



# LIGHT OF TRUTH



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**3 Jimmy Lai, the testy tycoon defying Beijing**

**You are the first Asian to head the Paris-based Congregation 'Religious of the Assumption' which is there since 1839; So how do you, as an Indian nun take, this call as Superior General?**

We are a congregation founded in France and our sisters are now working in 36 countries



**Sr Rekha Chennattu, RA, Superior General, Religious of the Assumption, Paris.**

tion – my biblical formation, the integral and wholistic spirituality of Asia, our radical option for the poor and marginalized, and the richness of our multi-religious and cultural contexts.

**As your congregation has a clear vision of serving the people in the margins of society especially the outcastes and migrants, what are the present challenges that need special attention from the Church as your nuns work in more than 34 nations?**

The last three General Chapters reminded the whole Congregation of our preferential option for the migrants and of our special commitment to ecology and sustainable development. The most pressing or urgent call for us today is to respond creatively and constructively to the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences

India, so-called online classes remain a farfetched dream. I want to embrace this situation as a kairos moment to explore new ways of making our presence and mission more meaningful and significant. The most challenging task is to discern the "NEW FORMS" of the "Assumption Way" or the "Assumption Culture" that could make us a source of positive energy and hope for new dreams. This new lifestyle hopefully makes God's mercy and justice more and more visible in these trying times.

## Relationships Are Mutual and Collaborative Rather Than Hierarchical



**“A paradigm shift in mind-set for both women and men is imperative to overcome the deeply rooted prejudices against women.”**

of the 4 continents, engaged in serving people through a life of prayer, community living and transformative socio-pastoral mission of education. The call to be the Superior General came to me as a surprise that I least expected and wanted. So, I consider it to be God's will for me and for the Congregation. I must say that my life has always been full of challenging surprises. When I was most comfortable with teaching Scripture at the Pontifical Athenaeum in Pune, I was elected to be Provin-

cial, and when I became very familiar with my Province, I was chosen to be the General. This call has therefore been an invitation to leave my comfort zones to explore an unknown territory, always something more challenging, which I find very fascinating and energizing. Although I miss my biblical research, writing and teaching, what gives me the greatest joy is to do things that please God. I thus accepted this election as a golden opportunity for me to share with the whole Congrega-

tion for today and tomorrow. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, there is so much pain and suffering everywhere: the agony of those who are sick and suffering from COVID-19, the pain of those who have lost their loved ones, the anguish of doctors, nurses, health care workers who risk their own lives while serving others, the insecurity and hardships of the daily wage workers and migrants due to long term and extended lockdowns, to mention only a few. We have seen millions of migrants become jobless and very poor overnight. For most of our students in

**How do you look upon 'the Pope Francis effect' in the Church and the world who brings special attention to the migrants and the poor which is already a prime concern of your Congregation? How do you see his concept of authority as Synodality?**

(Contd. on page 13)



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## GHAR VAPASI THROUGH NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

The National Education Policy (2020) brought out by the Ministry of Human Resources is the first education policy of the BJP. It is a document of 29,409 words. The word culture occurs more than 50 times in it. "The pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragyaa), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal." The Indian education system produced, says the document, 18 great scholars from Charaka to Thiruvalluvar. There is no one among them who belongs to the 73 years of Independent India. This the BJP's first education policy. They would only be eager to use education as a vehicle to promote their Hindutva policy. The great sages and inventors mentioned earlier are said to have made "seminal contributions to world knowledge in diverse fields such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medical science and surgery, civil engineering, architecture, shipbuilding and navigation, yoga, fine arts, chess, and more"... "Indian culture and philosophy have had a strong influence on the world." The leaders of Independent India like Gandhiji, Nehru, Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for literature and Amartya Sen, who won it for economics, all are blacked out.

History tells us that the Sangh Parivar was against the freedom struggle led by Gandhiji. The makers of the education policy leaped back over the independence years into ancient India. It is nothing but Hindutva's Ghar Wapasi. We encounter in countless gurus, philosophers and propagandists simmering signs of envy and wounded pride at work. The edifice of "Vedic science" is built on such distortions. The current crop of Hindu nationalists and their intellectual enablers are the progeny of these thinkers and display similar traits. We hanker after science and pour enormous resources into becoming a "science superpower," but we simultaneously devalue its historical and cultural significance and decry its "materialism," its "reductionism" and its "Eurocentrism." We want the science of the materialist upstarts from the West, but cannot let go of our sense of spiritual superiority, which makes us think that we are entitled to the status of jagatguru. This lethal mixture of desire, envy and a sense of innate "Aryan" superiority has characterised India's encounter with modern science and technology from the very start. A more insidious distortion happens when modern-day science—quantum physics, computer science, genetics, neurosciences, and so on—are read back into the speculative musings of seers and philosophers from our hoary past. We can read in between the lines Hindutva's envy, which extends beyond nationalism. It is simply an occult strategy to defend the very foundations of Hindu beliefs and practices.

The document goes behind the Independence and still speaks about the values of the constitution. Are the values of the Constitution fully drawn from ancient India's ethos? Where did democracy come from? Is the parliamentary system an Indian invention? No. Neither are modern technology and medicine. Geometry has no colour or caste. Education is intended to enhance the man within every one. Does ancient India have a view of man devoid of race, caste and colour? What type of humanism does Hindutva ideologues profess? The policy of education is silent on the pivot of education – the man. There is no mention of any religion, not even Hinduism, in the policy text. I personally believe that from Hindu scriptures a holistic humanism can be thought out and produced, receiving light from anywhere and everywhere. No stone is left unturned to sell our culture represented by yoga, dance and literature in the global market. But we must also be open to all other cultures and languages which can teach us. The problem with the Hindutva thinkers is not that they go to the Indian tradition, but that they go to those texts that divide and spread hate instead of to what joins us and make us one. For example, Hitopadesha's (1.3.71) vasudhaiva kutumbhakam, "the entire earth is but a family." There is nothing wrong in teaching and studying Sanskrit, but let the country be open to Latin and Greek also. Why also shut the doors to Arabic. The minorities are part of India's tradition and part of the culture.

Prime Minister Modi once said, "Genetic science was there (at the time of the Mahabharata)." Are we quoting Mahabharata to legitimise caste practices in eugenic terms? Every country must glorify certain events in history that are valuable for posterity, but presenting outright lies about the past as truths breeds doublethink of pharisaic self deceit. The past is remembered to enhance our future. That past that can endanger the future must be forgotten.

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## Letters to the Editor

### SEMINARY FORMATION ALWAYS DRAWS CRITICISM?

In your recent issue, you have an item "Seminary Formation Always Draws Criticism: New JDV President". True, as humans, we are always fallible. But we also learn from our failures. Hence, in October 1969, about a hundred and thirty representatives of the teaching and formation staff of the major seminaries in India came together to respond to the call of the Council. I was part of this gathering. We felt that with the fast-changing society we needed to radically rethink the formation of our priests. To be more effective we must have from the start students with greater maturity and motivation. We suggested that our candidates complete their graduation in a regular college before starting philosophy. JDV had twice taken the decision to demand graduation before philosophy. As far as I know, both the times, it went back.

Ours was not an academic concern—the acquisition of a secular degree—but the human formation of our future candidates, the maturity they need to enter a major seminary today. This was also the reason we emphatically stated that the graduation be done in a regular college. We wanted the students to experience the world more; take part in all the extra-curricular activities that would bring out their talents and respond to their juvenile needs; meet women of their age, be friendly with them, experience the beauty of loving a woman and being loved by her. This proposal was voted and was accepted by a hundred and fifteen. The others—about fifteen—either voted against it or abstained.

This proposal was presented to the bishops of India during a CBCI meeting in January 1970. They failed to appreciate the concerns of the seminary staff. They were frightened that were they to wait for people to complete their graduation before starting their philosophy, they would not have many joining the major seminary. They would not have enough men

to run the show. Hence, they came out with a very harmless but totally useless decision: "A first university degree or some corresponding technical or professional qualification is ordinarily required for priests in India."

But soon the bishops realized that our formation was not adequate. A national survey on priestly ministry was conducted in the mid-eighties. The survey also showed that "by and large, the people who accept and respect the priests today are the uneducated, not the educated... We cannot dismiss the educated laity's disaffection with the clergy simply as an expression of the disenchantment of the educated with religion in general. The survey data does not support the popular perception that the educated are generally less 'religious' than the uneducated."

The findings of this survey were presented to the bishops of India at the CBCI meeting in 1988. I was present for this meeting. A committee that was asked to make proposals in the light of these

findings suggested that after philosophy, all our students should find a job outside and be at it for at least a year and manage with their earnings—mandatory free regency. Again, the bishops got cold feet. They were afraid that many seminarians after getting a job would discontinue. They accepted free regency as one possibility.

The bishops think that their seminaries can work miracles. A horse-trainer, however qualified and experienced he may be, cannot train donkeys for the races. Most of our seminarians do not have the basic IQ and EQ needed for real pastoral ministry, which is different from rituals and administration. I am not saying that most of our seminarians are bad. They are good, but not every good young man can become a software engineer! If bishops keep on rejecting suggestions of people who have spent years in formation, and willing to accept only some cosmetic changes, we have no hopes.

Subhash Anand

St. Paul's School, Bhopalpur, Udaipur, 313001

### CROSSING THE RUBICON

The subtle line separating the religion and the State has been breached. By performing the bhoomi puja of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set the clock back. His act has taken the secular country to a path not envisaged in the Constitution of India.


It is in line with the ideology of the party in power from whose vocabulary 'secularism' seems to have been removed. It is important to look at the issue from what the Supreme Court of India said in its verdict allowing construction of the temple at the site where Babri Masjid stood for over four centuries. The apex court had termed the masjid demolition a criminal act. Though construction of Ram temple is the logical result of the Supreme Court judgment, one cannot ignore the traumatic memories of millions of people caused by that outrageous act.

The Modi government may not have the strength to alter the Constitution. But it seems to do it indirectly under various guises. It is doing it through symbolic acts and rhetoric. The Prime Minister's comparison of Ayodhya movement with freedom movement is a clear indication of what is in store for the country. While struggle for freedom from the yoke of colonialism was an inclusive movement, no one can put the agitation for construction of Ram temple on the same pedestal.

Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's assertion that he would not participate in the inauguration of the mosque being constructed in Ayodhya is a clear sign of where the country is headed to.

Fr Suresh Mathew

### PRAYERFUL BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

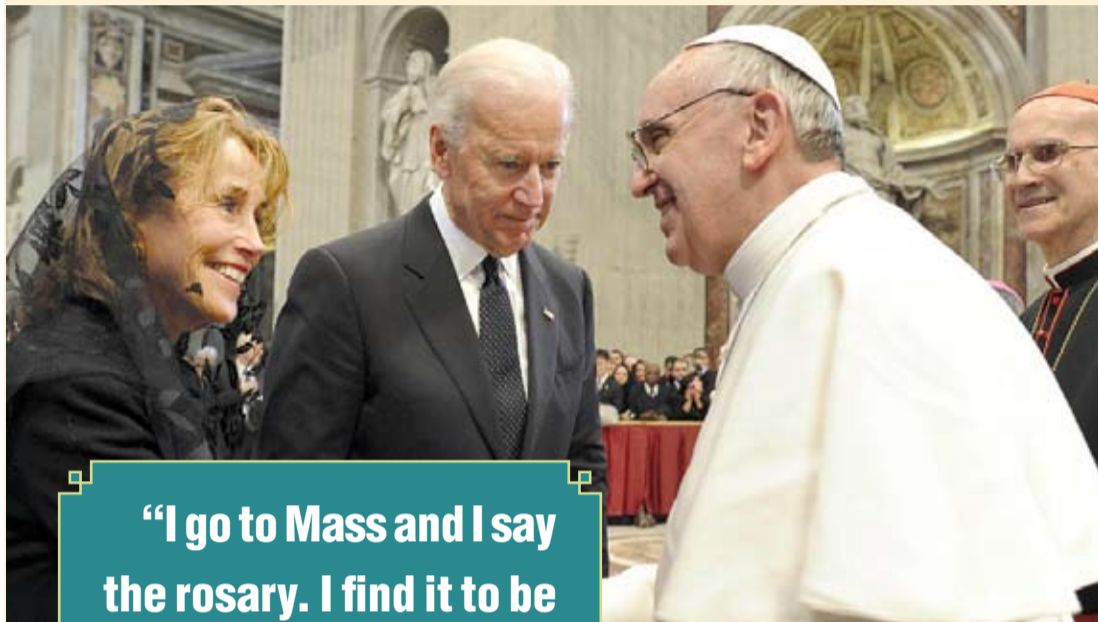
<b>Rt Rev. Sebastian Pozholiparampil</b> Bp of Hosur	* 01-09-1957	
<b>Rt Rev. Linus N. Gomes, SJ</b> Bp Emeritus of Baruiapur	* 07-09-1921	
<b>Rt Rev. Joseph Kunnath, CMI</b> Bp Emeritus of Adilabad	* 08-09-1939	
<b>Rt Rev. Henry D'souza</b> Bp of Bellary	* 09-09-1949	
<b>Rt Rev. Thomas Chakiath</b> Aux. Bp Emeritus of Ernakulam-Angamaly	* 10-09-1937	
<b>Rt Rev. Clement Tirkey</b> Bp of Jalpaiguri	* 12-09-1947	
<b>Rt Rev. Godfrey de Rozario, SJ</b> Bp of Baroda	* 13-09-1946	
<b>Rt Rev. George Punnakottil</b> Bp Emeritus of Kothamangalam	* 13-09-1936	

Going into the 2020 Democratic National Convention, party officials released a 60-second digital ad promoting the presumptive nominee's Catholic faith. The ad shows former Vice President Joe Biden making Pope Francis laugh during a meeting in St Peter's Basilica and speaking with a group of smiling nuns on a street in Rome. In a voice over, Biden talks about the importance of his Catholic faith and how, for him, the nuns epitomized the Church's teaching that "we are our brothers' keeper," a biblical idea that shapes his liberal politics. The Democratic Convention tweeted the video to its 68,000 followers, saying, "This is the kind of moral conviction we need in the president of the United States." It will not be the last time

lot of evangelicals who support Trump do worry about his mean-spiritedness and the polarization and we've been missing that pastoral tone."

