

The Missionary Oblate

A Journal of Mission Animation



**Pope Francis in Indonesia with President Joko Widodo
of Indonesia, on Sept., 4, 2024 (CNS,Vatican Media)**

No 66

July – Dec. 2024

The Missionary Oblate

A Journal of Mission Animation

ISSN 2362-096X

Editor: Fr. Emmanuel Fernando OMI

Address: Rajabima Oblate Centre, 519 / 16, Jayanthi Mawatha,
Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka

Tel (0094) 025-2222462; 077 235 9203

email: emma1938omi@gmail.com

Associate Editors: Fr. Anton Shivantha Waas, OMI
and Fr. Surain Dhanushka Fernando OMI

**Published by the Oblate Province of Colombo,
Sri Lanka**

Postal Address: De Mazenod House, 40, Farm Road,
Colombo 15, Sri Lanka

No 66

July –Dec. 2024

The Missionary Oblate

A Journal of Mission Animation

A Biannual Publication of the Oblate Province of
Colombo, Sri Lanka, No 66, July- Dec, 2024.

The Contents

Editorial

Synodal call for meaningful Pastoral Care <i>Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI</i>	4
Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Parish Priests	9
The Pope of Blessings <i>Jochen Sautermeister</i>	14
Primacy and Ministry of the Pope <i>Fr. Leopold Ratnasekera OMI</i>	20
The Symbols of the Flood Narrative <i>Prof. Dr. Shirley L. Wijesinghe</i>	26
“Human Dignity” <i>Fr. Leopold Ratnasekera OMI</i>	33
Transformative Power of the Eucharist <i>Fr. Dhanushka Silva CMF</i>	40
Pope Francis in Indonesia <i>Christopher White</i>	59
Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OLHL) <i>Fr. Asanga Viraj OMI</i>	63

A loving tribute to Fr.Aloy on his 90 th Birthday Fr.Emmanuel Fernando, OMI	69
Fruits of Failure <i>Ms Seshika Fernando</i>	75
Reaching out to the Scattered at Pothanegama <i>Fr. Emmanuel Fernando OMI</i>	81
It's a different time! Between US Sisters and Vatican -NCR	88
West and Rest of the Synod <i>Aloysius Pieris SJ</i>	89
Letter to the Editor of TABLET <i>Fr. Vimal Tirimanne CSsR</i>	90
Archbishop Viganò excommunicated by Vatican <i>Christopher White</i>	92
Fr. Merl Mendis OMI Fr. <i>Benet Shantha Fernando</i>	95
Br. W .Benedict Kurera OMI <i>OMI Bulletin</i>	99

Cover design by Fr. Shane Winston De Rosayro, OMI

Authors are responsible for the views expressed
in their articles of this journal.

Editorial

SYNODAL CALL FOR MEANINGFUL PASTORAL CARE IN THE PARISHES

Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI

The Synodal approach revived in the Catholic Church by Pope Francis is calling for innovative pastoral approaches in the parishes. Pope Francis, not only articulates people's new painful cries, he also strives to accompany them with much compassionate care and concern, adopting new pastoral strategies. His pastoral outreach clearly confirms his commitment to bring about profound renewal in the Catholic Church.

The Synodal pastoral perceptions and norms invite also Sri Lankan ordained ministers and the Consecrated Men and Women Religious to listen to the cries of some of the social categories of Catholics in today's Sri Lankan Catholic Church and accompany them, adopting suitable means to ameliorate their human conditions since "nothing genuinely human is foreign to a Christian" (*Gaud. et Spes- Vatican II*) and as well as to improve the quality of their spiritual life in today's world through an ongoing catechesis.

The following categories / groups in Sri Lanka, are in need of special compassionate pastoral proximity and care on the part of the ordained ministers and the Consecrated Men and Women Religious in order to listen to their real and legitimate needs and enable them to

experience fuller life which Jesus has promised (Jn 10:10).

The Plight of Social Categories of Catholics in Need of Special Pastoral Care

1. The young men and young women in our parishes who long to receive the Sacrament of Marriage.

In order to become an ordained minister (presbyter) in the Catholic Church, a young man (a Catholic) has to undergo formation / accompaniment and training at least for 8 years in a Major Seminary under competent presbyters and competent Laymen a Lay women. . Likewise a young Catholic woman who wants to become a Consecrated Religious Sister has to spend at least 4 years in a House of Religious formation under competent Religious Sisters. But what is the situation of the Catholic young men and Catholic young women who want to receive the Sacrament of Marriage in the Catholic Church? The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is also encountering couples in “instant marriages” and others seeking “Rectification” of their marriages. We see also the reality of ‘broken marriages’ of Catholics and the consequent plight of many Catholic children in Sri Lanka.

2. The plight of the Catholic families of migrant workers (expatriates)

The wives or the husbands – the mothers or the fathers - bring income for the families and foreign exchange for Sri Lanka. But what is the pastoral situation of such Catholic families? Isn't there a form of normless

living visible in some of those Catholic families? And what is the situation of the children in those families? This is truly a sad spectacle and a matter of great regret.

3. The plight of the Catholic families of deep sea fishermen

There is need to take care for the plight of the Catholic deep sea fishermen who spend several weeks (30 – 40 days) out in the sea and their families. Several men are employed by the owners of the deep sea fishing trawlers.

4. The plight of Plantation workers

We, the citizens of Sri Lanka, who profess the dignity of every human person(through profession of our Religions) need to feel ashamed, observing the pitiful human living conditions of the Plantation workers and their struggles in order to lead lives worthy of human dignity, justly compensated for their daily labour and toil in the estates. These are human persons who also bring foreign exchange to Sri Lanka.

5. The plight of the children in the social peripheries

The children in Sri Lankan social peripheries (rural, coastal, urban and estate) living without meaningful education. Many need psychological support too.

The Means to adopt

The above-mentioned pastoral needs demand suitable means to achieve the above-mentioned pastoral goals.

Marriage preparation.

The Catholic young men and Catholic young women who wish to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony need meaningful formation- programmes and pastoral care provided by the respective parish presbyters / priests so that they receive meaningful instruction regarding the Sacrament of Matrimony and the bringing up of their children. Initial formation through programmes can be given to senior Catholic boys and girls in the schools.

Pastoral care for Expatriate workers.

The parish presbyters and their assistants need to visit the homes in order to identify the families where the wife and / or the husband is living outside Sri Lanka to earn their living and bring up their children and find remedial pastoral means to assist those families remain steady, strong and hopeful.

Pastoral care of the Catholic fisher-families

There is need for pastoral care and attention of the presbyters / priests, embodying catechesis, divine worship and prayer, for families in the parishes where men spend 30 -40 days in the deep sea. Such pastoral attention will also help them from deviating from the Catholic faith and losing the Christian sense of living. To achieve the desired holistic pastoral goal, the respective parish presbyters (priests) and their Assistant presbyters should come to know the existence of such families in their parishes by visiting the families.

Pastoral care of the Plantation workers

We, the citizens of Sri Lanka, who profess the dignity of

every human person through profession of our Catholic faith need to feel ashamed, observing the pitiful human living conditions of the Plantation workers and their struggles to find effective means to ameliorate their human conditions in order to lead lives worthy of human dignity.

Pastoral care of the children in the social periphery

The poor families living in social peripheries in Sri Lanka, leading a human existence bereft of human dignity, need the concern and care of the Sri Lankan Consecrated Men and Women Religious whose divine charisms (special gifts of God) call them to respond.

Pope Francis in Indonesia

“People from different religions had to know we are all brothers, all pilgrims, all on our way to God, beyond what differentiates us”- Pope Francis in Indonesia, Sept., 2024.

03 % of Indonesia’s 275 million are Catholics.

Pope Francis praised Indonesians for having large families with up to five children. *“Keep it up, you’re an example for everyone, for all the countries that may be, and this might sound funny, (where) these families prefer to have a cat or a little dog instead of a child,” he said. His remarks were reminiscent of two years ago, where the Pope said having pets instead of kids diminishes the “humanity” of married couples.*

LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO PARISH PRIESTS

Dear Brother Priests,

The International Meeting “Parish Priests for the Synod”, and the dialogue with all of you who have taken part, provide me with the opportunity to pray for the parish priests the world over. To all of you, I address these words with great affection.

It is so obvious as to sound almost banal, but that does not make it less true: the Church could not go on without your dedication and your pastoral service. So before all else, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the generous work that you do each day, sowing seeds of the Gospel in every kind of soil (cf. *Mk* 4:1-25).

As you have experienced in these days of sharing, the parishes in which you carry out your ministry vary widely, from those on the outskirts of great cities – as I know personally from Buenos Aires – to those in sparsely populated areas that are the size of vast provinces. They range from those in town centres in many European countries, where ancient basilicas house dwindling and aging communities, to those where celebrations are held beneath the branches of great trees and the songs of birds mix with the voices of small children.

Parish priests are well aware of this, since they know from within the life of God’s People their joys and

hardships, their resources and their needs. For this reason, a synodal Church needs its parish priests. Without priests, we will never be able to learn how to walk together and to set out on the path of synodality, “the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”. [\[1\]](#)

We will never become a synodal and missionary Church unless parish communities are distinguished by the sharing of all the baptized in the one mission of proclaiming the Gospel. If parishes are not synodal and missionary, neither will the Church be. The Synthesis Report of the First Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is very clear in this regard. Parishes, beginning with their structures and the organization of parish life, are called to think of themselves “primarily as being of service to the mission that the faithful carry out in society, in family life and the workplace, without concentrating exclusively on their own activities and their organizational needs” (8.1). Parish communities increasingly need to become places from which the baptized set out as missionary disciples and to which they return, full of joy, in order to share the wonders worked by the Lord through their witness (cf. *Lk* 10:17).

As pastors, we are called to accompany in this process the communities that we serve, and at the same time to commit ourselves with prayer, discernment and apostolic zeal in ensuring that our ministry is suited to the needs of a synodal and missionary Church. This challenge is set before the Pope, the bishops and the Roman Curia, and it is also set before you, as parish priests. The Lord

who has called us and consecrated us asks us today to listen to the voice of his Spirit and to advance in the direction that he points out to us. Of one thing we can be sure: he will never leave us without his grace. Along the way, we will discover how to set our ministry free from the things that wear us down and rediscover its most authentic core, the proclamation of God's word and the gathering of the community for the breaking of bread.

I encourage you, then, to accept this, the Lord's call to be, as parish priests, builders of a synodal and missionary Church and to devote yourselves enthusiastically to achieving this goal. To this end, I would like to offer three suggestions that can help to inspire your lifestyle and activity as pastors.

1. I ask you first to *live out your specific ministerial charism in ever greater service to the varied gifts that the Spirit sows in the People of God*. It is urgent to "discover with faith, the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, be they of a humble or more exalted form" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9), which are indispensable for evangelizing any number of human situations and contexts. I am convinced that in this way you will bring to light many hidden treasures and feel less alone in the demanding task of evangelization. You will experience the joy of being true fathers, who do not dominate others but rather bring out in them, men and women alike, great and precious possibilities.

2. With all my heart, I suggest that you *learn to practise the art of communal discernment*, employing for this purpose the method of “conversation in the Spirit”, which has proved so helpful in the synodal journey and in the proceedings of the synodal Assembly itself. I am certain that you will reap from it many good fruits, not only in structures of communion such as parish councils, but in many other fields as well. As the Synthesis Report makes clear, discernment is a key element in the pastoral activity of a synodal Church: “It is important that the practice of discernment be exercised also in pastoral settings, in a way adapted to differing contexts, in order to illumine the concreteness of ecclesial life. This will help to recognize better the charisms present within the community, to distribute wisely different responsibilities and ministries, and to plan in the light of the Spirit pastoral projects that go beyond the mere programming of activities” (2.1).

3. Finally, I would like to urge you to *base everything you do in a spirit of sharing and fraternity among yourselves and with your bishops*. This is something that emerged forcefully from the International Conference for the Permanent Formation of Priests, on the theme, “Fan into Flame the Gift of God that You Possess” (2 Tim 1:6), which took place last February here in Rome, with over 800 bishops, priests, lay and consecrated men and women, engaged in this area and representing some 18 countries. We cannot be authentic fathers unless we are first sons and brothers. And we cannot foster communion and participation in the communities entrusted to our care unless, before all else, we live out those realities among ourselves. I am quite aware that, amid the constant call of our pastoral responsibilities, this commitment may seem

burdensome, even a waste of time, but the opposite is true: indeed, only in this way will we be credible and our activity not end up scattering what others have already gathered.

It is not only the synodal and missionary Church that needs parish priests, but also the ongoing process of the 2021-2024 Synod, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission”, as we look forward to the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which will take place in the coming month of October. In order to prepare for it, we need to hear your voice.

For this reason, I invite those who have taken part in the International Meeting “Parish Priests for the Synod” to be missionaries of synodality, among yourselves and, once you return home, with your fellow parish priests. I ask you to encourage reflection, with a synodal and missionary mindset, on the renewal of the ministry of parish priests, and enable the General Secretariat of the Synod to gather your distinctive contributions in view of the preparation of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The purpose of the present International Meeting was to listen to parish priests, but that cannot finish today: we need to continue to hear from you.

Dear brothers, I am at your side in this process, in which I myself am taking part. I bless all of you from the heart, and in turn, I need to feel your closeness and the support of your prayers. Let us entrust ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary *Hodegetria*, Our Lady of the Way. She shows us the way; she leads us to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

FRANCIS

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 2 May 2024

Courtesy: Vatican News

THE POPE OF BLESSINGS

SHORTLY BEFORE Christmas, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith under its new Prefect, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, published *Fiducia Supplicans*, a declaration on the pastoral meaning of blessings. The reactions that have followed have been compared to the turmoil caused by the release of *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI's in 1968 encyclical reaffirming the Church's ban on the use of artificial contraceptives by married couples.

