrator of Krishnagar. On 24 January 1936 Bishop Ferrando reached Shillong, and took possession of the See officially on 14 March 1936.[6]

The Catholic mission of Shillong from its inception faced a number of tragedies: the earthquake of 1897, the First World War (1914-1918) that caused the expulsion of all the Salvatorian missionaries,[7] the 'Good Friday Disaster' of 1936, where the flames of fire gutted down the mission complex of Shillong.[8] The greatest challenge that the diocese faced was the shortage of missionary personnel.

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4 Cf. B. Mawrie, *A Pastor Rooted in Culture*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, June 2002, p. 35.

5 Cf. E. Packumala, *In the Footsteps of His Master*, p. 49.

6 Cf. J.M. Thadathil, *A Great Missionary Legacy*, Guwahati: Missionary Sisters Publications, 1997, p. 23.

7 Cf. J. Aluckal, (ed.) *Platinum Jubilee, Celebrating Years, Archdiocese of Shillong 1934-2009*, Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 2009, p. 25.

8 S. Ferrando, *Nell'India nord-est, cronaca del regno di Dio*, Roma, Editrice SDB, 1975, p. 16.

On 18 March 1932, he wrote to the Rector Major of the Salesians: "St. Francis Xavier made that emotional appeal to the studious youth of his times. From the same wonderful land of India I renew his appeal so that many may come to work in Assam…*Messis multa, operaris autem pauci*".[9] With the erection of a new diocese at Silchar the Holy See raised the diocese of Shillong into an Archdiocese of Guwahati-Shillong. In 1969 Bishop Hubert D' Rosario was appointed as its first Archbishop.

After 34 years of dedicated service as the bishop of Shillong, Bishop Ferrando submitted his resignation in 1969. Pope Paul VI accepted his resignation and in recognition of his service the honorary title, 'Bishop of Troina' was conferred on him.[10]

1.2 People and Culture

The Church is not an isolated reality. She cannot take root and grow in any part of the globe without entering into dialogue with and immersing herself in cultures. Thus, the aspect of culture plays a vital role in the life of the Church so as to carry out her mission. The tribes of Northeast India constitute a major part of Indian tribal community. They are scattered in the seven States commonly known as the 'Seven Sisters', with multiple languages. With 31.4 million people, the region accounts for 3.8 percent of India's population. Some 8.1 million of the Indian population belong to various tribal communities. Socially they follow two types of lineage system which includes patriarchal and matriarchal. C. Becker remarked: "… the great simplicity and the naturalness found among the tribal show, that they are free from the powerful, all embracing and insurmountable barrier of the caste system with all its negative influences which

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9 S. Ferrando, *Letter to Rector Major*, Roma, Archivio Salesiano Centrale, 18 March 1932.

10 Cf. J. Puthenkalam and A. Mampra, *Sanctity in the Salesian Family*, Chennai: Salesian Institute of Graphic Arts, 2002, p. 537.

is built in to the very fabric of the Indian social life".[11] Women enjoy equality of rights and privileges without having to suffer any discrimination or bias on account of sex. They represent a completely separate string from the rest of the India community.[12]

On 1 March 1890, Fr. Otto Hopfenmüller[13] wrote to Fr. John Baptist Jordan saying, 'these people offer hope', and thus expressing his optimism about the people of Shillong as they received a positive response to their missionary work.[14] The missionaries took pain to learn the local languages like, Hindi, Garo, Khasi, Assamese, Jaintia, Bodo, Meiteilong, Nagamese, etc. In the words of St. John Paul II "…a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived".[15] Bishop Ferrando summed up thus his reminiscences on the cultures of Northeast India in a letter written to Rev. Fr. Peter Ricaldone, the Rector Major of the Salesians on 18 March 1932: "Perhaps no other region in the world presents such a variety of races like Assam and one can well define it as the paradise of ethnologist for the study of hundreds of different groups which form the most interesting mosaic of aboriginal tribes".[16]

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11 Cf. C. Becker, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1990*, (ed.), Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1993, pp. 384-385.