Mouw told Christianity Today he plans to vote for Biden, despite some qualms about the Democratic Party's positions on abortion and religious liberty.

These two issues will be the sticking point for many white evangelicals. When it comes to religious outreach, conservative critics of the Democratic candidate will likely argue that Biden is not Catholic enough, according to Baylor University historian Barry Hankins, who has written about evangelical opposition to the first Catholic candidate from a major party, Democrat Al Smith.



**"I go to Mass and I say the rosary. I find it to be incredibly comforting," Biden said.**

In 1928, Smith said he didn't believe Catholic teaching (at the time) that pluralism and democracy were inherently anti-Christian. He accepted the American set up that separates Church and state—and

the Democrats spotlight Biden's lifelong Catholicism. A political action committee announced it will spend \$50,000 on ads highlighting religious reasons to vote for Biden and the convention featured a nun and a Jesuit priest in high-profile speaking spots. Experts on the historically complicated relationship between American Catholics and evangelicals say this emphasis—primarily aimed at Catholic and mainline Protestant voters—may not help Biden win over white evangelicals, a core part of President Donald Trump's base. But it also won't hurt.

## JOE BIDEN CAMPAIGNS ON FAITH

"He is viewed as having an authentic faith," said Richard Mouw, former president of Fuller Theological Seminary and professor of faith and public life. "He may not be the conservative Catholic that a lot of evangelicals would like him to be, but when he talks about his faith, it rings true."

Mouw was one of the signers of the historic ecumenical document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," along with evangelical leaders Chuck Colson, J.I. Packer, and Bill Bright. According to Mouw, the 1994 statement was partly the result of high-level theological discussions about doctrines such as justification by faith, partly the result of political alliances over issues such as abortion, and partly the result of lay evangelicals responding to the heartfelt faith of their Catholic neighbours and co-workers.

Evangelicals might have a similar response to Biden's religious commitments, Mouw said.

"Most evangelicals didn't care about the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue on justification. They said I know a Catholic at work and he loves the Lord," he explained. "People believe Biden's faith is real. He has a pastoral tone. A

thought it was a good thing. Many conservative Protestants, looking at authoritarian Catholic regimes in Europe, didn't believe him. Biden, in some ways, faces the opposite problem. He disagrees with Church teaching on some issues and evangelicals do believe him.

"He's more serious about his Catholicism than a lot of Catholics are, but he still found his way to the pro-choice position on abortion," Hankins said. "A lot of Catholic Democrats seem to be in this tension. The autonomy of the individual is kind of central to what their politics are all about and that's in tension with the social teachings of the Catholic Church."

In the video, Biden, a Catholic, narrates how once, after having a brief meeting with Pope Francis at St Peter's Basilica, he departed the Church and ran into a group of religious sisters. These sisters, said Biden in a voice over, "to me, epitomize everything Pope Francis talked about in his homily and what he stands for. About generosity to other people, about reaching out, about making it a point to understand that we are our brother's keeper."

(Contd. on page 13)

## JIMMY LAI, THE TESTY TYCOON DEFYING BEIJING

When the Hong Kong government arrested Jimmy Lai for alleged violations of the Chinese territory's controversial new national security law, it dispatched more than 200 police officers to haul him in for the booking and to gather evidence.

It was a lot of manpower to arrest a 72-year-old textile entrepreneur-turned-newspaper magnate, and raid the headquarters of his Next Digital media empire. But Mr Lai is not your average Hong Kong tycoon. While most of his peers readily do Beijing's bidding, the self-made billionaire has been an outspoken proponent of democratic reforms, and critic of China's Communist party, for more than 30 years.

As a result, the party regards Mr Lai as its prime nemesis in Hong Kong. Welcoming his arrest, Chinese officials denounced him and others targeted for alleged "collusion" with foreign forces, as a "scourge that hinders Hong Kong's stability and long-term development."

The show of police force struck many as an attempt to intimidate the 60 per cent of Hong Kong voters who regularly cast their ballots for pro-democracy candidates in legislative and district council elections. If so, it backfired. Next Digital's live stream of the police raid went viral and the next day's print run of the group's flagship newspaper, Apple Daily, was seven times bigger than normal.



**"Jimmy talks about God a lot," a friend adds. "He says 'this is my destiny'."**

Mr Lai embraces his notoriety in Beijing and harbours no illusions about the Chinese Communist party and its current strongman president, Xi Jinping. "For the party it is [about] control, control, control," he told the Financial Times in April. "It's very clear that China has decided to take over governance in Hong Kong. It is the beginning of the end for Hong Kong."

Over the past year he has participated in a number of peaceful but unauthorised protests sparked by a clumsy attempt by the Hong Kong government to allow, for the first time, local residents to be extradited to mainland China. Hong Kong's Beijing-appointed chief executive, Carrie Lam, backed down after mass demonstrations against her extradition bill in the summer of 2019. But public anger simmered. Large, peaceful marches gave way to increasingly violent, youth-led protests that quickly became the most intractable challenge Mr Xi has faced since assuming power in late 2012.

Then in June, Mr Xi's administration announced it would impose its strict, new national security law. Under its provisions, acts of civil disobedience currently punishable by relatively lenient sentences can be construed as graver offences with suspects tried on the mainland or Hong Kong. That is the legal jeopardy Mr Lai now faces.

Born in China's southern Guangdong province, Mr Lai fled when he was 12 to then British-ruled Hong Kong during one of the most impoverished and repressive periods of Mao Zedong's rule.

(Contd. on page 13)

## Christian Classics



### THE POETIC WORD

**“Christianity, as the religion of the word proclaimed, of faith which hears and of a sacred scripture, has a special intrinsic relationship to the word and hence cannot be without such a special relationship to the poetic word.”**

Karl Rahner

## TURKEY CONVERTS CHORA CHURCH INTO MOSQUE

Turkey has issued a presidential decree ordering the conversion of the nation's best-known Byzantine monastic church into a mosque. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan published the executive order sealing the fate of the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora, Istanbul, a month after Turkey's top court delivered a unanimous verdict declaring the basilica of Hagia Sophia a mosque.

The decree, printed in the National Gazette, transfers “the administration of the Kariye Mosque [Chora Church] to the Directorate of Religious Affairs [Diyamet].”

In accordance with Article 35 of law No. 633 on the Presidency of Religious Affairs it orders the opening of the “mosque for [Islamic] worship.” Erdogan's diktat overturns an earlier ruling of the Council of Ministers from April 23, 1945, which had directed the ancient monastic church to be used as a museum and warehouse.



The executive order formally implements the change in the church's status, which was passed in Dec. 2019 by a decision of Turkey's Council of State. Speaking to Church Militant, renowned Islamic historian Robert Spencer stressed that the conversion of Hagia Sophia and now the Chora Church into mosques demonstrated the “signal failure”

of Pope Francis' pact with the world's highest-ranking Sunni Muslim leader Ahmad al-Tayyeb.

“Anyone could have predicted this monumental fiasco from the moment Pope Francis and al-Tayyeb signed the deal in February 2019,” Spencer asserted.

On May 29, Ottoman soldiers found their way to Chora and hacked the icon to pieces.

Muslim ruler Hadim Ali Pasha converted the church to a mosque between 1495–1511, adding a mihrab (a niche that indicates the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, facing which Muslims are required to pray) in the main apse and replacing the belfry with a minaret. Chora is an increasingly popular tourist destination known for its best-preserved examples of stunning Byzantine mosaics and frescoes. The interior is covered with biblical scenes and portraits of Jesus and the saints dating back to the 14th century.

### THIS SECRET SOCIETY OF PRIESTS STILL WON'T RECOGNIZE POPE FRANCIS

Since the election upon Benedict's retirement of Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, Leatherby has shunned the new pontiff and continued to only refer to Benedict as the church's true leader in mass. After several warnings, he was charged with schism, defrocked and excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

“I continue to regard Benedict as retaining the Office of Peter, as mysterious as that might be,” he wrote in an open letter to the Sacramento diocese, referring to the belief that all new Popes replace the original Pope Peter. “Therefore, I do not regard Bergoglio as the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church.”

Leatherby's story is somewhat complicated by allegations of a breach of his vow of celibacy through romantic affairs with at least two adult women, one of whom he publicly confessed his love to in a now rather embarrassing video that has been widely circulated. In it, he begins by addressing an unidentified woman: “Hey, Baby Doll. I love that without mascara that you are still strikingly beautiful,” the priest says into his phone camera as he drives his car at night. “I love that. I love it, like, a lot. A lot a lot. I loved it earlier when I saw you, and you didn't have it on, and I loved it all night long.”

### IN OPENLY CRITICIZING BRAZIL'S PRESIDENT, 152 BISHOPS SPUR ANGER, CONTROVERSY



A letter signed by 152 Brazilian Catholic bishops harshly criticizing President Jair Bolsonaro's administration and his unsuccessful handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has been spurring intense controversy among the country's Catholics since its release in late July.

As various groups expressed their support or disapproval of the document, backed by about a third of the country's bishops, some in the church began to fear that Brazil's sharp political polarization could be affecting its episcopate.

Titled “Letter to the People of God,” a draft of the document was first leaked to the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* on July 26. The letter says Brazil is facing “an unprecedented health care crisis” and a “devastating economic collapse,” which are the results of “the Federal Government's inability and incompetence to coordinate its actions.”

The document generated strong reactions, especially on social media, but also in the church. “There has been an outraged reaction from some bishops,” Fr Antônio Manzatto, a professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Sao Paulo, told NCR.

Few, if any, vice presidential candidates have had as much exposure to the world's religions as Kamala Harris, the 55-year-old senator from California whom Joe Biden just picked as his running mate.

Harris' ethnic, racial and cultural biography represents a slice of the U.S. population that is becoming ascendant but that has never been represented in the nation's second-highest office.

Here are five faith facts about Harris:

She was raised on Hinduism and Christianity.

Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, was from Chennai, India; her father, Donald Harris, from Jamaica. The two met as graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley.

Her name, Kamala, means “lotus” in Sanskrit, and is another name for the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. She visited India multiple times as a girl and got to know her relatives there.

But because her parents divorced when she

### GERMAN BISHOPS TO ACCEPT VATICAN OFFER OF 'CLARIFYING DISCUSSION' ON PARISH INSTRUCTION

The German Bishops' Conference has said it will accept the Vatican's invitation to discuss the new instruction on parishes at a meeting in Rome, suggesting that it will be accompanied by laymen representing the “Synodal Process” under way in Germany.

At the conclusion of their meeting in the Bavarian town of Würzburg on August 24, the permanent council, comprising the diocesan bishops of the 27 Catholic dioceses in Germany, announced the decision that Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg would “accept the offer of conversation made by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Beniamino Stella.”

Furthermore, as CNA Deutsch, CNA's German news partner, reported, the German Bishops' Conference announced that Bätzing “will suggest to the Congregation that the conversation be conducted with the Presidium of the Synodal Way, since bishops, priests, deacons and laity are equally addressed in the instruction.” If and when



the meeting is scheduled to take place is still unclear.

Cardinal Beniamino Stella, prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, said on July 29 that he would be happy to receive the bishops in order to “remove doubts and perplexity” voiced by German prelates.

Stella said that the meeting could take place “in due course” if the bishops wished to present their objections to the instruction, issued by his congregation on July 20. He reportedly declined to respond to specific criticisms ahead of the potential meeting.

### FIVE FAITH FACTS ABOUT KAMALA HARRIS



was 7, she also grew up in Oakland and Berkeley attending predominantly Black churches. Her downstairs neighbor, Regina Shelton, often took Kamala and her sister, Maya, to Oakland's 23rd Avenue Church of God in Oakland. Harris now considers herself a Black Baptist.

She is married to a Jewish man.

Harris met her husband, Los Angeles lawyer Douglas Emhoff, on a blind date in San Francisco. They married in 2014. At their wedding, the couple smashed a glass to honour Emhoff's upbringing (a traditional Jewish wedding custom).

It was Harris' first marriage and his second. An article in the Jewish press described her imitation of her Jewish mother-in-law, Barbara Emhoff, as “worthy of an Oscar.”

She was criticized for not proactively assisting in civil cases against Catholic clergy sex abuse during the years she served as a prosecutor.

## Pope Speaks



### PANDEMIC AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Pope Francis went on to note that many social inequalities have been “highlighted and aggravated” by the pandemic. “These symptoms of inequality reveal a social illness. It is a virus that comes from a sick economy... the result of unequal economic growth, which disregards fundamental human values.”

“In today’s world, very few rich people possess more than the rest of humanity. It is an injustice that cries out to heaven!”

Pope Francis  
in his weekly  
General Audience  
on 07/08/2020

## SYRIA WILL BUILD A NEW HAGIA SOPHIA WITH RUSSIAN ASSISTANCE TO PROTEST AGAINST TURKEY

The Syrian government has announced that it will build a replica of the Hagia Sophia, according to Lebanon’s Al-Modon media.