The document makes it clear – with the explicit assent of the Pope – that priests are permitted to bless couples who live in situations that are irregular in terms of canon law, such as cohabiting couples, married couples in which one or both partners are divorced and remarried, and same-sex couples. In his address to the dicastery on 26 January, Pope Francis explained that the purpose of these “pastoral and spontaneous blessings” is to “concretely show the closeness of the Lord and the Church to all those who, finding themselves in different situations, ask for help to continue – sometimes to begin – a journey of faith”. He emphasised that “moral perfection” is not a requirement for receiving a blessing and added that “when a couple spontaneously approaches [a minister] and asks for them, he is not blessing the union, but simply the people who together have requested it.”

As James Martin SJ told *The Tablet* last week, “The distinction between these blessings and a sacramental marriage was abundantly clear in the original declaration.

These blessings are not to be confused with a marriage ceremony. It's also clear that it is a blessing of a same-sex couple, not simply two people who happen to be standing together in front of the priest." While some have emphasised the novelty of *Fiducia Supplicans*, it is best understood as the latest initiative in an unfolding agenda of reform with consistent themes and priorities. Like Pope Francis' previous statements and declarations it does not change the teaching of the Church. But it is changing something as fundamental – the way in which the teaching is articulated and implemented.

From the first days of his papacy, Francis has called for a pastoral renewal of the Church in the service of evangelisation. His November 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* sets out his vision and programme. "*The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel*" (114). Francis' starting point is the primacy of the love of God: all human beings are God's creatures and are encompassed by God's love with no exceptions.

At the heart of this shift of tone and perspective is the insight that, as Francis famously puts it in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "*realities are greater than ideas*". God can be seen at work in the reality of the most various lives and circumstances. "*The Gospel has an intrinsic principle of totality,*" he writes. "*It will always remain good news until it has been proclaimed to all people, until it has healed and strengthened every aspect of humanity, until it has*

brought all men and women together at the table in God's kingdom. The whole is greater than the part" (237).

Fiducia Supplicans reflects this pastoral perspective of Pope Francis. It is a response to the often neglected pastoral needs and the spiritual desire of the many couples who do not live in a sacramental marriage. In the United Kingdom 21 per cent of children and young people under 18 live with a single parent, overwhelmingly likely to be a single mother. In the US, the figure is 23 per cent, in Russia 18 per cent. In the European Union, 16 per cent of all families are single-parent families, and more than 80 per cent of these parents are women. The number of single parent families is increasing throughout the world, for various reasons: abandonment, divorce, separation, death, prison or, especially, migration. These families face special difficulties; they are much more likely to be living in poverty than any other type of household.

When a single parent finds a partner who is able to share responsibility for the children and the family, these patchwork or blended families are often places of healing and flourishing. An estimated one in three families in England is a blended step-family, combining parents, new partners and children from different relationships.

THE CHURCH'S task is to accompany everyone in their search for God, whatever their situation: to encourage, aid, and comfort all the faithful in the reality of their lives. This includes all those who ask a minister of the Church for a blessing as an individual, as a couple, or as a family. The Christmas gospel relates that after a profound internal

struggle, Joseph was told not to abandon Mary, although the child she was expecting was not his own. He accepted Mary's child as his son, and loved and protected him as a biological father would do. This care and concern is lived in many patchwork families today too, and many parents and children who in the past might have been excluded because of their irregular situation in terms of canon law are today fully included in the life of the Church.

Fiducia Supplicans looks at the reality of the lives of couples in same-sex partnerships, with their concerns, difficulties and hopes, in the same way. It recognises the good in the responsibility, faithfulness, mutual care and love shown in these relationships. When such couples seek and receive a spontaneous blessing from a priest, he is honouring all that is good in their relationship. As Pope Francis said on 26 January, the priest "is not blessing the union". *Fiducia Supplicans* separates the pastoral possibility of receiving a blessing from the doctrinal evaluation of different forms of living in partnership. It allows a couple to experience the unconditional love of God, and to build awareness that all human beings are by their very nature limited, prone to error. We are all in need of forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption.

Fiducia Supplicans underlines that blessings, as sacramentals, are an invitation "to grasp God's presence in all the events of life". Following the principle that "realities are greater than ideas", pastoral care is to take its starting point in the concrete circumstances of people's lives. This is the place where evangelisation happens, the

place where the unconditional love, the care, the forgiveness, and the presence of God can be experienced. In an unusual clarification Cardinal Fernández responded to negative reactions from some bishops and episcopal conferences to *Fiducia Supplicans*. He accepted there could be local contexts with “strong cultural and even legal issues that require time and pastoral strategies that go beyond the short term” but added, “There is no room to distance ourselves doctrinally from this Declaration or to consider it heretical, contrary to the Tradition of the Church, or blasphemous”.

The rejection in principle of couples in irregular situations who seek an informal blessing by reference to canon law or “divine commandments” expresses a pastoral remoteness from human beings – as creatures of God – and from the realities of their lives. It is also a refusal to accept the findings of the human sciences. It is now understood that homosexuality is not a deliberately chosen deviation – as was the common assumption in the ancient world – but a naturally occurring variant of sexual identity. Again, a blunt refusal to bless a couple in an “irregular” relationship illustrates the mistakes the Church can make when it puts ideas ahead of reality.

Fiducia Supplicans changes nothing about church teaching on marriage and confirms much that was already known about the theology of blessings. It makes it clear – if it was not already obvious – that no one can appeal to church teaching to justify a refusal to bless a couple

because they fall short of moral perfection or are in an “irregular” relationship.

Giving thanks for the good granted by God in one’s life is an element of blessing. In Latin, to bless is *benedicere*, literally, to speak well of someone. As Henri Nouwen wrote, *“To give a blessing is to affirm, to say ‘Yes’ to a person’s Belovedness.”* It is the leitmotif of the Francis papacy to remind us that God’s unconditional love, God’s blessing, embraces everyone.

-Jochen Sautermeister is the professor of moral theology at the University of Bonn.

Courtesy: THE TABLET, 3 February 2024

POPE FRANCIS IN EAST TIMOR

More than 600,000 attended Pope Francis’ history-making Mass on Sept. 2024 in East Timor, also known as Timor-Leste. During his homily, the Pope reflected on the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah who “announces to his fellow citizens a new horizon, which God will open before them: a future of hope and joy, where oppression and war will be banished forever.” “He will make a great light shine upon them, which will deliver them from the darkness of sin that oppress them,” said the Pope recalling the words of Scripture. Yet he will do so not with the power of armies, weapons and wealth but through the gift of a son.” The parallel between Isaiah’ prophecy of the birth of the “Saviour of the world” and the Timorese’s own liberation was obvious to the enormous and deeply faithful crowd who sat silently listening to the Pope’s words.- Christopher White, Vatican Correspondent, NCR

Primacy and Ministry of the Pope New Vatican Document

The Vatican department for Ecumenism has promulgated a study document on the place and the role of the Pope as the Bishop of Rome and as the sign of unity and communion in the universal Church entitled: *“The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in ecumenical dialogues and in the responses to the encyclical Ut unum sint”* dated 13th June 2024. Following a three-year long study, this 150-page document is published to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the encyclical on commitment to ecumenism “Ut Unum Sint” of Pope St. John Paul II (25th May 1995) and also in view of the synod on Synodality and commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the first-ever ecumenical council of Nicea (325-AD) convoked by Emperor Constantine, that proclaimed the dogma of the divinity of Christ, the deliberations of which are accepted by all the major Christian denominations. The present multi-faceted text, giving a summary of some 30 responses to “Unum Sint” encyclical and in addition 50 ecumenical dialogues, concludes with suggestions from the Dicastery for a renewed exercise of the Bishop of Rome's ministry of unity "recognized by all concerned" as suggested by “Ut Unum Sint” n. 95, and in a manner relevant to the present time. *In fact, this new Vatican document sets the tone for clarifying all leadership roles in the Church – not only of the pope, but of all ordained ministers and pastoral leaders.*

The Church discerning the observations of the theological dialogues and meetings of the heads of various

churches, is now seeking ways of exercising the ministry of the Pope as a service to unity and service of love. The drama of the ecumenical trend of papal ministry was already seen in the convocation of Vatican II followed by Pope Paul VI in the institution of the Synod of Bishops (1965) and with further impetus from Pope John Paul II in his invitation to other Christians to reflect on the exercise of primacy. With Pope Francis we have reached a new stage where he feels that in a synodal church, the exercise of primacy of Pope will ensue much fruit in the promotion of the unity of all Christians across the various churches. In this process the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the collegiality of the bishops and synodality of communion, participation and mission will prove very relevant and meaningful to the universal church and to the world. *The basic question is how may the Pope, the Bishop of Rome exercising his role as successor of Peter through the Petrine office, preside over and exercise leadership while shepherding the whole Church in a spirit of love and service and thereby become a source and guarantee of unity of all Christians?* It is encouraging that non-Catholic voices are beginning to be open up to the importance of a universal primacy in the service of ecclesial unity.

In general, the Pope seen as the Vicar of Christ who entrusted to Peter the apostle the keys of the Kingdom (Matt.16: 18-19) and the task of feeding, tending and caring for the sheep of his flock (John 21: 15-17) is also sometimes seen as the Vicar of Peter accomplishing this task. The Primacy of the Pope accepted by Catholic churches of the Western rite is also accepted by the Catholics of the Eastern rite. The

orthodox churches and the Protestant denominations do not accept it though the orthodox churches accept a primacy of honor vis-à-vis Rome, the See which is the 'first in honor and order' in the body of the world-wide Christian Churches. In some way the High Church Anglicans (like the Church of England) do see the Bishop of Rome as holding some primacy and being a sign of universal communion in the context of ecumenical relations. These differences came about sadly with the first great schism of 1054, break of communion between Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Orthodox church: between the Bishop of Rome and patriarch of Constantinople. The second schism resulted with the revolt of Martin Luther who is seen as the founder of Protestantism that emerged in the 16th century and later diversified into a mosaic of churches. These two historical schisms greatly damaged the unity of the church, thus creating *three main branches of Christianity: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Church and Protestant denominations.*

Two important issues are at stake in this discussion: firstly, a re-reading of the so-called biblical texts (Petrine texts) that refer to the prerogatives bestowed on St. Peter which now devolve on the Pope and secondly, a critical look at the declarations of Vatican I (1869-1870) under Pope Pius IX which defined primacy to include [papal infallibility](#), whereby the pope is preserved free from error. Papal primacy has invariably appeared in all bilateral and multi-lateral dialogues of the various churches. The special importance given to Peter as found in those biblical texts (n. 35) is now generally being

accepted and that besides Peter there were others too who exercised the ministry of unity so that we see instances of *multiple church leadership*, the most apparent being that of St. Paul who founded the gentile communities. But he too refers to Peter, James and John as pillars of the Church. Jerusalem Church remains the “Mother Church”.

To make the role of the Bishop of Rome more significant, many steps have been proposed: one such being the convocation of an assembly where representatives of the Catholic Church and the churches belonging to the World Council of Churches could meet. As a conciliar assembly it constitutes a ‘privileged form of the ministry of communion, an initiative beneficial both for ecumenical progress and in conformity with the will of Jesus Christ for the unity of his church enabling the Bishop of Rome be faithful to his ministry as a servant of unity in the context of a spiritual and pastoral leadership. Likewise different other initiatives to promote synodality between Churches, especially through collegiality of bishops and primates is suggested. *Many churches are glad about the return of the Catholic Church to a synodal way of life since synodality and ecumenism are both pathways for churches for journeying together.* A critical evaluation of Vatican I must take into account the special historical background of its declarations, namely, that a majority of the bishops saw in a strong seat of papacy, a way to protect the freedom of the church and more generally to serve as a force for unity in the face of the modern world.

There are cogent reasons for some sort of primacy in the universal Church: firstly, given the historical importance of the Church of Rome and its bishop who is the Pope: many would accept at least a primacy of honor in this regard. Secondly, as far as the nature and mission of the Church is concerned, *the need of a ministry or service of communion in which primacy and synodality are interdependent at all levels including the universal Church*. Thirdly, the growing sense of the practical need of a ministry of unity at the universal level viz a visible expression of communion at the world-wide level both in relation to various churches and missionary considerations. The latter shows the importance of effective universal instruments of communion needed for the Church to fulfil her mission of witnessing to the Gospel and evangelization. Further, in understanding papal primacy, the principle of subsidiarity will be important, recognized as an important principle if the exercise of primacy is to guarantee the participation of the whole Church in the decision-making process.

Herein, some important suggestions are made such as: i) the need to reword the teachings of Vatican I regarding primacy and infallibility ii) a clearer distinction made between the different responsibilities of the Bishop of Rome, especially between his patriarchal ministry in the Church of the West and his ministry in the communion of Churches, both West and East iii) strengthening synodality in the Latin church d) fostering *conciliar fellowship between the different leaders of the churches*. The final aim is to look for a renewed exercise of the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome that can be

recognized by all as Pope John Paul II desired (Ut Unum Sint n.95): an exercise of authority in service to the communion of the Churches. There is the need to appreciate that collegiality and synodality are connected while recognizing the mutual dimensions of primacy and synodality which are bound to affect both the local and universal church. Evidently, the Petrine ministry must be seen as central to a synodal church focusing on the relationship between the See of Peter and the Churches of the world which the *present document formally confirms*. The point is not to lord papal primacy over others but rather to seek how the ministry of the Pope can be exercised in the service of the synodality (“walking together”) of all Christian Churches: a kind of prism for understanding the relationships within a reconciled and re-united Church, characterized not by superiority but by fraternity, not by clericalism but by co-responsibility. It means, as the document says: “*putting one’s unique Charism at the service of the many diverse charisms that make up the Body as a whole*”. However, it should never be forgotten that spiritual ecumenism is the soul of the ecumenical movement with unity being a gift of the Holy Spirit to be received by the universal Church through conversion and appropriate renewal of all churches.

Fr. Leopold Ratnasekera OMI.

Published in the Catholic Messenger, 18th August 2024.

The Symbols of the Flood Narrative

(Genesis 6, 5 – 9,17)

Prof. Shirley Lal Wijesinghe

Genesis 6, 5 - 9,17 has been considered a harmonised version of two different independent flood stories of the Yahwistic (J) and Priestly (P) Traditions. But recent studies have shown that the narrative is a P text combined with late post-priestly fragments ascribed to J. In other words, the narrative is basically a P text with later J style additions. The arguments in favour of this position are based on the observation that the vocabulary found in the sections traditionally ascribed to J is basically P terminology, and the fact that the flood story is the only text which is said to be a harmonization of J and P, whereas in other composite texts, J and P texts are placed side by side with each other, such as in Exod 14 and Num 13-14 (Ska, 1994: 37-62).

The text could be divided as follows:

1. The situation of the earth before the flood (Gen 6,5-13)
2. The construction of the ark (6,14-22) and the preparation for the departure (Gen 7,1-9)
3. The flood (Gen 7,10-12)
4. The end of the flood (Gen 8,1-2. 5. 13-14)
5. The new order of the universe (Gen 8,1-17; 9,1-7) (Ska, 1986: 40-42).

The flood narrative begins by explaining the situation of the earth before the flood: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6,5). In 6,11-12 we read: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” There are resonances of this situation in the prophetic literature: violence (ḥms) – e.g. Isa 53,9; 60,18; Jer 6,7; 20,8; 22,3; Ezek 7,23; 28,16; 45,9; being corrupt (šḥt) – e.g. Isa 1,14; Jer 6,28; 13,7; 18,4; Ezek 16,17; 20,44; 23,11; 28,17.

Water: The waters of the flood symbolize death, in this story, the flood waters wipe away a generation of violent people who were corrupt. In the Bible, water symbolizes both life and death. While springs of water symbolize life, waters of a flood symbolize death. In the context of Gen 6,5-9,17 water symbolizes death, it destroys evil from the face of the earth. “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die” (Gen 6,17).

Dimensions of the Ark: The length, breadth and height of the ark are given by God. Its length is 300 cubits, breadth 50 cubits and the height 30 cubits. The basic numbers of these dimensions are 3 and 5. The ark is constructed with 3 decks. It is interesting to compare the dimensions of the ark with the measures of the Tabernacle (Exod 26), Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 6), and Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple (Ezek 41). The basic numbers of the measures of the Tabernacle, Solomon’s temple and Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple are also 3 and 5. Solomon’s temple is constructed with 3 floors, and Ezekiel’s vision is also about a new temple with 3 floors. The three floors represent the three parts of the universe, namely, heaven, earth and the underworld. The form of the ark is rectangular with four sides or four cardinal points. It is also a cosmic symbol of the universe with four directions. The dimensions of the ark insinuate that the ark is a temple more than a ship. The ark houses human beings (Noah’s family) and animals, and represents the three parts of the universe. In other words, the ark is a microcosm.

The Calendar of the Flood:

- In seven days, I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights (Gen 7,10).
 - After seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth (7,10).
 - In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month on the seventeenth day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened (7,11).
 - Rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights (7,12).
 - The flood continued forty days (7,17).
 - The waters prevailed upon the earth hundred and fifty days or five months, i.e., in the six hundredth year, seventeenth day of the seventh month of Noah's life (7,24).
 - At the end of a hundred and fifty days (8,3).
 - The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen, i.e., in the six hundredth year, first day of the tenth month of Noah's life (8,5).
 - At the end of forty days ... Noah sent forth a raven (8,6-7).
 - He waited another seven days (8,10).
 - He waited another seven days (8,12).
 - In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month the waters were dried from off the earth (8,13).
 - In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry, i.e., in the six hundred and first year, in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month (8,14).
- The flood begins in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month on the seventeenth day, and ends in the six hundred and first year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month. In other words, the duration of the flood is one year and ten days, probably 12 lunar months and ten days or $[(29 \times 6) + (30 \times 6)]$ 354 + 10 days or 364 days. If this is meant by the narrative, the duration of the

flood is one solar year. The end of the deluge marks a new beginning of the universe and humankind, coinciding with six hundred and first year of Noah's life or at the beginning of the seventh century of Noah's life. Number seven is highlighted here.

In the calendar of the flood the numbers three, seven, forty, five and ten are significant. Number **three**: the three levels of the ark point to the three levels of the cosmos – the heaven, earth and underworld. Number **seven** refers to the week, the ark which was a 'microcosm' was built in seven days (7,4.10); there are three periods of seven days after the flood (8,10.12); the universe was created in seven days (Gen 1,1-2,4a); the universe was recreated in three periods of seven days. Number **forty** marks the time for change and transformation, symbolically a generation lasts for forty years. In forty days, all living beings of the earth were blotted out from the face of the earth (7,23), and at the end of the flood after forty days Noah opened the window of the ark and sent forth a raven. When the flood waters receded, the earth and conditions of life on earth reappeared, the earth has been transformed and recreated. Numbers **five and ten** are numbers of perfection. After hundred and fifty days or five months 'God remembered Noah', at the same time the ark came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat (8,1-4). The tops of the mountains appeared on the first day of the tenth month. For the ancients, the mountains tops were sacred places where the world of gods and the world of human beings met or where the heaven and earth were in contact and where human beings met divine beings.

The Birds – the Raven and the Dove

In the flood story, the symbolism of the raven is positive, possibly seen as a solar symbol. When the raven flew to and fro, the waters dried up. "At the end of forty days Noah

opened the window of the ark which he had made, and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth” (Gen 8,6-7). The raven functions like the sun drying the flood waters. The dove is a symbol of love, of fertility, of a new beginning. In Ancient West Asia the dove comes back after the winter and announces the beginning of summer time (Song 2,11-12. 14). It is a symbol of the spiritualization of love and fertility.

Mount Ararat

The mountain is the place of encounter and communication between heaven and the earth. In the story of Noah, Mount Ararat is the highest mountain of the world. At the end of the flood, the ark rested on the top of Ararat. “The image is very powerful and quite usual: the high mountain with the ark on its top is the ‘cosmic mountain’, where every life began, and the ark is a ‘temple’ on the top of that cosmic mountain. Life comes down from that mountain to fill the earth again. The cosmic mountain is the first one that emerged from the waters of chaos; here the waters of chaos are the waters of the flood” (Ska, 1987: 45).

The Rainbow

“When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen 9,14-15). The rainbow symbolizes the union between heaven and the earth, between God and human beings. It is a symbol of reconciliation between God and the universe. It is the sign of the covenant between God and every living creature.

Conclusion

The flood story in Genesis 6,5-9,17 is a Priestly narrative with late Yahwistic additions. After presenting the basic division of the narrative, we discussed the meaning of water, the dimensions of the ark, the calendar of the flood, the birds, Mount Ararat and the rainbow. The interpretation of these

symbols embedded in the narrative is important to understand the meaning and message of the text. The earth was filled with violence. Through a partial return to the situation before God created the world, he re-created it. The narrator of the flood story takes the reader through creation to de-creation by the waters of the flood and from de-creation to the re-creation of the universe.

For Reference and Further Reading

CAMPBELL, A.F. – O'BRIEN, M. *Sources of the Pentateuch. Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis 1989) 25-27, 95-97.

COATS, G.W. *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 1; Grand Rapids, MI) 73-84.

DAMROSCH, D. *The Narrative Covenant. Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (New York 1987) 88-143.

GUNKEL, H. *Genesis* (Mercer Library of Biblical Studies; Macon, GA 1997) 60-79, 138-151.

HOLLOWAY, S. "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology", *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1991) 328-355.

MAHER, M. *Genesis* (Old Testament Message 2: Wilmington, DE 1982) 63-75.

MCEVENUE, S.E. *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* (AnBib 50; Rome 1971) 22-89.

NORSKER, A. "Genesis 6,5-9,17: A Rewritten Babylonian Flood Myth", *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 29/1 (2015) 55-62.

SCULLION, J.J. *Genesis, A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers* (Old Testament Studies; Collegeville, MN, 1992) 65-84.

- SKA, J.-L. “El relato del diluvio. Un relato sacerdotal y algunos fragmentos redaccionales posteriores”, *Estudios Bíblicos* 52 (1994) 37-62 = “The Story of the Flood: A Priestly Writer and Some Later Editorial Fragments” *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch. Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Tübingen 2009) 1-22.
- SKA, J.-L. *Genesis 1-11* (Rome 1986, Unpublished) 38-45.
- SPEISER, G.A. *Genesis. Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB; Garden City, NY 1964) 47-59.
- VAWTER, B. *On Genesis. A New Reading* (London 1977) 109-137.
- VON RAD, G. *Genesis. A Commentary* (OTL; London 1972) 116-134.
- WENHAM, G.J. “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative” *VT* 28 (1978) 336-348.
- WÉNIN, A. *Da Adamo ad Abramo o l’errare dell’uomo. Lettura narrativa e antropologica della Genesi. 1. Gen 1,1-12,4* (Bologna 2008) 93-117.
- WESTERMANN, C. *Genesis 1-11. A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis 1984) 384-447.
- WIJESINGHE, S.L. *Primeval History, Patriarchs and Matriarchs* (Krisansa 5; Colombo 2019) 43-47.

Pope Francis to the priests in East Timor

In a culture where priests are highly revered – leading an ongoing denial by many Catholics of a shameful record of clergy abuse on the part of some of its most senior prelates – the Pope told those on hand in the Cathedral that they must avoid corruption, pride and power and not to see their ministries as “superior to the people.”

- Christopher White, Vatican Correspondent, NCR

“Human Dignity”

Vatican issues a new Declaration

The Doctrine of the Faith Dicastery of the Vatican has promulgated a new declaration on the dignity of the human person, entitled: “*Dignitas Infinita*” (Infinite Dignity) on 2nd April 2024 which Pope Francis had approved and ordered publication on 25th March. It is the final text of 66 paragraphs that has been worked upon for over five years. In addition to all that has been said in the previous papal documents such as the social encyclicals of the Popes beginning from Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the insights of Vatican II documents on Human Dignity and “*Gaudium et Spes*” (Church in the world) and the most recent documents from Pope Francis such as “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (Joy of the Gospel) in Nov. 2013 and “*Fratelli Tutti*” (All Brothers) in October 2020, the present declaration aims at showing *the gravity and centrality of human dignity in Christian thought*. It goes on to describe the various facets of human dignity sometimes lost sight of today and to help us recognize the harmony and richness of the thought about human dignity that flows from the Gospel. In its initial three sections, it draws attention to the frequent confusion that surrounds the use of the term “dignity” with the fourth section presenting some current and problematic situations in which *this inalienable dignity due to every human being is not sufficiently recognized*. The condemnation of these grave and current violations of human dignity is a necessary measure for neither can faith be separated from the defense of human dignity nor evangelization from the promotion of a dignified life and spirituality from a

commitment to the dignity of every human being. Furthermore, the Church affirms and renews the primacy of the human person and the defense of his or her dignity beyond every circumstance viz human dignity transcends all outward appearances and specific aspects of people's lives and exists beyond all circumstances. *It is a Gospel value that has implications in the cultural, social and political spheres.* The Church has always taken upon herself to defend the inviolable dignity of the human person as central to her mission.

Biblical Foundations

Human dignity is highlighted in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament, beginning from man being created to the image and likeness of God, (Genesis) followed by the historical books like Exodus and Deuteronomy which emphasize how God cares for the poor and the oppressed. Prophets continue on the same strain crying for social justice. In the prayer of Israel too, the Psalms there is reference to freeing the weak and the needy from the hands of the wicked. There is a clear exaltation of the human person in the life and work of Jesus. He broke down cultural and cultic barriers, restoring dignity to those who were "rejected" or were considered to be on the margins of society, such as tax collectors, women, children, lepers, the sick, strangers, and widows. Paul continued the gospel tradition of making no differences based on social status, gender or ethnicity and race. He proclaimed a society based on love as he did with Roman and Corinthian believers. He was the apostle to the uncircumcised: *the gentiles* and thus

extending the boundaries of Christianity as a cross-cultural religion. In the history of Christian thought there is the highest of St. Aquinas for whom a person is “an individual substance of a rational nature”. Then followed the Christian humanism of the Renaissance period and the idea of personalism later. This document says that amidst this evolution some Christian thinkers have succeeded building a vision of the human person that can validly dialogue with all the currents of thought prevalent at the present time, whatever their inspiration, even Post-modernism. It has to be emphasized that human dignity is not something granted or bestowed on the person by others based on their gifts or qualities, such that it could be withdrawn. Instead, human dignity is intrinsic to the person: it is not conferred subsequently, it is prior to any recognition, and it cannot be lost. *All human beings possess this same intrinsic dignity, regardless of whether or not they can express it in a suitable manner.* This includes the freedom of thought and conscience both personal and communal. The revealed Word of God and reason itself well attest to the above data.

Church proclaims Human Dignity

The Church proclaims, promotes and guarantees human dignity based on three convictions. First, revelation shows how the integral person of a human being is the indelible image and likeness of God coming from the love of the creator. It also includes the body that will share one day the soul’s glory in the divine beatitude. Secondly, Christ has elevated human dignity through his own incarnation and in his identifying with the poor and

the despised. The document declares that we see introduced here a new principle in history which has changed the face of the world namely, that *individuals are even more “worthy” of our respect and love when they are weak, scorned, or suffering, even to the point of losing the human “figure”*. It has given life to institutions taking care of those who are in disadvantaged conditions, such as abandoned infants, orphans, the elderly who are left without assistance, the mentally ill, people with incurable diseases or severe deformities, and those living on the streets. The fullness of human dignity finally flows from the mystery of the Resurrection that pledges eternal life to all those created in divine image and likeness. St. Irenaeus of the second century put it so well: “The glory of God is a man alive....but the life of man consists in the vision of God”

Conversely, each person must also strive to live up to the full measure of their dignity by using his freedom appropriately, thus living up to the fullness of its dignity. In light of this, one can understand *how sin can wound and obscure human dignity, as it is an act contrary to that dignity*. Even reason can fall prey to its distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person. Such misuse of reason, after all, was what gave rise to the slave trade in the first place and to many other social evils. Here one needs to defend the role of religion and faith as a necessary corrective to avoid this pitfall.

Foundational Principles for defense of Human Dignity

The middle section of the Vatican document lays down the binding principles on which one can affirm unconditionally and defend human dignity. Of course it refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN General Assembly on 10th Dec. 1948 (especially Preface & art.1). Hence, there should be an unconditional respect for human dignity coupled with its defense based on the constitutive demands of shared human nature, which do not depend on individual arbitrariness or social recognition. Often nowadays, the whole idea is being misused to justify an arbitrary proliferation of new rights, many of which contravene the fundamental right to life. A self-referential and individualistic freedom that claims to create its own values regardless of the objective norms of the good and of our relationship with other living beings is a slur on the dignity of the human person. And so, it is incumbent on humans to care for the environment, taking particular account of the human ecology that preserves their very existence. *Moral relativism* is no key for peaceful coexistence. On the contrary, it is actually the origin of divisions and the denial of the dignity of human beings. Besides, there are certain cultural, socio-economic and political factors that facilitate the exercise of personal freedom. *Market economy* and efficiency alone will endanger fraternity. Fortunately, there is an increasing progress in understanding human dignity in the present efforts to eradicate racism, slavery, and the marginalization of women, children, the sick, and people

with disabilities thanks to it being bolstered under the influence of the Christian faith continuing to be a ferment, even in increasingly secularized societies. However, the declaration notes that the arduous journey of advancing human dignity remains far from being completed.

Threats to Human Dignity today

The above presentation is followed by signaling out a series of specific and grave instances where human dignity is brazenly violated with its fundamental imperatives, rights and freedoms (nn 35-62). *This long shocking list of fourteen is as follows:* the drama of poverty, the tragedy of war, travail of migrants and human trafficking, sexual abuse and violence against women, abortion and the “deplorable practice of surrogate motherhood which violates the dignity of both the child and the woman, euthanasia and assisted suicide, the marginalization of the disabled, the gender theory, sex change and lastly digital violence. All these contravene *the dignity of human persons based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of their being. The declaration insists that unless this basic principle is upheld, there will be no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity.* Vatican II council has shown amply that all offenses against life itself, against the integrity of human person and offenses against human dignity are unacceptable. Death penalty, oppressive conditions in prisons and torture too are mentioned as instances of human dignity violations. There is no need to elaborate more on these violations for they are self-explanatory.

Though many steps have been taken in response to the UN charter on human rights, the declaration notes that the commitment to human rights is never finished. “In this spirit, the Church, with the present Declaration, ardently urges that respect for the dignity of the human person beyond all circumstances be placed at the center of the commitment to the common good and at the center of every legal system. Indeed, respect for the dignity of each person is the indispensable basis for the existence of any society that claims to be founded on just law and not on the force of power. Acknowledging human dignity forms the basis for upholding fundamental human rights, which precede and ground all civic coexistence” (n 64). The actual realization of human dignity, which the declaration professes to be *infinite* is the responsibility of every person and community not to mention the duty of the States “not only to protect human dignity but also to guarantee the conditions necessary for it to flourish in the integral promotion of the human person”. The Church continues to encourage the promotion of the dignity of every human person, regardless of their physical, mental, cultural, social, and religious characteristics, drawing from the power of the Risen Christ, who has fully revealed the integral dignity of every man and woman.

Fr. Leopold Ratnasekera OMI.

(Published in the *Catholic Messenger*, July 7, 2024, Pg. 10)

The Transformative Power of the Eucharist in the Seminaries: Shaping Religious Formation

Fr. Danushka Silva CMF

(Director, St. Claret Minor Seminary, 90, Baseline Rd.,
Kattuwa, Negombo)

Introduction

The Eucharist, central to Christian worship, signifies the commemoration of Jesus Christ's Last Supper with his disciples. Rooted in the New Testament, particularly the Gospel accounts, Jesus institutes the Eucharist during the Passover meal, declaring the bread as his body and the wine as his blood, urging followers to partake in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The Catholic Church, guided by Church documents such as the Council of Trent's "Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," affirms the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist—transubstantiation—the transformation of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ.

Papal writings further underscore the significance of the Eucharist. Pope Paul VI's *"Mysterium Fidei"* emphasizes the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, stressing its role in fostering unity among believers. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *"Ecclesia de Eucharistia,"* underscores the Eucharist as the "source and summit of the Christian life," highlighting its transformative power in shaping individuals and communities.

The Eucharist, beyond a symbolic ritual, is viewed as a sacred mystery that deepens the believer's connection with the divine. Rooted in biblical teachings and fortified by doctrinal affirmations and papal pronouncements, the Eucharist stands as a cornerstone of Christian faith, uniting worshipers in the solemn remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and nurturing spiritual growth within the Church.

The Imperative of Religious Formation in Seminaries

Religious formation in seminaries assumes a critical role in shaping missionaries who embody the teachings and values of the Church. Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation "*Evangelii Gaudium*," highlights the importance of forming missionary disciples who are rooted in deep spirituality, intellectual rigor, and pastoral sensitivity. He stresses that effective seminary formation is essential for nurturing shepherds who can lead with humility and compassion.

Furthermore, Pope Francis, in "*Veritatis Gaudium*," highlights the centrality of theological education within seminaries, emphasizing the integration of faith and reason. The document emphasizes the need for seminarians to engage with contemporary challenges, fostering a holistic formation that equips them for the complexities of modern ministry.

Hence, the formation in seminaries is not merely an academic exercise but a transformative journey, ensuring that missionaries who come out from the seminaries are well-prepared to address the spiritual and

pastoral needs of the Church. The significance of this formation lies in its capacity to shape future leaders who can authentically and effectively guide the faithful in the footsteps of Christ.

The Transformative Role of the Eucharist in Shaping Seminary Formation

The Eucharist stands as a pivotal force in the religious formation of seminarians. Pope Benedict XVI, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation "*Sacramentum Caritatis*," explains the profound impact of the Eucharist on the formation of clergy. He stresses that seminarians, by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, enter into a transformative encounter with Christ, deepening their spiritual identity and fostering a profound sense of communion with the Church. Through active participation in the Eucharistic liturgy, seminarians are not only nourished spiritually but also undergo a transformative process that molds their character, fostering virtues essential for effective pastoral ministry.

The Eucharist serves as a sacramental catalyst, instilling humility, selflessness, and a deep sense of service within seminarians. By internalizing the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, future clergy are prepared to emulate Christ's example in their pastoral roles, embodying the virtues inherent in their sacred vocation. In essence, the Eucharist plays a central and transformative role in shaping the religious formation of seminarians.

1.Theological Foundations in Seminary Formation

Emphasis on sacramental theology in seminary curriculum

The emphasis on sacramental theology within seminary curriculum is rooted in the rich theological tapestry woven through the New Testament, Church documents, and papal writings. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commissions his disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), laying the foundation for the sacramental life of the Church. The sacraments, as visible signs of God's grace reflecting Christ's redemptive work.

Church documents, such as the Council of Trent's "Decree on the Most Holy Sacraments," reaffirm the sacraments as efficacious channels of divine grace. Seminary curriculum, influenced by such doctrinal foundations, places sacramental theology at its core, ensuring seminarians comprehend the theological underpinnings of the sacraments and their transformative impact on the Christian life.

By grounding seminarians in sacramental theology, the curriculum enables them to grasp the sacraments not merely as rituals but as profound encounters with God's grace. This theological foundation equips future missionaries to administer the sacraments with reverence, understanding, and a deep awareness of their transformative power in the lives of the faithful.

The Eucharist as a central focus in theological education

The Eucharist emerges as a central focus in theological education through its profound theological, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions. Grounded in the New Testament, where Jesus institutes the Eucharist during the Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20), its theological significance becomes foundational for Christian thought. Theology, as an academic discipline, delves into the doctrinal footings of the Eucharist, exploring concepts like transubstantiation, the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, and its implications for Christian belief.

Papal encyclicals feature the centrality of the Eucharist in theological education. Pope Benedict XVI, in his apostolic exhortation "*Sacramentum Caritatis*," stresses the importance of the Eucharist in forming a Eucharistic spirituality and fostering a deeper understanding of the Church's mission. The Eucharist is not merely a topic of study but a lived reality that shapes the theological worldview of seminarians.

In theological education, seminarians are led beyond theoretical knowledge to a lived experience of the Eucharist. Liturgical studies and pastoral training integrate the sacrament, allowing students to appreciate its spiritual significance and practical implications for pastoral ministry. Thus, the Eucharist becomes the heartbeat of theological education, pulsating with the richness of Christian doctrine, spirituality, and the

practical application of faith in the service of the Church and its people.

1.Eucharist as a Spiritual Anchor

The Eucharist as a source of spiritual nourishment for seminarians

The Eucharist stands as a profound source of spiritual nourishment for seminarians. In the New Testament, Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). This proclamation underscores the Eucharist as a unique encounter with the divine, offering sustenance for the journey of faith.

Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation "*Evangelii Gaudium*," emphasize the transformative power of the Eucharist in sustaining the spiritual life of seminarians. The Holy Father encourages a deep, personal connection with Christ through the Eucharist, recognizing it as the source of joy and strength for those preparing for religious ministry.

As seminarians actively participating in the Eucharistic celebration, they experience a profound communion with Christ, finding in the sacrament the spiritual nourishment necessary for their formation. This sacred encounter fosters a deepening of their relationship with God, providing the sustaining grace and wisdom needed as they progress in their journey toward religious life. The Eucharist, as both a theological concept and a

lived reality, becomes a vital wellspring of spiritual sustenance for seminarians, shaping their identities and equipping them for the sacred responsibilities of their future ministry.

Role of regular Eucharistic participation in grounding seminarians in their faith

The regular participation in the Eucharist plays a pivotal role in grounding seminarians in their faith. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus instructs his disciples, "Take, eat; this is my body," and "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:26, 27-28). These words underscore the transformative nature of the Eucharist, inviting seminarians to partake regularly in this sacred meal for a deepening communion with Christ.

Pope Benedict XVI's *"Sacramentum Caritatis,"* highlights the Eucharist as the "source and summit" of the Christian life. Regular participation in the Eucharist becomes a spiritual anchor for seminarians, grounding them in the core of their Christian identity. Pope Francis, in *"Evangelii Gaudium,"* emphasizes the importance of encountering Christ through the Eucharist, stating that it "nourishes us from within."

For seminarians, frequent engagement with the Eucharist fosters a continual encounter with the living Christ, reinforcing their faith, and grounding them in the spiritual disciplines essential for their vocation. This regular participation becomes a foundational practice, instilling a profound sense of identity, purpose, and

spiritual resilience as they navigate their journey towards religious life.

Fostering a deep connection with God through the Eucharistic experience

The Eucharistic experience serves as a powerful channel for fostering a deep connection with God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). This proclamation highlights the Eucharist as a sacred encounter where believers find sustenance for their spiritual hunger and thirst.

Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation "Sacrament of Love," emphasize the Eucharist as an intimate communion with God. The Holy Father stresses that the Eucharistic experience is a profound moment of encounter with Christ's love, inviting believers into a personal relationship with the divine.

Through the Eucharistic experience, individuals, including seminarians, enter into a sacred dialogue with God. As they partake in the ritual, consuming the consecrated elements, they draw closer to the divine presence. This intimate connection becomes a wellspring of spiritual nourishment, cultivating a sense of closeness to God that permeates their entire lives. The Eucharist, as both a symbolic and tangible experience, serves as a transformative means for individuals to deepen their

connection with the divine, fostering a profound and enduring relationship with God.

1. Community Building through the Eucharist: Eucharist as a communal act of worship in seminaries

The Eucharist in seminaries transcends mere ritual, evolving into a communal act of worship deeply rooted in biblical principles. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus proclaims, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). This New Testament insight underscores the communal nature of worship, laying the foundation for the Eucharist as a shared experience in seminaries.

Recent papal documents, such as Pope Benedict XVI's "*Sacramentum Caritatis*," emphasize the communal dimension of the Eucharist. The Holy Father highlights that in the Eucharistic celebration, the Church becomes a visible sign of unity, gathering believers in a shared act of worship. This communal aspect is particularly poignant in the formation of future clergy.

In the seminaries, the Eucharist becomes a unifying force, bringing together seminarians, faculty, and staff as a spiritual community. This shared worship experience not only deepens individual spiritual journeys but also fosters a sense of unity and fraternity essential for those preparing for ministry. The Eucharist, as a communal act of worship in seminaries, echoes the biblical call to gather in Christ's name, creating a sacred space where individuals collectively encounter the divine and strengthen the bonds of their spiritual community.

Impact of shared Eucharistic celebrations on the seminary community

Shared Eucharistic celebrations wield a transformative influence within the seminary community, fostering a profound sense of unity, fraternity, and spiritual cohesion. As seminarians and faculty gather to partake in the Eucharist, they collectively enter into a sacred space where individual differences fade, and a communal identity as followers of Christ is reinforced.

The impact of shared Eucharistic celebrations extends beyond the chapel, influencing the ethos of the entire seminary. Through these communal acts of worship, relationships are nurtured, creating a fraternity among seminarians that transcends academic and personal differences. The shared experience of receiving the Eucharist becomes a unifying force, reinforcing a sense of purpose and shared mission among those preparing for ministry.

1.Eucharist and Discernment: The role of the Eucharist in discerning one's vocation

The Eucharist plays a pivotal role in the discernment of one's vocation, guiding individuals on the path to missionary life. In "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*," Pope John Paul II features the significance of the Eucharist in the formation of priests/religious. The document highlights that the Eucharist is not only a source of grace but also a privileged place for discerning and confirming one's vocation.

