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Pope Francis Revives Vatican II Reform

Editorial

Dr. J. Felix Raj, SJ

Following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI on February 28, 2013, the papal conclave elected, on March 13, 2013, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, as his successor. The new Pope chose St. Francis of Assisi, known for poverty, humility, simplicity and rebuilding the Catholic Church, as his namesake.

Pope Francis is people's pontiff – a leader like Simon Peter, an apostle like Paul, a religious like Francis of Assisi, a missionary like Francis Xavier and a reformer like Ignatius of Loyola.

On his first papal day itself, Pope Francis displayed a deep sense of humour when he told his cardinals who elected him as Pope, "May God forgive you for what you have done." On his first stepping out as the new Pope, he discarded much of the formal papal trappings of office, save the white cassock and simple cross.

In less than an hour he shunned the Papal limousine and boarded a bus. He is the first Pope to pick up his luggage and pay his hotel bills at Vatican after the election, and chose to reside in the Domus Sanctae Marthae guest house rather than in the papal palace. Francis has a refreshing style of leadership in living and functioning at the Vatican. This is what we call servant leadership.

Francis is the first Jesuit to be elected Pope, the first from the Americas, the first from the Southern Hemisphere, and the first Pope from outside Europe since the Syrian Gregory in the eighth century.

Francis has been globally visible and publicly noted for his humility, simplicity, emphasizing on God's mercy and justice, concern for the poor and commitment to interfaith dialogue. He believes that the Church should be more transparent, simple and welcoming.

In international relations he has helped to restore full diplomatic relations between the USA and Cuba and supported the cause of refugees during the European and

Central American migrant crises. He made the Holy See intercede to promote peace in South Sudan and Columbia.

Francis has faced increasingly severe criticism, particularly from some conservative theologians, cardinals and bishops on many questions, including the admission of civilly divorced and remarried Catholics to Communion with the publication of his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (the Joy of Love) and on the question of the alleged cover-up of clergy sexual abuse, against which he promulgated on 7 May, 2019, his Apostolic Letter *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (You are the light of the world).

In the spirit of genuine and healthy inter-religious dialogue, Francis has made efforts to foster ties with other religions. He travelled to United Arab Emirates in 2019 and presided over an historic Mass on the Arabian Peninsula and addressed hit-button global issues including migration and climate change.

Francis has spoken critically about economic injustice – the way the poor are treated in the world, the way the planet is exploited and the way the poor bear the main cost of the ecological crisis. He reignited his influence as a global environmental leader as he released, on 2 February 2020, an impassioned 94-page Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (Dear Amazon) regarding



Pope Francis in the Jesuit Curia in Rome



Pope Francis Canonising Mother Teresa in Vatican

the fate of the Amazon biome and its indigenous people.

This document comes as the Amazon faces “deforestation at breakneck rate” driven by illegal logging, mining, ranching and agribusiness in Peru, Bolivia, Columbia and Brazil, a nation that had also seen a sharp spike in killings of indigenous activists.

It is no wonder that as Pope Francis completes seven years of his Petrine ministry on 13 March 2020, a deeper understanding and appreciation of his papacy and his place within the larger context of contemporary Catholicism is coming into view. There is a widespread reading that he revives vision of Vatican II for the Catholic Church.

Consequently, his leadership is attentive to the contemporary concerns of the Church and the world, such as migration, refugees, economy of exclusion, climate change, and marriage and family. He sees the importance of dialogue with religions, Churches, science and society for the common good; he encourages pastoral care of L.G.B.T and is willing to discuss on matters of women's leadership in the Church and married clergy.

He dreams for a synodal modal of collegial leadership in the Church that gives due space to local Churches across the globe and work together through the challenges of the modern world along with other faiths and ideologies for the advancement of humanity.

His first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, gives us pointers to understand the priorities of his pontificate.

Through the powerful and stimulating messages of *Laudato Si* and *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis has connected himself with a humanity that hungers and thirsts for a message of hope, compassion and consolation.

In this backdrop, the January-March, 2020 issue of the *GOETHALS NEWS* is on the topic “Pope Francis Revives Vatican II Reform” with the following articles by experts:

- Rebirth of Vatican II in Francis' papacy by Dr. D. John Romus
- Church in dialogue with the world by Dr. Michael Amaladas, SJ
- Pope Francis, Evangelization and human advancement by Dr. Francis Gonsalves, SJ
- Women's leadership in the Church by Dr. Surekha Lobo, BS
- Pastoral Care of the Families in *Amoris Laetitia* by Dr. James Charles Davis
- Pope Francis' Call to Care for the Earth's Environment by Dr. P. R. John, SJ

I am grateful to all the contributors and I am confident that their ideas and reflections will make our readers think and initiate an on-going praxis towards furthering the collaborative efforts already existing in our communities and institutions to stand by what is true and good. We look forward to your response. 📖



Rebirth of Vatican II in Francis' Papacy

Dr. D. John Romus

Pope Francis completes seven years of his Petrine ministry on 13 March, 2020. Since he was introduced to the world on the balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square, he has set a path of reform for the Church with concrete examples, practical, available to enactment, such as renouncing

inherited symbols of power and the papal apartments. He made clear the priorities of his pontificate when he chose for his first papal visit outside of Rome the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, an asylum for people fleeing war and economic deprivation. All these gestures indicate that he is skilfully reforming the Church for making its mission realistic and relevant and reassuring to the demands of the present global attention.