This in opposition to the Turkish regime’s conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

A leader of the pro-Syrian government National Defence Forces militia, Nabeul Al-Abdullah, obtained the approval of Bishop Nicola Baalbaki, the Metropolitan of Hama and its dependencies to build a new church in the city of Suqaylabiyah in Hama province. More than 17,000 residents of Suqaylabiyah are overwhelmingly Greek Orthodox. Al-Modon said that the funding for the construction of the church is the first practical and indirect response from Russia to express its anger against Turkey for converting Hagia Sophia.



Russian MP Vitaly Milonov stated that “unlike Turkey, [Syria] is a country that clearly shows the possibility of peaceful and positive interfaith dialogue,” adding that “Orthodox Christians in Russia can help Syria with construction.”

The talk of creating a replica of Hagia Sophia in northern Hama had started in mid-July when Abdullah announced his donation of a plot of land for the implementation of

the project.

He presented the idea to the commander of the Russian controlled Hmeimim military base in Latakia province, and there he got the initial support for the project. This was followed by visits of Russian leaders and officials to the headquarters of the Abd Allah militia in northern Hama, who have been on the front line fighting against Turkish-backed jihadists.

Russian support for the construction of a Syrian Hagia Sophia was confirmed by the visit of a large military delegation from the Hmeimim base to the city of Suqaylabiyah, where they were received by a number of “national defence” leaders north of Hama, bishops and church officials, according to the Lebanese newspaper.

### POPE FRANCIS: MAKE CORONAVIRUS VACCINE AVAILABLE TO ALL



A potential coronavirus vaccine should be made available to all, Pope Francis said at the general audience Aug. 19.

“It would be sad if, for the vaccine for COVID-19, priority were to be given to the richest! It would be sad if this vaccine were to become the property of this nation or another, rather than universal and for all,” Pope

Francis said on August 19.

The Pope’s comments followed a warning by the head of the World Health Organization that some countries may hoard vaccines. Speaking in Geneva on August 18, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus appealed to world leaders to avoid what he called “vaccine nationalism.”

In his address, the Pope also said it would be a “scandal” if public money were used to bail out industries “that do not contribute to the inclusion of the excluded, the promotion of the least, the common good, or the care of creation.”

### CHURCH SELLING THE EUCHARIST ‘SHORT’ SAYS PROFESSOR

The Catholic Church is selling “the Eucharist” and people short and is making a mistake by turning Mass into a YouTube experience, according to a UK theologian. Thomas O’Loughlin, emeritus professor of Historical Theology at the University of Nottingham and Director of Studia Traditionis Theologiae, said: “There are some things Zoom and YouTube just won’t do because real experiences are whole human experiences.”

“Can you send an apple by email?” he asked.

He said he will accept doing



Mass online when people give up going out to dine with others and when people dine alone at home with pre-packaged food and say it is as rich an experience as it is eating and drinking with friends.

People wanting to have Mass on their TV or computer at home and priests supplying it sounds a warning about the real nature of the community, he said.

“Eucharist makes little sense without a community.”

Challenging the meeting, O’Loughlin posed the question as to whether the Church had stopped being a real community and is being reduced to religious ideology.

### ‘UNBAPTISED’ US CATHOLIC PRIEST ORDAINED AGAIN

Detroit archdiocese ordained a Catholic priest for a second time on Aug. 17 after learning that his infant baptism was void, making his ordination invalid.

Father Matthew Hood, ordained in 2017, has been working in the diocese for the past three years, just like any other Catholic priest. However, his priestly ordination was found invalid as his Catholic Baptism proved to be invalid, reported Catholic News Agency.

Father Hood thought he had been baptized as a baby. But this month, he read a notice issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Aug. 6. It said altering the words of Baptism can render it invalid.

For example, if the minister says, “We baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” instead of “I baptize you,” the Baptism is not valid, it said.

Father Hood remembered a video of his Baptism where the deacon said: “We baptize you....” He suddenly realized his Baptism wasn’t valid.

The Church presumes a sacrament valid unless there is proof to the contrary. Father Hood’s Baptism could have been passed as valid unless he had a video showing the opposite.

Father Hood informed this to



his archdiocese. He received Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist again. He made a retreat and was also ordained a deacon. He was validly ordained a priest on Aug. 17. One must be ordained a Deacon before validly ordained a priest.

### NIGERIA IS BECOMING WORLD’S ‘BIGGEST KILLING GROUND OF CHRISTIANS’

Nigeria is becoming the “biggest killing ground of Christians in the world” due to attacks by Boko Haram and Fulani militants, says a leading charity.

International Christian Concern (ICC) estimates between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians have been killed in the last decade in the West African nation, the most populous on the continent.

Nigeria’s 206 million people are almost evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. Islam is the dominant faith in the North, and Christianity in the South – but most of the killings take place in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, where the halves of the country meet. Attacks by Fulani herders in particular have had a devastating effect on Christian farmers -thousands have fled, leaving behind fertile farmlands.

“Without the access to their land, they no longer have the ability to grow food to sustain themselves and their families. It is also hurting the larger community as a whole as there are known



food shortages throughout northern Nigeria,” Nathan Johnson – ICC’s Regional Manager for Africa – told Crux. “The three biggest terrorist organizations in the world today are ISIS, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab. Boko Haram has been operating in Nigeria since 2009, and ISIS started

a splinter group there in 2015 called Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Al-Shabaab operates out of Somalia and mainly in East Africa.

There is also another lesser known group which we at ICC term “Fulani militants.” This is a hostile group of individuals who attack Christian farming communities throughout the Middle Belt of Nigeria. We do use the term militants because there are many Fulani who are peaceful, but there are also violent groups amongst their population who use it as a disguise. Between these three groups, an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Christians have been killed in Nigeria since 2010. This persecution has several different drivers, based on groups and location.

## Ray of Truth



### POEM AND PHILOSOPHY

**“The poem of the understanding is philosophy. It is the greatest impetus that the understanding gives itself about itself - union of the understanding and the imagination.”**

Novalis

Logological Fragments

p. 5

## CHRISTIAN MAN RESISTS FORCED CONVERSION, THREATS FROM YOUNG MUSLIMS

A video posted on TikTok in July shows a Christian man being pressured to reject his faith and convert to Islam. Despite threats, he can be heard saying that “for nothing in the world” will he abandon the Christian faith. The video, posted by bilalmaher479, went viral, but also sparked a strong reaction from Christians and members of other religious minorities.

Hitherto, non-Muslims have to had to witness the forced conversions of girls and young women, compelled to marry Muslim men. The forced conversion of boys and young men is something relatively new. In the video in question, the Christian man is seen being pressured to recite the shahada, the Islamic creed, surrounded by people who are not seen. Despite everything, he refuses, saying that for nothing in the world would he recite the Muslim creed and reject the Christian faith.

His tormentors then begin to threaten



him, saying that he will face serious consequences. Even then, the victim says no, stating that it is his right to keep his faith and that he is ready to suffer all the consequences, that he would not give up his religion.

In a statement, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) said that it has received many complaints about the immoral, obscene and vulgar contents in social media, especially TikTok and Bigo, for their negative

impact, especially on young people.

After contacting the two companies, the PTA said that their response was unsatisfactory and that it blocked Bigo under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act.

Taskeen Khan, a Glory TV presenter and human rights activist, came to the victim's defence, posting the video on his official page and slamming the forced conversion attempt.

“Will the Pakistani authorities find the offenders through their TikTok account and punish them according to the law?” he asked.

For his part, Rev Irfan James of Peshawar said that “Pakistani Christians suffer many challenges and [endure] persecution. They face difficult situations every day.” “It is sad that young Muslims, the majority community, constantly threaten Christians and our faith. Time and time again, they make fun of our faith, but neither the government nor law enforcement do anything about it.”

## SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT TURNS TO CATHOLIC BISHOPS TO HELP FIGHT CORONAVIRUS



S. Korean President Moon Jae-in, who is facing increased pressure over some of his policies, hosted a luncheon for Catholic leaders, asking for their cooperation in tackling the COVID-19 coronavirus.

“We must overcome the coronavirus (and) we will do our best to overcome the crisis quickly and minimize economic loss,” Moon said during the meeting, adding that he plans to meet with other Christian leaders in the near future.

Once seen as a model in

dealing with the pandemic, South Korea has seen a spike in cases of coronavirus that has led to a fresh suspension of public Masses and could even throw the nation into a second lockdown.

In attendance at the presidential luncheon were Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung, Archbishop of Seoul; Archbishop Hyginus Kim Hee-jong of the Gwangju Diocese; Archbishop Thaddeus Cho Hwan-kil of Daegu; Bishop Peter Lee Ki-heon of Uijeongbu; Bishop John Christostom Kwon Hyok-ju of Andong; and Bishop Lazarus You Heung-sik of Daejeon.

According to the presidential office, Moon praised the Catholic Church for its swift action in obeying government quarantine restrictions during South Korea's first wave of COVID-19 in February.

## CHINESE FEMALE JESUS WORRIES BAPTISTS IN INDIAN STATE



Church leaders in north-eastern India's Nagaland state are concerned about a Chinese Christian cult misleading thousands of their young people with faulty doctrines.

The Church of Almighty God, which emerged in China some three decades ago, teaches that a woman named Yang Xiangbin is the second Christ.

The cult is “reportedly making inroads into our land,” said Reverend Zelhou Keyho, general secretary of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), in a letter to all church bodies and Baptist leaders in the state.

It has reportedly attracted thousands of young people through social media, church leaders say.

Yang Xiangbin, also called Lightning Deng, and cult founder Zhao Weishan fled China in 2000

after the Chinese government banned it, mainly because of its direct opposition to the Chinese Communist Party, published reports show.

The cult “is a well-organized group, aggressively moving forward with publication and creating many Facebook pages and colourful artwork that appears biblical and enticing,” said the letter of Reverend Keyho.

The council is the top body of nearly 1,500 Baptist Churches in Nagaland, where Christians form 90 percent of two million people. The majority of Christians are Baptists. The cult's Facebook page has some 137,000 followers. They claim to have offices in the US, UK, South Korea, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Germany and France.

## ARCHBISHOP KONDRUSIEWICZ MEETS A MINISTER; LUKASHENKO THREATENS THE CHURCHES

After several denials, it has been officially confirmed: last August 21 a meeting was held between Yuri Karaev, Belarusian Interior Minister, and the head of the country's Catholics, Metropolitan Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz. The meeting had been requested by the archbishop to assess the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict between the president and the opposition.

Archbishop Kondrusiewicz reminded the minister of the unsustainability of violent repression, implemented by the local militia, denouncing at the same time the presence of no less violent provocateurs in various demonstrations. He also proposed the formation of a mixed commission, which would carry out checks on the conditions of arrest and detention of people. The state-owned television channel ONT said the parties reached an agreement on the formation of such a commission.

On the official website of the



Belarusian Catholic Church it is specified that Kondrusiewicz has placed the emphasis mainly on the protection of “the weakest and the defenceless.”

## BEIRUT, MARONITE CHURCH AND PRO-HEZBOLLAH NEWSPAPER IN UNPRECEDENTED CLASH

Following an unprecedented “paid and planned” attack on Patriarch Rai, carried in the newspaper al-Akhbar, the Episcopal Commission for Social Communications has stated that information on “hidden weapons and explosives in residential areas and among civilians” revealed in his Sunday Homily are “without any doubt.”

“Instead of abusively accusing the patriarch, whose sources of information leave no doubts of any kind, we advise this newspaper to verify and investigate the statements that reveal that weapons and explosives are being hidden and stored in residential areas and among civilians. Otherwise – affirm the bishops – in reality, the enemy is hiding, among them.”

In his homily, considered the first direct attack on Hezbollah's military strategy, Patriarch Rai



had asked the leaders to “consider the explosion at the port of Beirut as a warning signal.” The Cardinal called on authorities “to search all the weapons depots illegally located in the heart of residential districts, in cities and

villages.” The head of the Maronite Church added that “certain Lebanese regions have become minefields, which could blow up at any moment. The presence of these hidden weapons depots represents a real threat to the life of the Lebanese, which does not belong to anyone, any party or any organization.” “It is time - concluded the cardinal - to unearth these weapons and these explosives, so that citizens can truly feel safe.”

Furthermore, the patriarch, who has been promoting and relaunching the principle of Lebanon's “active neutrality” for several weeks, stressed.

## FOCUS

**Q:** How do you think the COVID-19 Crisis will get diffused? What lesson has the world to learn from this pandemic situation?

**A:** Though I am not an expert on the matter, I feel there is too much hype about it. Some countries talk about herd immunity. I think gradually people are knowingly or unknowingly acquiring immunity. When herd immunity is achieved, majority of the people will easily survive. That will be one way of solving the issue. And I hope a vaccine will come by the end of this year. It also will help. What I found striking during this period is the faith of our people. We have these charismatic centres that offer instant solutions to everyone, focusing only on the healing ministry and little on behavioural transformation. But none of them have got any answers now when healing is urgently needed. That raises a couple of serious questions: What exactly was the motive of those centres and what intention did the Church have in promoting them? Where do we stand in this crisis with all these hyped centres of healing? I think we misplaced our focus in our preaching of the Gospel on the healing ministry. Is Jesus only for that? This pandemic could serve as an eye-opener for us about misplaced priorities.



**Bp John Thomas  
Kattrukudiyil  
Itanagar**

## CARDINAL CLEEMIS OFFERS CHURCHES TO BELEAGUERED JACOBITES

Cardinal Baselios Cleemis, head of the Syro-Malankara Church, has come to the aid of the Jacobite faction of the Syrian Orthodox Church that has lost its places of worship in a legal battle.

"With great joy, we are offering you the Syro-Malankara places of worship to conduct services until you have made your own alternative arrangements," says a letter from the cardinal addressed to Joseph Mar Gregorios Metropolitan, the metropolitan trustee of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church.