12 Cf. V. M. Thomas, F. Fernandez, J. Kuruvachira, R. Karmakar (eds.), *In His Footsteps, Northeast India*, p. 9.

13 One of the pioneering missionaries of Assam, who became the first mission superior of Assam. He passed away on 30 August 1890, just after 75 days of his arrival in Shillong which was a great blow to the missionaries. Cf. G. Maliekal, *History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis*, pp. 84-85.

14 Ibid., p. 88.

15 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, in *Acta Apostolic Sedis*, 88 (1996), no. 78.

16 S. Ferrando, *Letter to the Rector Major, 18 March 1932*, Roma: Archivio Salesiano Centrale.

1.3 Faith Formation of People in the New Mission Land

The pioneering missionaries were enthusiastic about the new mission and soon set themselves to learn the local language. Fr. Angelus Münzloher, one of the Salvatorian missionaries in Northeast India observed: "Not knowing the language, we cannot preach the Gospel to the people. We strive daily to study the language. We certainly count on the help of God in spreading His Kingdom as his servants".[17] Fr. Hopfenmüller applied himself intensely to the work of translating prayers and preparing a text of basic catechism in Khasi language. A Catechism book in Khasi (which when literally translated meant "Lessons on Christianity") consisting of 82 pages (82+vii) was published by the Roman Catholic Mission of Assam with its headquarters in Shillong 1893. It is a simple book of Catechism with an introduction which begins with the Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Apostle's Creed, Confiteor, acts of faith, hope and charity, act of contrition, act of entrustment, glory be, daily prayers, prayers before meal and after, Angelus, prayers for the dead, *Salve Regina* and ends with night prayers.[18]

On 4 August 1890, he reported to the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, that the Catechism was already printed. He soon set himself to translate Schuster's Bible History.[19] By the middle of August he had completed the Old Testament. Besides these, the translation of the life of Jesus and of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the vernacular language was also published.[20] This served as a useful instrument for instructions and prayers. During the period

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17 Cf. G. Maliekal, *History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis*, pp. 89-90.

18 Cf. A. Hemrom, *The Salvatorians among the Khasis*, Shillong: Vendrame Istitute Publications, 2009, pp. 106-107.

19 Cf. C. Becker, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1915*, (ed.), Shillong: Sacred Heart Theological College, 2007, pp. 169-170.

20 Archives of the Propaganda Report from Shillong: 28 May 1890, in *Indie Orientali* 1890, *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi*, Vol. 35.

of 1906-1915, the number of Catholics tripled, reaching to 5176. The number of catechumens also rose to 1700.[21] Unfortunately, the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) put an end to the Salvatorian activities in Assam.[22]

The immediate action of the Holy See after the departure of the Salvatorians was to entrust the Assam Mission to the Jesuits of Calcutta. In 1915 the Holy See appointed Archbishop Meüleman S.J. of Calcutta as the Apostolic Administrator of Assam. The latter sent Fr. Paul Lefebvre S.J., his own Secretary, on 24 June 1915 as his Vice-Administrator to Assam. It was first looked after by Fr. Boone S.J. and was succeeded by Fr. P.A. Stanislaus Carbery S.J. in 1915. The main strategy employed by Fr. Carbery was that of touring and maintaining personal contact with the people. In 1919 alone he contacted 1200 Catholics who had arrived recently from Chotanagpur.[23] Besides saving and strengthening the faith of the Catholics, the Jesuits added many new members to the Church.[24] Their Superior General, however, insisted with the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in Rome, to relieve his confreres from the Assam Mission. In August 1920, the Prefecture counted 4,692 Catholics and 831 catechumens.[25]

From 1918 onwards, Rome requested the Salesians of Don Bosco to take over the Assam Mission. In 1921, Fr. Paolo Albera (1845-1921), the then Rector Major accepted the Assam Mission. The evangelization methods of the Salesian missionaries were to keep on moving. On reaching the village, they would have to sit for hours in the confessionals. 'There would be no moment of rest on the following

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21 Cf C. Becker, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India 1890-1990*, pp. 82-83.