The foundation stone of his reform measures is the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII discerned a movement of the Spirit was taking place in the Church, seeking to renew it as the salt and light of the Gospel, and present it anew to the world. For this, he convened Vatican II. In his inaugural address to the Council he stated out its objectives, categorically: The Council was to update the Church for the sake of its own spiritual vitality so that it may engage in creative encounter with the modern world to eradicate the seeds of discord, promote concord, just peace and unity of all humankind (John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, 15, 17, 20).

The documents of this historic Council have been consistently accepted in Latin America where they ignited the liberation theology movement and saw the development of a Church immersed among and concerned with the immediate responsibilities of its people. As Archbishop of Bruenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (future Pope Francis), is a representative of the "theology of the people," the Argentinean version of liberation theology.

He himself had repeated conflicts with the Vatican, and even experienced censorship. Thus, the theology of Vatican II, which matured itself in the painful pastoral context of Latin America, is what Pope Francis brought back to the Vatican as reform.

In the backdrop of liberation theology and the global context of poverty affecting millions of people the world over, Pope Francis realized that the Church's commitment for the poor and the need for reform in the Church go hand in hand. This was the core theme of the intervention he made before the papal election during the consistory of cardinals on 9 March, 2013. He said then that the Church reform and social reform, ecumenism ad intra and ecumenism ad extra belong together (cf. Weisner, Interim results, NCR, 13.3.2018). Later, in his Apostolic Exhortation

Evangelii Gaudium (EG), he wrote an extensive narrative on these matters and their significance for the life and mission of the Church today (EG, 53-109; 176-258).

Catholics in the parishes across the world knew that this Council heralded the rebirth of a pastoral and mission outreach Church which is open to other Churches, religions, cultures and society at large (C. Lamb, *The Tablet*, 7.3.2018). Hence, Pope Francis is both a product and a champion of the conciliar reform. His election is part of the historic process of rejuvenation of Catholicism.

The post-conciliar Church has wrestled with various attempts to thwart, contain or water down the spirit of reform. This was to be expected and be faced for an idea of renewal movement worth the name as John Henry Newman predicted. In his *Essay on the Development of*



Pope Francis with Jesuits in Bangladesh

Christian Doctrine, he wrote, "If a great idea is duly to be understood... it is elicited and expanded by trail and battles into perfection and supremacy" (Newman, *Essay*, 1878: 25).

In the years since the Council, some have refused to recognise the reform and called for restoration of a mythical pre-conciliar golden era of Catholicism basking in the baroque aesthetic sensibility protected by Neo-scholastic manual tradition. Others concede the importance of reform but continue to carry on the ecclesiastical responsibilities as usual.

Pope Francis faces each of these mindsets as he tries to nurture a renewed Catholicism of tenderness and mercy. In an interview given to Antonio Spadaro in August 2013, Pope Francis said: "The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful and the lost; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle" (Spadaro, Big Heart

Open to God, *America*, 30.9.2013). And so he dreams that every parish will be a “field hospital”, in which everyone is offered a chance to experience the healing power of Christ's forgiveness as they are accompanied on a path of discernment towards God.

Thus, his vision of the Church reflects the image of the Church depicted in the Pastoral Constitution of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) that opens with the declaration: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts” (GS, 1). With this vision in mind, Pope Francis has succeeded implementing, as I see, four significant reform measures in seven years of his pontificate.

First, Reform of the Papacy: Pope Francis has introduced a pastoral style of leadership to papacy to retain close connections with a wide range of people outside the traditional Vatican bureaucracy. It has brought an end to the papacy as a monarchy, replacing it with the model of servant leadership. This is the kind of leadership the faithful had so long longed for that their pastors remain close to their flock. To aid him in his reform project, he has also appointed a nine-member Council of Cardinals chosen from around the world giving due emphasis to cultural diversity in papal administration.

Second, Decentralised Church: The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG) and Degree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops, *Christus Dominus* (CD) have significantly defined the importance of episcopal collegiality and synodality as new order of ecclesiastical governance (LG, 23-24; CD, 4-10). Based on these documents, Pope Francis has committed himself to a cautious process of decentralisation of the Church through collegial and synodal forms of administration.

His Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* shows his resolve to put them into practice for making participatory Church governance, beginning from the parish to the Roman Curia. (EG, 16, 27-32). As a result, in accordance with the objectives of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in particular as stated in paragraphs 36, 40 and 63, he has directed the National Bishops' Conferences to have control over the translation of the liturgical texts from Latin into local languages (Pope Francis, *Magnum Principium*, 2017).