The August 24 letter began by expressing the Catholic Church's respect and love for the Jacobite Church, its leaders and the faithful.

"We are painfully aware of the recent anguish the Malankara Jacobite Church. We also pray for the Church before the Lord," Cardinal Cleemis says.



The Jacobites' decades-old feud with the Syrian Orthodox faction reached the climax on August 17 when the Kerala government took over the Jacobites' mother church, the ancient Cathedral in Mulanthuruthy near Kochi, Kerala's commercial capital.

The Mulanthuruthy Church, built in 1200, has been managed by Jacobite faction, but the Supreme Court verdict of July 3, 2017, gave its ownership to the Orthodox Church. The church is a fine example of Gothic architecture. The carvings, sculptures, symbolic icons and wall paintings, are a blend of Indian, West-Asian and European architecture. Most parishioners belong to the Jacobite faction.

The takeover was part of implementing a 2017 Supreme Court order that granted possession of more than 1,100 Jacobite churches to their rival.

### SYRO-MALABAR SYNOD PLEDGES TO HELP COVID-19 POOR

The Syro-Malabar Church ended its 28th Synod calling upon its people to help the nation increase its productivity and encourage agricultural and industrial activities.

As many as 61 bishops from around the world attended the August 19-21 Synod held through videoconference because of the health regulations to control the coronavirus pandemic. The second Synod of the year Synod addressed the Church's commitment to the poor at time of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Syro-Malabar Church, the larger of India's two Oriental Catholic rites, has spent some US\$ 7.3 million to help the poor since the country imposed a nationwide lockdown on the midnight of March 24.

The bishops urged their faithful to cooperate with the authorities to help society's poorest, irrespective of caste or creed. The Synod's first session was held on January 7 to 15 at Mount Thomas, the Church's headquarters at Kakkanad, a Kochi suburb. The Church has total 64 bishops heading dioceses all over the world.

### INDIAN ARCHBISHOP BLESSES CATHOLIC COVID-19 CENTRE

The first Catholic medical facility in India fully equipped to serve Covid-19 patients has been inaugurated in Bengaluru in Karnataka State.

The Covid care centre at St John's Medical College, which has 48 isolation beds, a 24-bed intensive treatment unit (ITU) and a 24-bed intensive care unit (ICU), was blessed and inaugurated by Archbishop Peter Machado of Bangalore on Aug. 17.

"The Church is always at the forefront to help the poor and the needy, whether in the education or health fields, and it is an opportunity to give our selfless service to our society and nation," Archbishop Machado told UCA News.

"Our hospital has taken a leading step to provide healthcare to people during these crucial times. It is a first in the country and I salute and thank people who made this possible."



He said the medical college has given free treatment worth over 5 million rupees (US\$67,000) in the last five months in tackling pandemic cases.

By the end of July, it had screened more than 5,000 fever patients, 2,000 patients in the emergency department, treated more than 600 patients on the wards and taken care of some 500 critically ill patients in the ICU.

### WHEN EMPEROR AKBAR ENCOURAGED CHRISTIAN ART



Portuguese India during the 16th century – that is, the colonial enclaves of Goa, Bassein, Cochin and the Pearl Fishery Coast – was blessed with the presence of the Jesuits. They built monumental churches, colleges and residences.

The Portuguese Jesuits lavishly decorated these buildings with paintings, statues and church furnishings, and they commissioned numerous artists, painters, builders and sculptors.

Indeed, the Jesuit Church was designed to represent a particular image of Catholicism in the East: a triumphant Church.

Most of these artists were Hindus. They created ivory and wooden statues and furnishings in a subtle hybrid style, merging the late Renaissance influence of Europe and elements of local Hindu temple art.

While the pictures of Mary, the saints and the angels were derived from Italian and Iberian originals, most of them were

usually adapted to Indian sensibilities.

One example of such hybrid art can be found in the courts of the great Moghuls – Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jehan. They were the result of the early Jesuit missions to the Moghul court in Fatehpur Sikri, near Agra.

### INDIA'S FIRST CATHOLIC PRIEST LAWYER CONTINUES TO EMPOWER POOR

Jesuit Father P D Mathew, the first Catholic priest to become a lawyer in India, has recently celebrated the golden jubilee of his religious life as a Jesuit. His is an inspiring story of empowering thousands of our citizens through his mission of legal aid.

Father Mathew says a short stay with a group of bonded labourers in early 1960s made a drastic change in his life. During his training to become a Jesuit priest, his superiors had asked him to study chemistry so that he could become a teacher in their college in Ahmedabad, the commercial capital of Gujarat.

But the stay with the tribals in the Bharuch district of Gujarat during 1962-1965, helped him realize the way they were oppressed by powerful people. "Their cries for human rights and justice challenged me as a priest to respond to them in an effective way," the lawyer priest recalled.

According to him, becoming a lawyer as "a vocation with his choice vocation" where his main mission was to listen to the plight of the simple and suffering people.



### CHRISTIAN PREACHERS BEATEN FOR PRAYING FOR SICK IN JHARKHAND

Two members of a neo-Christian sect were allegedly beaten a Hindu radical group when they prayed over a sick person in a village near Chatra town in the eastern Indian State of Jharkhand, Persecution Relief reported on August 26. One Lakhan, a member of the Gospel Echoing Missionary Society (GEMS), on August 22 took preachers Sanjeet and Siddharth to Kharik, a village around 7 km from Chatra, to pray for his relative Ramdev, who has been sick for one and half years. When the two missionaries were praying for Ramdev and his family, a group of Bajrang Dal members came at 11.00 am and took them out.

"It was in that situation that I first thought of studying law in order to liberate them from the bonded system prevalent at that time in Gujarat. My later studies in social work at the M S University, Baroda, (passed with distinction and gold medal) also inspired me to take up the legal profession as a means of liberating the oppressed people."

Father Mathew says not all supported his idea of becoming a lawyer. His Jesuit superiors and companions considered law as a "liar's profession" of those exploiting the poor litigants, who helplessly seek justice through courts. "As a result, no priest in India ever thought of studying civil laws to take up the legal profession as a mission to serve the poor," he explained. "Consequently I struggled a lot to get permission from my superiors to acquire a degree in law. After a year-long dialogue with my superiors... I got the LL.B. degree with distinction and gold medal which prompted the university authorities to ask me to continue my law studies to take an LL.M. degree and to teach in the Law Faculty of the University."

Fr Martin Kallunkal

## Lectio Divina - 50

### Encountering God and World in Scriptures

**READING** “Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

**REFLECTION** The one single verse we have read just now reveals God’s will for each one of us and the mystery that we are as individual persons. God wills in favour of us, and so His Spirit in us is working towards making us completely holy. But, what does it mean to be completely holy? The second part of the verse clarifies this. It means that our spirit, soul and body are to be kept blameless. For the moment, we shall focus on two elements, namely pneuma (spirit) and psyche (soul). If we miss the distinction between the psychic and the spiritual, or put simply, mentality and intellect, our Christian faith is likely to lapse into naturalism. St Paul contrasts the psychic person with spiritual person as follows: while the natural person does not perceive the gifts of the Spirit, the spiritual person judges all things (1 Cor 2:14-15). This means that spirit is superior to mind and body. While, on the one hand, St Paul qualifies the first man Adam as psychic or natural, he identifies, on the other hand, the second Adam Christ as life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:44-47). Spiritual life begins with nothing other than a simple spiritual alchemy: separating the pure noble gold of the spirit from its vile alloys. In order to understand and live from the spiritual centre of our very being, we need to reflect on the tripartition of the elements in a person as articulated in the supreme commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength” (Deut 6:5). The term that refers to the spiritual centre of human person both in the Old Testament and the New Testament is “heart.” Heart is also the centre of the psycho-corporeal individuality. Therefore, in matter of fact, all the cognitive and affective faculties which we normally associate with the mind and body are primarily the faculties of the heart. This is the reason why the Scripture says that “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). The Church understands the ‘eye of the heart’ referring to spiritual intelligence, with which one is capacitated to understand God, as a gift of the Holy Spirit. See how St Augustine and St Aquinas interpret the sixth Beatitude: “The sixth operation of the Holy Spirit, which is the intellect, comes to those who have pure heart, to those whose purified eyes can see what the eye does not see” (St Augustine). The sixth gift of the Holy Spirit gives us “perfect vision of the intellect causing us to see God in His essence” (St Aquinas).

**PRAYER** O’ Lord, the eternal Word, initiate a spiritual alchemy in my heart. O’ God the Holy Spirit, endow my heart with the gift of understanding so that I understand my spirit as spirit, mind as mind, and body as body. Give me the grace, O’ God, that heals my broken and adulterated heart so that I can gather all elements and aspects of my being in the order you have set from all eternity.

**CONTEMPLATION** There is a beautiful and insightful verse about Mother Mary, who is generally silent in the gospels: “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). Pondering, as its original Greek word means, refers to an act of connecting and joining together. Where did Mary join all things? As the Scripture clearly says, she did it in her heart, the spiritual centre of her being. Sit at the feet of our sweet Mother, and learn the art of pondering all different aspects and events in our life.

**ACTION** Set apart at least fifteen to twenty minutes a day to practice the spiritual art of pondering.

“Thanks a lot for your love and support throughout. From 19:29 hrs consider me as Retired.”

A simple Instagram post on the day of Independence. But this could bring shock and pain to Indians as a whole. It is Mahendra Singh Dhoni’s announcement of retirement in style. Dhoni is not the first hero of Indian cricket. He did not enter the cricket ground with a silver spoon in his mouth. He never had a godfather, nor has his native town

spotted in any of the pictures that came in the media? He let it be Sachin Tendulkar’s moment. He let it be about Indian cricket. It was actually his evening, but he looked at it with detachment. It was the sign of a confident man. He made a statement by not being there. His approach to cricket was spiritual.

From his magnificent career, there are some lessons for children that are never taught in classes.

## LESSONS MS DHONI TAUGHT US BUT SCHOOL DIDN'T

■ Nidhin Panavellil

### 1. DON'T ALWAYS PLAY BY THE BOOK

Sometimes when unexpected questions come for exams in schools, students complain they are about topics that are not in the syllabus. They are ready to face only what was there in the syllabus; they are not equipped to answer any question that comes from outside of it. When MSD started his career, many noticed that his shots and style were not of the text-book style, and so too was his wicket keeping. But his innovative methods gave good results.

### 2. MARKS ARE NOT EVERYTHING

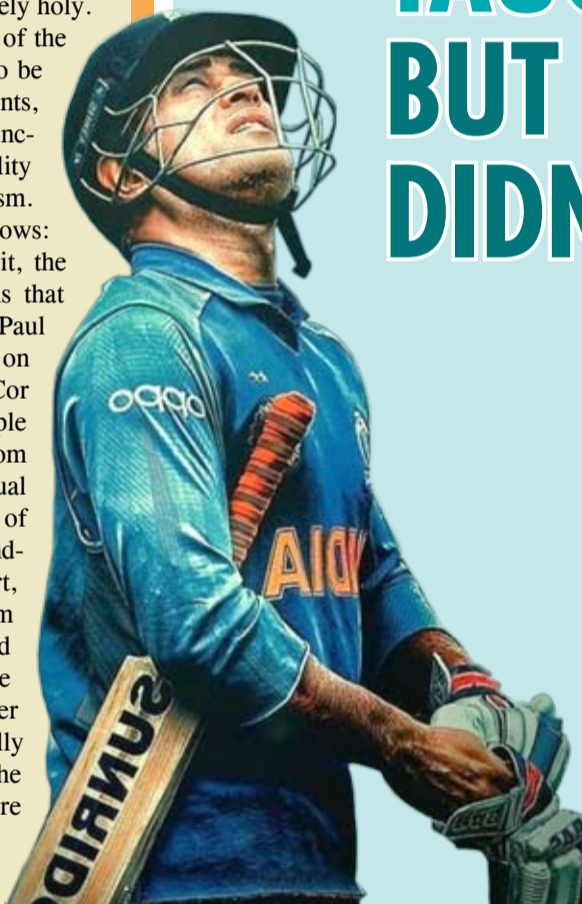
School is always about marks, the more you get the more successful you will be in life. It is all about comparison and competition with others. MSD got a chance in test cricket as the 11th man, but he retires after playing 90 tests for India, scoring 4876 runs, including 6 centuries and 33 half-centuries. Sometimes he was elevated to the 3rd position and then demoted to the 7th, but whatever the position in batting, he performed well for the country.

### 3. IT IS OK TO FAIL

Whenever you fail in exams, dejection sets in and you feel miserable. When MSD played his debut match against Bangladesh, he lost his wicket for a duck. He couldn't score much in the rest of the matches of the series either. There was a question mark on his cricket career. But when he got a chance in the next tournament against Pakistan, he scored a century. He was not obsessed too much about winning, just as he didn't worry too much about losing. That's the kind of balance and coolness one needs.

### 4. SOMETIMES FOLLOW UNCONVENTIONAL METHODS

In plus-two we have science, commerce, and humanities, and thereafter we can choose IT or medical field or else CA and Law. Once we have chosen one of them, then life is set. In



Ranchi a popular cricket tradition. But now when he walks away from international cricket, we realise that this is the end of an epoch in Indian Cricket. He is retiring as a Legend, as India's best captain ever, distinguished wicket-keeper, and also as one of the coolest and most destructive batsmen in the world.

Let us have a look at Dhoni's career and the many unique lessons that he taught us. Dhoni is a self-taught cricketer. He did not believe in one method or in one winning formula. His mind was always alive with ideas and his presence of mind worked wonders at crucial times. When he won his first T20 world cup as a young captain, he hurled his match shirt into the crowd and walked away quietly. Again, when he lifted the one-day international world cup in 2011, he was nowhere to be



school we learn a set pattern, but that was not case with MSD. In a T20 world cup final, for the last over he gave the ball to an untested baller Joginder Sharma, and that decision brought victory. In the 2011 world cup, he promoted himself up in the batting order at the riskiest juncture of the match to protect other batsmen from pressure. All situations in life are different, and diverse approaches needed to tackle them.

### 5. IT'S NEVER OVER

If you have not taken studies seriously during the ample time you had at your disposal, last minute crunching before an exam wont help. This is an oft repeated advice. But that's not necessarily true. MSD showed many times that chasing down unrealistic targets in the last over works. When 15 runs were



For watching the biopic  
"MS Dhoni: The Untold Story"

needed in the last over of the world cup final, he coolly hit 6,4 and 6 and sealed the match in style.

### 6. SMART WORK

That there is no substitute for hard work is cliché. But Dhoni taught us some smart work can bring success as well. In Melbourne against Australia, just when India was poised to win the match within a few minutes, suddenly MS asked for a new pair of gloves. It was a code message to his team members not to have a loud celebration. Otherwise, Australians would feel that the Indian victory was a fluke. Dhoni's point was loud and clear: This will continue to happen; it is not a rare upset.

### 7. DON'T STICK TO ONE SUBJECT

Once you choose a stream, focus on that only and don't switch to another midway. Why should an art student go to the chemistry lab? He shouldn't. It is useless. We all are familiar with these kinds of advice in school as well as in college. If MS Dhoni thought similarly, we wouldn't have had such an amazing wicket-keeper batsman in the new millennium. MS was more interested in football than in cricket. He wanted to excel as a goalkeeper. But when he became a cricketer, he brilliantly merged some football skills in wicket keeping and that produced an excellent output.

As Dhoni himself says in an interview for students, "you have to be honest to yourself. Respecting the elders, which I feel is the key. Be humble, and you have to be the same to everyone. Go through the difficult periods, because it is the tough period that makes you a better human being. Fight it out, but if you can do it with a smile that will be great." Like 'Captain Cool,' persist doggedly till the last ball of a tough game.

Priesthood is not a profession like others for various reasons. Firstly, the priests possess knowledge and skills of an autonomous nature. The public does not have access to their resources and properties. The rules governing their selection, formation and functions are of a cloistered nature. Secondly, clergy is supposed to be in their role out of religious motivation and not out of any worldly gains like monetary benefit or recognition.

The influence of clergy on people does not arise from their expertise in any scientific subject, rather from the religious faith of the people. The faith ascribes to them a mediating role between the Transcendent and the empirical world. They are bridging people: from the Divine side they carry the messages to people and from the peoples' side they transport supplications to God. That may be the reason why priesthood is often characterized as a religious vocation.

The aforementioned status of mediation has been questioned several times over the centuries. During the Protestant Reformation, the theological status of clergy was questioned by Lutheran doctrine of "baptismal priesthood." The Protestants removed Holy Orders from the seven sacraments and demoted clergy from their elevated status because they did not find anything special in being ordained for the priestly ministry. During the French Revolution the political and legal privileges of clergy were suppressed in France and a strong wave of anti-clericalism got momentum all over Europe. In India, especially in Kerala, a similar type of change has happened to the status of Brahmins due to the movements of renaissance in the recent centuries.

The present pandemic Covid-19 also seems to affect, though for different reasons, the mediating role of clergy. The crisis during the Covid-19 period arises mainly from the difficulty priests faces in exercising their two basic roles: administration of the sacraments and proclamation of the word of God. Numerous surveys conducted

in America in the recent decades have shown that the priests get the greatest satisfaction from liturgical services and opportunity to be part of people's life. What the pandemic has dismantled is nothing else than the regular and public exercise of these roles. Though after a lockdown

### VINCENT KUNDUKULAM "POST" PHENOMENAL ARCADES

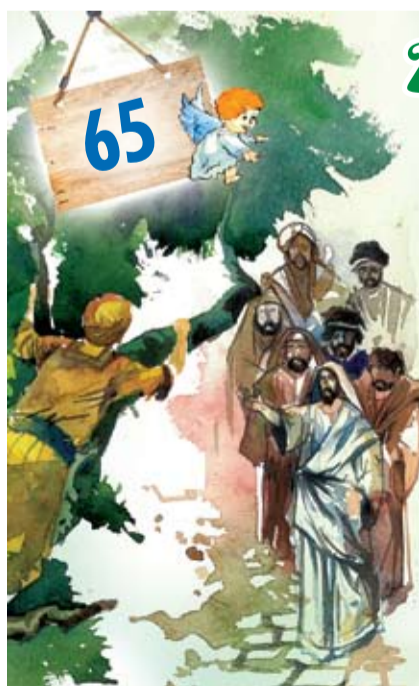
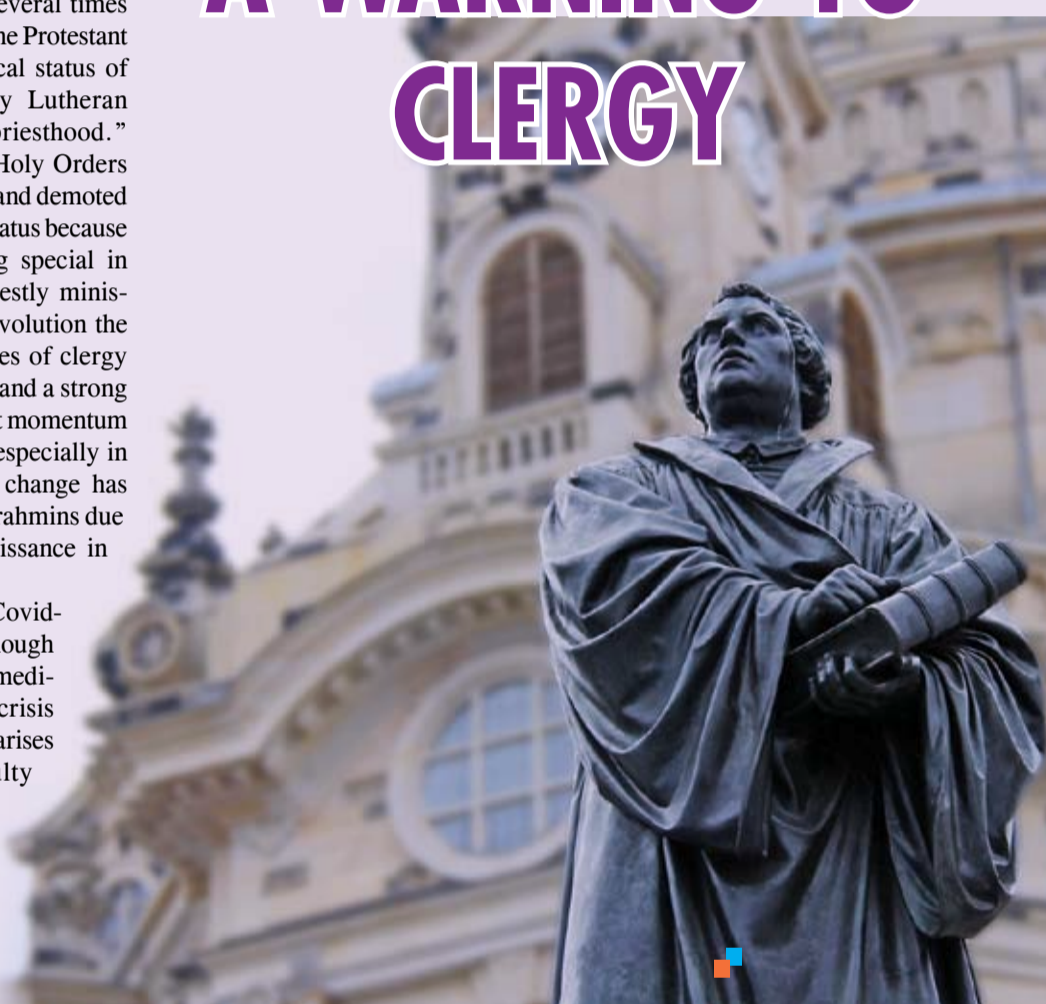


break, priests have begun to administer the sacraments with the participation of minimum members and have started online preaching, they don't derive real satisfaction from them. Besides, the laity has a feeling that they can manage their rapport with God without any assistance from clergy.

The present day changes within the society as well as among the Catholic laity indicates that the Catholics culture is moving in the direction of Protestantism. It is certain that the Catholic priests will no more have authority over laity merely by virtue of ordination. A spirit of egalitarianism will soon reign over the relation between laity and clergy in Church. The Covid-19 seems to give the following warning to the Catholic hierarchy: the clergy has to win authority over the flock through personal witnessing life.

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# A WARNING TO CLERGY



## Zacchaeus, the Dwarf

Zacchaeus was a rich man and nobody liked him very much.

One bright sunny day Zacchaeus saw a crowd coming his way. He wanted to see Jesus who was surrounded by the crowd.

As he was a little man he ran up ahead and climbed up the **Sycamore tree**.

Sure enough Jesus stopped right under the tree. He looked up and there was Zacchaeus peeking through the branches.

"Zacchaeus," Jesus called.

"Hurry down from there!  
**I must stay at your home today!**"

Zacchaeus was very happy.

But the crowd was not so.

They began to grumble.

Zacchaeus said,  
"I will give half of everything  
I have to the poor."

Jesus said,  
"Today, **salvation has  
come to this home.**"

## CATHOLIC PRIEST GOT AWARD IN THE SHORT FILM SCREENWRITING



Priest Fr Jose Puthussery of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly received the award in the short film screenwriting competition organized by the Kerala

Chalachithra Academy on the problems faced by Malayalees all over the world in connection with the lock down during the Corona period.

## COVID MANAGEMENT: MIZORAM SETS NEW EXAMPLE

A small state in India's troubled northeast has managed to contain the Covid-19 pandemic much better than some larger states with more resources. Mizoram is tucked away between Myanmar and Bangladesh, about 1,500 miles from New Delhi. It registered its first case on March 24—the day on which the country went into nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus.

Since then, the number of cases in Mizoram rose to 918 as of Aug. 24, but there have been no deaths.

## INDIAN BISHOPS TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH

The National Youth Commission of the Conference of Catholic Bishops' of India has decided to address the mental wellbeing of young people amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

In these times of uncertainty, the commission is committed to paying attention to the psychological and mental wellbeing of young people, said its executive secretary Father Chetan Machado. The Delhi diocesan priest issued a press note on August 23 after holding the annual consultative meeting (virtual) of national youth leaders of various Catholic Youth Movements in India.

## SOCIAL AMNESIA BURIES INDIA'S CATHOLIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS

"It may be mere coincidence that this article is written at a time when Asia in general and India in particular are facing the greatest threat to human freedom from ideologies and ideologues that present themselves as the unquestionable advocates of progress. But what triggered this writer to venture into this area is a surreptitiously engineered amnesia to black out Christianity from the map of India's freedom struggle.

The Christian contribution to India's freedom is quite evident from the fact that a Marthoma Christian from Kerala – Thevarthundiyil Titus – became almost the other self of Mahatma Gandhi in Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad. In the 1887 Madras meeting of the Indian National Congress, out of 607 delegates 35 were Christians." Writes Joe Palathunkal.

## CATHOLIC LAWYERS' FORUM CALLS FOR SUPREME COURT'S SELF-EXAMINATION

A forum for Catholic nuns, brothers and priests practicing as lawyers says time has come for the self-examination of the Supreme Court of India. "It is the right time for the Apex Court for its self-examination," the National Lawyers Forum of Religious and Priests (NLFRP) stated on August 22 after observing that certain moves of the apex court have evoked bar associations across India to organize protests and demonstrations.

The forum says it was disturbed by the court's full bench on August 20 holding Prashant Bhushan, a noted lawyer, guilty of criminal contempt of court for two tweets.

Bhushan was drawn into the case for the tweets dated on July 27 and 29 on



Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and the Supreme Court. One tweet was about a photograph of Justice Bobde astride a bike and another on how posterity would perceive the role played by the apex court in the past six years.

On August 14, the apex court found the tweets offensive and scandalizing the

court. Bhushan said the tweets embodied his bona fide belief and that it would be contemptuous on his part to apologize for something he believes in. He also said he would cheerfully submit to whatever punishment the court imposed on him.

The forum for Catholic religious and priests termed as "unfortunate" that the court finding the tweets undermining "the dignity and authority of the institution of the Supreme Court of India and the Chief Justice of India and directly affronts the majesty of law."

The forum has declared its solidarity to Bhushan as it finds him not just an individual but the "voice of millions of people and an icon of Right to Expression of our times."

## POLICE MOVE ESCALATES TENSION IN INDIA'S JACOBITE CHURCH



Tension escalated in parts of India's Kerala State as police used force to take over some churches of a Christian faction following a court order, aiming to give them to a rival camp.

In pre-dawn operations, police took over three churches of the Jacobite faction on behalf of the Malankara Orthodox faction. Police used force to remove hundreds of protesters including Jacobite priests and bishops.

"Women, children and bishops were subjected to cruel police brutality," said a statement by Jacobite bishops after

they met in an emergency Synod on Aug. 20.

They also registered their protest against the "inhuman and unjust" attitude of the Supreme Court that resulted in "the rushed move to take over the churches of the Jacobite Church."

The Synod decided to organize protests at their churches while following Covid-19 protocols. The Synod also declared the severance of "all sacramental and spiritual relationship" with the Orthodox faction, said Joseph Mar Gregorios, the metropolitan trustee and senior bishop of the Jacobite Church. More than 1,100 churches in the Jacobite Church's possession are under the threat of forceful acquisition after the court order, said Biby Kadavumbhagam, who edits an official publication of the Jacobite faction.

## REMEMBER THE POOR, SAYS INDIAN ARCHBISHOP



Indian bishops and the country's oldest lay Catholic organization have urged church members to stand in solidarity with the poor, who have been marginalized even more during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the nation is still following federal government guidelines to restrict social gatherings, the All India Catholic Union (AICU) held its annual general meeting through a webinar.

The meeting was inaugurated by Archbishop Felix Machado of Vasai, secretary general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), in Mumbai on Aug. 16.

He said that Pope St John Paul II and Pope Francis had stressed that foreign debt, with manipulated taxes and interests

of the creditors, should be cancelled.

"All Indian citizens are equal to us in dignity before God; and as Catholics, all people in the world are equal to us in dignity," Archbishop Machado said.

## COVID-19: CARDINAL GRACIAS ASKS PRIESTS TO BE VIGILANT

Cardinal Oswald Gracias has cautioned the priests of his Bombay archdiocese to not let their guard down as they have resumed pastoral activities as the administration has relaxed lockdown norms.

The cardinal's caution came in the wake of some priests succumbing to Covid-19. "It is with extremely deep sadness that we received the news of the passing into eternity of our two dear brother priests: Fathers Dominic Alves and Johnny Nicholas. Earlier we were shocked to learn of the passing away of Father Simplicius Khess, a Dominican helping out at Our Lady of Mercy Church, Pokhran. We were not prepared for these departures. We pray for them," Cardinal Gracias said August 15 while addressing the priests of Bombay archdiocese.

"This is a good occasion for us to remind ourselves not to let our guard down. Please observe strictly the norms for wearing masks, social distancing and Covid-19 washing of hands," says the 75-year-old prelate, who heads the Catholic Church India as the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.



## CHURCH WELCOMES INDIAN COURT ORDER AGAINST VEDANTA

A court in southern India has stopped a multinational firm from restarting its copper-processing plant, which was shut down two years ago following a protest that claimed 13 lives including those of four Catholics.

Madras High Court in Tamil Nadu State on Aug. 18 dismissed a petition by London-based Vedanta Limited seeking permission to reopen its multi-million-dollar plant in Tuticorin district.

"The court has done the right thing. It reflects the will of the people. The plant was instrumental in causing immense environmental pollution," Bishop Stephan Antony Pillai of Tuticorin told UCA News on Aug. 19.

## CATHOLIC PRIEST REVOLUTIONIZES MAHARASHTRA DISTRICT'S HEALTHCARE SCENARIO

A 106-year-old dilapidated hospital has become a state-of-the-art healthcare facility in Maharashtra, thanks to a Catholic priest.

Giving a new lease of life to the Morarji Gokaldas Rural Hospital in Mahabaleshwar is among several success stories of Father Tomy Kariyilakulam, who has revolutionized the healthcare scenario of Satara district after he entered the western Indian state a quarter century ago.

"This could be a role model for India to improve public health delivery, without privatization or corporatization," the 54-year-old priest, popularly called Father Tomy, told Matters India.

The member of the Kerala-based Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament says he



draws on "unique collaboration" among the state government, Red Cross of India and corporate houses to improve a few hospitals and nearly 80 public health centres in the district.

The Mahabaleshwar hospital, a government enterprise, boasts of a hoary past as its foundation stone was laid in 1914 by Lord Thomas Willingdon, the then governor of Bombay. It was originally meant for the use of locals and British tourists.

Despite its hoary past, the hospital – sprawled on an 11-acre forest land adjacent to the Mahabaleshwar market – was a decrypt structure that resembled "a ghost house" when the Catholic priest started the renovation works at the invitation of the Maharashtra government.

**Answer:**

The toxic mixture of religion and politics makes religion a pseudo-religion and politics pseudo-politics. What we have seen in the recent past in almost all countries is that the political parties come to power, remain in power and cling on to power using means foul or fair and mostly foul by manipulating the emotional attachment of the people to their religion. Those countries that claim to have democratically elected governments have manipulated religious symbols, religiously emotive statements and even a perverted and sinister religious propaganda to win elections, secure power and remain in power. Sometimes an imaginary situation of threat to their religion is instilled in the minds of

**QUESTION:**

Two pictures we saw in the current news; India's Prime Minister conducting the initiation of the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the Turkish president in the Hagia Sophia conducting Islamic prayer with the imam preaching with a sword repeating 481 years of history of conquest. What do you read out of the two pictures?

Joy Peter

manipulating Hindu religious sentiments. One religious issue that lent itself to accomplish this ambitious project was to take up the cause of building a Ram Temple in Ayodhya in the site of the Muslim Mosque Babri Masjid which was built in 1528. The Hindu religious fundamentalist groups like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other Sangh Parivar affiliates claimed that the Babri Mosque was built demolishing a temple which contained the birth site of Lord Ram. The Rath Yatra evoked unprecedented support of the Hindu masses and in the violence that followed polarising Hindus and Muslims 20 people were killed and the BJP made significant political gains. On December 6, 1996 the Babri Mosque was demolished and a small idol of Lord Ram was

the means and practices in all aspects of life claiming that in the legendary war described in Mahabharata foul means were used by the Pandavas to win the war in order to protect dharma. In the name of promoting Hindu dharma Pseudo-Hinduism tries to promote the inhuman and racist caste hierarchy and discrimination of humans based on the family or group into which she or he is born, affirm patriarchy and subjugation of women, emasculate the institutions that protect democracy, devalue the values of Constitution, polarize religions and to promote tension and enmity between majority Hindus against the members of the minority religions. Pseudo-Hinduism negates all the sublime values of Hindu religion like tolerance, openness to respect the views of others, emphasis



the people through propaganda. It is used as a tool to brainwash many of the common folk to evoke anger and hatred towards those who do not belong to their religion. Such negative emotions can be fanned up during election time and they can be translated into votes for the political party which use religion for their political ends.

What we have seen recently was the use of blatant use of religion for the political propaganda to galvanize support for the ruling dispensation whether it was in India in relation to the laying of the foundation of the Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya or the fourth transformation of the Hagia Sophia, the greatest cathedral church of the first millennium of Christian era into a mosque. The Prime Minister of India attended the religious ceremonies conducted at the laying of the foundation of the temple, obviously, not as a private devotee of Lord Ram but in his official capacity as the Prime-Minister of India. It is not that he cannot go to a temple. He could even go to this temple of Ayodhya on any day after the foundation is laid. But the fact that he chose to go on this particular day and actively participates in the religious ritual at this occasion appears to be more political than religious. In fact, the symbolism of this

act of the Prime-Minister of a secular nation is loud and clear. Those who support him and his party to hold on to power and win elections would be assured that the religion in which they seek identity would be free from any external or internal threats. Further, it would prosper. It is a chilling message to those who oppose the policies of the central government and the ruling party that they are not just opposing the anti-people and anti-poor policies and programmes of the government but indirectly opposing the religion he believes in and identifies himself with. It would certainly embolden the anti-social and criminal elements in the society to attack, maim and lynch people, whom they suspect for transporting cows for slaughter or selling and eating beef, not following the caste discriminations, rules of ritual purity etc.

When religious fundamentalism and bigotry get covert and overt support from the government, those with a criminal mind-set and those have the least regard for the life of other humans find it easy to kill and destroy whom they perceive as the enemies of their religion. They create communal tension and violence before any election to unite, at least temporarily, the people of the same religion, even when they are terribly divided

on caste, class and ideological differences to win the elections. We have seen this taking place in many parts of India especially in UP before the assembly and parliamentary elections. Religion is used to polarize and unite sociologically divided and mostly discriminated people in the name of one religion against the people of other religions especially minorities for winning elections. What the Prime Minister of India did in Ayodhya and the President of Turkey did in Istanbul have almost the same political agenda. They both belong to the majority religions of their countries and what they want to reap is rich dividend from their manipulation of religion to remain in power.

#### ■ **PSEUDO-HINDUTVA AND SEMITIZATION OF HINDU RELIGION**

The Ram Rath Yatra organized by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the Hindu Nationalist affiliates of the BJP was a political and religious rally from September to October 1990 headed by Mr L.K. Advani. It was organized to improve the political clout of the BJP and eventually to secure power in the Centre and in the States

placed in a temporary temple at the site of the demolished mosque. In the Hindu-Muslim violence that was triggered by the demolition of the mosque more than 2000 people were killed and the majority of them were Muslims. The criminal act was hailed as the victory of the Hindus over the Muslims and 8 years later the BJP captured power in the Centre and in some of the States. The demolition of the Babri Masjid marked the death of real Hindu religion and in its place the BJP, the VHP, the Sangh Parivar and its affiliates have placed the idol of Pseudo-Hinduism.

While true or real Hindu religion recognizes the value of every revelation of Truth and so respects every religion and even those who do not adhere to any religious belief or even atheists, Pseudo-Hinduism is intolerant of every other religion and its religious practices, food and dress habits and everything that makes it different from their definition of Hindu manners and customs. Pseudo-Hinduism embraces fascist ideology in politics, labelling their dissenters and critics as anti-national and propagates cultural nationalism against territorial nationalism. It holds the view that end justifies

on interiority and the worth of spiritual values over material prosperity. The Prime Minister's participation in the rituals of laying the silver foundation brick for the building of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on August 5, 2020 on the first anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 which gave Constitutional privileges to the Muslim dominated Jammu & Kashmir and relegating it to a Union Territory can be seen only as a powerful propaganda for Pseudo-Hinduism. It is an effort to overcome the collective inferiority complex developed from the colonial past through a symbolic victory over the Muslims who for centuries ruled the Hindus as their subjects. It is not a sign of civilizational maturity but rather a gimmick to boost the false ego of those who have no appreciation of their self-worth. In spite of various inhuman and irrational perversions that claim their origin in Hindu religion, the sublime values of Hindu religion have universal relevance and meaning. The pseudo-Hinduism is intolerant, jingoistic, divisive, anti-Hindu and anti-Indian.

The semitization of Hinduism that is symbolized by the building of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya to show that Lord Ram is historically born in this place

(Contd. on page 15)

This process for a New Education Policy (NEP) has been underway for a few years now. A committee of retired civil servants comprising only one education specialist conducted a national consultation, gathering the opinions of the Indian people through online contributions and consultation meetings, which proposed thirteen topics for discussion for the school education and twenty for higher education. According to the ministry's website, 110,623 of 244,252 village organizations, 725 of 4,027 municipalities, 2,738 of 6,620 blocks, 340 of 669 districts and 19 of 36 states or union territories took part in these consultations or sent their contributions online for the new education policy. It is arguably the largest consultative process ever for educational policy development in the history of modern education! It is not clear, however, what specific contributions were received from each of these consultations. We could not find on the site either a summary of the key contributions or mention of the methodology used to consolidate all of this data.

The revision of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), developed in 2005, and textbooks were expected to be high on the priorities of the new government; and all the more so since the NCF 2005 had been considered as a reaction aiming to influence "safranization" curriculum and textbooks then prevailing. The new government has, from the outset, completely taken over the NCF 2005, welcoming the principles on which it was formulated. The committee for NEP recommends that the guid-



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## THE NEW EDUCATION POLICY GUIDED BY A CERTAIN IDEOLOGY

ing principles of curriculum reform as set out in NCF 2005 be considered relevant and actively implemented. The ministry also put an end to the revision of the curriculum documents. Textbooks developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training have been retained unchanged.

It seems that the education ministry is striving to appear as modern Hindutva or guided by ideological interests. The only subject that has received national attention is that of yoga, promoted as a teaching subject under the title "yoga for health and well-being." The inclusion of yoga practice in school, promoted by the MHRD, is currently receiving strong support. But, as might be expected, this has raised concerns as to whether this practice should be seen as the effective promotion of Vedic practices in school. The MHRD itself has carefully avoided any reference to the links between religion and yoga, instead emphasizing its internationally recognized virtues for physical and mental

well-being. But any doubt or examination of what exactly is understood as "yoga" immediately elicits its share of strident and misleading comments from far-right groups.

In some of the BJP-ruled states, notably Rajasthan, history textbooks have been revised to incorporate a Hindutva version of India's freedom struggle, which radically redefines the roles attributed to national heroes, including the Mahatma Gandhi, reducing the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru,

to a minor figure, while some Hindutva figures are promoted to the rank of heroes, as is the case of Veer Savarkar, an admirer of Hitler.

We are currently witnessing in India the convergence between an old right and neo-liberalism. In its overall development outlook, the Indian state views political dissent as a waste of time and resources when, on the contrary, all citizens should be united for the advancement of the nation. In this context, freedom of expression is seen as an unnecessary luxury and the activity of those not having to justify their time or their results. It is in fact the entire education system that is currently being "disciplined" in India, through this accountability regime, which aims to achieve greater efficiency and limit waste. The Indian federal state has also sent police to campuses or excluded students for "disrupting" campus life.

The neoliberal developmental perspective promotes close supervision of teaching for greater effectiveness and the notion of accountability for better results. It is this approach that has been adopted at the central level, alongside the rise of the ideological Hindutva agenda in different structures. While a new educational policy is expected in the coming months in India, the new educational landscape is already taking shape, but without the necessary foundation of fundamental rights and freedoms. ■

### AS I SEE IT

You've watched the bhoomi poojan at Ayodhya. Remember the words of Prime Minister Modi? The launching of Hindu Rashtra could not have been made more intelligible than by what he said on the occasion. Ram will be the nucleus of India. Maybe, that unity could go beyond India. Who knows? Expansionism, as Toynbee said, is the familiar face of hubris in history. It is not pride, it's the empire, that goes before a fall.

The good thing about Modi is that he does not play hide and seek. He is not a hypocrite. I'm told that he lies. I wonder who doesn't. We are all liars; except that there are liars and liars. Some are more effective and convincing in lying. Others are timid and tentative. I wish they'd stop lying. What's the use, if your lying doesn't take you where you wish to reach? There is, by the way, a school of opinion which maintains that lying keeps a person mentally agile. Cute, no?

But, right now, we are on the question of majoritarianism. Lying is relevant to it. But we would be lying if we say that only the proponents of the Hindu rashtra employ this art. We all are in the business of lying. And smartly too. One of our favourite lies is that only the RSS is majoritarian.

Don't be surprised. I don't believe that there is anything like majoritarianism per se. If we insist on the contrary, we will mistake the effect for the cause. That doesn't help very much. Let the cause be cause; and effect, effect. We have plenty of other things to jumble up to make aviyaals of confusion. The cause is not majoritarianism. It is power. (And I am not so sure if we are allergic to it). In a democratic set up, power is numerical, till elections are over and done with. Then real power

takes over. The corporates kick in. We call this thing democracy.

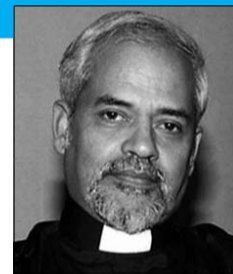
Did Muslims destroy Hindu temples in the past? Did Christians ill-treat Hindus in Goa? Do the big-wigs of the church crush dissent in our midst? What do you think? Have we improved on the track-record of our great ancestors in tolerating prophets? Why were the prophets stoned and killed? Who did that? Not the majority? Or, is majoritarianism only what others do to us? I

say these silly things because it doesn't help to live in denial. It cannot be that it is right when we do it to others. But it's horribly wrong, when others do it to us. That doesn't work; no, not for long. Else, Jesus would not have said, "Do to others what you would that they should do to you." Or, "With what measure you measure, it will be measured to you." We are all blooming majoritarians, except that we lack the wherewithal to go marching with it.

That's not all. There is this other thing about majoritarianism we need to note. Majoritarianism is a function -don't be surprised- of a vacuum. Hindus always comprised the brute majority in India. Then, why did it take so long for the majoritarian ghost to break loose and roam free? The point is that mere numbers doesn't -contrary to what I have implied so far- unleash this ghost. Like evil in general, majoritarianism also needs a vacuum to flourish. The paradox is this: the crushing power of majoritarianism is, for the most part, the power of a vacuum. That facility was offered on a platter by UPA-2. (Ten years ago, we weren't so slick with names; otherwise we'd have called

it UPA 2.0. Now UPA-2 sounds pre-historic!). The terrible achievement of UPA 2.0 was the creation of the national carnival of a vacuum.

At risk of sounding heretical and anti-national let me say-nay, assert-that the invincible power of Narendra Modi is the power of a vacuum. I give him full credit for demonstrating to the country that



**VALSON THAMPU**

that question is, frankly, a no-brainer. Look at us! Paradoxically, we are full, very full. But our present fullness is the fullness of a vacuum. Or, a vacuum fill us. The gravity of this becomes clear when we

examine our plight as Christians by the yardstick of biblical spirituality. We don't do that, for the most part. So, we stay smug. Great, especially if

## MAKING SENSE OF MAJORITARIANISM

a disastrous vacuum was created by the Congress-led UPA. This is only too obvious. He came to power by ridiculing and deriding the Congress. Modi's election plank was Pappu. That it was a lie, a mere figment of one's imagination, did not matter. In a vacuum anything sells, you see? The so-called election promises, we were told later, were made in jest. If anyone expected to be rewarded Rs. 15, 00000 for casting a vote, he is the choicest poltroon in the world.

Nature abhors a vacuum. I learned that in school science more than half a century ago. This thing continued to haunt me. I slowly realized that the principle had a wider relevance. Indeed, it is a cardinal spiritual principle. Jesus taught the same through a parable. Satan is driven out of a person. He does a global race to choose an ideal location for himself. Finds none. Returns to the original site. Finds it, Ah!, empty! Emptiness is, for Satan, red-carpet welcome. He takes violent hold of the former victim! It is the same thing, folks, today. Beware of a vacuum!

Why should be we mind this? Well,

it lasts. Remember, I pray, my school science: nature abhors a vacuum.

In a vacuum, the living feel suffocated. It is not an issue for the metaphorically dead. So, not everyone feels the oppression of it equally. But one day, we shall wake up, and find that the vacuum is filled with forces like our own. There'll be a difference, though the boots will be on the other the other majoritarian feet. Then we will cry aloud and beat our breasts against majoritarianism. We'll scour the pages of the Bible and the cellars of theology for imprecatory stuff to blight it. It wouldn't be easy, though, to convince ourselves majoritarianism crept in through the backdoor of the spiritual vacuum we are busy enlarging. We are doing a good job of imitating UPA. 2.0!

Blessed are those who realize that the seeds of majoritarianism are sown by the minorities. It's the old, old story, my masters. Sow the wind; and reap the whirlwind. Right now it is the season of sowing. So, go on smiling. Look smart. Pull off your tricks. Have a great time. Thank you. ■

(Contd. from page 1)

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE MUTUAL AND COLLABORATIVE RATHER THAN HIERARCHICAL

I am personally inspired and challenged by Pope Francis's way of animating the Church. As a Good Shepherd, he walks the talk. Transcending the boundaries of Collegiality, he embraced Synodality as the best model of leadership in the Church. Based on John's Gospel, I have been teaching and proposing a covenant-friendship paradigm as the best model of animation in our religious congregations. The Johannine covenant-friendship paradigm takes seriously both Synodality and Collegiality. It is characterized by quality service and fair treatment, active participation of all, transparency coupled with confidentiality, and accountability. Far from insisting on conformity to one or another set pattern, it encourages diversity. We need forward-looking, optimistic, daring and committed leaders who are ready to offer what they can give and to be receptive in the process of discerning the will of God. The well-being of the entire community determines the choices and decisions. What is unique to John's Gospel is the aspect of reciprocity in leadership roles: "one another" as friends and covenant partners in God's mission. In such an atmosphere, relationships are mutual and collaborative rather than hierarchical.

If leadership is understood as reciprocal and communitarian, one can ask the following legitimate questions: is there a need for "a leader" in the covenant-friendship paradigm? If so, what is the unique role and mission of this leader or the superior? Yes, this model underlines a unique place for "a leader" of the community. Our daily experiences tell us that

we need someone ("a head") responsible for an institution to ensure its resources are pooled together and its goals are met. The leader will receive the grace of God to inspire all members to live the charism given by God in its fullness and to accomplish its mission with zeal and hope for a better world. The charism of leadership, rather than control from above, inspires both Synodality and Collegiality. It becomes animation from within to build up a community of covenant partners and friends for God's mission. It is not easy, but it is not impossible when we "walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

**Vocations to convents have practically dried up in the West and also in Kerala from where you hail, how do you explain this phenomenon? Is it because the nuns' vocation was no longer challenging to girls? Or is it because the Church relegated the nuns from the limelight to the green rooms?**

I personally feel that there are many reasons for the lack of vocations to women religious congregations. One of the reasons seems to me that some of us have failed (at least to a certain extent) to be authentic witnesses of the Gospel values. We sometimes lack authentic spirituality, radiating the holiness of

consecrated women. Sometimes we do wonderfully well in our respective apostolic field but we cannot live well together in community. If we are just like another charitable organization, the young are not attracted to our communities when there are innumerable better choices and possibilities before them. If we radiate the joy of Easter women, share the holiness of consecrated persons, and communicate zeal for God's mission, we will receive vocations. If not, it is better that we die naturally, having given our best and lived our time. The present situation invites us to reinvent ourselves and reclaim our identity and mission as consecrated women of God.

**You have been involved in the formation of young sisters for the past 10 years and also a professor of Biblical Studies at the Pontifical Atheneum in Pune, how do you define the role and mission of the nuns in the Church and how happy are you with the present status? Do you envisage a paradigm shift in the Church in the perspective of the Church?**

None will contest the fact that women religious play an important role in fostering and preserving faith. And they give

themselves at the service of life in and through their manifold apostolic ministries in the Church and in Society. Despite many new initiatives on the part of Church leaders, it still remains a disheartening truth that women religious are NOT given their rightful place in the Church in India, and elsewhere. I am deeply shocked and pained by the experiences of some sisters wherein they are denied the sacraments in remote places by the priests just because of some disagreements or disputes. It is rare (thanks be to God!), but it still happens. When I started teaching Scripture in the 90s, there was some resistance to the acceptance of women theologians whose perspectives are as valid and authentic as those of male theologians. But things are gradually changing. I was very happy to participate in the Synod of New Evangelization in 2012, and it signalled the growing acceptance and recognition of women theologians in the Church. I believe that women religious and also the laity can assume more responsibilities in the animation of the Church. A paradigm shift in mind-set for both women and men is imperative to overcome the deeply rooted prejudices against women. As the COVID-19-pandemic has taught us, the Church in India needs to move away from a "clergy-centred Church" to a more inclusive, participative, authentic "spirituality-centred" Church at the service of life for all, especially the poor and needy. It is my hope that the Church is now better prepared and better situated in the process of making this paradigm shift.

## JOE BIDEN CAMPAIGNS ON FAITH

(Contd. from page 3)

Biden said the idea that people have an obligation to look out for one another had been imprinted on him during his Catholic upbringing and "being educated by the nuns."

"That's what those lovely women I'm talking to symbolize to me," said Biden.

He quipped he thought it was a "good omen" to see the sisters, and said the encounter was an "exciting time and it gave me a lot of hope."

"Personally for me, faith, it's all about hope and purpose and strength, and for me, my religion is just an enormous sense of solace," he added.

"I go to Mass and I say the rosary. I find it to be incredibly comforting," he said.

While Biden has repeatedly profiled his Catholicism during this election campaign, his faith has been a source of controversy over his lengthy political career, and he has endorsed policies that are contrary to Church teaching.

Shortly after his election as vice president, the then-bishop of his hometown of Scranton, PA, rebuked Biden for his views on abortion.

"I will not tolerate any politician who claims to be a faithful Catholic who is not genuinely pro-life," said Bishop Joseph Martino of Scranton in 2008.

"No Catholic politician who supports the culture of death should approach Holy Communion. I will be truly vigilant on this point."

White evangelicals may also choose

not to vote, said Shaun Casey, former director of the US State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs under Secretary John Kerry, and the author of a book about how John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic president despite Protestant opposition.

"There is a growing dissatisfaction among evangelicals with Trump," Casey said. "They know Trump's weaknesses: His immorality, his incoherence, his rage and incompetence. But I don't see it leading them into the Democratic Party."

Casey said Biden is smart to talk about his Catholicism in the campaign, regardless. It's a point of personal connection with many voters. And when Biden talks about how his faith formed his character, sustained him in hard times, and taught him kindness and empathy, many will see a stark contrast with Trump.

Richard Mouw has been invited to two sessions and spoken to multiple evangelical leaders who have met with the Democrats. He will join a listening session. Mouw plans to bring up the party's positions on abortion and religious liberty.

"There are real issues," he said. "It's very important that Biden send out a signal that he cares about communities of faith and people of conviction—even convictions that are different from his own."

Gestures might not be enough to bring evangelicals and a Catholic candidate together, Mouw said, but they won't hurt.

## JIMMY LAI, THE TESTY TYCOON DEFYING BEIJING

(Contd. from page 3)

Working first as a child labourer in a garment factory, he rose to become manager, and spent his year-end bonus to speculate successfully on stocks. The bankrupt garment factory he bought with his winnings expanded into a pan-Asian retailer.

Appalled when Beijing unleashed the army on peaceful demonstrators in 1989, Mr Lai founded the pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper in the mid-1990s, shortly before Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997 as a "special administrative region" with wide-ranging autonomy, civil freedoms and an independent judiciary.

Apple Daily quickly became a best-selling title, attracting readers with sensational scoops and exposés of everyone from senior officials to local celebrities. Hong Kong readers could not get enough of a newspaper that Chinese state media accused of playing "a critical role in instigating hatred, spreading rumours and smearing Hong Kong authorities and the mainland."

"Next Media gave reporters more space — there was much more editorial freedom than at other places," says Alvin Chan, a journalist with the group's digital arm. "Jimmy Lai is a very important person in the evolution of Hong Kong media."


He could also be a difficult boss. One former employee says Mr Lai had a habit of issuing an urgent order one day and contradicting it the next. Senior staff could be shunted into drastically different roles with little or no warning. But many of his employees and friends feel he has mellowed over recent years — a transformation some attribute to his late conversion to Catholicism and a conviction that he is doing what he was meant to do. "He was very loud and often shouted at people with foul language," Mr Chan says. "He is much nicer these days."

"He talks about God a lot," a friend adds. "He says 'this is my destiny'."

Mr Lai, who has six children from two marriages, has been a UK national since 1996. But he has never contemplated leaving Hong Kong, and is surprised that it took over 20 years for there to be a final showdown between the party and Hong Kong's pro-democracy camp.

Now that the battle has finally been joined, Mr Lai has no regrets. Shortly after his release on bail, he said in his weekly webcast that he had been moved by the supporters who flocked to the police station where he was held. "People were so excited, so loud," he said. "I was so touched. It just reaffirms that whatever I had done wrong in the past, at least what I'm doing now is right."

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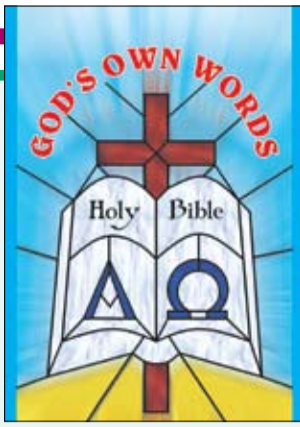
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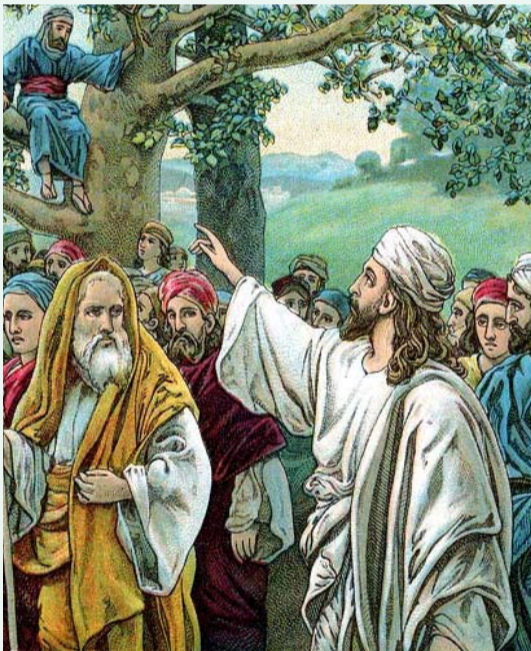
“Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). This statement of blessing by Jesus at the house of the “converted” Zacchaeus seems to be one of the most fascinating declarations of Jesus in a home - context in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Luke, the act of conversion or repentance is often pictured as a homecoming act - an act that is completed at home, or being at home with God. The parable of the Lost Son undoubtedly presents this theme of conversion or repentance as homecoming in a convincing manner. The Zacchaeus episode gives a more vivid and distinct picture to this act of homecoming and the “work from home” that followed.

Most of the unjust and corrupted exercises of authority and power in the world are taken place by the demands of the home. The financial needs of the home often become the catalyst in amassing wealth through unethical and inhuman ways. The

Jesus’ “work from the home” of Zacchaeus begins with his entry into the house. It was an act that was criticized and questioned by others. This unexpected homecoming of Jesus made all the difference in the life of Zacchaeus who had only the intention to see Jesus, whom he had heard of as a person welcomed tax-collectors and sinners. He might have been totally surprised and shaken by the spontaneous act of Jesus. For a moment, he might have been in a world of disbelief. This shock and surprise are turned into a self examination. Zacchaeus might have been forced to reflect about his own unworthiness to welcome Jesus to his house. Moreover, he might have been compelled to assess the paled face of his home enriched by his own unjust and inhuman possessions. He is compelled to take a U-turn immediately. Such was the effect of the homecoming of Jesus!

The second step of the conversion of Zacchaeus

## CONVERSION: A “WORK FROM HOME”



structural sins of the society are closely knit with the projects and plans that are envisaged at home. Zacchaeus home may not have been different from this trend. So Jesus might have chosen the home of Zacchaeus to make his conversion possible through the purification of his home.

Jericho is listed as one of the greatest taxation centres in Palestine. Zacchaeus was a man who had reached the top of his profession there; and he was the most hated man in the district. Zacchaeus was wealthy but he was not happy. Inevitably he was lonely, for he had chosen a way that made him an outcast. His home might have been the only place of solace for him where he might have not been criticized or looked down by others for his “unjust” way of tax collection. Now, this home becomes the focus of the episode and the centre of salvation in the life of Zacchaeus pronounced by Jesus. While we find in other conversion stories the act of homecoming - returning to God from the part of the sinners as the starting point of conversion, in the Zacchaeus episode, the homecoming is from the part of Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus wanted to visit the house of Zacchaeus who wished and determined to see Jesus. In fact Jesus wanted to “work from the home” of Zacchaeus. He invited Zacchaeus: “Zacchaeus! Hurry and come down! for this very day I must stay at your house” (Lk 19:5).

### Benny Nalkara, CMI

is another “work from home.” This time it is Zacchaeus who works. He declares his intention to do the restitution for his guilt. He decided to give half of his goods to the poor; the other half he did not intend to keep to himself but to use to make restitution for the frauds of which he had been self-confessedly guilty. Actually, in his restitution he went far beyond what was legally necessary. Only if robbery was a deliberate and violent act of destruction was a fourfold restitution necessary (Ex 22:1). If it had been ordinary robbery and the original goods were not restorable, double the value had to be repaid. (Ex 22:4, 7). If voluntary confession was made and voluntary restitution offered, the value of the original goods had to be paid, plus one-fifth (Lev 6:5; Num 5:7). Zacchaeus was determined to do far more than the law demanded. He wanted to clean himself by cleaning his home. The decision to give a half of his property to the poor and the resolution to give back to the person whatever he had taken by fraud four times over was actually going to give a crucial blow to the financial stability of his family. But he was fully convinced and repented considering the fact that his home was built on unjust money. His conversion at home and the decision to pay restitution was going to be a demanding one for him, namely, making himself to go to the door steps of the others whom he had looted and tell them, “sorry, I did wrong to you and hurt you. I am ready to repay you in fourfold.” This act of conversion had to be started from own home and to be reached the home of the others.

Finally, the conversion episode of Zacchaeus concludes with the “blessing of the home” by Jesus: “Today salvation has come to this house.” A home that is cleansed by the inner purification of the house owner becomes an abode of salvation. Any conversion through “work from home” culminates at the blessings upon the home. More than the individual, the entire home is blessed.

Jesus wants to enter our homes and is ever ready to help us to have the experience of salvation. His presence and work at our home can cleanse us, liberate us from all the personal and structural bondages and bring peace and joy to our homes. The question is whether we are ready to do “our work from home?”

### Prema Jayakumar



A column written now cannot ignore what time of the year it is. It is the time of Onam, when the banished Asura king, Mahabali, comes to visit his subjects in this small area of his erstwhile kingdom. Oddly enough, while most festivals are celebrated across India, this is a festival that does not find a place in the calendar of the other states.

## Celebration of a Defeat

Why a king who ruled over all the worlds should be forgotten elsewhere and remembered only here is a puzzle. We, people of Kerala, seem to have appropriated and kept this virtuous Asura king, in whose reign there was plenty and when falsehood did not thrive, to ourselves. And his yearly coming is celebrated most joyously, cutting across religions. The celebration is colourful and full of life with dances, races, and games. Nature too seems to join in with flowers and butterflies and sunshine. Ten days of celebration, flower patterns, new clothes, rich food, it is celebrated by most people as well as their purses permit them to.

Most celebrations, religious and otherwise, involve births, victories and other joyous occasions. Whether it is Christmas, Janmashtami, Easter or Deepavali, Independence Day or whatever it be, it is the birth of a saviour, the defeat of evil, the birth of a nation, that is celebrated. A festival that pays homage to a defeated king and places him at the centre of the celebration is a rare one. The logic of it is difficult to understand. I guess, it is the generosity that resulted in the defeat that is celebrated. Of course, it helps that the time of the year is one of harvests and plenty and serves as a reminder of a time when there was plenty in the land.

Mahabali was that rarity, a king who cared about his subjects and saw to it that no one wanted for anything in his country. There is nostalgia in the remembrance of a ruler who saw to it that there was no falsehood, no cheating in his country, who ensured that all his subjects were taken care of. His pedigree was unimpeachable too. He was the grandson of Prahlada, the virtuous Asura king who was a devotee of Vishnu. He was extremely generous - his subjects had only to ask to be given. And yet, his people were so well off that he was rarely asked and he did not need to give much. So, what was his sin that he needed to be banished to the netherworld?

One, perhaps, was that he was not satisfied with ruling over the earth, but captured the heavens too and brought them under his rule. The other was the sin of so many virtuous kings - that of hubris. Warned by his guru that the young Brahmin boy was his enemy in disguise, come to take away his kingdom and perhaps his life too, he will not go back on his word that anyone who attends his fire sacrifice and asks for anything will be granted that request. Like Oedipus in another time and place, who would seek the answer to his question in spite of being warned that tragedy would result, and brought destruction on his family, Bali too brings disaster on himself. By rashly keeping his word, he loses the worlds he rules over and has to offer his head as a resting place for the third foot of the enemy whose request he had granted. And yet, there is glory in the surrender. In case any of us feels that it was unfair to the king to banish him to the unpleasant netherworlds, we are reassured that they became as pleasant as the heavens!

What is it about the reign of Mahabali that captures our imagination and affection? Is it the picture of the egalitarian society, a world where ‘manusharellarum on-nupole,’ people were treated equally? Is it the memory of a world where there were no cheats, where people did not trick each other or even lie to each other? They say ‘kallavumilla, chatiyumilla, ellolamilla polivachanam.’ To a people who are fed up of being cheated, of being lied to, by the leaders they trusted and by everyone they thought knowledgeable and steadfast, the picture of the land of the Asura king has an attraction that lasts.

(Contd. from page 11)

## CUNNING POLITICIANS PLAY ON THE WEAKNESS OF THE PEOPLE

is another perversion of Hindu Religion. The term semitization is defined as a process of any religion acquiring the characteristics of Semitic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For the Semitic religions the intervention of God in history is very important. Therefore, in the world-view of Semitic religions, time is interpreted in the linear direction and everything begins from God and ends in God. Thus, the events of history become very central to their belief. History does not repeat itself and every decision in history determines the destiny of the individual and the world. According to the Hindu religious world-view, time is cyclic and it goes on and on without beginning or end. Therefore, history is not important. The cycle of birth and rebirth continues. Therefore, what happens in history is not to be taken seriously. Everything comes and goes and comes again!

According to the Pseudo-Hindutva ideologists the enslavement and victimization of the Hindus is due to this world-view. They believe that the success of Semitic religions in conquering most part of the world is due to their world-view of giving importance to history. All the three Semitic religions claim their historical origin and have a geographical place as the symbol of their unity. Therefore, it is the belief of those who follow the ideology of Pseudo-Hindutva

that like Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Mecca of the Semitic religions if Ayodhya can be set up as the birth place of Lord Ram and the temple built there as the rallying point of all Hindus then it would help their political agenda to secure and remain in political power and fulfil their dream of a Hindu-Rashtra. At the moment the Constitution of India is a block to their nefarious plans. They will use every available means to achieve their goal. The Prime Minister's participation in the Ayodhya temple foundation ceremony is only one among them!

### RE-CHRISTENING OF HAGIA SOPHIA AS A MOSQUE

Built in 537 the Church of Hagia Sophia or the Holy Wisdom was the largest Christian Church in the Eastern Roman Empire and the Cathedral of the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1453, almost after 10 centuries of Christian worship it was converted into a mosque by Mehmed the conqueror of Ottoman empire. In 1931 after being a mosque for about 4 centuries it was closed and in 1935 it was reopened as a museum by the secular republic of Turkey and was later recognized by the UNESCO as a world-heritage monument. In the early July 2020 the present Turkish government headed by Recep Tayyip Erdogan decreed that its status is changed from a

museum to a mosque. Erdogan who came to power claiming to have secular credentials changed his position to a Muslim fundamentalist in the course of time to remain in power. He changed the Constitution to become the president of Turkey. The motives to declare Hagia Sophia as a mosque and to go there on the first day of prayer according to the Muslim religious tradition along with the Imam and other government officials are not much different from the action of the Indian Prime Minister to attend the foundation laying ceremony in Ayodhya on August 5, 2020. Religions are certainly different but the political strategy of both leaders are very similar: use religious symbols which are emotionally appealing to give the distressed people a sense of superiority over others and to secure support for the government especially when the financial situation of the country is bad and both the opposition parties and the independent agencies criticize the inefficient handling of the pandemic COVID 19 by the Turkish government.

Political leaders have only one religion: power. They use any means to secure it and keep it. They are not bothered about truth and justice. They cannot stand any opposition. They go any extent to remain in power. Playing with the emotional appeal of religion is one of the best means used by political leaders with autocratic and fascist ten-

dencies of all times. There are so many mosques in Istanbul and there is no need for converting Hagia Sophia to a mosque. But it is not a religious need. It is a political need and a statement that the superiority or the supremacy of Islam over Christianity. Here again, it comes from a collective inferiority or superiority feeling that is manipulated by a cunning politician who knows the weakness of his people.

### THE RELIGION GOD WANTS

Political leaders of all religions manipulate the infantile religious faith of the people and deceive them through all the means available and make them believe that, that these leaders are the saviours and protectors of their religions. What the present president of the United States does in presenting himself as the champion of the Christian faith and the traditional Christian values is not much different from the manipulation of religious faith by the Prime Minister of India and the president of Turkey. Though we have reflected only on the recent manipulation of religion for political purposes by pseudo-hindutva and pseudo-islamic leaders such actions are not limited to them. In the history there are many Christian political leaders who have manipulated the religious sentiments of the Christians to secure, remain and continue in power. So too there are Jewish and other religious

leaders doing the same.

Power gives more thrill to life than anything else in the world. Both religious and political leaders get power through election, appointment or through heredity. Both tend to manipulate the blind faith of the people in them. Usually they are supportive of each other. What we can see in history as well as in the recent events of Ayodhya or Istanbul is the same mutual support of politicians and religious leaders to hoodwink gullible people so as to remain in power and enslave people for their selfish ends. Only those prophets who would not let people be enslaved by any type of manipulation in the name of God and religion can challenge and bring to light their ungodly plans and activities. Genuine religious and political leadership bring harmony and concord among people of different religions, cultures, languages, ethnicities and ideologies. They are people of authority and not power. They don't polarize people but prevent any type of division and discrimination. Those who use religion and politics to divide and discriminate, destroy harmony and kill peace are wolves in sheep's clothing. What God requires of humans is "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly before God" (Micah 6:8). Therefore, eternal vigilance is not only the price of democracy but also the price of genuine religion!



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