22 Cf. Ibid., pp.129-130.

23 Cf. A. Pianazzi, *Don Bosco Nell'Assam*, Torino: Elle Di Ci, 1983, p. 44.

24 Cf. G. Gil, *Per i restauri della Chiesa di Guwahati (Assam)*, in "Bollettino Salesiano", Vol. XLIX, Nr.4 (aprile 1925), p. 93.

25 Cf. C. Becker, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, pp. 42-44.

day: confessions, baptisms, solemn Eucharistic celebrations, visits to the families, meeting with different groups and associations, etc. fill up the day'.[26] Bishop Ferrando set a marvellous example to his fellow missionaries by making frequent visits to the nearby and far-flung villages. The number of baptisms administered during the year 1935-1936 in the diocese reached a satisfying figure of 7,259.[27] It was the highest number of baptism administered in a year since the beginning of the missionary work in the region.

Popular devotions and practices of piety too were potent means of evangelization and catechesis. The first Friday devotion, monthly recollection for catechists, prayer meetings, annual retreats for various groups, marriage preparation course, Bible camps, processions, were all found to be effective means in propagating and deepening the faith. Since the tribals are fond of music, the missionaries taught them numerous hymns which were means of catechetical instruction.[28]

2. Bishop Stephen Ferrando: A Missionary Par Excellence

Bishop Ferrando was a Salesian missionary par excellence in Northeast India. He personified the motto of St. John Bosco, *Da mihi animas cetera tolle* (Give me souls, take away the rest) in his life to a very high degree. He manifested his zeal for souls in every aspect of his life. As a bishop he was a good Shepherd to his flock and loved them as his own. To his motto, *Apostolus Christi* ("Apostle of Christ"), he endeared till the very end of his life.[29]

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[26] Cf. S. Ferrando, *Assam-nel campo delle conversioni*, in "Gioventù Missionaria", Vol. XVI, Nr. 3, (marzo1940), pp. 40-42.

[27] Cf. S. Ferrando, *Assam*, in "Bollettino Salesiano", Vol. LXI, Nr. 1 (gennaio 1937), p.13.

[28] P. Vadakumpadan, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1993, pp. 499-503.

[29] Cf. P. Mathew, *The Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity as lived by our Founder Bishop Stephen Ferrando* in *MSMHC Acts of the General Council*, Vol. 3, Nos. 2-3 (May-December), p. 23.

2.1. A Salesian Formator with Missionary Zeal

Stephen Ferrando was the novice master of Salesian novices from 1924-1934, in the first novitiate house of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Shillong, called "Our Lady's House".[30] Being fully absorbed in Salesian spirit and spirituality, he created a beautiful atmosphere of a family in the formation house. While giving a solid missionary formation he trained them to live the motto of Don Bosco, *Da mihi animas cetera tolle* ('give me souls, take away the rest'), right from the initial days.[31]

Missionary zeal was the hallmark of his formation programme. On weekends, Fr. Ferrando and the novices walked miles to villages far away on the mountains. On reaching the villages, the novices would lead the people to sing, pray and prepare the people by revising catechism lessons, while Fr. Ferrando heard confessions and celebrated the Holy Mass.[32] He taught the novices the technique of learning local languages of the tribes. In the words of G. Maliekal, "Fr. Ferrando played a vital role in the formation of many generations of Salesians in India. Besides, he gave the Church some outstanding missionaries who were unparalleled in their missionary undertakings in the region."[33]

2.2. A Missionary Bishop

Bishop Ferrando was essentially a missionary at heart. He exhibited his missionary zeal as a young priest. The motto of Don Bosco propelled him throughout his life to seek for souls without counting the cost. As a true son of Don Bosco, he gave great

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30 Cf. J. Thekkedath, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India*: *From the Beginning up to 1951-1952*, Vol. 1, Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2005, pp. 113-114.