Through active participation in the Eucharistic celebration, individuals contemplating missionary life immerse themselves in a profound encounter with Christ. The Holy Eucharist becomes a sacred space where discernment is nurtured, and the call to serve God's people is clarified. The Eucharistic liturgy, as both a source of spiritual nourishment and a moment of intimate communion with the Lord, aids in the discernment process by fostering a deep sense of unity with the Church and its mission.

In the quiet moments of reflection and prayer surrounding the Eucharist, individuals discerning their vocation find clarity and inspiration. The document acknowledges that the Eucharist, as the "sacrament of discernment," provides spiritual sustenance, grounding those on the path to missionary life in a profound awareness of their call. Ultimately, the Eucharist serves as a guiding light, illuminating the journey of discernment and confirming the vocational calling to serve the Church as missionaries.

Eucharistic Experiences and Vocational Clarity for Seminarians

In the quiet reverence of the Eucharistic celebration, seminarians immerse themselves in the sacrament, seeking clarity about their vocation. Eucharistic experiences offer seminarians a profound sense of purpose and mission. As they participate in the sacrament, they discern the call to serve the Church with a heightened awareness of their vocation. The Eucharist, through its

transformative power, becomes a guiding force, bringing clarity to the vocational journey of seminarians and preparing them for a life dedicated to the missionary life.

1.Eucharist and Moral Formation:Eucharist as a catalyst for moral and ethical development

The Eucharist emerges as a powerful catalyst for moral and ethical development. In the Gospel of John, Jesus imparts, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them" (John 6:56). This communion in the Eucharist fosters a profound union with Christ, becoming a transformative force for moral growth.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical "*Laudato Si'*," emphasizes the interconnectedness of the Eucharist with ethical living. The document underscores that the Eucharist is a source of strength, inspiring believers to embrace a sense of responsibility for the environment and social justice.

The Eucharist serves as a communal reminder of Christ's selfless sacrifice, challenging individuals to emulate these virtues in their lives. Regular participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes a sacramental commitment to moral excellence, promoting virtues such as love, humility, and selflessness. Through the reception of the Eucharist, believers are called to embody the teachings of Christ in their interactions with others, contributing to the moral fabric of society.

The Eucharist's Influence on Virtue Cultivation in Seminarians

The Eucharist holds a transformative influence on cultivating virtues in seminarians, shaping them into compassionate and virtuous future missionaries. The Gospel of John (13:34-35) records Jesus' command to love one another as He has loved, a lesson reemphasized through the Eucharist. By partaking in the sacrament, seminarians immerse themselves in Christ's selfless sacrifice, inspiring a commitment to emulate virtues such as love, humility, and service in their own lives.

Papal documents, including Pope Benedict XVI's "*Sacramentum Caritatis*," highlight the Eucharist's role in fostering virtues. The Holy Father stresses that the Eucharist nourishes the Christian life, providing the spiritual sustenance necessary for the cultivation of virtues.

Regular participation in the Eucharistic celebration becomes a formative practice for seminarians, instilling virtues crucial for pastoral ministry. Humility, compassion, and a sense of self-sacrifice are nurtured as seminarians internalize the Eucharistic message of Christ's love and service.

Integrating Eucharistic Teachings into Seminary Decision-Making

Integrating Eucharistic teachings into ethical decision-making in seminary life involves applying the transformative principles derived from the Eucharist to guide moral choices and actions. In this process, the

Eucharist becomes a blueprint for ethical conduct in seminary communities.

Papal documents, including Pope John Paul II's "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*" and Pope Francis's "*Laudato Si'*," emphasize the ethical dimensions of the Eucharist. They highlight the inseparable link between the Eucharist and a commitment to justice, compassion, and environmental stewardship. Integrating these teachings into seminary life requires a conscious effort to align decision-making processes with the ethical imperatives derived from the Eucharistic celebration.

In practical terms, seminarians and faculty can draw upon Eucharistic teachings when faced with ethical dilemmas, considering questions such as: What action reflects selfless love and service? How can decisions contribute to the well-being of the community? By actively integrating Eucharistic teachings into ethical decision-making, seminary life becomes a reflection of the transformative power of the sacrament, fostering an environment where virtuous choices and moral discernment are deeply intertwined with the Eucharistic ethos.

1.Challenges and Opportunities:Navigating Challenges in Integrating the Eucharist into Seminary Formation

Implementing the Eucharist in seminary formation, while a central and essential aspect of religious education,

is not without its challenges. Some key challenges include:

Liturgical and Pastoral Sensitivity: Balancing the regularity and significance of Eucharistic celebrations with the diverse spiritual needs and backgrounds of seminarians can be challenging. Ensuring that the liturgy is inclusive while maintaining the richness of the Eucharistic tradition requires pastoral sensitivity.

Theological Understanding: Seminarians may have varying levels of theological understanding and appreciation for the Eucharist. Addressing these differences in comprehension and fostering a deeper theological appreciation can be a challenge in a diverse seminary environment.

Logistical Considerations: Coordinating frequent Eucharistic celebrations within the seminary schedule, especially considering the demands of academic studies and pastoral training, can pose logistical challenges. Balancing the frequency of the Eucharist with other formative activities requires careful planning.

Cultural and Ecumenical Contexts: In a globalized and ecumenical seminary setting, integrating diverse cultural expressions and accommodating different liturgical traditions related to the Eucharist can be complex. Respecting and incorporating various cultural aspects while maintaining the integrity of the sacrament can be challenging.

Personal and Spiritual Readiness: Some seminarians may face personal struggles or spiritual dryness that can affect their readiness to fully engage in the Eucharistic celebration. Pastoral support and guidance are essential to address individual challenges and foster a deeper spiritual engagement.

Theological Controversies: Historical and contemporary theological debates surrounding the Eucharist, such as the nature of transubstantiation, can create challenges in presenting a unified understanding within the seminary community. Navigating these theological complexities requires careful theological education and open dialogue.

Liturgy Formation: Proper formation in the liturgical aspects of the Eucharist, including the rubrics, prayers, and rituals, is essential. Inadequate liturgical formation can hinder the seminarians' full and active participation in the sacrament.

Despite these challenges, a thoughtful and holistic approach to the integration of the Eucharist in seminary formation, incorporating pastoral care, theological education, and cultural sensitivity, can contribute to a rich and transformative spiritual journey for seminarians.

Maximizing Opportunities for Transformative Eucharistic Impact in Seminaries

Enhancing the transformative impact of the Eucharist in seminaries involves recognizing and maximizing opportunities for deeper spiritual formation. Some key opportunities include:

Eucharistic Catechesis: Offering comprehensive and ongoing catechesis on the theology and significance of the Eucharist provides seminarians with a profound understanding of the sacrament, enriching their participation and fostering a deeper spiritual connection.

Liturgical Formation: Providing thorough liturgical formation ensures that seminarians are well-versed in the rubrics, prayers, and rituals of the Eucharistic celebration. This enables them to engage more fully in the liturgy, enhancing the transformative experience.

Regular Eucharistic Adoration: Incorporating regular Eucharistic adoration sessions allows seminarians to spend focused time in silent contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament. This practice deepens personal prayer, reflection, and the sense of intimacy with Christ.

Sacramental Preparation Programs: Structured programs for the preparation and reception of the sacraments, including the Eucharist, can create intentional moments for spiritual growth. This includes facilitating the sacrament of reconciliation, emphasizing the importance of a clear conscience.

Integration into Pastoral Formation: Linking Eucharistic spirituality with pastoral formation reinforces the practical implications of the sacrament in pastoral ministry. This integration can enhance seminarians' understanding of how the Eucharist informs their service to the Church and community.

Retreats and Spiritual Exercises: Incorporating Eucharistic-focused retreats and spiritual exercises provides dedicated time for reflection, prayer, and spiritual renewal. Retreats centered on the Eucharist offer opportunities for seminarians to deepen their relationship with Christ.

Emphasis on Eucharistic Devotions: Encouraging seminarians to engage in various Eucharistic devotions, such as the Holy Hour or Benediction, creates additional avenues for experiencing the transformative power of the Eucharist outside of the regular Mass setting.

Cultivating a Eucharistic Spirituality: Fostering a holistic Eucharistic spirituality involves integrating the teachings of the Eucharist into daily life, encouraging seminarians to live the values exemplified in the sacrament through acts of charity, humility, and self-sacrifice.

Formation in Eucharistic Ethics: Expanding ethical formation to include a focus on the principles derived from the Eucharist, such as selflessness and love, equips seminarians with a framework for ethical decision-making in various aspects of their lives.

By capitalizing on these and many other opportunities, seminaries can create an environment where the transformative impact of the Eucharist is maximized, contributing to the holistic spiritual development of seminarians preparing for ministry.

Conclusion

We have delved into the essential role of the Eucharist in shaping the religious formation of future clergy in seminaries. As we recapitulate the key points, it becomes evident that the transformative influence of the Eucharist extends far beyond mere rituals—it permeates the very essence of seminary education. The communion experience fosters spiritual growth, theological understanding, and a profound connection to the divine. Recognizing this, it is imperative that we prioritize and persist in exploring ways to seamlessly integrate the Eucharist into the fabric of seminary education. By doing so, we not only preserve a sacred tradition but also ensure that the leaders of tomorrow are deeply rooted in the spiritual nourishment that the Eucharist provides, fostering a profound and enduring impact on their ministries and the communities they serve.

.....

THE NEW PRESIDENT OF FABC

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has elected India's **Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão**, Archbishop of Goa and Daman, as its new president. The 71- year-old cardinal, president of the Latin-rite Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, will succeed Myanmar's Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, in January 2025.

POPE FRANCIS IN INDONESIA

By Christopher White

Vatican Correspondent, National Catholic Reporter

Pope Francis on Sept. 4 delivered a sharp warning that "distortion of religion" fuels extremism, intolerance and violence and urged Indonesia to double down on its long tradition of coexistence and social harmony during the first full day of his nearly [two-week tour](#) of Asia and Oceania.

"Prejudices can be eliminated and a climate of mutual respect and trust can grow," said the pope during his first address in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. "This is indispensable for meeting common challenges, including that of countering extremism and intolerance, which through the distortion of religion attempt to impose their views by using deception and violence."

With a population of nearly 280 million — about [87%](#) of whom are Muslims — the country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion and there is a longstanding government commitment to pluralism and diversity. But an [uptick](#) in religious restrictions as of late and the recent victory of President-elect Prabowo Subianto, who has a well-documented [history](#) of human rights abuses, has heightened concerns.

The pope used his remarks at Indonesia's presidential palace, in the presence of current President Joko Widodo,

to remind Indonesia — a country made up of thousands of tiny islands — that their diverse society represents a "magnificent mosaic" that can offer an example of social harmony, rather than division.

"A harmony in diversity is achieved when particular perspectives take into account the needs common to all and when each ethnic group and religious denomination acts in a spirit of fraternity, pursuing the noble goal of serving the good of all," he told a crowd of some 300 government leaders and diplomats.

"The awareness of participating in a shared history, in which solidarity is essential and contributions are made by all, helps to identify the right solutions, to avoid the exasperation of contrasts and to transform opposition into effective cooperation," the pontiff continued.

The 87-year-old Francis, who is making the longest trip of his pontificate, arrived in the country on Sept. 3 and after a brief welcome ceremony spent yesterday resting at the residence of the Vatican's ambassador to Indonesia.

But at the presidential palace on Sept. 4, the pontiff received a grand welcome that brought traffic here in one of the busiest cities in Asia to a grinding halt.

Dozens of school children in local dress enthusiastically waved at the pontiff and shouted "Welcome to Indonesia!" as his car made its way through the presidential compound. And while Francis may be here to preach a message of peace, military cannons boomed as a band played the Holy See's national anthem, prompting

hundreds of white pigeons to abandon their perches in the nearby trees and swirl above the palace and a neighboring mosque.

After taking in this spectacle, the pope and the president met privately before both delivering their official remarks, where both leaders reiterated the need for tolerance and peace.

While the pope praised Indonesia's constitution for its commitment to these values, he also said the government must match its "impressive declarations of policy" with a greater focus on social justice.

Indonesia is now one of the world's fastest growing economies, yet there are still stark divides between the rich and poor.

"A considerable part of humanity is left on the margins, without the means for a dignified existence and no defense against the serious and growing social imbalances that trigger acute conflicts," the pope said.

Here in a city where towering skyscrapers are being rapidly built next to shantytowns, the pope returned to that same theme when he met in the afternoon at the city's cathedral with the country's Catholic bishops, priests, seminarians and consecrated women and men, and where he encouraged them to embrace compassion over self-interest.

"What keeps the world going is not the calculations of self-interest, which generally end up destroying creation

and dividing communities, but offering charity to others," he said. "It makes us see things better, in the light of love."

Caring, the pope added, "is not communism."

Through a witness of charity and fraternity — not by imposition or proselytism — the church will best model the example of Christ, said the pontiff, who was frequently animated as he spoke off the cuff and energetically engaged Indonesia's Catholic community.

"Proclaiming the Gospel does not mean imposing our faith, proselytizing or placing it in opposition to that of others, but giving and sharing the joy of encountering Christ, always with great respect and fraternal affection for everyone," Francis told the crowd, imploring them to be "prophets of communion, in a world where the tendency to divide, impose and provoke each other seems to be constantly increasing."

Outside of the cathedral, hundreds of onlookers — Muslim and Catholic alike — stood in front of Jakarta's Istiqlal Mosque, hoping to get a glimpse of the pope.

In a strange harmony, their cheers were joined by both the sounds of the call to prayer coming from the mosque and wooden wind chimes being played outside the cathedral — helping to illustrate one of the pope's major themes from his ambitious journey that there is room for a wide range of diversity on this multifaceted continent.]

Oblate Institute of Higher Learning (OLHL)

(Annual Report of 2023 presented by **Fr. Asanga Viraj, OMI**,
the Director, OLHL, on November 25, 2024)

Dear Parents, Lectures of the academic Staff, Students, and Well-wishers, I am delighted to extend my heartfelt greetings to each one of you as we come together on this beautiful day.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of Catholic education, had said: “*The things that we love tell us what we are.*” We can imagine the different ways this statement can be understood when we look at our own lives and know what it is that we really love. Are they material possessions? Buying the newest car? Living in the biggest house? Or are there intangible realities that we value such as faith, knowledge and wisdom?

Today, I feel very much privileged and honored to stand in front of you all and acknowledge the achievements of our students who have made both the Oblate Institute of Higher Learning and their parents proud. This certificate-awarding ceremony is held to recognize the talents of the students. These students exhibit such qualities that will not only help them to achieve their goals but also bring the glory of success to our society. Today, we are gathered here not just to celebrate the achievements of our students, but also to give due regard to our values and morals which these awardees exemplify, like discipline, compassion, and zeal for learning.

Short History

The Oblate Institute of Higher Learning was inaugurated on May 21, 2016 when the Oblates in Sri Lanka celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Foundation of the Oblate Congregation. It was established as an umbrella institute with an immediate focus on national reconciliation and peacebuilding. However, the aim was to develop it into a fully pledged higher education institute, which could organize degrees, diploma programs, Certificate courses, retreats, seminars, and personality and skill development programs. Rev. Dr. Oswald Firth OMI was the founding Director of OIHL.

Following the directives of the 35th Oblate General Chapter in 2010, the Oblate Institutes of Higher Learning in the world are considered and valued as an essential ministry within the Oblate Mission of Evangelization. Recognizing the long experience in higher education in our Oblate Province, and the steps we had taken to establish the OIHL, we were invited to participate in the meetings organized by the International Association of the Oblate Institutes of Higher Learning (AOIHL). In 2019, OIHL Colombo became a permanent member of AOIHL.

Following the proposal of the Oblate Provincial Congress held in 2018, OIHL, which was functioning at the Centre for Society and Religion (CSR), Maradana, Colombo 10, was shifted to Dev Arana Oblate Centre, Polwatta, Minuwangoda in January 2021, having its own physical facility. Having conducted the Diploma in

Conflict Management and Peace Studies for 4 years, an evaluation took place in 2021.

I was appointed as the Director of OIHL in December 2021. Having reflected and evaluated the journey we had made and the call we had heard, OIHL came up with a new program for the academic year 2022. During the year 2023, we conducted 7 study programs: (1) a certificate Course on Bookkeeping and Accounts, (2) a Diploma course in Psychological Counselling (in Sinhala medium), (3) a Diploma course in Teacher formation, (4) an Italian Language Course, (5) Basic English Courses for the Post A/L students, (6) Basic English Courses for the Post O/L students and (7) a Diploma in English for Entrepreneurs.

OIHL also was able to conduct a few retreats, and a study session on Governance of the Temporal Goods for the Bursars and the Superiors of the Good Shepherd Sisters at Good Shepherd Convent, Nayakakanda, Wattala and a Junior Prefect Training Program for the students of St. Peter's College, Udugampola, Gampaha. With the powerful intercession of Our Blessed Mother and st. Eugene de Mazenod, our beloved Founder, we were able to conclude them with success.

During the academic year in 2023, Fr. Sampath Perera OMI and Dr. Celinta RGS Joined our academic staff to strengthen our Institution. During the academic year, with the generous contribution given by Fr. Anton Grecian OMI, our Oblate Provincial Treasurer, OIHL got the lecture hall fully air-conditioned, have a more suitable

environment for the students to study, a new conference room to conduct our meetings and a solar system.

Future Plans

With trust and confidence in the almighty, in the ever-loving maternal care of Mary Immaculate and St Eugene De Mazenod, we are planning for the 2024 academic year to update the courses and introduce a Basic computer course, a course on Human resource Management and a course on the Japanese Language, while continuing to conduct Seminars, programs on Personality and Skill development and Retreats.

We also have applied for registration with the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) of Sri Lanka in order to conduct Professional Courses and Examinations at the tertiary Level. In keeping with our vision to be the heart of innovative learning, it is our desire to serve humanity, promoting humanitarian values, knowledge, and skills in a creative way, responding to contemporary needs in the Sri Lankan Church and in the secular society.

As the Director of this esteemed institution, I thank with immense joy for the spirit of cooperation of a team of passionate educators and dedicated staff who are committed to providing the best possible educational experience to our students. Our mission is not merely to impart knowledge but to inculcate a lifelong love for learning, foster creativity, and develop essential life skills

which will empower our students to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

We firmly believe that every child is unique and possesses untapped potential, waiting to be unleashed. As such, we strive to create a nurturing and inclusive environment which encourages curiosity and exploration, allowing each student to discover their strengths and passions.

Our approach to education is rooted in the understanding that academic excellence goes hand in hand with character formation with genuine values. We emphasize the importance of personal integrity, empathy, resilience, and compassion, moulding our students to become responsible global citizens who will contribute positively to human society.

As we embrace the possibilities of technology and innovation, we also cherish the importance of traditional values and human connections. Our classrooms are not just spaces for learning but places where minds are united, dreams are nurtured, and lasting memories are formed.

To you, our dedicated and exceptional staff, I express my deep appreciation for your commitment and hard work. Your unwavering dedication to excellence and your passion for teaching play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our students.

To you, dear parents, I extend my gratitude for your constant support and trust in our mission-vision. Your involvement in your children's education and your

active participation in their activities strengthen the foundation of their achievement.

To you, dear students, I encourage you to be curious, fearless in your pursuit for knowledge and genuine passion in your interactions. Please remember that education is not just about grades but about developing a thirst for learning which will last a lifetime.

As we move forward on this journey of educational excellence, we will continue to evolve and adapt to the changing times. Our commitment to providing a safe and inspiring environment for learning remains steadfast, and we are excited to exploring new opportunities which will shape the future of education.

I invite all members of our community and well-wishers to join with us as we collectively embark on this quest for knowledge, growth, and progress. Together, let us create a future where our students can shine as beacons of hope and knowledge.

Thank you. May God bless you all.]

A loving tribute to Fr. Aloy on his 90th birthday
RENOWNED SCHOLAR AND GOOD SHEPHERD
Fr. Emmanuel Fernando, OMI



Fr. Aloysius Pieris, SJ was awarded the prestigious honorary Doctorate of Literature (D.Litt) by the Chancellor of the University of Kelaniya, the Most Venerable Welamitiyawe Dharmakirithi Sri Kusala Dhamma Thera on Nov. 23, 2019.

Jesuit Fr. Aloysius Pieris (affectionately called Fr. Aloy) celebrated his 90th birthday on April 9, 2024 and I, as the editor of our Oblate Journal, *THE MISSIONARY OBLATE* had gone to press by that time. Immediately I decided to publish an article, appreciating the untiring selfless services he continues to offer for inter-Faith dialogue, the renewal of the Catholic Church, his concern

for the poor and the suffering Sri Lankan masses and to me, the present writer.

It was in 1988, when I was appointed **Director of the Oblate Scholastics** at Ampitiya by the then Oblate Provincial Fr. Anselm Silva, that I came to know Fr. Aloy more closely. Knowing well his expertise in matters spiritual, theological, Indological and pastoral, and with the collaborative spirit of my companion-formators, our Oblate Scholastics were sent to Tulana, the Research and Encounter Centre, Kelaniya, of which he is the Founder-Director, for ‘exposure-programmes’ on matters spiritual, biblical, theological and pastoral. Some of these dimensions according to my view and that of my companion-formators, were not available at the National Seminary, Ampitiya. Ever since that time, our Oblate formators/ accompaniers at the Oblate Scholasticate, Ampitiya, have continued to send our Oblate Scholastics to Tulana Centre for deepening their insights and convictions regarding matters needed to serve the people in today’s context. Fr. Aloy also had tried very enthusiastically with the Oblate team headed by Frs. Oswald Firth and Clement Waidyasekara to begin a Theologate, directed by the Religious Congregations in Sri Lanka, for the contextual formation/ accompaniment of their members. **It should very well be a desired goal of the Leaders / Provincials of the Religious Congregations.**

NEEDED RENEWAL

Besides being a formator / accompanier at the Oblate Scholasticate, I was entrusted also with the task of editing and publishing our Oblate journal, '*The Missionary Oblate*'. To maintain the quality of the journal I continue to depend on Fr. Aloy for his thought-provoking and stimulating articles on Biblical Spirituality, Biblical Theology and Ecclesiology. I am very grateful to him for his generous assistance. Of late, his writings on renewal of the Church, initiated by Pope St. John XXIII and continued by Pope Francis through the Synodal path, published in our Oblate journal, enable our readers to focus their attention also on the needed renewal in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. Fr. Aloy appreciated very much the Synodal path adopted by the Jesuit Pope Francis for the renewal of the Church, rooted very much on prayerful discernment. In my Religious and presbyteral life, Fr. Aloy continues to be my spiritual animator / guide and ongoing formator / accompanier.

A RENOWNED SCHOLAR

Fr. Aloysius Pieris, BA Hons (Lond), LPh (SHC, India), STL (PFT, Naples), PhD (SLU/VC), ThD (Tilburg), D.Lit (KU), has been one of the eminent Asian theologians well recognized internationally and one who has lectured and held visiting chairs in many universities both in the West and in the East. Many members of Religious Congregations from Asian countries have benefitted from his lectures and guidance in the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) in Manila, Philippines.

He had been a Theologian consulted by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences for many years. During his professorship at the Gregorian University in Rome, he was called to be a member of a special group of advisers on other religions consulted by Pope Paul VI.

Fr. Aloy has a BA in Pali and Sanskrit from the University of London and a Ph.D in Buddhist Philosophy from the University of Sri Lanka, Vidyodaya Campus. On Nov. 23, 2019, he was awarded the prestigious honorary Doctorate of Literature (D.Litt) by the Chancellor of the University of Kelaniya, the Most Venerable Welamitiyawe Dharmakirithi Sri Kusala Dhamma Thera.

AUTHOR

Fr. Aloy is the author of more than 30 books and well over 500 Research Papers. Some of his books and articles have been translated and published in several countries. Among those books, one can find the following: 1) The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation (An Autobiographical Excursus on the Art of Theologising in Asia, 2) An Asian Theology of Liberation, 3) Providential Timeliness of Vatican 11 (a long-overdue halt to a scandalous millennium, 4) Give Vatican 11 a chance, 5) Leadership in the Church, 6) Relishing our faith in working for justice (Themes for study and discussion), 7) A Message meant mainly, not exclusively for Jesuits (Background information necessary for helping Francis renew the Church), 8) Lent in Lanka (Reflections and Resolutions, 9) Love meets wisdom (A Christian Experience of Buddhism, 10) Fire and Water 11) God's

Reign for God's poor, 12) Our Unhiddden Agenda (How we Jesuits work, pray and form our men).

Fr. Aloy is the editor of two journals, *Vagdevi*, Journal of Religious Reflection and *Dialogue, New Series*, an international journal on Buddhist-Christian studies and published since 1974. He is the founder-director of the Tulana Research Centre at Kelaniya since 1974 and the co-founder of Patron and Trust Board Member of Sr. Greta Nalawatta's Centre for Education of Hearing Impaired Children in Dalugama, Kelaniya since year 1982.

CONCERN FOR THE POOR

Fr. Aloy continues to be a promoter of Gospel values and virtues. Justice as a constitutive dimension of love and social concern for the downtrodden masses are very much noted in his life and work. Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ, an Associate professor of theology at Fordham University, USA, in her superb book, *Consider Christ* writes, "Aloysius Pieris (Sri Lanka) takes note of the similarity between Jesus' historical life and the lives of poverty and asceticism lived by so many Asian peoples." Fr. Aloy has collaborated with the late Jesuit Fr. Paul Caspersz and Oblate Fr. Tissa Balasuriya in their apostolate of social justice without violence in Sri Lanka. Speaking of the late Fr. Oscar Abayaratne, the founder of the Kithu dana pubuduwa (KDP), Fr. Aloy wrote that he (Fr. Oscar) has gone on record in the annals of ecclesiastical history as the first to start a Charismatic Movement that was equally sensitive to the Church's teachings on social justice" (*The Missionary Oblate*, No 62, 2022). Fr. Aloy had very much appreciated also the commitment of the late Fr. Joseph (Joe)

Fernando, the National Director of the Social and Economic Centre (SEDEC) for the poor.

ONLY REGRET

In Sri Lanka, a few religious Congregations – the Good Shepherd Sisters, the Christian Brothers, the Marist Brothers and the Oblates – have invited him to animate their members especially during their Provincial Congresses, Chapters and International Conferences. The mainline Christian Churches also have sought his advice and followed his seminars. **I, for one, regret very much, that the Sri Lankan authorities of the Catholic Church –today’s Hierarchy--- have not sought Fr. Aloy’s expertise for the renewal of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka and thus have not benefitted from the immense store of wisdom and insight that he can offer to our local Church while the Sri Lankan bishops who governed the Catholic church in the immediate aftermath of the 2nd Vatican Council (Edmund Fernando OMI, Anthony de Saram, Leo Nanayakkara OSB, Frank Marcus Fernando, Paul Perera,) visited him and consulted him on many matters while among the Tamil Bishops, Bishop Rayappu Joseph was keeping close contact with him and Bishop J. Deogupillai hosted him and his team visiting him after the horrible Black July massacre of Tamils.]**

Fruits of Failure

(This is a slightly revised version of the address by the Chief Guest, **Ms. Seshika Fernando** at the Annual Prize giving at Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya on the 12th of July 2024. She holds M.S. (London), M.B.A. (Queensland) and is the Vice President, Banking and Financial Services, *WSO2*. Her address at the Prize giving is published in our journal with the approval from her and the Principal of Holy Family Convent).

Rev. Sr. Principal, distinguished guests, teachers, parents, and most importantly the VIPs - our prize winners,

Congratulations girls. Your hard work has paid off! Each of you are sitting here, because you consistently performed well in your class. Well done. I have some unsettling news. Today as we all celebrate your achievements, I am going to talk about the fruits of failure. I wish I could tell you some glamorous stories like how I dropped out of university like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg and created world class technology from my parents' garage. Sadly, my parents did not have a garage. And my failures started when I was a lot younger.

For some background, I come from a Catholic middle class family. Both my parents were outstanding sports persons in their respective schools as well as outstanding at various extra curricular activities. But as luck would have it the 'sports' gene decided to skip a generation rendering me and my brother pretty average at sports and most extra curricular activities. I did however

inherit my dad's sense of humour and my mum's 'never say die' attitude.

At Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, I was that kid who signed up for everything - every sport, every club, every activity. The consequence, as I disappointingly found out, was frequent failure. I did not get placed, I did not make the team, I did not make it beyond the heats or the preliminaries because I was an average athlete, a mediocre singer, a passable dancer and so on. I did not stand out in anything. Looking back, those string of failures that happened early in my life was the foundation to the successes that were to come.

Let me explain. In the beginning it was shocking that I could not run as fast as my mother, but once that realization hit, the pressure of winning faded. Then it was all about the experience, making new friends, getting to stay after school, and sometimes about the giddy delight of cutting class. When the focus shifted from winning to experiencing, it freed me to be creative, to make mistakes, to learn new things about myself and others and to finally find what I was good at.

It turned out that what I was really good at was using humour to make a connection with anyone that crossed my path - not something you could get an award for. But the team sports and after-school clubs and societies gave me 100s of opportunities to meet new people and make relationships. It was within those interactions that I understood what leadership really meant. I made mistakes and learnt the hard way that you

could not get things done by barking orders. Leadership was about truly connecting with someone else and inspiring them to join hands towards a common cause.

To inspire others to join my cause I had to master the art of storytelling. It was not about communicating an idea; it was about empathy, understanding others' needs, and tailoring my message to align with their beliefs. I also got opportunities to challenge the status quo, because I was not afraid of the outcome, and had nothing to lose. So I asked the hard questions and pushed boundaries and challenged the norm. And that gave birth to new ideas and inventions.

Today these are the traits that set me apart from my peers. The ability to connect and inspire a diverse range of people through the art of storytelling, empowers me to do my job in consulting with countries and their governments and move them to understand how our work impacts their communities and businesses. It helps me lead diverse and global teams towards technological advancement. But beyond all, the confidence to challenge the status quo is so important especially for us women who constantly have to push boundaries and pave the way for ourselves, as we collectively continue the fight for equality in the workforce.

Girls, you will ALWAYS find yourselves in the minority. Women in the workforce is a minority, women in STEM fields are an absolute minority, women in leadership is embarrassingly low and women in leadership within STEM fields is unheard of. And I stand

before you today humbled to be in that ‘unheard of’ category.

You are sitting here today, because you have excelled in academics. But let me be the one to tell you that Academic excellence **alone** will not get you far. If you think about it, everyone in the executive workforce has passed their Advanced Level examinations well, and have earned a degree. That is the most basic qualification to be in the executive workforce. However, if your dreams extend beyond that, if you want to challenge the status quo, if you want to set trends for others to follow, if you want to end up in your own ‘unheard of’ category, then look beyond your books. Sign up for various activities, it will also teach you the art of balancing your studies with many other things. And one day if and when you become a mother, you will appreciate that ability to multitask. Now, this may sound like a tall order but you can not do this alone. You need the support of your parents and teachers.

Teachers:

I have a humble request from our wonderful faculty of teachers. Who taught me and enabled me to achieve the success I did. Can we lead by example and challenge the status quo of local school education? Can we consider moving away from spending precious class time getting children to copy notes and instead provide the content in digital form? This will not only enable students to delve deeper online but it can free up precious class time to engage in project-based-learning that actually

helps students apply academic concepts to real world problems. This will ignite their curiosity and equip them with skills that matter and inspire a generation of innovators.

Parents:

To our proud parents. I am in no way qualified to give any parenting advice to anyone. But I would like to share with you the most valuable gift my own parents gave me. They gave me the freedom to enjoy my childhood. To participate in anything without any unnecessary pressure to achieve something.

It was my parents who held my hand through all those failures, dusted me off and gently encouraged me to try again. It built up my confidence tremendously! Free from their expectations, I started ferociously working towards my own goals. And that is how the mediocre speaker and the average dancer and decent singer ended up winning prizes in school and beyond.

When I look at my children, I am amazed at the world I see through their curious eyes. They challenge the status quo and ask hard questions every five minutes. As hard as it is, I believe that it is our duty to nurture that curiosity instead of dampening their spirits and shutting them up. If we can ignite their curiosity, I believe we can empower them to become the extraordinary individuals they were meant to be. To enter into their own 'unheard of' categories one day.

I want to leave with you one last thought. This radical idea to talk about the fruits of failure at a prize giving came to

me last Sunday at the church while listening to the second reading from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians. This powerful verse really struck me. *“But God has answered me, ‘My grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness.’ and that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions and distress for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong.”*

Embrace your weaknesses, your failures. Not only will they pave the way for success but more importantly they will allow God to do great things in your life.

Glory to God Alone!]

POPE FRANCIS TO THE CATECHISTS IN INDONESIA

Pope Francis took the floor after listening to some testimonies during a meeting with the bishops, priests, Religious, Seminarians and catechists in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Assumption, Jakarta on Sept. 4, 2024, and he asked the catechists to stay by his side for a moment and said, *“With you standing here in front of everyone, I would like to say something. The catechists carry the Church forward. They are the ones who move forward first, followed by the nuns, then the priests and the bishop. But, the catechists are at the front, they are the driving force of the Church.”* On one of my trips to Africa, the President of a country told me that he had been baptized by his father who was a catechist. Faith is transmitted at home and in dialect. The catechists, together with the mothers and grandmothers, pass on the faith. I am very grateful to all the catechists: they are good, very good! Thank you!”

REACHING OUT TO THE SCATTERED AT POTHANEGAMA

The small church - building dedicated to St. Eugene de Mazenod at Pothanegama in the diocese of Anuradhapura (which comprises the North Central Province of Sri Lanka, geographically the largest Province in Sri Lanka) is situated on the Puttalam-Anuradhapura main road, and is right at the point of entrance to the sacred city of Anuradhapura. **At the time of building this church structure, it was the only one, in Sri Lanka, dedicated to St. Eugene de Mazenod, the Founder of the Religious Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).** This church-building can be considered as a symbol of the tremendous dedicated service rendered to the Catholics by the Oblates and by the diocesan presbyters.

Fr. Henry Goonewardena OMI (later the bishop of Anuradhapura) had bought this property from Mr. Justin Fernando, a Tile factory owner from Negombo and Mr. Galhena had settled down there.¹

Before Mr. Galhena and his family came to settle down in this property, Eucharistic celebrations by priests (Oblates and diocesan) from St. Joseph's Cathedral, Anuradhapura, had taken place in the homes of the Catholics. For example while the Catholics of Korakegahawewa used to assemble for the Eucharist near the house of Mr. H.T.A. Alexander and the Catholics of Pothanegama assembled in the house of Mr. Gregoris.² Later, Eucharistic celebrations had taken place in the

small house where Mr. Galhena and his family were living.³ But such a Catholic religious practice had caused resentment among the Buddhist, led by a Buddhist monk. The atmosphere changed when the late **Brother Victor Wilfred OMI** had come to reside in that building. Brother Victor resided for many years in that building, using it as a mission-station, under the instruction of the Bishop Henry Goonewardena, OMI, the late bishop of the diocese of Anuradhapura.

Br. Victor Wilfred OMI, a Pathfinder

With much zeal under trying circumstances Br. Victor Wilfred OMI had begun to go round with much zeal under trying circumstances discovering the Catholics who were scattered at Pothanegama and in the neighbouring villages. His apostolic zeal had made him visit also the Buddhist monk, who had resented the sight of a church-building at Pothanegama, when he (the monk) was hospitalized. Brother Victor's compassionate visit had brought about attitudinal change in the monk and the Catholics began assembling for worship in the old structure where Br. Victor was residing. Bishop Henry Goonewardena OMI built a small chapel there. Today the small church- building at Pothanegama, has become a beautiful symbol of an emerging Catholic community.

Going down the memory lane, the elders still remember with much love and affection Brother Victor Wilfred OMI, who with his simple life-style, had trekked with his walking stick and umbrella, through the narrow paths of Pothanegama and the neighbouring villages,

thereby paving the way for creating a lively Catholic community at Pothanegama, with a place for worship.

The feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod

For the first time the feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod had been celebrated on June 21, 1978, presided over by late Rev. Fr Reginald de Silva OMI, the then Vicar General of the diocese of Anuradhapura. Though many Oblate and diocesan presbyters who had been parish priests of St. Joseph's Cathedral had occasionally celebrated the Eucharist in that small church-building, proper pastoral care had not taken place due to difficulties relating to the distance and to the fact that the Catholic families were living in the jungles of Pothanegama and Korakegahawewa. Only a few Catholics had travelled sometimes to take part in the Eucharistic celebration in the Cathedral.

“The “Quasi Parish” of Pathanegama

Fr. Dudley Sapramadu OMI, who had been at Rajabima Oblate Centre, Jayanthi Mawatha, Anuradhapura since 2005 and had been helping the presbyters at St. Joseph's Cathedral by celebrating the Eucharist on Sundays at Pothanegama, had appealed to Bishop Norbert Andradi OMI, the bishop of Anuradhapura, to make the Catholics residing at Pothanegama, Korakegahawewa and Vilachiya into a new parish and appoint an Oblate as the new parish priest. But the missionary and the pastoral care of the Catholics living only in Pothanegama and Korakegahawewa were

entrusted to the Oblates on March 30, 2008 by Bishop Norbert Andradi OMI, making the scattered Catholics into a “quasi Parish”, and appointing **Rev. Fr. Dudley Saparamadu OMI** as its pastor. Fr Dudley told me that he began his pastoral ministry on the following Sunday with only four Catholics (one lady and three men) for the Eucharistic celebration.

Fr. Dudley Saparamadu, while continuing to celebrate the Eucharist in the small chapel at Pothanegama, had begun visiting the ‘scattered children of God’ (the Catholic families) living in the elephant-infested villages of Pothanegama and Korakegahawewa and had rectified marriages, baptized children, giving copies of the Holy Bible to the Catholic families, celebrating the Eucharist in the homes on week days, organizing catechism classes for children, promoting education of children, organized a Mutual Help Society with a donation of Rs 100,000/= from a benefactor, thereby facilitating through these activities the emergence of a dynamic Catholic community. He had also provided accommodation at Rajabima Oblate Centre to families (Catholics and non-Catholics) affected by floods.

The Oblates (e.g Frs Shivantha Wass, Jagath Anthony, Danushka Fernando, Dileepa Jayamaha, Savindhu Senarathne and Shane Winston De Rosayro) who succeeded Fr. Dudley Saparamadu over the years as pastoral animators of the Catholic families of the above-mentioned villages, have also continued the mission of preaching to the poor with many faces as preachers of the

Word of God, celebrating the Eucharist, promoting education of children, teaching new skills and reaching out to the people, both Catholics and people of other Faiths, giving a facelift to the church-building and its physical environment, trying also to respond to people's felt needs (physical, human and spiritual) in a spirit of solidarity. On Thursdays, they celebrated also very meaningful 'cottage Masses' which also brought the Catholic families living in the zones for worship until the Covid-19 pandemic, the fuel crisis and the destitute situation in the country prevented the smooth functioning of that practice.

Fr. Savindhu Senarathne had begun giving a facelift to the church-building and the physical environment and it was continued by Frs Danushka Fernando and Shane de Rosayro. Fr. Jagath Anthony concentrated very much on people-oriented apostolates begun by his predecessors. Fr. Shivantha Wass reached out to the young men and women forming a 'youth circle' and trained also a few to play the harmonium. Their services during the liturgical services are very much appreciated. Fr. Dileepa Jayamaha was instrumental in obtaining financial assistance from benefactors of Mazenod College, Lesmurdi, Australia, to provide domestic water purifiers (filters) to 60 families at Pothanegama irrespective of race and religion, including Ven. Vijitha Thero of Pothanegama, a good friend of the Catholic families and of the Oblates.

Being inspired by our saintly Founder and treading on the footprints of the forerunners, the Oblates

are committed to make the parishioners of Pothanegama to act like good human beings, secondly as good Christians and finally as saintly persons.

The city of Anuradhapura has a predominant Buddhist religious and social culture. Nevertheless, the Catholic community of the “quasi parish” of Pothanegama lives in harmony in this environment, maintaining good rapport with the Buddhists and the Buddhist monks.

Contribution of the Sisters of Providence

Sisters of Providence – Sr. Gonzaga, Sr. Loretta, Sr. Therese Maria and Esther-- who were living in their Convent at Jayanthi Mawatha, Anuradhapura, had been involved in teaching children in a pre-school at Pothanegama, thereby helping Br. Victor in the burgeoning apostolate. After the Oblates were entrusted with the pastoral care of the Catholics at Pothanegama by Bishop Norbert Andradi OMI, the Bishop of Anuradhapura, Sisters Felicita, Malanie, Sr. Monica and Sr. Alexia have continued to collaborate in the catechetical and liturgical apostolates. Sr. Alexia continues also the apostolate of visiting the sick in the parish and in the hospital, thereby assisting the sick and Fr. Shane De Rosayro who is also the hospital chaplain

There are 65 registered Catholic families in the Quasi-Parish of Pothnegama, and about 60 children attend the Sunday school. At the moment Fr. Shane Winstan De Rosayro OMI is engaged in conducting also weekly

English classes and La-Kri-Vi apostolate for the children in the church premises on Saturdays.

Fr. Shane Winstan De Rosayro OMI, the present Pastoral Animator of the Catholics belonging to the ‘quasi parish’ of Pothanegama continues the multifaceted missionary and pastoral services.

1. Personal contacts and communication with people of all Faiths in the “quasi parish”
2. Responding to physical, human and spiritual needs e.g. hunger, sicknesses, lack of proper shelter etc)
3. Promoting education of children (Schools, colleges, College of education, Universities), with the compassionate assistance of benefactors.
4. As diocesan Chaplain, visiting the sick in the hospital and celebration of Eucharist on Sundays for the Catholic prisoners
5. Organising and conducting Catechism classes after the Eucharistic celebration on Sundays.
6. Liturgy meeting on Tuesdays
7. Promoting *Lakrivi* –Children’s apostolate at Pothanegama and in the diocese
8. Building a ‘youth circle’
9. Animating a Mutual Aid Association
10. Paying special attention to the poor, the sick, and the elderly in the parish and in the hospital,

Besides being the ‘quasi presbyter’ of Pothanegama, Fr. Shane De Rosayro is also Vice-Rector of Mazenod College, Anuradhapura.

Fr. Emmanuel Fernando OMI

It's a different time! Relations between US Sisters and Vatican have changed radically

US Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)

“It’s a different time,” said Sr. Marlene Weisenbeck who was president-elect of LCWR when the doctrinal assessment of LCWR was launched by Vatican and became president a few months later. There are new people in the dicasteries. We have a new Pope who has led the Church on the basis of being close to one another and being transparent... It’s a different time and the agenda has changed. Margaret Susan Thompson, a historian at Syracuse University who has examined Catholic Nuns in the United States has said that while leadership in the Vatican had already begun to change – both the Prefect and Secretary of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, which was conducting the apostolic visitation had been replaced with bishops seen as friendlier to women Religious – the 2013 retirement of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis cannot be discounted. “The whole tenor of the Vatican, in particular toward religious life changed radically.”

Weisenbeck has said that the relationship between the Sisters in US and Rome has gone from confrontational to collaborative, noting that the dicasteries are working with the Sisters to solve problems related to changing demographics, such as a lack of Sisters able to be in leadership. “It shows the dicastery is willing to be involved in the discussions and solicit opinions,” she said. “It’s the other side of the coin.”

Courtesy: NCR, April 25, 2024

THE WEST AND THE REST ON THE SYNOD

“This synod has revealed the West’s irritating reaction that has hurt the theologians of the Southern Hemisphere since at least Vatican II. The “explanatory” theology that dominated the Christian West since the first centuries (and which has been challenged by “liberation theologies” of the South since the 1970s) still seem to be over-assertive in the media, insinuating a rather negative assessment of the Synod on the basis of certain of their unattained objectives or priorities. This is a sad continuation of their former dominance, deeply felt in the South.” “The Acts have recorded how the Spirit and the Church worked as *equal partners in discernment* during the circumcision debate. This is what the Synod is about.” “May this Synod continue its journey with the Holy Spirit, who broke the language barrier between nations on the First Pentecost Day. For only Divine Love, who the Holy Spirit is, can transform a broken and divided church into dialoguing partners on pilgrimage. In his latest *motu proprio (Ad Theologiam Promovendam)*, Francis (the first Pope from the South) recommends what the South has been working at for decades:” a fundamentally contextual theology.”

Courtesy: Extract from the Editorial of Aloysius Pieris, sj, Vagdevi 35, New Series, Vol .18, no 1, Jan., 2024.

Letter to the Editor of *the TABLET*

by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna CSsR

YOUR NEWS STORY “Synod report ‘wounds many faithful’ ” (25 November) prompted me to respond because I myself was a non-episcopal voting member from Asia. In the Synod Hall there certainly were voices enveloped in clericalism, but to say, as the open letter from Mary McAleese and others does, that the “prophetic voices won no significant concessions from the powerful and wealthy forces of conservatism” is not correct. As participants, we felt the need to transcend the divide between the “prophets” (liberals) and “conservatives”.

The Church needs to be led neither by the conservatives nor by the liberals but solely by the Holy Spirit. Almost all of those promoters of the so called hot button issues hail from the “developed world”. They seem to forget that there are many other groups elsewhere in the wide world who have their own hot bottom issues. Thus the Africans and Asians would press for changes in the murderous, unjust economic order in the world. In Africa, they would like the Church to reconsider her teaching on polygamous marriages, and in Asia, they would like to see further developments in inter-faith marriages. None of those groups were “wounded” because their hot-button issues were not mentioned!

This Synod Assembly was called not to address such specific issues of various local Churches but to deliberate, listen and discern how to change the very way of being Church all over the world.

It is inaccurate to say that the Synodal Assembly did not address at least some of those Western “hot button” issues. A process to address them has been set in motion, through further study and deliberation. The Synthesis Report has many seeds of change that would surely germinate, sprout and bear fruit in its own due time.”

(Courtesy: *The TABLET*, the International Catholic Weekly), Dec., 2, 2023

POPE FRANCIS IN VANIMO, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Pope of the “peripheries”, Pope Francis visited Vanimo in Papua New Guinea’s remote north-west coast and told the small Catholic community, served by missionaries from his native Argentina, *“You live in a magnificent land, enriched by a great variety of plants and birds. The beauty of the landscape is matched by the beauty of a community where people love one another.”*

Archbishop Viganò found guilty of schism, excommunicated by Vatican

Italian Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the disgraced former papal nuncio to the United States who questioned the legitimacy of Pope Francis and the authority of the Second Vatican Council, has been found guilty of schism and excommunicated, the Vatican announced on July 5.

"His public statements manifesting his refusal to recognize and submit to the Supreme Pontiff, his rejection of communion with the members of the Church subject to him, and of the legitimacy and magisterial authority of the Second Vatican Council are well known," stated a Vatican bulletin that announced the ruling.

The decision of Viganò's excommunication was widely expected following the archbishop's June 20 announcement that he had been charged with schism by the Dicastery for the Doctrine for the Faith and that he would not be cooperating with the Vatican penal process.

At the time, Viganò said he would not comply with the request to present himself in person to formally receive the accusation and evidence against him and said he considered the charges brought against him to be an "honor."

The June 11 Vatican decree stated that if Viganò remained unresponsive through June 28, he would be sentenced in absentia. The July 5 Vatican statement announcing the excommunication noted that the Congress

of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith met on July 4 to conclude the penal process against Viganò.

The statement also noted that the archbishop was notified with news of his excommunication on July 5 and that the reversal of such a decision is reserved to the Apostolic See.

The weighty decision by the Vatican to excommunicate Viganò comes six years after he published an unprecedented 11-page letter in 2018 alleging a widespread Vatican cover-up of allegations against ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and called on Francis to resign.

Although many of his initial claims he alleged have been discredited, the Italian archbishop was lionized by some right-wing Catholics for his support of former U.S. President Donald Trump, opposition to the COVID-19 vaccines and spreading of Q-Anon conspiracy theories.

While many mainstream Catholics have dismissed the former Vatican diplomat, he has continued to use his website and social media to promote his radicalized views, with his posts being shared by high-profile individuals such as Trump and being widely promoted within certain pockets of the U.S. Catholic Church.

The rare excommunication of one of the church's own prelates is likely to put a number of U.S. bishops in an awkward position given that following his initial 2018 allegations against the pope, more than two dozen issued

statements attesting to his credibility, including some of the current leadership of the U.S. bishops' conference.

At the time of publication, Viganò had yet to issue a statement in response to his excommunication. His last public posting on social media, published on the same date of the Vatican's statement on his excommunication, was a request for donations for his foundation in support of the "traditional training" of young seminarians.

BY CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Vatican Correspondent

—National Catholic Reporter

Rev. Fr. Merl Mendis OMI

An Appreciation by Fr. Benet Shantha Fernando,
National Director for Catechetics and Bible Apostolate



Rev. Fr. Merl Mendis OMI, former National Director of Catechetics, Education and Bible Apostolate (1995-2001), having completed 56 years of dedicated service in the vineyard of the Lord entered into eternal glory on 18th May 2024. He was a great preacher, Teacher and trainer who dedicated his whole life to continue the mission of Jesus Christ our Master very faithfully. Born on January 16, 1941 at Kadalana, Moratuwa he studied at St. Sebastian's College and entered the Religious Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and made his first vows on May 31, 1961. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Edmund J. Fernando OMI on September 28, 1968.

After his ordination, Fr. Merl's first assignment was at St. Anne's Church, Wattala as the Assistant parish priest. Owing to his keen interest for studies and pastoral concern for the people, he was sent abroad for further studies and formation.

As a result, Fr. Merl obtained a Post Graduate Degree in Mass Media and Communication from the University of Concordia, Montreal, Canada, a special Diploma in Adult Education from St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Canada, together with a Diploma in Catechetics from Eucharistic College, London. Upon his return he anchored himself at "Nazareth", Wennappuwa, giving leadership to the Preaching Band, and initiated an island-wide Pastoral Campaign. He tirelessly undertook many programs in different dioceses, parishes and shrines, mainly involving himself in preaching. He also conducted a variety of workshops and training programs for youngsters and adults.

Fr. Merl was the first Director of the OMI Communication Centre which was inaugurated at Polwatta, Minuwangoda on November 14, 1988. He took the initiative to conduct leadership courses, Mass Media courses and Bible courses for children, youth and adults. He did organize special English courses at Polwatta Centre until 1993. From 1993 to 1995, he took charge of the Mirigama Parish.

It was the appointment of Fr. Merl Mendis as the Director of Catechetics, Education and Bible Apostolate which marked a major milestone in his life. He put a great

effort into updating and giving value to the National catechesis. He took a keen interest in Religion and with teachers in Government schools, both in the Sinhala and Tamil medium He set a new trend in initiating workshops for G.C.E (A / L) and G.C.E (O / L) students at school level. While doing these various activities, he took trouble to compile, edit and publish Literature books and pamphlets for Catechism teachers and G.C.E students. During his term nearly 25 publications came out of the National Catechetical Centre. Among those publications, the Pentateuch and Summary Edition of Catechism of the Catholic Church are still very popular among people.

A handbook and the set of posters created by him based on the Sacraments were an efficient audio-visual tool for teachers. Fr. Merl managed to utilize the different forces in operation both in the Church and in the Government so that the certificate awarded to the teachers of Catechism was duly recognized by the Government. After six years of tireless ministry in the National Catechetical Centre, he took leave from his office as Director on July 31, 2001.

Soon, this tireless worker looked for new avenues for Oblate Missionaries at Wanaluwawa, Pugoda Retreat Centre. It is a quiet and remote but ideal place to take a walk with the Lord. Fr. Merl was leading the Centre as Resident Pastor while continuing to conduct several ongoing formation programs on leadership, life education and community building. A good number of Buddhist children and youth took advantage of this Centre to gain

knowledge and spiritual awareness. As a result, this Centre became a sign of reconciliation and peace. Fr. Merl continued to be the Director for Adult Education and Catechesis for the Archdiocese of Colombo. He was made the Dean of Gurubewila Deanery in 2007.

In 2010 Fr. Merl Mendis left Wannaluwawa and pitched his tent at Bopitiya where there was a good number of Catholic families. There he also found a fitting place for his apostolic work. He started teaching English to the students who sat for the G.C.E Advanced Level Examinations. It was not only teaching a language but he also gave a prominent place for the religious character formation for youth who came to him. Parents were very happy with the all-round education they received there and soon the numbers increased year by year.

Rev. Fr. Merl Mendis received a number of invitations from the Catholic schools around to teach English in their schools too. According to the time table available, he was happy to help those schools whenever possible. He helped the nearby churches by celebrating Mass, hearing confessions and attending to the spiritual needs of the people when there was a request from the parish priests of the area. He was a very zealous priest who was always ready to help others.

During the very faithful and enriched 56 years of priestly life in the Oblate Congregation and in the Archdiocese of Colombo, he had engaged himself in a variety of ministries. May he rest in peace with the special care and love of Mother Mary.

Rev. Brother W. Benedict Kurera OMI



Br. Warnakulasuriya Benedict Kurera OMI, a member of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate was born on December 18, 1960 at Kimbulapitiya, Negombo. Br. Benedict Kurera was the eldest son of Warnakulasuriya Solomon Kurera and Maaage Mary Aneiline Perera.

Br. Benedict Kurera received his education from several schools, beginning with the Roman Catholic School at Kibulapitiya from 1965 to 1969. He then attended the Sinhala Boys' School, Negombo from 1970-1971 and St. Mary's Primary Boys' School at Chilaw from 1972-1976. He completed his schooling at Vidyakara Pirivana at Chilaw from 1977-1980.

Sacred In 1985, Benedict Kurera joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He underwent his religious formation at De Mazenod Novitiate, Pre-Novitiate at Maggona from 1985-1987, and at the Heart Sidupiyani,

Bandarawela from 1992-1993 and professed his vows as a Missionary Oblate on September 8, 1993.

His Services

Br. Benedict Kurera OMI served in various capacities throughout his religious life. He was at the Oblate Scholasticate, Ampitiya from 1993 -1996 and was placed thereafter as a community member at St. Vincent's Home, Maggona from 1997 -2002 where he made also his final profession of vows on December 18, 1999. He had served as Bursar at Suba Seth Gedera, Buttala from January 1, 2002 to September 2, 2007 and as bursar at St. Joseph's Juniorate, Kohuwela from September 10- 2007 to February 1, 2011. He was placed again as a community member at St.Vincent'S Home,Maggona from February 12, 2011 to February 10, 2020 and at Marian Grove at Kohuwela from February 10,2020 until his passing away on June 5, 2024.

Commitment of Br. Benedict Kurera OMI

Br. Benedict Kurera OMI was well known for his commitment to his faith and his dedication to the service of others. He will be remembered as a kind and compassionate Oblate who had touched the lives of many during his life-time on earth. His legacy will live on in the hearts of those who knew him and his memory will be a source of inspiration to all who seek to follow in his footsteps.

May he rest in peace.

- OMI Bulletin

The Missionary Oblate

A Journal of Mission Animation



**Pope Francis and Grand Iman Nasaruddin during visit
to Grand Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia in Sept. 2024**

No 66

July – Dec. 2024