

# HOUSE TOP

MSMHC Missionary Journal  
GO PROCLAIM

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SPIRITUALITY & SOCIAL COMMITMENT

# HOUSE TOP

MSMHC Missionary Journal



**Let your light shine**

Director: Sr. Mary Thadavanal  
Editor: Sr. Mary Concepta Dkhar  
Associate Editor: Sr. Shiji James  
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House Top : MSMHC Missionary Journal is a biannual missionary journal to disseminate current mission trends among us and to give ample opportunities to our sisters to share the rich experiences of the various field of our apostolate.

## **Editorial Office**

Missionary Animation Centre (MAC)  
Little Flower Convent  
Hatigaon , Dispur  
Guwahati - 781 006  
Assam, India

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## MSMHC Missionary Journal

### SPIRITUALITY & SOCIAL COMMITMENT

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## *Spirituality, an Expression of Life*

"I have found my true God who is rich in mercy and steadfast in love" was the words of a person whom I met the other day in a hospital during my visit to the place. He shoulders the responsibility as the head of a family and like every good father, wishes the good of his family and children. He was eager to share his life experience with me and from his sharing I came to know that he had a history that kept him bound for years, not letting him experience true freedom. He thought of God as terrible, punishing, vengeful and unforgiving for he led an ungodly life, committing many sins. At one point of time, he became aware of his sinful life and decided to change and choose a path that can lead him and his family to life, but he remained in fear of the punishments of God. It was then he heard the voice of the one whom he feared through the Scriptures, prayers and persons who spoke of the unconditional love of a forgiving God. Today he believes in the God who restores him to life and enjoys the freedom of the true children of God.

Spirituality can be defined as human beings' innate reaching for self-transcendence and for ultimate meaning. Some approach it as the wholehearted living of Christian faith - creed, moral code, and worship and some insist that spirituality must include a God-centered struggle for justice. But for almost everyone, spirituality implies a direct relationship with God. By deepening our faith in God, we can experience a deeper growth of knowledge and understanding of Him. From the Source of this fountain of spirituality we get the vitality of life, growth and maturity and we can thereby live by the power of the Spirit. As St Paul wrote to the Christians of Galatia 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit' (Gal 5: 22-25).

"You are not a human being having a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being having human experience" says Wayne W. Dyer. Spirituality is the lived experienced of one's faith. In Jesus who is the Way the Truth and the Life, we find that Spirituality is the true way to reach God and the Sacred. True Spirituality is something that is found deep within oneself, it is our way of life, way of loving, accepting and relating to the world and people around us. Spirituality is an expression of life. It is concerned with the transcendent addressing ultimate questions about life's meaning with the assumption that there is more to life than what we see or fully understand while religions aim to foster and nourish the spiritual life- and spirituality is often a salient aspect of religious participation though it is possible to adopt the outward forms of religious worship and doctrine without having a strong relationship to the transcendent.

This issue of the House Top focuses on the spirituality that calls for an intense, consistent and committed love for God and neighbour. Sr. Lissy George explains about "The practice of spirituality and social commitment - A Gospel paradigm, Sr. Philomena Mathew describes on the Spirituality of our beloved Founder, Bishop Stephen Ferrando, Fr. Jose Varickkaseril places before us "The Spirituality based on the letter of St. Peter" and Fr. Paul O Lyngkot writes on "Youth Spirituality".

Wishing you God's special blessings at Christmas and although the New Year 2010.

***Sr. Mary Concepta Dkhar***



## Superior General's Message:

A spiritual person is one who is touched and transformed by God, and consequently the life of the person gets permeated by God's presence and his qualities. Compassion is at the heart of God and so a spiritual person is in essence a compassionate person. The closer one is to God, the closer she/he is to her/his neighbor. The call came to Moses to lead the Israelites out of the slavery of Egypt because Yahweh "heard the cry of his people". We have received our call to a missionary congregation essentially for the service of our people. The raging World War II and its ramifications on his people left Bishop Stephen Ferrando, our Founder with an aching heart and his determination to bring them well being and wholeness resulted in the foundation of the msmhc. Through Bishop Ferrando Jesus has called us to continue his saving mission of giving life to people. "I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness". The end result of all our missionary activity is therefore 'fullness of life for all'.

The Good Samaritan tells us clearly what spirituality is in lived experience. It requires us to move out of our comfort zones to be at the side of the needy neighbor. The book *Spirituality and Social Care* edited by Bruce Stewart and Mary Nash explains, 'Spirituality opens the door to integrity and genuineness in our relations with others who may be limited by personal difficulties, situational circumstances or oppression. There is a connection between the freedom to determine one's own goals, morals and spiritual perspectives and a responsibility to support the same for other people. Recognition of the importance of personal freedom is linked to ensuring this for others and this in turn heightens a rationale of mutuality. Spirituality is inseparable from helping relationship. Spirituality supports all aspects of human development by providing meaning and purpose in life, creating harmony and balance in relationships, deepening the therapeutic effect of professional helping, and integrating the pursuit of personal need with resolving social and political inequity'.

If our well disciplined life and pious practices do not lead us to the neighbor who needs our service and kindness we fail in our mission. Our hearts must become sensitive enough to sense the pain in the other and walk the extra mile to help them. This is not a favour we do them but an obligation our call has laid on us. Therefore our spirituality has to be an integrated spirituality where life, prayer and charity in deed go hand in hand. After having encountered Christ and experienced his transforming power we move out to the society to proclaim that love and lead God's people to the same experience. Our spirituality is tested in our ability to recognize the face of God's beloved son in the sad and lonely, the naked and the imprisoned, the one standing in need of liberation.

In our concerted effort to commit ourselves to bring about social justice and dignity of every person we need to sustain, challenge and encourage each other to attain our common goal of a transformed society and thus advance the kingdom of God. The Missionary Sister loses her identity if she severs herself from her mission of social commitment. Apart from the society she has no mission.

***Sr. Mary Thadavanal***  
Superior General

## The Practice of Spirituality and Social Commitment: A Gospel Paradigm

*Sr. Lisy George*

The word spirituality seems to exclude material realities and activities connected with them. It is suggestive of the immaterial, the non-bodily, the non-social, the a-historical, the interior, and the other-worldly. Dictionaries note that "spirituality" defines spiritual as distinct from physical or material. Even A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality tells us that the word is used to describe "attitudes, benefits, practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards supernatural realities". Monica Furlong, however, laments the presence at the heart of Christianity of a 'split between sensuality and spirituality'.

A less forged understanding of spirituality identifies it almost exclusively with explicit religion - with piety, devotion, prayer, dogmas, rites, cults and the organization of these, or with matters pertaining to the individual soul and its salvation as distinct from matters that concern the body or the human community. Thus to pray, to meditate, to confess would be spiritual exercises, but not to sink a tube-well for a thirsty village. Spirituality tended to be defined in opposition to the political, the economic, the social, the active, the external. It was closely associated with asceticism and with monasteries, monks and nuns. Or it was thought of as something available in ashrams, retreat houses or diploma courses. The result was that for many good people, for youth in particular, spirituality smelt too much of the cloister and the sacristy, or of incense and candles; it appeared to them as something abstract, something of a kill-joy, negating full-blooded life and whole-hearted involvement in the business of building a beautiful world. However, it may be added that today spirituality is regaining respectability and becoming popular. It is something people seek, even traveling abroad, cloyed as they are with the shallowness of materialist affluence.

Nevertheless, some suggestion of dualism still clings to the word 'spirituality'. The word has become ambiguous and somewhat confusing. Hence we have been looking for other expressions not so much to replace spirituality altogether as to help bring out its real intent and meaning. Thus one speaks of the life with God, or of living before God, or walking with God and with fellow creatures; or of personal union with God, or of God-consciousness. For some spirituality has to do with the ordering of our life, with the form we give to it and the fixing of priorities. Others have described it as a primordial experience of being rooted in God, as a radical sensitivity; or as that which gives meaning to human life; or as freeing oneself in order to free others; or as the love of the beautiful; or as desert experience patterned on the Exodus or on Hosea 2. For Maria Teresa Porcile spirituality is "a kind of homesickness for God, for silence, beauty, prayer, liturgy, chant, theology, which becomes worship... and a way of watching the world that is being transformed into compassion and hymn, an anticipation of Jerusalem". A. Schmemman clarifies that Christian spirituality is not simply for interior life or the inward person. It is as much for the body as for the soul, as much for society as for the individual. It

consists in implementing the two commandments of loving God and neighbour, the neighbour including nature. Pannenberg presents spirituality as a progressive realisation of the Gospel of transformative affirmation of the human person and human history by God's love. Prophet Micah, if asked, would reply that spirituality consists in acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly with the God of us all (cf. Mi 6:8). Or, in Jesus' phrase, to be spiritual is 'to think the things of God', to think as God thinks and live accordingly (cf. Mt 16:23).

For some spirituality is essentially relational. With Thomas Merton spirituality's accent falls on transformation of conscience from a self-centred state to an other-centred condition; "one's self is no longer one's own centre; it is now centred on God" Elizabeth S. Fiorenza is strong on relationality. "The focal point", she writes, "of early Christian self-understanding was not a holy book, or a cultic rite, not mystic experiences and magic invocations but a set of relationships: the experience of God's presence among one another and through one another...". Consequently Christian spirituality came to mean "eating together, sharing together, drinking together, talking with each other, receiving each other, experiencing God's presence through each other, and, in doing so, proclaiming the Gospel as God's alternative vision for everyone, especially for those who are poor, outcast and battered".

### **Spirituality as Life in the Spirit**

Spirituality is life in the Spirit, living by the Breath of God. Spiritual is what the Holy Spirit creates, initiates, inspires, gives, guides, sustains, blesses, approves, animates, accepts and rejoices over. All

creation then is radically spiritual: the earth and the sky, birds and beasts, women and men are all spiritual from their foundations and in their essential openness to the Spirit's influence. This perception is vital for all authentic and holistic understanding of spirituality which would avoid all dualist pitfalls. This view provides a necessary horizon for all further interpretation and application of spirituality. But it has its limitations too. It spells out the Spirit's role and activity rather than the part we, humans, are to play in the history of our life in the Spirit. It needs to be supplemented; or, rather, this rich description of spirituality spoken from the side of the Spirit needs now to be told from our side.