31 Cf. P. Malngiang, *Testimony*, in *Copia Pubblica*, Vol. I, p. 81.

32 Cf. P. Mathew, A *Man Sent by God*, p. 35.

33 Cf. G. Maliekal, *History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis*, pp. 201-202.

importance to missionary evangelization and catechetical instruction in carrying out his mission. As the bishop of Shillong, with the entire Northeast under his care, he was able to make a regular pastoral visit to his flock which would extend into weeks as he had to travel from one end of Assam to the other. Fr. A. Ravalico testified to this apostolic zeal of the bishop with these words: "His excellency Bishop Ferrando, true to his beautiful motto Apostle of Christ, is really making an apostolic pilgrimage. He is constantly on the move across his vast diocese which extends from Bengal to the boundary of China and Tibet".[34] He was truly a bishop of the people, a good pastor and a committed shepherd.

2.3. Founder of a Missionary Congregation

Bishop Ferrando, a farsighted pastor wanted the best to be accomplished in the Church in Northeast. As the missionary work of the Sisters of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) were restricted due to the Second World War, he thought of alternatives to reach out to the people. One of the means he thought was founding an indigenous congregation. At this juncture, he came across a group of young girls at St. Mary's Convent, Guwahati, who were keen to offer themselves as apostles in the mission field. Trusting in the Divine Providence and in the good will of those young girls he laid the foundation of a new religious congregation on 24 October 1942. The initiative is marked as one of the most important and Spirit-inspired event of the Second World War years (1939-1945). Bishop Ferrando wanted his spiritual daughters to be new athletes of Christ, formed in the Mission, well acclimatized and adapted, with the knowledge of local languages and with zeal that has grown with the passage of time.[35]

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34 L. Ravalico, *Fervore d'opere e movimento di conversione nella Missione Salesiana*, in "Bollettino Salesiano", Vol. LXII, Nr. 6 (giugno1938), p. 136.

35 Cf. S. Ferrando, *Letter to the Rector Major*, in *Copia Pubblica*, Vol. V, 2007, p. 1422.

3. Factors that Influenced Bishop Ferrando

Missionary zeal was one of the most outstanding characters of Bishop Ferrando. He received a solid Salesian formation right from his adolescent years, which sought to save souls. His ardent love for the people was manifested in his readiness to forego anything for their sake. He spared no effort to reach out even to the remotest corner of his diocese. His participation in the Ecumenical Council in 1962-1965 helped him to have a new outlook on his pastoral ministry.

3.1 Salesian charism with emphasis on Education to Christian Faith

The Salesian Congregation was born in the *milieu* of great missionary movement of contemporary ecclesiastical history. The Salesian Congregation was born during this period and it absorbed the missionary charism of the Church as one of the fundamental tenets of its own charism. Article 34 of the Constitutions of the Congregation affirms this fact: "The society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson". The article further emphasizes, "For us too evangelizing and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission".[36] The most effective method that Don Bosco formulated in forming the faith of the young was the preventive method of education based on Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness.[37]

The Preventive System of education became the Salesian method of missionary action in the context of Northeast India. The missionaries gathered boys, entertained them, instructed them, led them in prayer. Some of them called the oratory children 'little apostles' (*piccoli apostoli*) because many of them were

[36] Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of Francis de Sales*, art. 34.

[37] Cf. M. Thadavanal, *Return to the Founder for a Renewal in our Charism, Spirit, Spirituality and Traditions*, p. 70.

instrumental in bringing the Catholic faith to their parents and families. Many entered the Church through the doors of these oratories. They have also formed lay catechists who devote themselves full time for the proclamation of the Gospel. They were considered as the *lunga mano* (extended hands) and *portavoce* (spokesperson) of the missionary.[38]

3.2. Participation in the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) expresses the mind of the Church for the world of today. It was meant to renew the Church in its message, in the transmission of faith so as to make it more relevant in the twentieth century. It called for an *aggiornamento*, a freshening of thinking and practices that would better enable the Church to enter into the life of the faithful in a more relevant way. The theme of the Council is: "To know the Church better and to live as worthy children of the Church". In the matter of implementing the teachings of the Vatican II as emphasized by the Council fathers, Bishop Ferrando initiated the discussions and deliberations through his pastoral letters to his priests and the faithful of his diocese. The most important and essential message was the widespread use of vernacular languages in the Holy Mass instead of Latin, the revision of Eucharistic prayers, the abbreviation of the liturgical calendar, the ability to celebrate the Mass *versus populum* (with the officiant facing the congregation) and the modern aesthetic changes encompassing contemporary Catholic liturgical music and artwork.