Another important key to decentralization is his emphasis on synodal Church in which the entire people of God

collectively read the signs of the times while the bishop of Rome is the guarantor of unity and has the final say. The broad and frank consultation process applied in the preparation for the synods on the family in 2014 and 2015, on the young people in 2018 and the recently concluded Amazon synod in 2019 has been welcomed worldwide as signs of a new culture of participatory governance emerging in the Church.

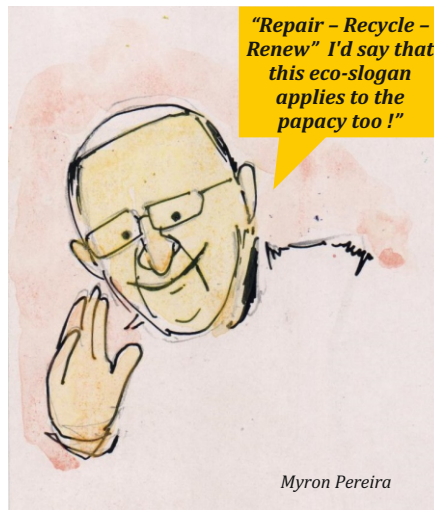
With the crucial statement in Paragraph 3 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, on Love in the Family, issued in 2016, Pope Francis restored to the Church the freedom of dialogue and development of doctrine that was curtailed in the past. He declares in Paragraph 3: “I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium... Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs.”

Pope Francis has chosen “Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission” as the theme for the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which will be held in October 2022. It seems to me that he feels a Synodal Church is the model best suited for the third millennium”.

Third, Dialogue and Collaboration: Vatican II insisted in its documents on Ecumenism and on Church's Relation

to Non-Christian Religions that the Catholic Church must enter into dialogue and collaboration with all Christians, all faith communities and with all people of good will because in many ways the Catholic Church is connected with all people as God's children (LG, 14-17; GS, 22, 92). Hence, in the footsteps of the Council, Pope Francis has reinvigorated the ministry of dialogue and collaboration with all religions and denominations, including the state, civil society and academic community to discern for collaborative mission to further the cause of the common good (EG, 238-258).

Fourth, Compassionate Global Statesmanship: The environmental and social Encyclical *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis has received a positive worldwide response since its release in May 2015. It is as if humanity longed for a strong voice to denounce the inconsistencies of world development theories and praxis, and to call people at various levels to act for the common good of all earth's inhabitants. In fact, this ministry is a calling, a vocation, very much encouraged by Vatican II (GS, 91, 93). As nationalist, insular political movements are becoming stronger around the world, Pope Francis has become a standard bearer for a compassionate post-war global political consensus.



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Pope Francis, Evangelization and Human Advancement

Dr. Francis Gonsalves, SJ

Often say, tongue-in-cheek, “I love Pope Francis not only because he took my name and belongs to my Congregation, but also since he ‘walks the talk’ and shows us a new way of being Christian and Church.”

In my recently-published book I’ve called Pope Francis a ‘revolutionary of tender love’; for he strives not just for reform—i.e., putting new wine into old wineskins—but for total ‘renewal’, unleashing a ‘radical revolution’, the seeds of which were sown by Jesus.

Pope Francis is an ‘evangelist’ in the best sense of the word. He not only bears Good News but ‘is’ good news, incarnate. He makes Christ come alive not by yoking Christians with difficult do’s and don’ts, dense documents, and mighty missions, but simply by showing them how to be humble, human and happy by his words, works and witness of his life. He basically believes that you and I must ‘be’ good news by being fully human; for, only those who are deeply human can truly be holy, and, holy persons are always human: like the pope himself!

While many worldwide are critical, if not condemnatory, of Pope Francis’ papacy, many thinkers from the so-called Global South, i.e., Latin America, African and Asia, view him as ‘radical’ and well versed in Scripture and

Tradition. ‘Radical’—from the Latin radix, meaning ‘rooted’—is not synonymous with ‘liberal’ referring to laissez-faire or a chalta hai attitude. Far from uncritically yielding to everyone’s whims and fancies, Francis is led by the Spirit and discerns the greatest good, especially for Jesus’ least brethren: the poorest of the poor.

Evangelii Gaudium (hereafter EG), Pope Francis’ magnum opus on mission, shows how firmly anchored he is in God, while exhorting Christians to ‘go forth!’ to love and serve the world. Chapter four of EG nn.176-216 subtitled ‘The Social Dimension of Evangelization’ solidly situates Christian mission within the larger landscape of God’s Reign. Francis begins this section by simply saying: “To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world.” God’s kingdom—called Ram Rajya, Sangha, Umma, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or anything else—is to be constructed by us all, collaboratively.

When the world’s power-brokers wish to perpetuate their diabolic designs unhindered, they accuse religious leaders of being “too political”. Rubbishing such accusations, Pope Francis writes: “For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one” (EG 198). This simply means that Francis is neither politicking to publicize Church as ideal



Pope Francis had a pizza party with children on his 81st birthday

world-community nor even to suggest that Jesus Christ is universal saviour since both these faith-claims are untenable in any multireligious and multicultural context like ours. However, he proceeds differently

Since any genuine dialogue must be built upon truth, openness and sensitivity to other dialoging partners, Francis candidly confesses that his foundations are Christian and Trinitarian. However, in EG 178, he writes: "From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love God in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others."



God's love, concretely seen in committed striving for the 'common good', is the wellspring of Christian mission. Indeed, if all believers accept the Parenthood of God in its myriad avatars as Amma, Abba, Allah, Mata, Ishwar, Ishtadeva or Devi, then everyone of God's children is sister, brother, friend, companion, co-pilgrim and so on. Love being neither limited by language nor confined within manmade categories, "We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses." (EG 183).

(Continue from Pg. 4)

"Rebirth of Vatican II in Francis' Papacy"

Conclusion

It is our certain conviction that under the compassionate leadership of Pope Francis, the Catholic Church will now be able to take up the path of reform set out by the Second Vatican Council for evolving a model of Church relevant to the needs of the third millennium so as to take on collaborative role to help solve the immense global problems affecting the human family in a fast changing world.

Echoing the Church's teaching on social issues (EG 182-187) based on the premise that God's Son, Jesus, was "the poor one", Francis reminds us that, "Christians, with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor" (EG 191). The cry of the poor is the cry of the crucified Christ, which everyone—especially Christians—must respond to. This does not mean giving the poor only bread; for the poor suffer from a "lack of spiritual care" (EG 200) too. Most heartening in Pope Francis' approach to poverty is his analysis of its complexity and his unmasking the power play of those who ensure that the poor remain always poor.

Cautioning about apolitical, ahistorical Christian charity, Francis writes: "We need to be convinced that charity is the principle not only of micro-relationships [with friends, family members or within small groups] but also of macro-relationships [social, economic and political ones]." (EG 205). This straddles many fields of human activity etymologically stemming from the Greek 'oikos': home. Consequently, the disciplines related to 'oikos'—economics, ecology, ecumenism—must jointly work to make our "common home" a heaven for all.

The poor and vulnerable children of Abba-God and Amma-Earth—especially migrants (EG 210); child labourers, prostitutes, bonded labourers whose bodies are being trafficked (EG 211); women who are violated in various degrees (EG 212) and defenceless, unborn babes (EG 213)—call for special care and commitment. Beware! All our offences against them are "an offence against Our Creator" (EG 213).

Pope Francis' gospel is not only for humankind but for cosmic communion: "An incredible variety of insects lived in the forest; and was busy with all kinds of tasks... Birds flew through the air ... God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland..." (EG 215). Recalling his namesake from Assisi, Francis says: "As Christians, we are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live and all its peoples" (EG 216). What 'more' can we do? 📖

The Catholic Church is the largest global player ever. It has a great responsibility far beyond its own faith community. The world at large is watching whether and how the largest faith community intervenes in the survival questions of humanity. From this global perspective of the third millennium, I believe the Church reform and the survival issues of humanity are closely intertwined. Pope Francis has discerned it, he has scripted specific designs to destine it. 📖



Women's Leadership in the Church

Dr. Surekha Lobo BS

I have been interested, if not actually engaged, in emancipation and empowerment of women for the last 20 years. Looking back, I am amazed at the manner in which the outlook of women has changed. Sharing that would give us some idea of where women should be in the Church. The

question of the role of women in the Church is one of the most significant issues facing the Church today. Much has been accomplished but more needs to be done to lighten the burden that woman in the Church carries.

Gender bias runs deep in the Church and has historically prevented women from fulfilling their leadership call. Down the ages, the Church has taken on a very patriarchal image – reasons for this are multiple, political and historical factors. To re-phrase this image would be first, to restore the human face of the Church which entails recovering the feminine dimension of being Church; second, to reconstruct the structure of the Church; third, to structure of the Church is to deconstruct gender boundaries, for we are aware of the boundaries that divide and exclude the women in the Church. Hence a breakdown of gender boundaries and transcend them is imperative; and forth, is to retrieve Christ's vision for the Church, being a community of equal discipleship, a Church that is egalitarian and inclusive, as Pope Francis often says. In this

regard, I believe that there is a need for an alternate mode of leadership because culture, society and religion have determined how leadership has to be exercised in the family, in the society, religion and the Church as well. The topic: Women's Leadership in the Church is in itself provoking and hints at a need for reflection on the self-understanding of the CHURCH, especially in relation to women.

In this regard, my questions to you are – Is the Church making space for women leadership in the Church? How can the Church promote women leadership in the Church? Is the Church right in using those catchwords like gender justice, equal participation, and inclusive Church?

Pope Francis speaks much about this, about religious women and men being mothers and fathers. As we know and perceive, his papacy has been marked by a series of most extraordinary gestures, the first of which was that he became the first Pope in two thousand years to dare to take the name of the great saint of the poor, Francis of Assisi. The Church for the past two thousand years has embraced the mission of taking the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth. The renewed vision of Pope Francis spelt out in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), his first Apostolic Exhortation, published on 24th November, 2013, gives a paradigm shift to the leadership in the Church. It also heralds a passionate call to be inclusive of women presence in the Church. (EG 103-104).



"Listen, ladies – I can't make you deacons under canon law, but how about if I make you all cardinals instead?"



Pope Francis was not the only pope for the emancipation of women in the Church: In fact, in 1995 John Paul II, in his ground-breaking Encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* urged women to be at the forefront of an evangelising revolution built on an active but 'new feminism' which: "rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination', in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation" (EV 99). Again in his Letter to Women and the Encyclical, *Mulieris Dignitatis* (1988), he reaffirms the celebration of 'femininity' and of motherhood – both spiritual and actual – as an ontologically and metaphysically distinct, equal and complementary way of being human and called by God.

New Adventures for Women's Leadership

I believe that the prime result achieved so far is that Pope Francis drew worldwide attention to the presence of women in the Church. I would like to enumerate a few examples of this which are definitely known:

- i)** Pope Francis named the first woman to a managerial position in the Vatican's most important office, the Secretariat of State.
- ii)** In late October 2019, at the end of the Amazon synod, which repeatedly referred to the leadership of women in faith communities throughout the region, Pope Francis promised to "reconvene" and expand the commission he had appointed to study the diaconate of women as permanent deacons – Church ministers who are able to perform some of the duties of priests, but not to say Mass or hear confessions.
- iii)** Last May 2019, Pope Francis appointed six consultants to the general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, the office that coordinates the gathering. Four of the six were women, of whom three are religious and a lay woman. They are the first women consultants to the secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, which reflected the Pope's desire for greater

female representation at senior levels in the Church, but they can only attend the assemblies as advisers or observers. iv) In his fourth Apostolic Exhortation, "*Christus Vivit*" (2019) Pope Francis' calls for a Church with "open doors" that can acknowledge past ills and be attentive to women seeking "greater justice and equality" (CV 42). The Exhortation is a clear indication of the Pope's willingness to evolve his Church with the times.

Ambiguity and Polarization

Even though the changing role of women in the Church and society has been identified as one of the most significant trends of the 20th century still there is a growing awareness among the women today that women are not given their rightful place in the life and mission of the Church. Yet these reforms only make clear how little power women hold in the Church, where they constitute about half of Catholicism's 1.2 billion adherents. Women's role portrayed on the documents is ambiguous and polarized, as it were! For example, one, though the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* indicates an open door to women yet the exhortation fails to mention any strategies for helping to create space for women in the Church leadership positions; two, although the accomplishment of the synod is a milestone yet it is far from the point of arrival of an inclusive or participatory Church; three, not only are women barred from ordination to the priesthood, they are not even allowed to vote at Vatican synods, convened to advise the Pope about challenges facing the Church; four, although ordained women deacons are historically documented and doctrinally permissible but many continue to hold the belief that ordination of women to any ministry in the Church is impossible because a female "cannot image Christ."

The irony is that despite the high visibility of women in the pastoral work, they still remain invisible at the level in which strategic planning is done. On the one hand, the official Church teachings project a liberative view of women's empowerment and participation in the Church's apostolate, but on the other hand, women have to constantly claim their dignity and rights from the church and civil authorities – a paradoxical situation indeed! Still the numerous incidents of gender-based discrimination and violence tell us that despite many efforts we have a long way to go to see a world where men and women live as equals.

What sort of Church Pope Francis has in mind? Where does he want to take the Church? Pope Francis envisages a Church that knows how to walk with women and men along the path. Failing to empower women narrows the Church's vision, and makes it less equipped to be a force for good in the world. I think the best example of this partnership is God himself; God in Jesus entering into a partnership with humankind.

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Pastoral Care of the Families in *Amoris Laetitia*

Dr. James Charles Davis

No other Papal document has been so much discussed as Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) – the Joy of Love, published on 19 March, 2016.

He begins the Exhortation with these words: “The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church. ... The desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and this is an inspiration to the Church. ... The Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed” (AL 1). He reaffirmed what he said in Santiago de Cuba that “families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity” (AL 7) with due respect to the genuine words of the local Bishops of Chile who stated that “the perfect families proposed by deceptive consumerist propaganda do not exist... Consumerist propaganda presents a fantasy that has nothing to do with the reality which must daily be faced by the heads of families” (AL 135). *Amoris Laetitia* speaks on love, marriage, partnership, sexuality, parenthood and family and invites for a renewed pastoral care of marriage and family with an open ear and a generous heart.

In a very positive appreciation of love of married couples, Pope Francis says that erotic love should not be considered simply as a permissible evil or a burden to be tolerated for the good of the family. Erotic love is a gift from God that enriches the relationship of the spouses. Cardinal Kasper praises such realistic, open and relaxed way of dealing with sexuality and eroticism: “With a grain of salt, we can say that *amoris laetitia* distances itself from a predominantly negative Augustinian view of sexuality and turns toward the Thomistic view on affirming creation.” (*Stimmen der Zeit* 11 (2016) 725). Pope Francis recognizes the erotic love in marital relationships. This will have an impact in the Church’s teaching on family and sexual morals.

Pope Francis brings necessary attitudinal changes in teaching of Church’s doctrines towards marriage and families. He says, “The Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (AL 310). He breaks no norms. He alters no theology. Yet he seems to be a trendsetter and brings new attitudes in everything. Cardinal Kasper confirms that “*amoris laetitia* does not change an iota of the teaching of the Church, yet it changes everything,” and the



Church with Pope Francis is gradually moving away from a “legal morality” toward a “virtue morality.” (*Stimmen der Zeit*, 725-26).

The core message of the gospel lies behind the Petrine leadership of Pope Francis marked by love, mercy and compassion. His heart is filled with the message of pastoral mercy. Not only his message is of inclusion and integration, but his very method is inductive. There is no black and white but only different nuances and shadings in pastoral situations. Pope Francis says, “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.” (AL 37) It means that we need to form consciences of people in the light of the moral norms and not replace them with laws and rules. While stressing the need for education of the faithful in marriage and family, sexuality and love, Pope Francis promotes respect for personal conscience of the concerned persons to deal with conflict issues, such as, communion to the divorced and remarried, artificial contraception and same sex partnerships.

Failures and difficulties in adhering to the ideals do neither make persons automatically objective offenders nor do they lose human dignity due to the “irregular situations” in which they are in. Thomas Aquinas says that “mercy is the greatest of the virtues, since all the others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies” (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 30). The virtue of mercy has

“It's Benedict's last book on celibacy. Do read it – I've never; laughed so much in my life!”



become the hallmark of Pope Francis who does not want to abandon even one sinner as “Jesus himself is the shepherd of the hundred, not just of the ninety-nine. He loves them all” (AL 309). In the variety of situations affecting families, “the Church is commissioned to proclaim the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the mind and heart of every person. The Bride of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who goes out to everyone

without exception” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 12). Pope Francis wants the Church to *avoid* a cold

bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues and *adopt* a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love to understand, forgive, accompany, hope and above all integrate the concerned persons (AL 312).

Pope Francis critiques the rigidity of pastors that “we put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL 311). Pastors must rather make room for God's unconditional love in pastoral activity with an open ear and a generous heart especially to those living on the outermost fringes of society (AL 312). According to the new perspective of Pope Francis, pastors must listen to those affected and make right distinction of each individual situation. Thus, it is no longer possible to claim that all who live in any so-called irregular situation

are in a state of mortal sin and lost the sanctifying grace (AL 301). He has shown a new way that pastoral discernment is an alternative solution to permit reconciled persons in irregular situations to receive the Eucharist following confession and penance.

In this line of welcoming spirit of inclusion, the Church has moved away from rigid and unforgiving attitude towards



Pope Francis with the Youths



stern warning to those who procured it.

The paradigm shift in *Amoris Laetitia* with extraordinary permissions in individual cases to receive the Eucharist is a responsible pastoral discernment. Extraordinary permissions, granted by Pope Francis in individual cases, do not abolish the objective contradiction of the ongoing bond of marriage of the first sacramental marriage and the second civil marriage (*Stimmen der Zeit*, 729-31). *Amoris Laetitia* continues to emphasize the fruitfulness of “the ideal of marriage, marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability” (AL 34). The inseparable elements of love and the

openness to life of married couples continues to mark the Christian marriage. Without diluting the norms of the Church on marriage and families, Pope Francis has clearly given a new direction in pastoral approach in guiding those vulnerable people who need the mercy most. 📖



The Two Popes

sinners of abortion. Through his Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera* (MM), issued at the Conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy on 20 November, 2016, Pope Francis permitted all priests to absolve the reserved sin of abortion during and beyond the Jubilee year of Mercy until further provisions are made: “I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father. May every priest, therefore, be a guide, support and comfort to penitents on this journey of special reconciliation” (MM, 12). The Catholic position on abortion remains a grave sinful act, while the attitude towards the sinners of procured abortion has changed. While Pope Francis wants more opportunities of reconciliation for sinners, he has not diluted the gravity of sin of abortion. The special provision of Pope Francis is a token of God's love and mercy for those who underwent abortion un/willingly while sending a

(Continue from Pg. 8..) “Women's Leadership in the Church”

Way forward

Christianity from the very beginning has paved a broad way for the emancipation of women. Jesus challenges gender prejudices at their core. He dissociated himself from the customary exclusion of women. All I need to say here is that Jesus challenges the oppressive system of domination. The women in the life and ministry of Jesus are seen as channels of transformation by challenging the patriarchal structures and by retrieving their dignity.

Obviously, Pope Francis raises our expectations that he is making space for women leaders in the Church. He calls for a greater presence of women in the decision-making areas of the Church. According to him, women are givers and mediators of peace and should be fully included in decision-making processes. Because when

women can share their gifts, the world finds itself more united, more peaceful. An ongoing transformative process among women as well as men is an imperative for the comprehension of women's leadership that will enable one to retrieve the human face of the Church – proclaimed by Jesus as free daughters of God created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:28). Every step forward for women is a step forward for humanity as a whole. 📖

“If something is true, it is good and beautiful; if it is beautiful; it is good and true; if it is good, it is true and it is beautiful. And together, these elements enable us to grow and help us to love life, even when we are not well, even in the midst of many problems. True education enables us to love life and opens us to the fullness of life.”
- Pope Francis



The Church in Dialogue with the World

Dr. Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

It used to be said that the Church has been sent into the world on a mission to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God in and through Jesus Christ. Such a proclamation would normally lead to a conversion through which people become members of the Church. The goal of such conversion is the saving of 'souls'. This view of mission, however, has been changing after the Second Vatican Council, particularly in two important ways. The goal of mission is no longer the saving of souls, but building up the Kingdom as human communities of freedom, fellowship and justice for all.

The second change is that, not only the Church, but all the religions are journeying towards this Kingdom and are therefore called to collaborate in the task of building it up. The Spirit of God is present and active in individuals, their cultures and religions. The people therefore are asked to collaborate with each other towards the building up of the Kingdom. Such collaboration can take place at two levels. Cultures and religions are meaning systems. Religions deal with ultimate values. As such they have to dialogue with the

cultures and enable them to promote the Kingdom values in society. Cultures and societies are animated by different religious systems. But religions do claim to promote ultimate values. Their visions and praxis tend to clash. Interreligious violence is not rare today. In an era of globalization, the religions too feel that they need to dialogue and collaborate in the promotion of common human spiritual values in society.

So we are faced with two processes of dialogue. Religions have to dialogue with society – culture, world – in view of presenting, defending and promoting ultimate human and spiritual values. In the process of doing so, they have to dialogue also among themselves so that they can present a common front in their dialogue with the world.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of both kinds of dialogue. The Gospel needs to be proclaimed, not only to individuals, but to the cultures as a whole. He suggests that “a theology which is in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences is most important for our discernment on how best to bring the Gospel message to different cultural contexts and groups.” (133) When



certain categories of reason and the sciences are used in the proclamation of the Gospel, they become tools of evangelization. (132) “Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way.” (134) In interreligious situations, however, we have to be creative in searching for suitable methods. One such method is dialogue with states, with civil society including cultures and the sciences and with other believers (238).



Pope with religious leaders

Every Christian is called to be a “peacemaker and a credible witness to a reconciled life. In a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter, it is time to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society.” (239) This task is entrusted, not to any particular group or to an elite, but to the people as such and their culture. It is the responsibility of the State to safeguard and promote the common good of society, committed to principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, political dialogue and consensus building. The Church itself does not have solutions to all social and political problems. But “together with the various sectors of society, she supports those programs which best respond to the dignity of each person and the common good.” (241)

Whereas positivism and scientism refuse to go beyond reason and the positive sciences, “the Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence.” (242) Faith is not fearful of reason since the light both of reason and of faith come from God and cannot contradict each other. The Church respects science and its discoveries. But it refuses to accord the position of dogma to not fully verified scientific opinions, pushed, not by science, but by an ideology.

Pope Francis asserts that “Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world. And so it is a

duty for Christians as well as other religious communities.” (250) Rejecting factors like religious fundamentalism and communalism, “we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation.” (250)

Religions must collaborate in building up the community of the Kingdom which involves the promotion of freedom, fellowship and justice. “The same Spirit everywhere brings forth various forms of practical wisdom which helps people to bear suffering and to live in greater peace and harmony. (254) “A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques.” (255) We are opposed to a rationalist approach that rejects religious belief and its manifestations.

At the same time, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God.” (257). Pope Francis finally invites everyone to the Court of the Gentiles, where “believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence.” 📖



Pope Francis' Call to Care for Earth's Environment

Dr. P. R. John SJ

Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*, celebrates the 'gift' of God's creation and at the same time, is an invitation to a 'task' to care and protect the environment. It is inter-disciplinary

in its approach and engages critically the environmental and cultural issues that threaten the relationship of humans to nature and humans among themselves. It clearly presents the findings of science and technology, economics and politics, ethics and poverty etc. It explores the causes for the degradation of the materialistic society. The encyclical proves Pope Francis' theological and philosophical orientation very effectively and gives a considerable support to the people's movements for environment protection all over the world. Pope Francis also challenges men and women who promote a kind of contemporary consumer world order that aggravate the ecological crisis by their 'throw away culture'. Therefore, he invites the world community for creating an "ecological citizenship" (LS 211) for developing an ethics of ecology through effective transformative education to glow in solidarity and to have a passionate heart to protect the world by engaging in "dialogue with the people of the Common Home".

In my reading of the encyclical, the predominant theological thought that arises out of the exhortation is, "Cosmotheandric Vision" to use the expression of Raimondo Panikkar. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* discovers the mystical meaning of consciousness – the dancing cosmos, divine and humans (sacramentality):

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that "contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures [signs and symbols]

outside ourselves" (LS 233).

According to Pope Francis, the Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi opened our eyes that "each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure". This awareness deepens human person in a mature relationship with God, with oneself, with others and the creatures (LS 239). Thus, a creation-centred spirituality pushes us to be open to a sense of wonder in the creation and in the spirit of dialogue to protect our common home.



The Amazon rainforest

A dialogical approach for the sustenance of ecosystem is the need of the hour. It can deal with social problems and promote social development and encourage political activity at the local level. Along with the scientific dialogue, religious dialogue is equally beneficial to balance the facts and figures, ethical and spiritual values in a human person. In the exhortation, Pope Francis challenges the hierarchical kind of philosophy of the Aristotelian thought and draws us towards a mystical perspective of unity of all in God (*advaita*). The sense of interconnectedness and cosmic solidarity with nature brings forth the spirit of compassion (*karuna*) and of non-violence (*ahimsa*).

To conclude, we can say that the teaching of Pope Francis represents the emergence of a new framework for Catholic Social Teaching. It invites us to appreciate God's wonderful creation and help us to reflect on ethics and how to be a responsible environmental stewardship. It also asks of us what is at stake in our dignity which would eventually help us for an ecological conversion aiming at "tilling" and "keeping" God's Creation, Our Common Home. 📖

Fr. Courtois Memorial lecture on Islamic thought

Dr. Victor Edwin SJ

Kolkata, March 7, 2020: A lecture program to commemorate a 20th century Belgian Jesuit who worked in Kolkata explored the selfhood and identity in Islamic thought.

The fourth Victor Courtois Memorial Lecture was held at St. Xavier's University, Kolkata on March 7. Islamologist Father Victor Courtois, who died in Kolkata in 1960 aged 53, is considered an apostle of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Kolkata.

The lecture entitled 'Who am I? An Exploration of Selfhood and Identity in Islamic Thought' was presented by Yusuf Jha, a researcher in Islamic Theology at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom by a video link.

In his welcome address, University Vice-Chancellor Jesuit Father Felix Raj highlighted the importance of interreligious understanding and the need for bringing people together in the present context of divisiveness and interreligious tensions. He said, 'St. Xavier's University, Kolkata is committed to promote interreligious understanding and appreciation of all religions through its curriculum and teaching-learning methods.'

Jesuit Father Victor Edwin, the secretary of New Delhi-based Islamic Studies Association, said Father Courtois fostered relationships between Christians and Muslims in and around Kolkata.

According to Father Edwin, polemics and debates marked the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the past. Father Courtois ushered an era of relationship and respect in such an era. The Belgian missionary taught that Christians and Muslims are brethren since God is the Father of all humans.

Father Courtois encouraged that Christians and Muslims to not shy away in giving witness to one-another's faith, for in giving witness to one another's faith that they recognize the heavenly Father in one another.

In his video lecture, Yusuf Jha noted that the West often questions 'Who am I?' in a dualistic pattern. Such patterns are premised on ultimate questions of existence, being split into two distinct substances: mind and matter. This thinking, Jha explained, has its roots in the 17th century, where people such as Descartes and Galileo, left God and the human mind intact as immaterial entities, but then conceived of the rest of the cosmos as mere matter in motion.

By 19th century, even this dualism waned, as minds (and the soul) themselves came to be understood as aspects of the material machine, until today when our consciousness is explained as an epiphenomenon (mental by-

product). Even though this mechanistic model is further challenged by today's science which has shifted the foundation to Quantum Physics and disputes the 'observer' and 'observed' pattern of alienation and estrangement, this still has not affected mainstream discourse which is still dominated by the mechanistic model.

In contrast to this approach, the approach of most world religions in their spirituality, and especially Sufi spirituality that is solidly founded on the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad presents a holistic approach.



The fundamental call of Islam is to affirm the oneness of God and worship the one God. Yusuf affirmed that the call to surrender to one God is a call to see the One even though we observe the 'many' in the phenomenal level and to worship the One by mirroring the One in creation. The speaker affirmed that God is the foundation of this oneness and diversity.

God is the hidden treasure, noted the speaker. This hidden treasure, wanted to be known in a spirit of love. In order to be known, God, out of love, brings about creation. Thus God creates and nurtures in a constant means of disclosure, said the speaker. Drawing on the teachings of the Qur'an, Yusuf explained that God is known to creation through God's beautiful names, which are attributes of God. The attributes are imprinted in the soul of every human person.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of every human person is to experience this Oneness of love with God, wherein the egoistic sense of the separate seeker is annihilated (fana) and he remains through God (baqa) witnessing this Oneness. Drawing from the Sufi traditions, Yusuf noted that every seeker under guidance of his/her sheikh walks the Sufi path moving from one Station (maqamat) to the next consistently going through different 'states' (hal) patiently waiting for the movement of God's grace. 📖

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