That may be done by stating that to be spiritual is to be open to reality and responding to it relevantly and as adequately as possible. From the perspective of human praxis, life in the Spirit is defined in terms of **openness and responsiveness to reality**. Reality is to be understood inclusively: it embraces everything from sand and grass, through singing birds and wildlife; through the solar systems and the furthest constellations in an expanding universe, through the complex and structured universe within each molecule, to the world of thought and grief and love and brokenness in the depths of human hearts, to the hunger and misery and tears of women and men, to the experience of forgiveness, and on to the Ultimate Mystery of life and love we call God, Brahman, Allah. To be spiritual is to be open to these realities, to all of them, to any of them, and to all further possibilities, rejecting none, shutting out nothing. Openness means listening to the other, to the depth and the silence of things and events, refusing to close the door to

possibilities however unfamiliar, unpalatable, challenging and disturbing. Openness means being ready for the surprise of history and of the cosmos. Materialism is a prejudiced option for narrowness while fairy tales affirm that nothing given within our experience exhausts the possibilities of the real. To be open is to let reality come in all its beauty, ugliness, wonder, terror ; let it come, invade our life, touch us in depth, affect us, awaken us, gladden us, wound us, and move us to joy, to song, to sorrow, to tears, to anger, to action. To relevant action, action that responds to reality and its actual condition, affirming, fostering, negating, resisting, subverting, transforming as the case may require. 'Response-ability' will address not only reality's present but its past as well and its future; it will speak to the personal no less than to the structural. To be spiritual is to be open and responsive to the reality of the earth, of history, of life, of people, of the Spirit.

Christian spirituality demands sensitivity to the presence, the needs, and the gifts of others, as well as to the created goods of the earth. Finally, Christian spirituality is transformational. The spiritual Christian is consciously in touch with the presence of the Spirit as the power which heals, reconciles, renews, gives life, bestows peace, sustains hope, brings joy, and creates unity. Christian spirituality requires that the Spirit be allowed to work so that through the instrumentality of the individual and of the Church the transformation of the world into the Reign of God might continue to occur.

### **Praxis of Spirituality as Social Commitment in the Gospels**

The parable of the Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:29-

37) could illustrate the point. Two men of religion, two cult persons, a priest and a Levite, came along, saw the traveler lying on the roadside, stripped, robbed, beaten, bleeding to death; they saw and passed by. Then came along a non-Jew, a non-believer, a Samaritan, someone the cult persons despised. He too saw what the priest had seen, and he responded in a way the priest had not. Moved with compassion he went up to the dying man, bandaged his wounds, lifted him on to his own mount, took him to the nearest inn and arranged for him to be looked after unto health and wholeness at the Samaritan's own expense. That was openness, showing his ability to respond; that was neighbourly love, and authentic faith and true religion and spiritual worship. It was a more relevant response than the priest's even if we imagine that the priest was perhaps hastening to the temple to pray for the bandits' victim. The priest was not open: he did not respond. What the Samaritan did was. And Jesus said to the learned Jews, "Go then and do the same" (cf. Lk 10:37), follow the Samaritan, take a lesson in religion from him.

One could multiply illustrations of authentic spirituality from the Bible, but they are also illustrations of spirituality for Social commitment. So we shall postpone telling the stories till a word has been said about Social Commitment.

The "Go and do the same" of the Samaritan story is a Social Commitment word; and the spirituality which the story depicts in terms of broken humanity, of religion's indifference, of Gentile sensitivity and wine, oil, money, humanity, responsibility and love, portrays faithfully the authentic face of a spirituality of Social Commitment.

Traditionally Mt 28:18-20 has been

honoured and obeyed as the Lord's great missionary mandate. But debates and hesitations described in the Acts prove that the Matthean passage is not a word of Jesus inaugurating a world mission; it is a word of the early Church setting forth the happy conclusion of early Christian controversies. The fact is that Jesus confined his ministry and that of his disciples to the house of Israel and its lost sheep (Mt 10:5-6; Mk 7:26-27; Acts 10:11). But we are not left without direct mission words from Jesus. 'Go and do the same' of the Samaritan story is one such word. Another, absolutely central and decisive, is Jesus' love commandment: I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you (cf. Jn 13:34).

This mission word of Jesus sums up all his teachings and synthesises the meaning of his life and death. To love is the ministry and mission of the disciples; it is to be the distinctive mark of the Church: "It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples" (Jn 13:35). The commandment is then repeated with a dynamic Trinitarian structure: there is the Father, there is Jesus, and their shared Love reaching out to draw us in: "I have loved you just as the Father has loved me... This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you... My commandment to you is to love one another" (Jn 15:9, 12, 17).

And the love is to be made real in concrete relevant service to, and acceptance of responsibility for, one another: "If I have washed your feet, you also must wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14; Mk 10:41-45).

But that 'one another' should not harden into a closed circle: the disciples are not to become a ghetto. We are commissioned to break out of circles and let our love and

service spread far and wide to transform the world. The mission word is, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you (Mt 5:44) Disclose a new way of life, a new style of relationship, a new set of values, a new economic practice, and take the world by surprise.

Akin to this is the command in Mt 5:23-24 about interrupting cult to give priority to the Gospel task of community-building, peace-making and reconciling, and laying the foundations of a new, beautiful world (cf. Mt 5:8; 2 Cor 5:17-19). Similarly the blessing pronounced on those who hunger and thirst for justice (Mt 5:6) and struggle on the side of the victims of iniquitous economic, political and social systems, carries a mandate for social commitment. All the beatitudes are in fact mission words indicating with whom the bearers of the Gospel are to stand, what values and goals they are to pursue, to what visions and dreams they are to win the people over, what life style they ought to adopt, and what price they may have to pay for discipleship. The point is made clear in the mission mandate which concludes this section: You are salt for the earth to preserve it from decay and give it new flavour and vigour; You are light to the world, sent to shine in people's sight, so that seeing your good works and your astonishing way of life people may burst into praise of the Father (cf. Mt 5:13-16).

Matthew is a missionary Gospel with a global perspective beginning from the genealogy (ch. 1), through the Magi story (ch. 2), and the story of the Light breaking into the shadows of Gentile existence (4:12-17), through Jesus' self-identification with the deprived (8:20; 25:31-46), and the cosmic phenomena which mark Jesus' death

(27:51-54) on to the world mission at the end (28:18-20). The Sermon on the Mount is a formal charter of Social commitment. We wish to call attention to two more points in this charter. The first is the Our Father (6:9-13). This prayer says that the mission's goal is the Father's glory when encounter with God's reality will be experienced as meaningful, life-giving and liberating. It says that the mission is at the service of God's Reign. The values and dynamics of that Reign, which is older and larger than the Church, will shape and guide the mission. At the heart of the prayer stands not just the Reign of God, but the Reign and the Earth - the Reign as it comes to the Earth touching and transforming it, and the Earth as the place where the Reign is realised through the doing of God's will, the implementation of God's designs. The second part of the prayer spells out some specifics of the Reign, some concrete ways of doing God's will. The prayer calls for a radical revamping of our systems of social fragmentation and social gaps. It demands the fashioning of fellowship in which everybody's right to daily bread, daily rice, daily share in resources required to live with dignity and to participate creatively in history's processes will be met and honoured. As a prayer, the Our Father is an act of commitment to a programme of action to remake the world.

The second point we need to touch upon in the social commitment charter is found in Mt 7:21-23. It re-emphasises the doing of God's will, stressed already in the Our Father. It warns us against misunderstanding the mission as an exercise in religious rhetoric. Mission seeks to discover and unite people committed to God's designs for the earth, to win more people for God's cause, to urge and aid people to practice what would

change our hearts and our world into something beautifully human. It will not do then merely to get people to say 'Hail Mary' and 'Creed' while the basic structures of the heart and of society continue unaltered and unchallenged. The language of proclamation and preaching found in Matthew and Mark begins to change in Luke and is replaced in John with martyrion (martyrdom), bearing witness to the Gospel with life, even with death, and not merely with words. The change in terminology is significant. Significant too is Jesus' reference to baptism. Discipleship consists in our participation in the Baptism which Jesus receives. And Jesus' baptism consists in his unconditional commitment to the cause of the Reign of God even if that should cost him his life (Mk 10:38-39; Lk 12:49-50). We are warned not to reduce Baptism to a water rite, and not to overlook the few or the many baptised into the paschal mystery who live and serve outside the institutional Churches.

The Fourth Gospel too is a social commitment Gospel. This theme is implied in the announcement of the coming into the world of the Word-Light that enlightens everyone (Jn 1:9). It is present in the work of the Baptizer and the role played by Andrew and Philip in the same opening chapter. It underlies the language of witnessing which occurs throughout the work. It becomes explicit in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and in the apostolate she undertakes. It is Jesus' life-giving and liberating mission that chapters 5 to 11 present. Jesus describes himself so often as the One the Father has sent. Chapter 17, described at times as a priestly prayer, is in fact a social commitment prayer. As the Sent One, Jesus can say and do only what the Sender has commanded him to. And this is

the mission of Jesus: to convince the world that God so loved it as to give his only Son for its healing and wholeness. We have seen how the Son extends to us the love he himself receives from the Father, and how he would have us extend it to the world. The commission comes to a climax in the concluding chapter of John when the Risen Christ breathes on his disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit, as the Father has sent me, I send you" (Jn 20:20-23).

The Father is the ultimate Sender. The mission is God's. God sends the Son and the Spirit, and through the Son in the Spirit God sends forth creation. The overall mission of the created universe is to be a translation, in the language of matter and motion and energy and beauty, of the eternal Word of God. Its mission is to be a revelation, a manifestation and proclamation of God's face and mind, of God's beauty and wisdom, of God's power and wonder, and of God's inmost reality as love (Rom 1:19-20; Wis 13:1-9). Creation's mission is to bear witness to God, that God is present and God cares (Acts 14:15-17). A psalmist had realised that the heavens do declare the glory of God and proclaim his handiwork, that day declares of it to day, and night to night hands on the knowledge (Ps 19:1-4). In this overall mission of creation, each particular reality has a share. Each is on a mission to the rest. Every creature has something special, some gift, some experience, some promise or challenge or good news for its fellow creatures. God's varied gifts are so distributed that creatures need not only God but each other within an intricate web of cosmic interdependence, of give and receive, of mission and ministry. This is so because creation has its roots in the Trinitarian Mission within the Divine. All this is true not only of God's creation but

of human cultures as well. No culture, no race, no language, no age or system can exhaustively realise all human possibilities and all of life's promises. The perceptions and achievements of each age, race and culture have their limitations and differences. They are meant to complement, supplement, each other, to seek and meet each other across time and space, and thus progressively to come to understand and achieve the Human. Every culture has something to learn from other cultures, and something to offer to them as well.

Does not the same hold also for religions? God speaks to every group and age, and communicates with them in a variety of sounds and symbols. Divine gifts and graces are not concentrated and heaped up in any one place or time or in a single human group or spiritual experience or religious tradition. None of these exhausts the truth of God, nor the truth of the relationship God builds with us, nor the truth of the human predicament, nor of the human heart, nor of the dreams God has lodged in it. Every religious tradition is partial and imperfect, and has a share in distorting God's message and disfiguring God's face, and wrecking God's work in history. God speaks to each through the rest. God places in many hands and hearts gifts needed by and meant for all. God sends each to its neighbour to learn its own name. For no religion is meant to be an island, separate and self-sufficient. All the religious and spiritual traditions need each other's word of revelation, reassurance, challenge, correction, promise and assistance. The achievements of each tradition, its symbols, saints, scriptures, art and insights belong to all to the extent they are life-promoting and liberating. They must be respectfully sought, offered, received, assimilated, integrated and lived

for the benefit of the human family and its earth-home. That is social commitment. Without love faith would be dead; and dogmas, laws, authority claims and submissions could only be hurtful. Love is the point of the mission, the meaning of the Church, and the core of being human, being Christian.

And our social commitment must be located and lived within these larger horizons of the interdependence and mutuality of the religions, the cultures and the various spheres and phenomena in creation. Inter- and intra- cosmic, cultural and religious dialogue is the context and method of social action today. Spirituality for social commitment would consist in openness to the missionary dimensions of creatures, cultures and religions and in 'response-able' dialogue with concrete given realities.

### **The Context of our Socio-Spiritual Praxis**

India is people. Indians comprise a variety of races and ethnic groups, many families of languages and a multiplicity of cultures. Organizationally too the country exhibits a bewildering pluralism. Politically you will find umpteen ideologies here. Economically, the feudal landlord system continues in many regions; millions therefore are tenants or landless agricultural workers; this system is used by liberal capitalism and market economy which in recent years have been tightening their grip over the nation; imbalances and disparities are on the increase. Politically and economically conflict situations abound both internationally and intra-nationally as between India and Pakistan, India and China, the North-East India, Jammu Kashmir and the Nexalite and Maoist prone Areas of our country. Socially there

are several Indias: the super rich, the rich and the middle class, the poor and the destitute. This class division is compounded by caste system or its kin tribal feuds.

India is religion. It is the birth place and home of scripture religions of the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Other scripture religions such as Christianity and Islam are accepted by a large section of Indians. There are also the primal religions of indigenous peoples, with traditions not yet imprisoned in written texts. The most noteworthy fact is that Asians in general have an all-embracing sense of the transcendent and of the depth and mystery of things.

Vast masses of the people are economically poor.

Among the major historical causes of Indian poverty are:

- i) age-long exploitation by feudal and royal rulers;
- ii) conquest, subjugation and plunder of land and the hijacking of our history and culture mainly by European invasions and colonization.
- iii) introduction of development models designed in the West have proved to be anti-poor and ecologically disastrous.

More positively, there are movements, small but widespread and significant, all over India, both in society and in the Church, which are carefully critiquing the existing systems, exploring alternatives in economics and politics, experimenting in authentic self-rule and socialism to replace capitalism's pseudo-democracies and their endemic corruption. They work to shape free and responsible, culturally integrated local churches and theologies, and to foster the new awakening of women, youth and lay people.

## **The Praxis of the Spirituality of Social Commitment**

In our praxis-definition, spirituality consists in being open and responsive to reality. A spirituality of social commitment in Indian context calls for openness and responsiveness to the message and mystery of Jesus and to the reality of India. It would consist in contemplating India with eyes that have looked on the crucified and raised Jesus; it would consist in traversing in spirit and affection the length and breadth of the country, visiting her peoples and her cultures; it would consist in taking India to our heart, and letting her rivers flow through us, her winds blow in the halls of our minds, her perfumes of lotus and Joss sticks waft in our spirits, and her mountains and trees rise within us like the earth's prayer heaving to the everlasting Mystery of Life and Love. Spirituality begins with loving the context of our mission, carrying her in our heart, cherishing her features, nursing her wounds, and believing in her future.

Christ's sent ones will in the first place be with the people, close to their reality, irrespective of colour, culture and creed, loving them for themselves, for what they are and what they can become; knowing that the lowliest and the least among them is a person in the likeness of God, and is far more precious than abstract truths, rituals, laws, taboos, and authority claims. For spirituality refers to that dimension of the human which the Bible points to when it speaks of the person as made in God's image; as called by God and engaged in conversation; and as questioned by God and challenged and made capable of an answer; as commissioned by God to till the earth and keep it, and to name things and name each other, to liberate the enslaved, to let

justice flow like a river, and to go on imagining and creating the new and the beautiful; as capable especially of dreams and visions, and of loving deeply even to the giving of one's life for friends. The people are spiritual in their struggles for daily rice, in their devotion to their children, in their love for one another, in their simple prayers, their trust in God, and the responsibility they assume for new generations of people. Responding to people with respect and warmth of affection is spirituality.

Our faith educates us to be responsive to the fact that God has never left these or any other people without evidence concerning God's own Self - that God is present and that God cares, 'sending them rain from heaven and seasons of fruitfulness', and 'filling them with food and their hearts with merriment' (Acts 14:17-18). To be responsive also to the fact that God has always been speaking to the people and disclosing God's heart in the symbolic language of creation (Rom 1:19-20); as well as to the truth of the divine law engraved in people's hearts (Rom 2:15).

Our openness will look upon our peoples' history as sacred, as salvation history, as included in and encompassed by God's universal saving design. God is the liberator and leader not only of Israel but of the Philistines and the Aramaeans as well (Am 9:7); God is the God of Job, the Edomite; God is a God who anoints Cyrus the Persian Messiah to shepherd Israel (Is 45:1-7).

The Spirituality of social commitment may not be understood in terms of bringing God or of giving Christ to people. Our mission will rather be a humble attempt to sense God's presence among the people and to discern what God has been doing here down the ages, and continues to do; the graces and charisms with which God has

enriched each culture; the saints God has raised, the faith God has sustained, the justice God has promoted; the social transformations God has led, making for greater freedom, fuller life and finer fellowship. The mission is here to discern this and give thanks. This Eucharist is a major part and task of the mission.

The Risen Christ who goes ahead of the Apostles to Galilee (Mk 16:7), has by centuries preceded us to our people. In the first place, he is Asian by birth. Secondly he who identifies with the hungry and the homeless (Mt 25:31-46), is surely there where the destitute masses struggle to survive. Discover the Christ of the poor and stand by him to work with him for the liberation of the poor.

The affluent world claims to have the Christ: a Christ with or without the cross? The poor surely has the cross, and the likelihood is that the Crucified One is on it. Ours it is to stand beneath their cross in the company of Jesus' mother. Ours to touch, with Thomas, the wounds of the people and come to recognise 'my Lord and my God' (cf. Jn 20:24-28). Our spirituality takes the form of solidarity with the poor, and participation in their movements and struggle for food, freedom, dignity and community.

A socially committed religious will weep with Jesus over the death of our children from starvation and deprivation caused by the development policies of the greedy and the powerful. We will gather into the chalice of our hearts the tears of the poor, and hold it up for God to see and bless and transform into a cup of abundant life.

Meanwhile we shall miss no opportunity to name the Name of him who opted to be poor with the poor, to be homeless, to be a

rejected stone, and the suffering Servant of all. Name the Holy One who is present and gives meaning and value to people's wounds and sighs, who plants the seeds of the resurrection in the heart of our death. We name him with humility; we present him as our love and our treasure, and not as a hammer with which to threaten people and smash skulls. We present Jesus in his kenosis and his love and in the solidarity of the Resurrection, as a friend of the people and a giver of freedom.

The spirituality of social commitment will be glad to pray with the people, the villagers, the workers, the women, the peasants, the illiterate - in the medium of their words, songs and symbols, their bhajans and kirtans, and especially their silences which echo, and convey us into, that Eternal Silence from which the Word, the Vac, the Sabdabrahman, is born.

The spirituality of social commitment will be more concerned with presenting the Gospel embodied in life-witness rather than in verbal proclamation. It knows that people pay greater attention to witnesses than to teachers. It will seek to overcome what Kosuke Koyama has diagnosed the Churches to be suffering from: namely, a teacher complex, a heated pre-occupation with culturally correct terminology rather than with divinely right living, loving and relating. Being and doing in their dialectical interplay will matter far more than talking. Here let us hold up four New Testament symbols which embody the reality and the mystery both of mission and of spirituality. The symbols are light, salt, yeast and fragrance (cf. Mt 5:13-16; 13:33; cf. 2 Cor 2:14-16). Social Apostolate consists in the light the community spreads by the newness and beauty of its life; and in the salt-quality

the community has in order to keep the world from rotting in the mire of violence and vulgarity. Believers are called to be a powerful leaven capable of transforming hearts and structures, and make the earth become fine bread for the feast of God, the feast of people. We are the fragrance of Christ. That is our mission and spirituality. Through us and through all believers God "is spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of himself". Gandhi is reported to have said to a group of Christian missionaries: "You talk too much. Look at the rose. It too has a gospel to spread. It does it silently, but effectively, and people come to it with joy. Imitate the rose".

The spirituality of social commitment is interior to our common quest, our common question, "Master, where do you live"? Jesus responds with a 'Come and see', and he takes us to where the victims of our great systems struggle to survive: the slums, the dalit and tribal villages, the abused women and children, the starving people. That is where Jesus lives. We are spiritual if we opt to stay with him there in the heart of misery and squalor, ready to act in order to change things into something human.

Our spirituality as religious women resembles the intense awareness and concern of women about any shortage of wine, bread, rice, joy, life and honour in Church and society (cf. Jn 2:3-10). It is like their determined stand close to the Crucified in defiance of palace and temple; close to the wounded, battered, broken body of humanity in measureless compassion and love. Mission spirituality is like the women returning from the tomb with words of hope and a story of life and a dance of joy, though sombre men fail to understand or appreciate it (cf. Jn 20).

Spirituality is where women are discovering the Saviour of the world right in the midst of their daily chores, and turn apostles themselves and bring people to the Well, to the Spring of life, to the mystical Waters (cf. Jn 4). Spirituality is like women weeping over the death of their loved ones and discovering a weeping compassionate God standing close to their tearful lives and bidding death surrender its prey (cf. Jn 11).

The spirituality of Mary, Mother of Jesus, reveals the heart of mission spirituality of social commitment. From the beginning Mary is associated with the kenosis of God's Son, and with the Saviour's smallness, poverty and social insignificance. She is actively concerned about the possible embarrassment of a poor family which could not afford enough wine even for a wedding feast, the only celebration in the life of the poor. When her son is arrested, mocked, stripped, tortured, disowned, humiliated and reduced to nothing, Mary stands close to his cross, supportive of his options, appreciative of his way of life and participative in his destiny. Her Magnificat depicts dramatic contrasts between the proud, the rich, the mighty and the enthroned on the one hand and the lowly, the poor, the hungry on the other. She has herself experienced the stark contrast between her defenseless Baby and Herod the killer king; between the Wise Men and the same Herod; between her lowly family and the distant Cæsar who issues edicts to facilitate the collection of more taxes; between her crucified Son and the power of palace and temple. Mary's Magnificat, that 'song of high revolt', leaves us in no doubt as to whose side she takes and what kind of a subversive God she celebrates.

Monica Furlong reminds us that "any spirituality worth its salt is going to be

profoundly taken up with ecological concern". This concern may be dictated by fear of the planet's doom. But actually we ought to be gripped by "a powerful sense of grief". Furlong believes that "we may need to recognise a process of mourning going on within us for so much that is lost and destroyed - for people dying of starvation, for the death of creatures, forests, oceans, for the heart-breaking loss of what is innocent, beautiful, helpless". To care not for the heart but for money and to be preoccupied with power, success, consumer goods and speed is to be unspiritual. The contrary, to be spiritual, is costly. It is costly to go counter to capitalist pre-suppositions, to the pull of the market, and to be an oddity like the early Christians. But our fears and defenses can dissolve when we perceive ourselves as ecosystems and keep the parts working in harmony with one another, to maintain a delicate equilibrium with other ecosystems. "Our spirituality, our growth, our prayer, began with a loving and gentle care of ourselves and a loving and gentle care for the other; - be this a sick person, a hungry child, or the sick and dying earth. It is part of our spirituality to foster in all the ability to, wonder like children, to be touched in depth, to see the mystery of nature, of simple realities like flowers, birds, human faces or love. A richly suggestive line from Tagore may sum up the ecospirituality we are hinting at here: "Silence, my soul; these trees are prayers". The Spirit's activity overflows the bounds of the Christian community. The Spirit fills the whole earth and all history. She is creatively present in the lives of followers of other faiths as well as in secular movements and struggles for justice, freedom and unity, and for the creation of

the beautiful, whether physical or social. Not only the Church but humankind is endowed with a variety of Spirit-gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11). Both the Church and the human community are charismatic in structure. It is essential to our spirituality to discern, respect, foster, and evoke these gifts and treasures since they are given to enable people to meet the demands of God's Reign in an unfolding history, and to handle experiences of sorrow and joy and disappointment and death in ways that can serve life and hope. The Spirit does not separate, divide or compartmentalize. She permeates all aspects of life and all spheres of reality, and brings about wholeness and harmony though often dialectically through conflict and pain, through the dynamics of the Cross. She unites God and creation and leads us to experience God in creation and creation in God. We experience God as "acting on us and on the world at the same time, relating us to the world and the world to us, not in some vague cosmic contact, but in a specific and limited course of action". There is no gap between experience of acting and experience of the Spirit, nor between action and prayer, nor between practice and celebration of the practice, nor between individual person and community. This integration marks the our committed life in the Spirit.

In our praxis experience the Spirit is more important than the texts created by Spirit-inspired people. The Spirit inspires not only "religious" texts but also secular ones like poems, plays, laws, philosophies and all searching questions about meaning, values, relationships and ultimate concerns. The Spirit criticizes all texts and our interpretations of them. She challenges our creations, subverts our establishments and calls us to fresh insights and new dreams

and unsuspected depths and praxis.

If the poor are not under our eyes, they gradually grow distant from our hearts as well. If the God of the poor is not in our hearts, He gradually grows distant from our lives as well. Our Commitment to social dimensions of the Kingdom is

continually submitted to a listening to these internal motions in which the Spirit of God is revealed to us. Fidelity to such attentive listening is what will give us the capacity to navigate the difficult waters of a socially committed life. And that is our Spirituality!

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*i Wakefield, Gordon S., ed., A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, London: S.C.N., 1983*

<sup>1</sup> Furlong, Monica, 'Spirituality for Survival' in *The Weight of Glory*, edited by Hardy, D.W and Sedgwig, P. H., 1991, p. 245

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, D.W. and Sedgwig, P.H., eds., *The Weight of Glory*, 1991, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> Smuel Rayan, A Spirituality of Mission in an Asian context, [www.sedos.org/english/ryan2.htm](http://www.sedos.org/english/ryan2.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Porcile, Maria Teresa, in the *Ecumenical Review*, January 1986, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Schmemmann, A., *Of Water and the Spirit*, 1976, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Pannenberg, W., *Christian Spirituality*, 1983, p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Kroeger, James H., in *Verbum SVD*, 31/3, 1994, p. 23

<sup>8</sup> Fiorenza, Elizabeth S., *In Memory of Her; A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York: Crossroads, 1983, p. 345.

<sup>9</sup> Smuel Rayan, A Spirituality of Mission in an Asian Context.

<sup>10</sup> Smuel Rayan, A Spirituality of Mission in an Asian Context.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Furlong, pp. 243-44.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Furlong, p. 244.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Wijngaard John, *Inheriting the Master's Cloak. Creative Biblical Spirituality*, Bangalore, 1986, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> cf. *Gaudium et Spes* nn. 22, 26; *Redemptoris Missio*, nn. 28-32; *Dominum et Vivificantem*, John Paul II, 1986, nn. 53-54.

<sup>15</sup> cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, nn. 61-76; cf. Kroeger, 1994, pp. 48, 52.

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*"An otherworldly, excessively transcendent spirituality is of little use to us if we wish to be followers of Jesus Christ, God made human, and it renders us no use at all to the poor and marginalized who also carry the spark of the divine presence. If our spirituality doesn't lead us to honour God in those around us, and to work for their dignity and rights - to make the life of the whole human family more human - is it a Christian spirituality? A spirituality that fails to promote human dignity and human rights fails to take seriously the incarnation, the very Christ event."*

**Cornish, S.J.,**

*"The Joys & Hopes of the People of Asia Today: The Church in the Postmodern World"*  
*speech at Vatican II +40 Conference, Bangkok, 2002*

## Foundation of Christian Spirituality

*Sr. Philomena Mathew*

Christ has no body now but yours  
no hands but yours,  
no feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which  
Christ's compassion must look out on the world.  
Yours are the feet with which  
He is to go about doing good.  
Yours are the hands with which  
He is to bless us now. (St. Teresa of Avila)

We measure time in relation to the birth of Jesus. All dates end with a suffix, B.C. or A.D., indicating whether an event took place before Jesus' birth or after. The whole world does this and it indicates something about his importance in history. For us, as Christians and religious, Jesus is the center of everything: our meaning, our hope, our goal of striving and guide for our discipleship. What Jesus wants from us is not mere admiration, but imitation. A disciple is someone under a discipline. In Christian spirituality, Jesus is the energy that undergirds everything else. Jesus is the vine, the blood, the pulse and the heart of a true disciple. True spirituality is becoming the presence of Jesus here and now. Jesus, and the discipleship he asks of us can be best understood in the single phrase: ***"The word was made flesh and dwells among us."***

### **Root of Spirituality**

What shapes our actions is our spirituality. And what shapes our actions is basically what shapes our desire. Desire makes us act in peculiar ways, which will lead to a greater integration or disintegration, to strengthening or deterioration of our relationship with God, others and the cosmic world. Spirituality concerns what we do with our desire. John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic begins his famous treatment of the soul's journey with the words: "one dark night, fired by love's urgent longings ... I went out unseen ..." For him, it is urgent longings that are starting point of the spiritual life, and in his view, spirituality is essentially defined how we handle that 'longing' or the 'energy' within us.

As striking examples what comes to my mind is how Mother Teresa or Bishop Ferrando handled the 'fire' within them. Mother Teresa was a dynamo of energy. She looked frail and weak, but no one could ever stand in her way; she was a much disciplined woman, dedicated to God and the poor. Even during her life, everyone considered her a saint. Why? A saint is someone who can channel that powerful, creative energy within us in a life-giving way. A saint is someone ***who can will the one thing***. Nobody disputes that Mother Teresa did just that, willed the one thing, - God and the poor. Her fiery energy was poured out for God and poor. That total dedication of everything to God and poor was her signature, her spirituality. It made her what she was.

Looking at the life of Bishop Stephen Ferrando we find a similar 'fire' and pouring out the energy - a total dedication for the people, especially the neglected ones in remote villages, coupled with a

contagious enthusiasm which ignited the fire in all those who were in close contact with him. With single minded devotion for the cause of Christ and with great love for the poor and needy, he lived the missionary mandate, "Go proclaim the good news ... make disciples of all nations." (Mk 16:15)

At a very basic level, it is true to say that if we do things which keep us energized and integrated, and on fire then we have a healthy spirituality. On the other hand, if our yearning drives us into actions which harden our insides or cause us to fall apart and die then we have an unhealthy spirituality. Spirituality is about what we do with the fire inside of us, how we channel it, the disciplines and habits we choose to live by.

### **The Need for personal Act of faith**

In order to be truly spiritual we need to get in touch with our deepest selves. Karl Rahner said: "The time is fast approaching when one will either be a mystic or an unbeliever." It is not enough to have been born into a Christian family or to be part of a religious community. These will not give us real faith in Jesus Christ. To have a living faith today one must at some point of our life make a deep private act of faith. This act, which if really meant is equal to becoming a mystic is very difficult, because there are many forces within us to work against this private act of faith.

What are these anti-faith forces? They are all those things good and bad, within us and around us that tempt us away from prayer, self-sacrifice, from being with the community, from being sweating blood in an agonizing situation in order to keep our integrity and commitment, from mustering courage to enter deeply into our own souls. They are not abstract external forces. They live with us in the house and often we are comfortable with them as our outfits. What blocks faith is those myriads of innocent things within our ordinary

normal lives which make our lives comfortable: our laziness, our self-indulgence, our ambition, our restlessness, our envy, our refusal to live in harmony, our consumerism, our greed for things and experiences, our need to have certain life style, our business, our perpetual tiredness, our obsession with celebrities, our perpetual distractions with TV, mobile phones and endless talks. These are the anti-mystical forces of our time.

### **Personal Faith leads to Personal Prayer**

In order to sustain in faith one must daily and regularly spend extended period of time in prayer. Spiritual Masters say that the failure in prayer results in dissipation of soul. There is no way to stay in touch with one's soul and to keep a balance, outside of regular personal prayer. Robert Moore says: "If you don't pray, that is, if you do not have a personal dialogue with the living God, you will inevitably become either depressed or inflated - or bounce back and forth between the two." Hence developing a habit of personal prayer is of paramount importance not only for religious persons but also for secular people. Henri Nouwen assures us, that time spent in prayer will keep us centered, even when it does not feel as if we were praying or making any improvement. He says: "My time of prayer is not a deep prayer, nor a time in which I experience a special closeness to God: it is not a period of serious attentiveness to the divine mysteries. I wish it were! On the contrary, it is full of distractions, inner restlessness, sleepiness, confusion and boredom. It seldom, if ever, pleases my senses. But the simple fact of being for one hour in the presence of the Lord and of showing him all that I feel, think, sense, and experience, without trying to hide anything must please him. Somehow, somewhere, I know that he loves me, even though I do not feel that love as I can feel a human embrace, even though I do not hear a voice as I hear human words of consolation,

even though I do not see a smile, as I can see in a human face. Still God speaks to me, looks at me, and embraces me there, where I am still unable to notice it." (H. Nouwen, *A Latin American Journal*, p. 69)

Ultimately prayer is something we must do within all the activities of our lives and not just in certain formal moments set aside. "Pray always" scripture tells us. How do we pray always? One way is to ponder in biblical sense. It is to stand before life's mysterious events like Mary stood before various events of Jesus' life, including the way she stood under the cross. There she was utterly helpless and she could do nothing to save him or even to protest his innocence and goodness. She carries a great tension that is helpless to resolve and had simply accept the situation in faith. There is great joy in that but also incredible tension. True Christian spirituality is this kind of pondering, a willingness to carry tension as Mary did. In each of our lives, resurrection will follow only after the agony in the garden and the crucifixion. Unless we are willing at times to sweat blood in the garden in order to remain true to our commitments, true to our personal integrity and the things that faith asks of us, and as did Jesus and Mary, we will not sustain real faith. When we go through life's inevitable tensions and turmoil as Mary of Nazareth did, these are transformed and will give birth to what is most noble inside of us, namely, compassion, forgiveness and love.

In South Africa, prior to the abolition of apartheid, people used to light a candle and place it in their windows as a sign of hope, a sign that one day this evil would be overcome.

At one point, this was declared illegal, just as illegal as carrying a gun. The children used to joke about this saying: "our government is sacred of lit candles!" Eventually apartheid was overcome. Ultimately the 'lit candles' were more powerful than the guns. In our mission of establishing the Kingdom of God, our true weapons are not our ideology or talents and gifts, but 'lit candles', hope, personal integrity, charity and prayer. This is what we see in the lives of our beloved Founder and Pioneers. They were able to light candles of hope in spite of the many inconveniences, lack of modern facilities of travel and communication. Their weapons were absolute faith and trust in God, personal integrity and humble prayer which reached the heart of God, bringing down blessings on humanity.

Jesus promised that whenever a group of people gather together in prayer, he will be with them. The early church took this promise literally. The first disciples had been used to having Jesus physically among them and then after his ascension, they often struggled to know what Jesus would want them to do. However, they had a simple formula for every occasion and difficulty. They would gather around the word and the breaking of the bread and there let Jesus make his presence felt and effect through them what they could not otherwise accomplish themselves. Our life is not sustained by private acts of prayer, and virtue. It is sustained in a community, by gathering ritually around the word of God and through the breaking of the bread. We do not have to be brilliant, imaginative, or stimulating. We just have to gather in his name, in faith, around the simple, clear promises he gave us. He promised to do the rest.

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Sometimes people get the mistaken notion that spirituality is a separate department of life, the penthouse of existence. But rightly understood, it is a vital awareness that pervades all realms of our being.

**David Steindl-Rast**

## Spirituality for today - Reflections on 2 Peter

*Dr. Jose Varickasseril, SDB*

### Introduction

The New Testament writings are a reflecting back of the Christian community on the life and teaching ministry of Jesus. Jesus was the teacher par excellence. He taught with his words and deeds. A good teacher that he was, he invited his listeners to be trained for the kingdom of heaven. He wanted them to bring out of their treasure house things new and old. His disciples were to prove that they were true administrators or householders (see Mt 13:51-52). Training for the kingdom consisted in relating correctly to God and man. The various New Testament writers indicate how to have the mind of Christ. When one has the mind of Christ he becomes a person capable of relating to God and to other persons.

The author of 2 Peter presents the Christian community with the requirements needed for relating correctly to God and one's fellowmen. The author's exhortations aim at inculcating in the Christian the disposition, mentality and attitudes of Jesus. Among the more important passages, we have the following:

For this very reason make every effort to supplement your  
faith with virtue, and  
virtue with knowledge, and  
knowledge with self-control, and  
self-control with steadfastness, and  
steadfastness with godliness, and  
godliness with brotherly affection, and

In this short article we would like to examine this above mentioned passage. However, it is also important to understand the historical background and purpose of this letter. This will help one to perceive the reasons for inculcating the virtues that he has enumerated.

### The historical background and purpose of 2 Peter

There were members who compromised with the pagan environment. The situation deteriorated due to the presence of false teachers who did much harm with their false teachings. Their antinomian tendencies coupled with ethical libertinism corroded the pristine values that were handed down to them. The author wants to caution the members of the community against the false teachers who have infiltrated into the community and are perpetrating severe harm to the members of the church. He is engaged in the task of translating

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<sup>1</sup> R.J. Bauckham, "Second Letter of Peter" in, *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid (Ed.), Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2004, p 864.

<sup>2</sup> See "2 Peter" in *The Full Life Study Bible: An International Study Bible for Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians* (New International Version), Donald C. Stamps (Gen. Ed.), Grand Rapids (MI): Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, pp 1964-1965.

the Gospel into terms intelligible in a new cultural environment. He wants to exhort the believers to diligently pursue godliness and a true knowledge of Christ. The letter is written in the form of a last testament or a farewell discourse. Anxious for the welfare of the community, the author makes a passionate appeal for fidelity to the teachings of Jesus. He exhorts them to preserve and defend the apostolic message that was handed over to them. The author exposes the defects of the false teachers especially their immorality, insubordination, skepticism, twisting of scripture, greed and avarice. The author not only indicates the folly of sinfulness and wayward life but also proposes a good Christian life in view of Christ's return. He intends to praise and maintain the ideal moral behaviour of the orthodox Christians. In this exhortatory letter he appeals to their memory with the models and imageries. There are vices to be avoided and virtues to be practiced. The author takes care to indicate the role of the Spirit. The message underlines the importance of the Word. In fact, the author takes the readers frequently back to the Old Testament Scriptures. He also reminds them of the message by Christ. The author refers to the letter as a reminder. He reminds them of what the prophets have said as well as the command of Jesus mediated through the apostles (3:1-2).

### **The Christian call and election**

The pericope that we have quoted above is to be perceived in the context of the Christian's call and election. It is this call and the subsequent life style that gives a special tone to the members of the Christian community. St. Peter reminds the readers that the Christian is called to God's own glory and excellence (2 Pet 1:3). This obliges them to keep off from the corruption that is present in the world. The true Christian shares in the divine nature of God. This brings about a spiritual tone to his life. However he does not live his life in the vacuum. He/ She does not live an isolated life. There is a relational dimension to his/ her life which calls for the practice of virtue. The author has indicated seven virtues with which every Christian must adorn his faith. These virtues are required in order to be spiritually victorious and fruitful before God. The cumulative effect issuing from the practice of the chain of virtues will be quality and excellence in the Christian life. It goes without saying that such a life produces a spirituality of high calibre.

### **Searching for the meaning of 2 Pet 1:5-7**

Peter invites the readers to work with zeal and eagerness. He asks everyone to supplement faith with virtue. Faith is the Christian doctrinal tradition received from the apostles. It is fundamental for establishing a special relationship with

<sup>1</sup> See "2 Peter" in *The Full Life Study Bible*, p 1966.

<sup>2</sup> It is good to take note of the fact that the same Greek word is translated as "excellence" in 1:3 and as "virtue" in 1:5 [in the RSV]. The translation is legitimate since the Greek contains both the meanings. However, excellence should be qualified as *moral excellence*. See Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp 105-106.

<sup>3</sup> See David Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Epworth Commentaries), Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998, pp 150-151.

<sup>4</sup> See Horrell, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp 150-151.

<sup>5</sup> See "The Second Epistle of Peter" in *Spirit filled Life Bible* (New King James Version), Jack W. Hayford (Gen. Ed.), Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991, p 1918.

Christ. The word used in the original Greek for "to supplement" is a hapax legomenon [which means a word that occurs only once in the New Testament]. It has several nuances like bring in alongside, introduce, bring to bear, or to apply. Here in the given context to supplement means to make an effort to fortify one's faith with virtue. Virtue means moral excellence. Virtues are valued in stoic Hellenistic ethics and philosophy and the author absorbs what is good in a given culture. Moral excellence or virtue is the fruit of knowledge. It is knowledge that makes one long for moral excellence. Knowledge is an attribute of God and man is made a sharer in this divine quality. Knowledge is discernment of God's will and purpose. True knowledge leads to virtue. The will is directed to long for what is good and upright. In the mind of the author, the basis of knowledge is the Scriptures, referred to as the "prophetic word" (1:19-21) and the apostolic teaching (3:1-2; 3:15-16). Knowledge is important since bad ideas can lead to bad behaviour. A misconception of what life is all about leads to a distorted existence.

The knowledge should be supplemented with self-control. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). Luke in the sequel to the Gospel presents self-control as among the content of Paul's preaching along with justice and future judgement in front of governor Felix (Acts 24:25). Self-control is related to discipline and

abstinence. Discipline is the quality of an athlete (see 1 Cor 9:25). It is self-control that gives strength to a man who is chaste. He is able to abstain from what offers momentary delight. Self-control flows from knowledge and is linked to one's free will and the capacity to choose between alternatives.

Self-control will give the capacity for endurance. Endurance is a frequently occurring word in biblical literature. It contains a host of meanings like patience [which is capacity to suffer], fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance. Jesus is the model par excellence of endurance (2 Thes 3:5; Heb 12:1-2). Endurance, related to suffering, ought to be for a just cause. There is no merit in enduring suffering if one is guilty of a crime (1 Pet 2:20-21). Consequently Peter speaks of godliness as related to endurance. The endurance is to be supplemented with godliness. Peter refers to godliness a second time in the same letter (see 3:11). Godliness includes piety, reverence, loyalty, fear of God etc. It is the duty which man owes to God. It is an integral part of religion and involves worship and the homage rendered to God.

Godliness is to be further enhanced by brotherly love. The Greek word used in the text refers to love among siblings. However, it is the love that the Christian has towards those sharing the same faith. In the mind of Peter, godliness or religiosity or practice of religion is incomplete without having a sincere love for the members of the same

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke Timothy Johnson, "2 Peter: Reading Guide" in *The Catholic Study Bible* (New American Bible), Donald Senior (Gen. Ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp 558-562.

<sup>2</sup> See Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon*, p 216.

<sup>3</sup> See the various nuances contained in "godliness" in Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon*, p 326.

<sup>4</sup> See Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon*, p 858.

<sup>5</sup> See Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary), Nottingham: Apollos, 2006, p 184.

family of faith (see also Gal 6:10). If religion or the practice of piety does not have a horizontal dimension it is empty sham. Here one can recall how the prophets lamented over the fact that often religion did not lead to true love of neighbour (see especially Isa 1: 10-17; Amos 5:21-24).

For Peter, the zenith and high point of all virtues is love of benevolence [agap?]. It is a love devoid of self-seeking (see Phil 2:1-4; 1 Cor 10:32-33 1 Cor 13:4-7). Love is a virtue and not so much an emotion. The cumulative result of the practice of these virtues will be a life that is fruitful. When one equips oneself with the virtues that Peter cites, he or she will be no longer ineffective or sterile.

Peter adds weight to his words by a reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in the community. Moved by the Spirit a person becomes capable of uttering prophecies to guide and direct the community (1:20-21).

A life that is not lived in accordance with the above-mentioned guidelines is tantamount to an empty life. It is similar to the life of those who have gone astray. Peter (like Jude) describes it with several imageries. People without the practice of virtues or moral excellence are no different from waterless springs (2:17), mists driven by the storm (2:17), akin to a dog that turns to his own vomit (2:22), and the sow that has been washed yet returns to wallow in the mire (2:22).

The author repeats the invitation to lead a

life of holiness and godliness (3:11) and wait for the Lord's return by living lives without spot or blemish (3:14). Holiness is linked to godliness. Living a holy life is made possible when a committed effort is made to remove all spot and blemish from one's life. The return of the Lord or the eschatological dimension of the life of the believer serves as a motivating factor to lead a life that is intensely spiritual.

### Conclusion

Peter does not define spirituality with all its ramifications. However the letter contains his last words to his spiritual charges to help them advance in their spiritual pilgrimage. Consequently the letter offers the essential and integral elements of spirituality that have a perennial relevance. For Peter faith has primacy of place in Christian life. Faith finds expression in a multiplicity of virtues. A faith that is not enhanced with virtues is bound to dwindle and disappear. Faith has its culmination in love which is the very definition of God himself (see 1 John 4:8, 16). A true spirituality cannot be visualized except in terms of an intense, consistent and committed love for God and neighbour. The author leads the readers to a God-directed life by entering into the life-situations of others. This again is the fruit of a persevering practice of a chain of qualities or virtues. The pursuit of virtues will help one to enter into every dimension of the world of human friendship. The author of 2 Peter has a message that speaks across time and space to lead one on the path of true spirituality.

<sup>1</sup> See "2 Peter" in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, Leicester: Apollos, 2005, pp 654 and 666.

<sup>2</sup> See Joann Wolski Conn "Spirituality" (see especially the section on *Spirituality in the Life of the Church since Vatican II*) in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph A. Komonchak et al. (Eds.), Collegeville (MI): The Liturgical Press, 1993, p 981.

## Youth Spirituality

*Fr. Paul Olphindro Lyngkot sdb*

Youth spirituality is a re-reading of the Gospel in the context of the present day; a progressive maturing in Christian identity; the possibility of an experience of God in the context of one's own life inserted into a wider panorama of history; and a path to sanctity or a specific plan of the Spirit. Youth spirituality is thought out and realized within the experience of the young; it tries to present the image of a young Christian in a manner suited to our own times and to those who are living in today's youth situation; it facilitates the making of contact with the individual youngster at the point at which he/she is at present with regard to freedom and faith, and helps him/her to become progressively responsible for his/her own growth; and making him/her a protagonist in plans for his/her peers and for the surrounding environment.

### **The nuclei of the youth spirituality thought out are:**

#### **1. Life as the place for meeting God**

The daily life of the young person is made up of duties, social contact, recreation, growing pains, family life, self-development, future prospective, requests for assistance and aspirations. This is the material which has to be accepted, deepened and lived in God's light. It is to discover the fatherhood of God in the simplicity of daily life. Holiness therefore is to be sought in one's own life and in a present situation.

#### **2. A life which conforms progressively more to Christ**

Spirituality means living under the

promptings and inspiration of the Spirit, rather than that of the flesh or mere human reason. Christ is the man of the Spirit. Therefore young people of the present day should be lead towards a life rooted in Christ in a systematic deepening of the faith and the learning of prayer as a dimension of life in Christ and in the Spirit and the participation of faith in the community.

#### **3. A life in Jesus Christ in joy and commitment**

This exploitation of joy derived from belonging to the Spirit is the source and consequence of commitment and it should be fostered to young people.

#### **4. An experience of Church, a communion and service**

Young people learn to see in the Church the invisible body of Christ, the continuation of his incarnation, a mystery which embraces within the limits of human weakness, the invisible grace of the presence of God. They provoke awareness of the divine dimension and of the human reality of the Christian community.

#### **5. A path of guidance and vocational choice**

The vocation is a free and gratuitous initiative on the part of God, forming the individual in the context of a community and of history. Vocational guidance fosters an active commitment to discern one's particular task in life and of one's whole person and abilities for the Lord's plan and for the service of others. It promotes an opening to reality and human contact to offer service together for other people.

## **6. A life which takes its inspiration from Mary, the Mother of Jesus**

Mary, the Mother of Jesus is the first and most perfect disciple of Christ. She was intimately united to the Son of God. She stands out among the humble and the poor, a strong woman who knew poverty and suffering, flight and exile. She plays a vital role and a meaningful way of life for young people at the present day.

The six themes mentioned above are points to reflect and live in unity - the whole of Christian experience. It is here that the youth apostolate begins and accompanies its own experience of God initiated by God's Spirit and leads to a shared journey of human and spiritual discernment and growth in the lives of the young person. The act of sharing reveals the mystery of the presence of Christ and enables the young person to make choices and perceive a reality beyond the mere physical and concrete situations of life. These choices and this perception, however, are integrated into the ingredients of everyday life *making spiritual growth human growth, and vice versa*. The realities of sin and corruption are ever present and demand a sober awareness of human nature that is always balanced by the concurrent reality and conviction that are truly children of God. This welcomes the invitation to journey along the road to Life by bringing the young immediately to Christ. In this way, the

meeting with the young becomes a meeting for them with the true God, the God of salvation. The task of the educator and animator, then, becomes the task of touching the heart of the young and manifesting for them the life of God in their longing hearts.

The Spirit as the starting point and foundation of all spiritual experiences plays as an encounter with God. This treatment is vital, for it situates the life and action of the Spirit in the gritty, post-modern world of the young, deeply affected by the coldness of scientific analysis. To allow one to see the Spirit of God, a Spirit which breathes and moves within this concrete reality, the educator or animator of the young must be the one who recognizes the long view of God for humanity and becomes inspired to live a witness of charity testifying to the importance and value of human existence. They should also see the Spirit as the gift of fine-tuning which enables one to perceive God in the experiences of life. Such a fine-tuning neither negates the real world nor sees it apart from God. Instead, the Spirit allows one to see the relationship of God, humanity, and the world with each other. This fine-tuning is important for the educators of the young to discover the Word of God within culture itself and to find a path to salvation in the realities of life in the present moment.

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*"The joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of human beings. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation that is meant for every person. That is why this community realises that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history"*

**Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, 1965**

## YAC COLUMN

### Answers of the Quiz on Don Bosco

*Sr. Mary Concepta Dkhar msmhc*

1. on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1815
2. Margaret Occhiena
3. Francis Bosco
4. In a small hamlet at Becchi at Castelnuovo (Italy)
5. Don Bosco was a saintly priest who worked for the poor and abandoned youth and is the founder of the Salesian Society.
6. In St. Andreas Church at Becchi on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1815.
7. John Melchior Bosco.
8. Anthony, who was sturdy of build and strong as a young bull. He was jealous of Johnny Bosco. He did not want him to study.
9. Joseph Bosco.
10. Matichior Ochiena and Magdalene Bosco
11. He was good, gentle, calm, generous, affectionate and intelligent.
12. On 11<sup>th</sup> May 1817.
13. Patience, courage, fear of God, good manners, discretion, collaborative, carefulness and endurance in suffering.
14. With Secundo Matta.
15. Don Calosso.
16. John Roberto, a Tailor.
17. Don Bosco receive his primary education in the public school of Caprilio.
18. I want to study and become a priest.
19. He could do different types of tricks. He knew sleight of hands, changing of colour of things, to walk on the tight rope, dance and sing.
20. Jesus and Mary.
21. "Make yourself humble, steadfast and strong".
22. "You will have to win these friends of yours not with blows, but with gentleness and kindness".
23. "Club of Cheerfulness".
24. "Whatever comes we shall be happy. Make others happy. Do not go against conscience. In short do not commit sin"
25. Louis Comollo.
26. 19 boys.
27. He showed himself humble and treated everyone with kindness.
28. 'A day dreamer'.
29. On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1835.
30. Fr. Michael Antony Cinzano.
31. "Remember that it is not the habit that brings honour to your state in life, but only the practice of virtue. When you were born, I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin. When you began your studies, I told you to be devoted to our heavenly Mother, now I ask you to be hers entirely... and if you will become a Priest, spread devotion to Her".
32. On October 1835
33. Fr. Joseph Cafasso helped him. He also got Scholarship money for the best student of his course. He worked as the Sacristan of the Church for which there was a small salary. He used to borrow books from others for his studies.
34. On the Sundial, there was inscription that read: "Time will fly if you are cheerful, it will drag on if you are not" Seeing it Johnny said: "there is our programme. Let us always be of good cheer and time will fly".
35. Johnny Bosco had a self-imposed rule of never wasting a moment of time. He

- studied also outside the appointed study hours, whenever he could find a little spare time. He read an enormous amount of books and acquired a vast knowledge of many subjects.
36. John decided to be different from the superiors. He wanted everyone to approach him freely when he would become a priest.
  37. On 5<sup>th</sup> June 1841.
  38. He prayed for the gift of eloquence.
  39. "Today you are a priest and you will offer Mass everyday. Therefore you are near Christ. But remember to say Mass means to suffer".
  40. Fr. Joseph Cafasso.
  41. Fr. Antony Cinzano.
  42. With a simple catechism class.
  43. Bartholomew Garelli.
  44. On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1841.
  45. Dialogue, entertainment, music and catechism lesson.
  46. To teach religion and Christian virtues and to give sound education to the youth so that they attain their salvation.
  47. Because he wanted to teach his boys how to pray and He wanted to get the habit of going to church regularly.
  48. The meaning of oratory is the 'place of prayer'.
  49. Saint Francis De Sales.
  50. Because he was afraid that oratory would become the foundation for political organization.
  51. Because they thought that Don Bosco was becoming mentally insane.
  52. Mamma Margaret.
  53. 'Give me souls and take away the rest'.
  54. 'The Companion of Youth'.
  55. On 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1841, on the feast of Immaculate Conception.
  56. A cabbage grows better when it is transplanted. So too the oratory.
  57. With the prayer 'Hail Mary'.
  58. They called her 'Mamma'.
  59. Mamma Margaret.
  60. Ascanio Savio.
  61. The mother of John Caliero, Teresa Cagliero.
  62. On 25<sup>th</sup> July 1854.
  63. Dominic Savio.
  64. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1854.
  65. "Death rather than sin"
  66. When it is a matter of preventing let nothing stand in your way. Prevent sin at any cost.
  67. Charity is what sets the Sons of God apart from the sons of satan and of the world.
  68. Avoid idleness and be most diligent in your scholastic and religious duties, Idleness is the father of all vices.
  69. 'A Salesian house without music is like a body without a soul'.
  70. 'Jump, play and make all the noise you want, but avoid sin like a plague'.
  71. On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1875 to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in South America.
  72. Because he was the father of millions of orphans and unwanted youth.
  73. "Your cassock is too thin; you need a thick one because many boys will hang on to it".
  74. On 24<sup>th</sup> December 1887
  75. 31<sup>st</sup> January 1888
  76. "Jesus Mary and Joseph, I give my soul into your hands".
  77. "Priest and father of orphans, rests in peace with Christ".
  78. 72 years, 5 months and 15 days.
  79. 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1907 by Pope Pius X.
  80. 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1929 by Pope Pius XI.
  81. He said that, Don Bosco had practiced to a heroic degree the virtues of faith, hope and charity.
  82. Easter Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> April 1934.
  83. Pope Pius XI.
  84. Boys are so made that unless they pray together aloud they don't pray at all.
  85. It is not enough to take the cross in our

- hand and kiss it; we must carry it.
86. Frequent confession and communion and daily Mass are the pillars, which support the edifice of education.
  87. To form the pupils into-'loyal citizens and exemplary Christians'
  88. "The Preventive System"
  89. It is based on reason, religion and loving kindness.
  90. Michael Rua, Paul Albera, Philip Rinaldi, Peter Ricaldone, Renato Zizzioti, Louis Ricceri, Egidius Vigano, Juan Edmundo Vecchi and Pascual Chavez.
  91. 'Either speak well or remain silent'.
  92. He said:"For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life".
  93. Don Bosco, quoting St.Philip Neri, said: "jump, play and make all the noise you want, but don't sin".
  94. He said: In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger, or which serve to win souls to God, I push ahead even to the point of temerity.
  95. Don Rua said about Don Bosco:"He took no step, he said no word, he took up no work that was not directed to the saving of the young".
  96. He taught them to be always cheerful. He said, "Let us serve the Lord in holy joy".
  97. There were very many holy boys always at the oratory of Don Bosco. The best known saint is Dominic Savio.
  98. Don Bocso showed that it was easy to become a saint. He said to Dominic Savio:"All that you have to do is just obey; Your penance is the daily bearing with insults and suffering the heat, cold, tiredness and inconvenience of the day which God may send you".
  99. He said:"I never knew it could be easy to become a saint, but now I see that one can be happy and holy too. I simply want to become a saint".
  100. Don Bosco built many churches. The most important churches are the Basilica of Mary help of Christians in Turin and the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Rome.

***Congratulations  
to the Prize Winners of  
Bosco Trophy***

**1<sup>st</sup> Prize** -1.Ferrando Unit, Umroi.  
2. Little Flower Unit, Malki.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Prize** -1.Ferrando Nivas Unit, Udaipur.  
2. Don Bosco Unit, Rongkhon.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Prize** - Sacred Heart Unit, Golaghat.

***Kindly collect the prizes from the  
YAC Coordinator of Your Province***

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*Ethical Humanism is primarily an attitude about human beings, their worth, and the significance of their lives. It is concerned with the nature and quality of living; the character and creativity of our relationships. Because of this concern, humanism spontaneously flowers into a spiritual movement in its own right.*

**Edward Ericson**

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*Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude.*

**Denis Waitley**

## QUIZ ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. What is the Old Testament?
2. How many books are there in the Old Testament and when these books written?
3. How are the books of the Old Testament divided?
4. What was the peculiarity of the creation of man?
5. What is the meaning of "In his own image and likeness"?
6. What kind of tree was in the middle of the garden?
7. Why did God create Eve?
8. Did Adam and Eve obey the Command of God?
9. What works did Cain and Abel do?
10. What did God tell Noah to do?
11. Why were the people unsuccessful in building the tower of Babel?
12. What did God ask Abraham to do with his son Isaac?
13. What did Abraham answer Isaac when he asked about the lamb for the sacrifice?
14. For how much was Joseph sold to the Midianite traders?
15. What did the Midianite traders do with Joseph?
16. What does the book of Exodus speak about?
17. How was Moses saved from death as a baby boy?
18. What did Moses hear from the burning bush?
19. How many plagues did God send to Egypt name them?
20. Where do we find the Ten Commandments given by God?
21. According to the book of Leviticus what did the Lord promise to those who obeyed Him?
22. What was the population of those counted by Moses and Aaron?
23. Why did God not permit Moses and Aaron to enter the Promised Land?
24. Who were the parents of Moses and Aaron?
25. Where did God take Moses to show the promised land of Canaan?
26. What is the meaning of Deuteronomy and Who wrote it?
27. In what four particulars may Moses be regarded as a type of Jesus?
28. Who was Joshua?
29. What encouragement did God give to Joshua?
30. When Joshua died which tribe did the Lord direct to fight against Canaanites?
31. What further sins were the people during the time of Joshua guilty of?
32. Did the Lord deliver the people of Israel during the time of Joshua?
33. Who was Abimelech?
34. Who was Samson?
35. What was the name of the Father of Samson?
36. What was remarkable about Samson?
37. What did Samson say to Phillistines?
38. Finally what did Samson do to his enemies?
39. Did Samson's strength lie in his hair?
40. Who was Elimelech?
41. Who was Eli?
42. What is the meaning of Samuel?
43. Did Samuel inform Eli about the message?
44. In what spirit did the Lord make Saul a king and who anointed him?
45. What was the difference between Jonathan and his father?
46. What did Samuel tell Saul the king?
47. Who was David?
48. What effect did David's harp have on Saul the king?
49. Who was the champion of the army of Philistines?

50. For what pleasing traits of character was David remarkable?
51. How did David go to face the giant?
52. Where was the Ark during David's rule?
53. How did Nathan convince David of his sin?
54. How did David repent for his sins?
55. What judgment Solomon render in the case of two mothers claiming the same child?
56. What was Solomon famous for?
57. How many proverbs and songs did Solomon speak, are any of his sons existing today?
58. What return did Solomon make to the queen of Sheba?
59. Who was Elijah?
60. What was Elijah commissioned to tell Ahab the king?
61. What did the prophet Elijah tell the widow?
62. Why did Elijah drench the sacrifice with water?
63. To what place did Elijah flee for fear of Jezebel?
64. Where did Elijah ascend?
65. Who was Naaman?
66. How did Naaman show his gratitude to Elisha?
67. Whose son was Manasseh?
68. How did Manasseh act after returning from captivity?
69. Who was Nehemiah?
70. What is the character of Nehemiah?
71. Who was Haman?
72. How did Esther save the Jews from termination?
73. Who was Job? How was he afflicted?
74. What is a psalm?
75. How many psalms are there in the book of psalm, how are they categorized?
76. What are the subjects of the psalms?
77. What is a proverb?
78. How are the proverbs arranged?
79. By whom was Ecclesiastes written and does it mean?
80. What is the moral of the Canticles?
81. Who was Isaiah and why is he called the evangelical prophet?
82. How did Jeremiah respond to God's first call?
83. Of what idolatry were the people guilty of as stated by prophet Jeremiah?
84. How did the Lord prepare Ezekiel for his mission?
85. What remarkable vision did Ezekiel see?
86. With whom was Daniel taken to Babylon?
87. About whom did Daniel make a request to king Nebuchadnezzar?
88. In whose reign did Hosea prophesy? What did the Lord accuse the people of Israel for during the time of Hosea?
89. Who was Amos and what was his occupation when he was called to become a prophet?
90. When and what did Obadiah prophesy?
91. Against whom was Jonah told to prophesy?
92. During whose reign did Micah prophesy?
93. To what do Nahum's prophecies relate?
94. What was the first prophesy of Zephaniah?
95. What was the message of prophet Haggai?
96. What was the first message of Prophet Zechariah for his people?
97. When was there-construction of the Jerusalem temple complete?
98. Who was Malachi?
99. Of what sins does Malachi reprove the people?
100. How is Malachi described?

**Remember to send your answers to the questions by 15 of February 2009 to the YAC Coordinator, MSMHC Generalate, Little Flower Convent, Hatigaon- Dispur. Guwahati, Assam.**

## Remembering Sr. Elizabeth Kujur

*Sr. Marina Thomas msmhc*

Sr. Elizabeth Kujur was born on 18 October 1913 in the village of Sugaruwa in Bihar. She lost her mother when she was one and a half years old. Her father brought her up with much affection and care. He migrated to Assam and admitted his daughter in the boarding school at St. Mary's, Guwahati to give her a good education.

As Elizabeth came across many girls who had come from outside North East India to join the Salesian Sisters, she felt the desire to become a Sister. During the annual retreat in the boarding, she approached the superior and spoke about her desire. She was filled with sorrow when she knew her plea was refused by her superiors. She then decided to leave the boarding and look for some other religious congregation that would admit her. Meanwhile her father decided to give her in marriage. Earnest about her desire to become a religious, she returned to St. Mary's Convent. Here she joined the new Congregation of MSMHC and made her First Profession in 1944, at Guwahati, in the hands of the founder of the new Congregation, Bishop Stephen Ferrando, as one among the six fresh beautiful lilies placed on the altar of the Lord. Hers was an offering made fully and consciously for the sake of the Kingdom.

The road she had to travel to fulfill her desire was a rugged one. A girl of her age with so much education in 1940's from an obscure village of Assam definitely had many opportunities opened before her for a happy and prosperous life in the world. Even as a child she was determined, receptive and hard working. This trait Elizabeth carried along with

her and proved to be a determined and hard working religious who was always willing to learn, adjust and adapt to any new situation and circumstances. Many people discouraged her from becoming a sister especially in the new congregation of the Missionary sisters of Mary Help of Christians. But **nothing could separate her from the love of Christ** who became her sole Master.

Her father was very dear to her and it did really cost her much to leave him. Her love for him was so much that she used to say, "What will happen to me when he dies! Perhaps I too might die of sorrow". But she managed to renounce all that she loved. She knew the cost of discipleship and learned to accept the difficulties of life with the help of her superiors. Being formed by the FMA Sisters she possessed an affectionate and grateful memory of them. She spoke of them with much affection and gratitude.

### **A committed Religious**

Sr. Elizabeth was serious and a perfectionist by nature but very affectionate and simple. She was pious and devoted to Mary Help of Christians. She followed the maxim of Christ "Pray unceasingly" in her life that her lips would continuously move in praise of Christ. She definitely was one of those strong foundation stones, on which the Lord decided to build the humble congregation of the MSMHC.

She was found to be a very vigilant assistant to the boarding and a very good and caring teacher. As a newly professed sister she was first sent to Tezpur along with two more sisters there. She then was assigned to teach in the

school of the FMA's and assist the boarding girls there. She did her duty with perfection. She was an exemplary assistant to boarding girls that the girls found in her a loving mother, caring sister and a guiding Guardian Angel. What she preached she lived in her life. Her very life sunk deep into the lives of many young girls as she went about keeping every place neat and clean and teaching the girls the art of housekeeping.

She was very particular about doing every work neat and tidy for she offered everything for the love of Jesus. Can any one who has fallen in love do any thing carelessly for her loved one? Doing every little thing with perfection was her motto. She spent most of her free time in the workroom doing embroidery, stitching uniforms for students, mending the torn clothes or replacing a button or two on the frocks of the children in the boarding house. She was a good tailor and taught the candidates and Sisters tailoring.

Sr. Elizabeth was known to be loving and firm and was never found to be partial in her dealings with children or others. She used to scold the slow learners or those who used to be careless with their work under her care.

### **Learning from womb to tomb**

Sr. Elizabeth had no age limit for learning. She made use of every opportunity to learn, understand and assimilate. Being a good teacher, she wanted that she learns well so that she will be able to teach better. She could be called a very good student who saw each day as better than every yesterday. Filled with determination she kept learning throughout her life. She took lot of pain in learning local languages. She would try on anything to learn from others, be it learning a language, or anything else that would help her to do her mission more effectively. She never hesitated to try her hands on anything that she found

useful and helpful in spite of the many failures she would have to face. Her capacity to learn and change was so great that she managed to change some of her behaviours even in her old age. She was so full of enthusiasm and energy to learn and change.

### **Spiritual Life**

To be plucked from a very attractive garden to grow in want and poverty and continuous struggles to be full blossom, Sr. Elizabeth Kujur needed so much strength. She could get all what she wanted from her father any time since she was the beloved of her father. But her deep communion with the Lord and her devotion to Him enabled her to live a totally committed life. She believed in the words of Jesus, "pray unceasingly". She did everything for the love of Jesus. In faith she accepted all the hardships and privations of her life. Sr. Elizabeth was always on time for her practices piety and trusted in the Divine Providence. In all her free time, she was found with Rosary in her hands and the lips moving with the recitation of prayers like Rosary or any aspirations to Jesus. In all her community life she was always the first person to be in the chapel for prayers. Sr. Elizabeth Kujur posed a deep faith in God and a tender devotion to Mary help of Christians. She impressed everyone with her spirit of piety. She received that extra ordinary strength from the Lord to give away many opportunities and privileges like going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and other occasions of special opportunities to others with no regret.

### **Community life**

Sr. Elizabeth impressed everyone with her spirit of piety, poverty and sacrifice. She faithfully observed the rules and encouraged others to do the same. Sr. Elizabeth Kujur lived the spirit of the Congregation to the fullest and passed on to the younger generation of Sisters the charism that the Founder had

entrusted them with. She spoke less but observed much and accomplished a lot more. Though a perfectionist she was very kind and gentle at heart and those in the community could experience concern and admired her for that. Sr. Elizabeth was never found wasting time. She practiced the little ways like that of St. Teresa of Child Jesus and made full use of her time sanctifying herself and saving many souls for Christ.

She was so exceptional in her love and respect for the superiors and this was very evident in her dealings with them. She also was very much other centered though she appeared to be a hot tempered person. Being a perfectionist she expected others to be like her and so she used to scold those not reaching up to her standards of performance. Yet she always had a very loving and caring approach. Her thoughtfulness knew no bounds. In 1975 when Archbishop Hubert D’Rosario offered to give two plain tickets to the sisters for pilgrimage to Rome Mother Mary Rose Thapa after consulting with Sr. Elizabeth Packumala the Vicar General decided to take Sr. Elizabeth Kujur also in the team. When she was asked by the Vicar General she politely refused and said “you please go with Mother to Rome”. The sacrifice she made here was so great that she made this choice joyfully because there was no trail of selfishness in her but thoughtfulness alone.

### **Last Days**

Sr. Elizabeth Kujur, a great missionary, an observant religious and devout and faithful MSMHC lived 44 years as the beloved spouse of Jesus with grace and dignity. In all her apostolate like teacher, boarding assistant, tailoring and embroidery instructor, touring missionary and animator of the community, she left no stone unturned under her feet to permeate the love and compassion of Jesus

passed on through her. She walked gracefully to her Eternal home well prepared as an accomplished and faithful soldier.

It was in the year 1980 she took the chance of visiting her friends and relatives who lived in her native village. She obtained permission from her superiors and went to Dhekhiajuli in Assam where she was born and brought up. There she had the opportunity to attend an ordination, while visiting her relatives. Unfortunately she couldn’t remain on there to share the joy for a longer time. Towards the end of the function, she was suddenly struck by a heart attack and was carried to a nearby hospital. After a couple of days she was brought to Shillong and admitted at Nazareth hospital. While in the hospital she silently bore her pains with no complains. Those who visited her had watched her groan with pain but no complains escaped her lips. She told those who spoke of suffering, “If you suffer, Jesus will bless you, Our Lady will help you”. She endured her pains with the blessings of Jesus and help of Mother Mary. The Lord destines the home coming of all His children in His own way. Silently and serenely the Master took her away to her home on 18 March 1980. She was 67 years of age then. Hard work and poor food habits let this lily of the MSMHC garden to be plucked away before anyone was really aware of the time of offering. May her soul rest in Peace!

The legacy Sr. Elizabeth left behind enables us to be more committed and faithful to our call. The contribution she has made to the cause of Christ and the building up of His church spur us on in our enthusiasm and missionary endeavours. Certainly, Sr. Elizabeth will continue to live on, down the memory lane of the congregation calling its members for renewal and rededication to live a totally committed MSMHC way of life. May she intercede for us all! --



*Your Legacy Lives on ... To Inspire us*

## *The Christmas Present*

*I heard a knock on my door one Christmas Eve,  
As I looked out my window a man I could see,  
he was cold and seemed so lonely and upon a bended knee  
he asked can you spare anything for me to eat...*

*I opened up the door and as I helped him in,  
he looked up at me with such a peaceful grin,  
As he drank down some coffee and had a bite to eat,  
I put more wood on the fire so he could warm his feet...*

*Over there by the fireplace he warmed his tired hands,  
I wonder where did he come from, this quiet white haired man,  
but I wasn't at all afraid of his peaceful ways you see,  
this man dressed in poor, almost as poor as me...*

*As he left he turned and thanked me for all I had done,  
but he forgot to take his gloves, so out the door I run,  
He was gone in the blizzard and I couldn't hardly see,  
so I took his ole glove's back to the house with me...*

*Just a little after midnight I awoke in the dark,  
there wasn't a bit of fire just glowing cinders in the dark,  
and where I'd placed his gloves by my little christmas tree,  
there laid a brand new pair, and a Christmas Card for me...  
and it read...*

*You gave me shelter and food to keep me warm,  
you even tried to bring me my gloves in the storm,  
so here's you a new pair,... the finest ever seen...*

*as an angel of the Lord  
I'll be sure to tell the King.... Merry Christmas.....*

*Billy M. Smallwood*