Bishop Ferrando manifested his complete obedience and oneness with the Vicar of Christ by following the recommendations of the Council with precision. He spared no time to implement them by renovating the Liturgy in the Vernacular language. The solemn *Messi Cantata* in Gregorian was also translated in Khasi for the

[38] Cf. J. Kuruvachira, *History of the Inculturation of Don Bosco's Charism in India* (1906-1956), in "*Salesianum*", 77 (2015), pp. 677-681.

better participation of the mass. By virtue of faculty received from Rome, the Sisters touring the villages could carry with them the Blessed Sacrament to be consumed by them when there is no possibility of the Holy Mass. His love for the Church and the Vicar of Christ grew deeper after having taken part in the Council which he exhibited in implementing the various recommendations of the documents. Unfortunately, due to the Chinese invasion of Assam in 1962, Bishop Ferrando had to interrupt his participation in the Council and come away to his diocese because the Shepherd has to be with his people in times of danger and war.[39]

Conclusion

The origin and growth of the diocese of Shillong goes back to 1934. The Prefecture of Assam under the care of the Salvatorians, the Jesuits and most of all the Salesians made tremendous progress in number and in faith. When Bishop Ferrando took up the leadership of the vast diocese of Shillong, he had a vision for the whole region: "To lead the whole of North East India to Christ". To achieve this goal he made use of all the means that could be harnessed. His passion for mission and apostolic fervor are remarkable. Shortage of personnel and lack of funds were the two major problems he faced in the new diocese. To add to these there were a number of trying situations which made the whole region and all the missionaries go through pressing times. The greatness of Bishop Ferrando lies in the fact that in the midst of difficult situations he was able to keep up the missionary enthusiasm of all who were with him, and managed to maintain the focus on the mission throughout his episcopate. His contributions towards the growth and development of the Church in the vast mission land of the northeast remain significant and commendable.

[39] Cf. P. Mathew, *A Man Sent by God*, p. 87.



My past twenty-five years have given me many opportunities to be with the people in the vast mission land of Garo Hills in Meghalaya and Assam. Difficult terrain with thick forests, wild animals, poor connectivity and lack of proper conveyance make the journeys unsafe and works wearisome. To reach some of the villages, we have to climb bare mountains in which there are no plants and trees to support. There are also rivers without proper bridges. Once during a tour, I remember crossing the same river twenty-eight times in different locations in order to reach a particular village. Even though the numerous missionary tours that I undertook to the far-flung areas were not always easy, those were filled with many positive and joyful experiences. The positive emotions which I carried back home each time were more precious than what I could give to people during my stay with them. As a whole, people were very kind, simple, welcoming and generous. They were like the poor widow in the Bible (Mk. 12: 43), gave all what they had to make my stay comfortable.

I have also tried every possible means to revive the life of youth in the Church. Special attention was given to the strayed ones and those remained passive. Once, I noticed a boy in one particular village who used to hide whenever we went to that village. When enquired about him, I came to know that he was addicted to drinks and never bothered about going to church. Whenever I visited the village, I made it a point to visit his house and talk to him. In the

beginning, he was unwilling, shy, and hesitant to talk, but gradually he began to show interest and showed eagerness to listen and change his ways. Today he is one of the leading members in the Church, living a good life. He is also a talented musician and singer who uses his gifts to glorify God and to serve the Church.

On one occasion, I met a person who abandoned faith and lived away from the church for the past thirty-two long years. While conversing with him, he told me that he has not committed any sins and found no reason to go to church. I spend long hours speaking to him about the need to remain faithful to God who loves and cares for him. Though in the beginning he remained unmoved and obstinate, I was able to convince him of the need to return to God. The realisation of his turning away from God and his disloyalty towards Him made him weep bitterly. He was ready to begin all over and asked for a priest to make his confession. I could get the help of a priest two days later and the man was assisted to get back to his life of faith in the Catholic Church. Since then, he remained faithful and lived a holy and contented life. A year after he passed away peacefully, leaving behind many fond memories for those in his family and neighbourhood. I feel very happy and thank God for making me His instrument of love and peace.

I was privileged to accompany the St. Joseph sodality in the diocese of Tura for the last twenty-five years. In the initial days, the movement had only a handful of members and even the annual conventions had the attendance of less number of people. However, changes began see in the movement with new members being added each year. The annual convention held in the recent past have gathered more than 2000 members from various parts of the diocese. Another association I have is with the Marian solidarity, which is 27 years old. Today it has over 4000 women

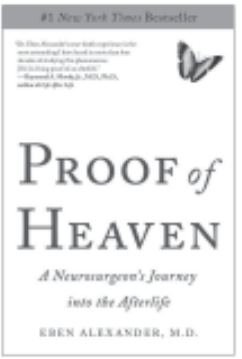
members who are enthusiastic in collaborating with the local Church to carry out its various activities.

At every turn of my life, I see God's powerful hands at work. It is His guidance and support I receive all along the way. Today, I find my life greatly blessed as I could draw many to Jesus' side. Indeed, a number of them were guided to follow the Lord closely in religious life and are living a holy and contented life, serving the people of God.

Our challenge today is to win the hearts of people and to lead them to receive the good news of Jesus. We need to flee away from temptations to remain in our own comfort zones and respond to the invitation of God to become the bearers of the Good News. Let us always keep in mind that our mission remains incomplete until we reach out to everyone in this world.

Sr. Mollina Marak MSMHC





Eben Alexander's book, "Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife"gives owe-inspiring thoughts about life and eternity. This 196-page nonfiction book presents the autobiographical accounts of an American neurosurgeon, Eben Alexander who had a near death experience after suffering from a bacterial meningitis induced coma. He beautifully describes his experience just before the illness and after, to give an overall idea about the context and the time, that anyone who reads his account could easily understand the situation he encountered.

His description about his illness shows that it was totally unexpected and sudden, despite the fact that he had much experience as a medical doctor. His narrations about his condition before illness shows that he tried every possible means to remain calm and pacify the situation as he began to take note of his imbalanced physical condition, but things went out of his control, even to the extend, which he could never imagine. His wife Holley rushed him to the hospital, where he spent seven days in a meningitis induced coma. His condition was very critical that the doctors were unable to provide surety about his recovery. Later, when he was recovered, it was told that he had suffered from a very rare form of bacterial meningitis, and his recovery was a miracle.

The days he spent in coma is described as afterlife experience, during which he conversed with God. Speaking about the seven days of his coma, Alexander tells, "My journey deep into coma, outside this lowly physical realm and into the loftiest dwelling place of the Almighty Creator, revealed the indescribably immense chasm between our human knowledge and the awe-inspiring realm of God." He is now convinced that the death of the body and the brain are not the end of consciousness, that human experience continues beyond the grave,where the universe itself and all the beings within it are ultimately joined.

Much more than the recovery Alexander had, what takes our attention is the journey he made beyond this world and meeting the Divine, who guided him into the deepest realms of super-physical existence while his body remained in coma. The experience has led him to believe in the power of God and eternity, and the understanding he gained on the profound truth transformed his thought patterns. He says, "To say that there is still a chasm between our current scientific understanding of the universe and the truth as I saw it is a considerable under statement. I still love physics and cosmology, still love studying our vast and wonderful universe. Only I now have a greatly enlarged conception of what "vast" and "wonderful" really mean. The physical side of the universe is as a speck of dust compared to the invisible and spiritual part. In my past view, spiritual wasn't a word that I would have employed during a scientific conversation. Now I believe it is a word that we cannot afford to leave out."

The insight, which Alexander shares, sheds light in us and inspires us to think of our ultimate goal in life. He presents God as ever loving and thoughtful and assures the comfort of His watchful care and unfailing support.

The author of the book, Eben Alexander is an American neurosurgeon, who had a near-death experience in the year 2008, which changed his belief system. He also authored the book, "The Map of Heaven" which builds on the claims in his previous book, and co-authored the book, "Living in a Mindful Universe" which describes his personal journey since 2008.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC