

Jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

Dimensions of Priesthood



Volume 13 No.1

January 2010

Jnanadeepa Journal details2

Editorial.....3

Treasuring the Word.
Biblical Hermeneutics in Priestly Ministry
Nishant A. Irudayadason.....4

Priest - Celebrant of the Cosmic Sacrament: Some
Reflections on Holy Eucharist and Priestly Ministry
Isaac Parackal, OIC.....26

The Ecclesial Vocation of the Priest. A Vatican Council II
Perspective
Errol D’Lima, S.J......42

The Challenges Priests Face in India Today
Kurien Kunnumpuram, S.J......65

“You are ... a royal priesthood ... so that you may
announce ...” (1 Pet. 2:9). Reflections of two lay female
theologians
Anna Findl-Ludescher and Teresa Peter.....91

The Priest and Communications
Jacob Srampickal, S.J......117

A Sad Chapter Of Church History
Julian Saldanha, S.J......142

Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies

Editorial Board

Editor

Thomas Kuriacose

Core Committee

Errol D'Lima

Paul Parathazham

Maria A. Stephen

Nishant Irudayadason

Paul Fernandes

Editorial Adv. Board

Kurien Kunumpuram

Kuruvilla Pandikattu

Job Kozhamthadam

Lorenzo Fernando

Rosario Rocha

Evelyn Monteiro

Cyril Desbruslais

Selvarathinam S.

Chennattu Rekha

George Karuvelil

James Ponniah

Mathew Jayanth

Mohan Doss

Noel Sheth

Abraham M.C.

Jose Thayil

Isaac Parackal

Stephen C.T.

Stephen Jayard

Henry D'Almeida

Mariadas Peyyala

Anil Thomas

Francis Ezhakunnel

Jnanadeepa (=“Light of Wisdom” pronounced as *Jñanadeepa*) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411014, India.

Jnanadeepa is published biannually, in January and July. Views expressed by the writers are not necessarily those of the editors. Manuscripts submitted for publication should be original and cannot be returned (writers' style sheet is available on request); they could be sent (preferably as a text or RTF file) in a computer diskette or through E-mail as file attachment.

All correspondence (requests for subscription, manuscripts, books for review – two copies, please – exchange copies of journals, advertisements, etc.) to:

The Editor, *Jnanadeepa*, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014, India Tel (office): +91-20-41036111, (res): +91-20-41036364 Fax: +91-20-41036199

E-mail: journalpune@gmail.com

Subscriptions could be sent from India either by Money Order or Demand Draft. From foreign countries International Money Order or Crossed Cheque is preferred. From Commonwealth countries British Postal Order is preferred. All payments are to be made in the name of *Jnanadeepa Journal*.

Typeset & print: JDV Computer Centre

Publisher: Thomas Kuriacose for Jnana Deepa Publications.

ISSN: 0972-33315

Subscription Rates

<i>Country</i>	<i>One year</i>	<i>Three years</i>
India	Ind. Rs. 100	Ind. Rs. 250
SAARC Countries	Ind. Rs.140	Ind. Rs. 400
Other Countries		
Individual Rate (Surface Mail)	US \$ 20/Euro16	US \$ 50 /Euro45
Individual Rate (Air Mail)	US \$ 25/Euro20	US \$ 65 /Euro55
Institutional Rate (Air Mail)	US \$ 45/Euro40	US \$ 120/Euro110
Individual Life Subscription	Rs 3,000(India)	US \$ 400/Euro350

Editorial

The opening words of this editorial are words of gratitude to Fr. Kurien Kunnumpuram, S.J., who started this Journal as its first editor in January 1998. *Jnanadeepa* will be always grateful and indebted to you, Fr. Kurien, for these years of selfless, committed and dedicated service. You gave this Journal a vision, as you wrote in your very first editorial: “*Jnanadeepa* seeks to provide a critical, creative and interdisciplinary approach so that the major questions of our times can be studied from various perspectives.” You have upheld this vision. Thank you very, very much. Your blessings and support will help tremendously to keep progressing on the path that you have shown.

A word of gratitude to all who subscribe to this Journal, and to every person who reads it. Your support and good wishes are greatly appreciated. Suggestions are most welcome. Please do feel free to write to the editor.

Being the “Year of the Priest”, the basic theme of this issue is “Dimensions of the Priesthood”. Hope this year has helped all, not just priests alone, to study and reflect on priesthood in the Church. *Jnanadeepa* endeavours to do its part in this enterprise. The next issue, due in July 2010, will look at some more aspects of the priesthood.

Thomas Kuriacose, S.J.
Editor.

Treasuring the Word. Biblical Hermeneutics in Priestly Ministry

Nishant A. Irudayadason

Faculty of Philosophy,
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014.

Abstract: Biblical hermeneutics is necessary for meaningfulness, to avoid arbitrariness in interpretation, dogmatism and other extremes. Tradition plays an important role in the interpretation of Scripture. This position is substantiated through an interdisciplinary approach of history, philosophy, exegesis and theology. The viewpoints of several prominent thinkers are given in this regard.

Keywords: Bible, tradition, faith, exegesis, hermeneutics, text, reader, meaning.

Understanding is an art of hermeneutics because understanding means precisely responding to the issue that the pre-understanding raises. Bultmann expresses this as follows: "Every understanding, like every interpretation, is continuously oriented by the way the question is put and by standpoint (its *Woraufhin*). This is never without a pre-understanding of the matter it is questioning the text about."¹ Our pre-understanding is constituted not only of ideas, concepts and world-views but also of beliefs we have inherited from traditions both cultural and religious. If we as Christians believe the Bible to be the Living Word of God relevant for everyone at all moments of history, then biblical hermeneutics is inevitable.

We need hermeneutics to prevent us from locking up the richness of the Bible by interpreting it univocally, allowing us to recognise the meaningfulness of God's

Word in the concrete life situations of any reader at any historical epoch. It can also serve as a guardrail against the fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible, which in no way manifests a historical conscience of the formation of its canon and the development of its interpretative traditions. The danger of such a lack of historical perspective leads to an arbitrary interpretation of the Bible according to the whims and fancies of an individual and even to justify one's own ideology as if the Bible was meant to be an unfailing proof of one's own world-view of God, of human person and of the world. At the heart of this attitude is found the claim of self-sufficiency stemming from an epistemological dogmatism, namely "I possess the truth of the Bible and whatever I say or do is in perfect tune with God's Word." The "I" becomes prominent even to the detriment of real faith. This is a divinisation process of the self. A real danger indeed!

Biblical texts are therefore to be interpreted. This would then mean that we should not read our personal ideas into the text. Whence some important questions! Does the Faith Tradition play a role in the interpretation of Scripture? If so, how? Would the *Scriptura Sola* as claimed by the Reformation Churches be tenable? How to reconcile Scripture and the interpretative Faith Tradition? The historicity of the text is at the heart of the problematic. Our *thesis* is that the *Tradition plays an important role in the understanding of the Scripture*.

In order to substantiate this thesis, we need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. Only through our knowledge of the interpretative tradition of the Bible, can we be precise about the progressive formation of this tradition in the course of history. Thus it becomes important not to rule out any helpful approach, both intellectual as well as

spiritual, to the study of the Bible. “We are not condemned to the ruinous alternative: either honouring the intelligence or nourishing the spiritual life.”² Faith is compatible with intelligence and it has to be so. The act of reading the Scripture receives “the promise of *an* intelligence that goes beyond *the intelligence*” and understanding itself proceeds “from the same spirit that inspired the Scripture.”³

1. Historical Approach

Two eminent thinkers of the 17th century, an exegete, Richard Simon, and a philosopher, Spinoza, had hermeneutical concerns. Simon, in his effort to have a scientific approach, became interested in the MT by comparing it with the LXX without neglecting other former translations. Spinoza gave a more philosophical dimension to the study of the Bible by subjecting it to philological, literary and historical analysis. This scientific exploration would continue till the Renaissance, paving the way for what is called “Textual Criticism” consisting of a comparative study of different manuscripts related both to the history of the redaction and to the authenticity of the biblical books.

After the Reformation there emerged a meeting place between Scripture on the one hand, and the question of the study of language as well as of the historical context of the biblical books on the other hand. This is due to the realisation that *Sola Scriptura* would not be adequate to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of the biblical texts. Thanks to this scientific method, the emergence of different meanings other than literal was observed. Literal interpretation is not insignificant but meaning cannot be confined to it. It should not be forgotten that the Scripture

has certain obscurities. For example, the Gospel of Mathew while quoting Micah (5,1) referring to Bethlehem as “small” changes it as “not small at all,” by which Origen would later interpret that the little Bethlehem became great thanks to Christ.

Thanks to the discovery of the ancient texts of the Middle East, the exegetes from the time of Le Clerc (1697) to the time of Gunkel (19th century) followed the comparative method. In the beginning of the 20th century, Lagrange, the founder of the Biblical School in Jerusalem had the audacity to affirm that a scientific approach to the reading of the Bible could also lead to a spiritual enhancement. He held that the revealed truth does not change but it grows.⁴

Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893), recommends a good formation of the exegetes both in biblical languages and in scientific methods. The beginning of 20th century witnessed some obstacles to the spirit of *Providentissimus Deus*. The encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* by Pope Pius XII in 1943 once again renewed this spirit, offering an invitation to the use of historical methods in the study of the Sacred Scripture. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Vatican Council II brings together the wealth of the scientific research of the Bible and its study from within a faith tradition, underscoring the meaning and the significance of the First Testament for the Christians. The Pontifical Commission for the Bible in 1993 confirmed this by approving the historico-critical method for the study of the Sacred Scripture, which is “God’s Word in human language.”

In résumé we can say that every text has a history. “The

dimension of the historicity of the biblical text is an integral part of the identity of the Sacred Scripture.”⁵ Hence we need to seriously take into consideration the historicity of the Scripture without doing violence to the text, though its historicity is studied by means of scientific methods. The historico-critical method leads to the enhancement of faith. In the words of Paul Beauchamp: “if we humans cease to speak humanly, we do not listen to God!”⁶ We are at the very heart of the mystery of the incarnation. “For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.” (*Dei Verbum* §13) The critical study of the Bible has some limitations. Some presuppositions of the historico-critical method need revision. Hence there is a need for philosophical hermeneutics to throw some light on the relation of the text to its reader.

2. Philosophical Approach

If we accept the affirmation of *Dei Verbum* quoted above, which is primarily a faith affirmation, then there is some justification for faith reading of the Bible. Nevertheless, can someone say that he/she fully understands the message of the Bible to the extent of a complete possession of the revealed truth as would claim some fundamentalists? Understanding a text is possible only because of the meeting of two worlds, namely the world of the author and that of the reader. The reader has his/her own history just as the text has its own. We are part of a tradition. As Gadamer notes, “the anticipation of meaning which guides our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity but is determined starting from the

community which binds us to the tradition.”⁷ Our hermeneutical stance is not our invention but a result of belonging to a tradition. Belonging to a tradition does not imply a blind adherence to it, nor understanding a text, a simple repetition of what the text says.

Our personal reflection on biblical texts is a hermeneutical task, but we place ourselves in our own faith tradition that would form part of our pre-understanding. “No one questions a text without having engaged a world of representations, of knowledge, of judgements, again a resemblance whose possibilities and limits will command his/her interpretation,”⁸ says Pelletier, commenting on the Heideggerian theme of “prejudice” in the act of understanding. Paul Ricœur holds that any interpretation can be described as the fusion of two horizons, the meeting of two worlds, one of the text and the other of the reader. In other words, the meaning is not locked up in the text itself; rather it emerges only when the reader of today with his/her own questions in mind enters in resonance with the text.

Ricœur further speaks of the autonomy of the text. The text has “a set of meanings that have broken their moorings to the psychology of the author” and “the text must speak for itself.”⁹ The life of the text gets renewed in the hands of a reader, for the reader is distanced from the author both in time and space. Rejecting “the alternative between alienating distanciation and participatory belonging,” he argues that a text “transcends its own psycho-sociological conditions of production and thereby opens itself to an unlimited series of readings themselves situated in different socio-cultural conditions. In short the text must be able to ... ‘decontextualize’ itself in such a way that it can be ‘recontextualized’ in a new situation

...”¹⁰ He further argues with the act of reading, that there is a triple dialectic in a phenomenology of reading: discordant concordance, lack of determinacy and excess of meaning, familiar and unfamiliar.¹¹

The meaning is therefore to be found in the fusion of the world of the text and that of the reader. “To understand is to understand oneself before the text,”¹² says Ricœur. The responsibility lies with the reader who has to take into account his/her lived experiences when he/she finds himself/herself before the text whose meaning takes him/her beyond the present to the future when the meaning will be comprehended in its fullness. This does not however mean that the reader can treat the text as if it were an authorless entity. Ricœur cautions against this trap of the fallacy of the absolute text when he says that “a text remains a discourse said by somebody to someone else about something. It is impossible to cancel out this main characteristic of discourse without reducing the texts to natural objects, i.e., to things which are not [hu]man-made but which, like pebbles, are found in the sand.”¹³

There is no hierarchical opposition between intelligence and spiritual life while reading the Bible. In the words of Pelletier, “it is not by getting away from the contemporary knowledge that one keeps the tradition, but by getting actively involved in it.”¹⁴ The contribution of modern sciences (and therefore of intelligence) is precious even if no science can exhaust the meaning of the Scripture. “Reading [of the Bible] proceeding from the same spirit that had inspired the Scripture, receives the promise of an intelligence which surpasses intelligence itself.”¹⁵

3. Exegetical Approach

Has there not always been hermeneutics in classical exegesis? It is obvious that it has been the case in the Jewish practice of biblical readings. According to the Jewish practice, reading and writing are inseparable. The term *miqrah* is used to refer to reading as proclamation in liturgy and *midrash* is used to indicate a rereading or interpretation in the creation of new texts. It is also true of the traditional Christian exegesis. Origen has already given thought to the role of the intelligence of the reader, with new and current questions in mind, capable of bringing out new meaning from the text that is read. Augustine, by making reference to his own personal life history, has affirmed that a re-examining of one's life in the light of biblical texts is a way to conversion. It is not a question of denying the obvious differences between the past and the present. Hermeneutics makes it possible to realise the importance of reading the Bible (written in the past) in the present, and of the understanding of its meaning for a contemporary reader.

In the Bible, hermeneutics is already at work when the Second Testament quotes the First, when Books of Wisdom quote Pentateuch, etc. One cannot read the Second Testament without any reference to the First. There is historical continuity of biblical texts. It is clear that the gospel narratives reflect a re-reading and re-interpretation of the First Testament books. Could the presence of the First Testament theology re-interpreted in the Second Testament be said to have an apologetic value? The authors of the books of the Second Testament, in all probability, would have liked to see themselves as the true heirs of what had been proclaimed, whose culmination is in bearing witness to the death and the resurrection of Jesus, which is the fulfilment of Israel's faith and hope, in

a nutshell, of the First Testament writings. In the episode of the disciples of Emmaus (Luc 24, 13-35), the renewed understanding of the Scripture in the light of the Pascal event opened the eyes of the disciples. It is in and through the Scripture (it is a reference obviously to the First Testament) that the disciples could recognize the Risen Christ. As says Pelletier, “the practice of citing the First Testament is an act of the intelligence of Faith, circulating in periods of history and in texts and arriving at the truth of the person of Christ recognized and confessed. This is why the Scripture is a true weaving of both old and new words having a theological value of the highest degree.”¹⁶

The progress in exegetical study today is also due to the renewed interest for the typological aspect of the Bible. Paul Beauchamp has consecrated his efforts, particularly in his book titled *L'un et l'autre testament*, to explore profoundly this aspect, trying to articulate all that contributes to the fulfilment of the First Testament writings in the person of Jesus Christ. This probably is due to a conviction that, in the words of Pelletier, “it is precisely the fulfilment that is at the theological horizon of the singularity of the biblical writing.”¹⁷ The assertion of Paul Beauchamp is very significant and relevant: “The old Scriptures are not fulfilled in the New, but in the acts and the deeds of Jesus Christ,” on realising that “to say that the act of Christ fulfils the Scriptures is in some way to express the totality of the essence of this act.”¹⁸ Does it not correspond to the readings of the Paschal Vigil? A creation leading towards the fullness in a re-creation! We can thus say that the Second Testament is a reinterpretation of the First from the perspective of faith in Christ dead and risen.

Nevertheless, there is no question of being ignorant of

the socio-historical context in which these texts were born. We should not forget the conflict of the Israelites with the people of the other religious traditions in the Near East. Biblical texts took shape in the course of history in the process of trying to find meaning of life in conflicting situations. The Torah says, “You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you” (Dt. 4, 2). Yet the scribes never ceased adding to it, preventing God’s Word from becoming dead words. The research of Michaël Frishbane along these lines brought out the idea of intra-biblical exegesis. His creative innovations are made predominantly in the legislative codes of the Scripture. This intra-biblical exegesis is quite in tune with hermeneutics, namely every text must be reread and be reinterpreted so that the words of the past may have a resonance today and may prepare the future.

Schleiermacher was right to have insisted on the involvement of the reading subject in the act of reading. The reader engages in a dialogue with what is read by the intermediary of the book received from tradition. But the author is also a subject, who has a history of his own and who was himself a reader of the pre-existing texts and, by appropriating from those texts, has authored a book in a given time and place. Meaning must therefore constantly be thought of as the future of the text. A text is not limited to what is said or to what has been put down in writing; it goes far beyond than the words in it.

Pelletier exemplifies this by the Book of the Song of Songs, one of the enigmatic texts of the Bible, and on which many scholars have commented. Saint John of the Cross had realized the difficulty in interpreting these

songs. “These Canticles,” he tells us, “since they were composed in the fervid love of overflowing mystical knowledge, are quite unable to express themselves adequately; and I, for my own part, do not claim to be able to do any more than throw some light on them in a very general way.”¹⁹ Contemporary exegetical studies show that it is likely that it is a rewritten work. Questions have been raised if its origin has roots in Egyptian or Israelite love literature. This book signals that “writing a book in the Bible goes hand in hand with rereading pre-existing literature both of Israel and of other peoples.”²⁰ Recent studies affirm that the meaning of this book in itself is exclusively literal and erotic. However, Ricœur perceives in this book a model for metaphorical writing. It expresses an erotic love but points to another meaning, namely nuptial. There is still another aspect to be underlined thanks to contemporary studies: This book is a song, that is, a dialogue, a vibrating personal address of one to another and not a speech on love. The reader is thus invited to re-enounce these words by taking his or her place in this exchange of voices. Usually, in the Christian tradition, this dialogue of love represents the bond between Christ and His Church. If we situate this poetic literature in the whole of the Bible, starting from creation in the Book of Genesis, up to the Book of Apocalypse speaking of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Book of the Song of Songs could be seen as offering an innovate meaning whose full understanding is in need of a future to come.

4. Theological Approach

There is a perennial risk of placing the Tradition over and above the Scripture. While theological reflections are to be based on the Bible, there exists a danger of reading

into the Bible what has been taught by the Tradition. This is why Lessing had once declared that “Religion is not an affair that should be received from one’s parents.” There could be another possible danger of reducing the Living Word of God by dissecting it through scientific exegetical methods as if these methods would have the last word. We can be certain about what we are not supposed to do, that is, replacing the Scripture by the Tradition.

Has the modern hermeneutics anything to do at all with all that concerns the Tradition? The Tradition forms part of what belongs to the “prejudice” (pre-understanding) of the reader, which is one of the fundamental hermeneutical principles, a constitutive element of every act of understanding, resulting from the fact that no judgement, no knowledge is inaugural, since every single gesture is part of a tradition and there can be no absolutely new beginnings.

The Reformation Denominations already had “prejudices” when they affirmed that Tradition is both unnecessary and necessarily corrupting. It is quite true that theology should never be static and petrified in a given Tradition. However, it should not be forgotten that in so far as Tradition has a historic continuity and it is in and through the history to which we belong that we have gained knowledge, we cannot dispense with Tradition as is easily imagined. We are the heirs of a historical Tradition in which we have our role to play, as adding layers of creative and innovative thinking to this tradition, taking it ahead towards the future. This is to ensure that the tradition does not remain merely a deposit of the dead past but a living present relevant for tomorrow. Thus interpreting a text is never a task of reproduction but of an innovative understanding. In the words of Pelletier, “my

act of reading is only a way of inserting myself in a process which precedes me and will continue to go beyond me.”²¹

Theologians before us help us to know how they have read and interpreted the Scripture to respond to the questions of their time in their respective contexts. Their reading of the Scripture has not only helped them to understand God’s Word but also to understand themselves in the light of God’s Word, that would have necessarily transformed their own lives and would have shaped their thinking. The same is true of us, the contemporary readers of the Bible. This dynamism keeps going and therefore the understanding of the Scripture can never said to be complete once and for all. “The great lesson is certainly not to be too hasty to believe that by virtue of critical knowledge, we have arrived at the profound layers of meaning. It is precisely for this reason that reading has within itself a dimension of promise.”²²

Every believer can and must enter into his/her “act of memory.” The former exegeses of the Bible throughout history constitute a collective memory of Faith. However, every new reader must make the Word of God both alive and relevant in his/her present day context without ignoring the collective memory of Faith, which binds him/her to the believing community, not only of the present, but also of the past starting from the very first Christians. Both reception and creation are at work since no innovation is possible without reception. Faith is a continuity of Tradition, for the Gospel message is transmitted from one person to another, from one generation to another. Irenaeus puts it so succinctly: “When any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the son of him who instructs him,

and the latter [is called] his father.”²³

Let us not forget that the Church through various generations, since two millennia, has handed down the Bible to us. Besides, in written discourse not only does its original sender disappear in the text, but also its first “receiver” or interlocutor as well as, for the same reason, the horizon of the original discourse: current addressees (or readers) receiving the message have another “world” of interests, concerns, culture and so on. The change of addressee is more important in the case of religious texts, mythical or not, for these claim ongoing meaning and validity for centuries, generation after generation. “Any text is open to many readings, none of which repeats another. The greater the distance from the author, the greater the dimensions acquired by the rereading of a text.”²⁴

A text, therefore, does not have a univocal meaning. “Hermeneutical age is one of many meanings.”²⁵ Equivocal meaning is due to the fact of interpretation. This would not necessarily mean that one could make the text say anything according to one’s own likes and dislikes. Nevertheless, the Bible should remain an “open Book,” not only because many Christians read it but also because research scholars are interested in it as it is considered to have contributed to the shaping of the consciousness of the contemporary culture.

The reader therefore has a significant place in the interpretation of a text. “The text grows together with its reader,” says Gregory the great. The more a reader understands the meaning of a text, the more he/she examines his/her own life in the light of the message of the text. In other words, both the reader and the text

continue to grow together. It serves no purpose to believe that one has understood biblical texts, if it does not help the reader change his/her life for the better. Does not Saint John evoke this idea when he says “Those who say ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn. 4, 20)?

There remains another question to be addressed. Is the interpreter conscious of his/her “prejudices,” that can both facilitate understanding and obstruct it as well. Ricœur might illumine us on this point through his dual concept, “to explain” and “to understand.” Both acts of explaining and of understanding, according to him, must go hand in hand so that the “otherness” of the text may surface. In the words of Levinas, “The true relation does not delete the otherness.” Could one wipe out what hinders the understanding of a text, particularly in the context of a faith-reading of the Scripture? Pelletier says that “reading the Bible implies giving consent to listen to the text stating what one hardly or partly knows and even what one does not want to know!”²⁶ The Bible invites the reader to make a centripetal movement of the self and to enter into an experience of becoming stranger to one’s own self. Would not the Bible be, to borrow the image from Pelletier, a new burning bush to which one refuses to come close for fear of getting burnt, or in which one ventures confidently in reverence?

We should first of all underline the relevance of biblical hermeneutics in modernity that calls for disengagement with tradition. Modernity would like to affirm the autonomy of intelligence of an individual who can and must dispense the tradition from the so called objective and scientific intellectual pursuit without which reason can

be endangered. Pelletier's approach to the biblical hermeneutics is therefore both relevant and inspiring. Taking insights from philosophical reflections, she adopts an inter-disciplinary, scientific and systematic approach to help us understand the need of the Tradition in the interpretation of the Scripture. To use the philosophical language of Ricœur, we are "indebted" to the Tradition. Pelletier founds her arguments on a fundamental phenomenological presupposition, that is, meaning is not objectively present in the text but emerges from an encounter between the reader and the text in a given space and time. And, both the reader and the text are part of one Tradition or another.

Our *sitz-im-leben* comprises of three dimensions, namely, anthropological, theological and cosmological. The Bible is the revelation of God to human persons in the world. From this perspective, the content of Pelletier's book deserves appreciation. If God reveals Himself in the Scripture it is because we humans can get to "know" Him. There arises inevitably a philosophical problem, namely, how is it possible for the finite and the infinite to have an encounter? To put it differently, how can the finite human person understand the revelation of the infinite God? We do not enter into the detail and the suitability of this question. Nevertheless, we shall give a brief response from the perspective of Christian Faith. In so far as the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, he/she has the trace of the infinity with himself/herself (a fundamental precept both of Descartes and of Levinas), which make both understanding and non-understanding possible, thus leaving space for the art of interpretation to be at work. Non-understanding, we dare say, is the condition of the possibility of understanding.

Language is what makes a person human, but it alone cannot make understanding and transmission of a text complete. It hides as much as it reveals, especially emotions cannot be fully expressed by the medium of language. The Bible, while being the revelation of God's plan is also and perhaps even more a revelation of His Love expressed in feeble human language. Hence, the need for rich symbolism in the Bible, that calls for the need of hermeneutics.

If the world is the locus of divine revelation and as a human person is "Being-in-the-world," then the need to understand God's Word in human language demands of us a certain sensitivity to the socio-historical realities of all times, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Pelletier underlines the importance of the socio-historical reality in biblical hermeneutics. In so far as the human person is "Being-in-the-world," he/she is also "Being-with" (*Mitsein* in Heideggerian language) and therefore any interpretation that does not takes into account the presence of "others," is not fully receptive to God's revelation, for every human person is created not for himself/herself but to be related to others in love. Whence our claim: God continues to reveal Himself in many other ways even today, though the revelation in the Scripture is normative for us Christians. However, it is imperative that we learn to interpret the divine revelation in the signs of the times with the help of biblical knowledge, and also to understand and appreciate better the Scripture with the help of what is 'revealed' today, here and now.

The tradition therefore has its proper place, playing a positive role in biblical hermeneutics. There is a continuity of the transmission of Faith by the interpretation of a biblical text that a biblical scholar studies scientifically.

As belonging to the Tradition, he/she does not begin his/her study from scratch, from a zero-point, rather he/she confronts the text with what he/she has inherited from the faith tradition, but of course with his/her questions in the present-day context. As Rorty has said, “we cannot step out of our tradition in as much as we cannot step out of our skin,” and it is rightly so because the Tradition does not belong to us, on the contrary, we belong to the Tradition.

The reader is not an isolated individual but one belonging to a community. So he/she shares in the world of meaning of the Tradition to which he/she belongs. His/her “prejudices” are shaped by the Tradition in which he/she is a part. Tradition is not a tangible reality, nevertheless it is ubiquitous. It is not a static reality either; it is dynamic as it forms people and is formed in the process. Belonging to a Tradition, therefore, does not necessarily mean being imprisoned in a petrified Tradition, rather it means keeping alive the Tradition but being cautious at the same time not to interpret the biblical texts without having any historical consciousness of the Faith Tradition to which one belongs. This in no way goes against the possibility of plurality of interpretations, though there is no room for a haphazard interpretation. The Tradition neither constrains us nor does it lock us up in the by-gone past, but what has been passed on to us by the Tradition cannot be ignored in as much as we cannot be silent about our own findings that add up to the Tradition.

We are heirs of a given Tradition and it is our duty to keep it alive in as much as we have to keep God’s Word alive by placing ourselves at the heart both of the Scripture and of the Tradition. Understanding a text is neither to

repeat what the text says nor to confine the meaning to what the interpretative Tradition says, but to go beyond what has been passed on to us, of course not ignoring it. "To understand what a text says could not be reduced to identify its historical referent, to restore the cultural universe which saw the text being born or to explicit the conditions in which it was written."²⁷ Hermeneutics makes the debate on the role and the importance of the Tradition relevant especially since the Bible has been handed down, as a canon of Faith, from one generation to another. The theological Tradition, which is a reflection on and an articulation of the meaning of the Bible, God's Word, is inevitable. We can neither distance ourselves from the tradition, nor can we leave it in the lapse of memory.

Finally, what is Tradition, if not a dynamics of reading and rereading in a given period of history, which would enable the present day reader to understand a biblical passage addressing him/her in his/her day to day life? "Reading is not limited to a passive recognition of a fixed and static meaning. To read is not to repeat an immutable meaning, even if the relation to the text in the context of Faith directs the reader from the very outset towards the mystery of Christ."²⁸ Let us conclude this paper by citing a Hassidic anecdote: "A disciple went to see his master who asked him: 'What did you learn?' The disciple replied: "I went through the Talmud thrice," and the master told him: "But, did the Talmud go through you?"²⁹

Bibliography

BEAUCHAMP, Paul. "Accomplir les Ecritures: Un chemin de théologie biblique." In *Revue biblique*. 1992.

BEAUCHAMP, Paul. *Parler d'Ecritures Saintes*. Paris:

Seuil, 1987.

BERNARD, Charles. "Symbolisme et conscience affective."
In *Gregorianum*. Vol. 61/3, 1980.

CROATTO, Servino J. *Biblical Hermeneutics*. New York:
Orbis, 1987.

GADAMER, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Trans. Donald
G. MARSHALL. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1979.

GREISCH, Jean. *Entendre d'une autre oreille*. Paris:
Bayard, 2006.

IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies*, IV.
<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-62.htm>.

PELLETIER, Anne-Marie. *D'âge en âge les Ecritures*.
Bruxelles: Lessius, 2004.

RICŒUR, Paul "Metaphor and the Main Problem of
Hermeneutics." In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, eds.
Charles E. REAGAN & David STEWART. Boston:
Beacon Press, 1978.

RICŒUR, Paul. "Existence and Hermeneutics." In *The
Conflict of Interpretations*. Trans. Don IHDE. Evanston:
Northwestern University Press, 1974.

RICŒUR, Paul. *From Text to Action: Essays in
Hermeneutics*. Trans. Kathleen BLAMEY and John B.
THOMPSON. Evanston: Northwestern University Press,
1991.

RICŒUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*. Texas: Christian
University Press, 1976.

RICŒUR, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. New York: Harper
& Row, 1967.

RICŒUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative* (vol. 3). Trans.

Kathleen BLAMEY and David PELLAUER. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," cited by Paul RICŒUR, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 326-327.

² Anne-Marie Pelletier, *D'âge en âge les Ecritures* (Bruxelles: Lessius, 2004), 161; translation mine.

³ Ibid., 165; translation and emphasis mine.

⁴ « La vérité révélée ne se transforme pas, elle grandit ».

⁵ Pelletier, *D'âge en âge les Ecritures*, 39-40; translation mine.

⁶ Paul Beauchamp, *Parler d'Ecritures saintes*, (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 22; translation mine.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Donald G. Marshall (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1979), 315.

⁸ Ibid., 56; translation mine.

⁹ Paul Ricœur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," eds. Charles E. Reagan and David Steward, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 154.

¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 83.

¹¹ See Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* (vol. 3), trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 168-169.

¹² Ricœur, *From Text to Action*, 88.

¹³ Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory* (Texas: Christian University Press, 1976), 30.

¹⁴ Pelletier, *D'âge en âge les Ecritures*, 163; translation mine.

¹⁵ Ibid., 165; translation mine.

¹⁶ Ibid., 86; translation mine.

¹⁷ Ibid., 95; translation mine.

¹⁸ Paul Beauchamp, "Accomplir les Ecritures: un chemin de théologie biblique," in *Revue biblique*, 1992, 151; translation mine.

¹⁹ Cited by Charles Bernard, "Symbolisme et conscience affective," in

Gregorianum, 61/3, 1980, 437-438.

²⁰ Pelletier, *D'âge en âge les Ecritures*, 112; translation mine.

²¹ Ibid., 121 ; translation mine.

²² Ibid., 135 ; translation mine.

²³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 41, 2; (accessed on February 08, 2010 from the online source <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-62.htm>).

²⁴ Servino J. Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York/ Orbis, 1987), 19.

²⁵ Pelletier, *D'âge en âge les Ecritures*, 139; translation mine.

²⁶ Ibid., 149; translation mine.

²⁷ Gadamar, *Truth and Method*, 53.

²⁸ Pelletier, *D'âge en âge les Ecritures*, 141; translation mine.

²⁹ Cited by Jean Greisch, *Entendre d'une autre oreille*, (Paris: Bayard, 2006), 293.

Priest - Celebrant of the Cosmic Sacrament: Some Reflections on Holy Eucharist and Priestly Ministry

Dr. Isaac Parackal, OIC

Faculty of Philosophy,
Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014.

Abstract: The Eucharist symbolizes the cosmotheandric mystery, and it is seen as a cosmic sacrament. Priests are the celebrants and stewards of this, and their ministry includes the preservation of the cosmotheandric order. The cosmotheandric covenant between God, humans and the cosmos is renewed and strengthened in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist reminds one and all of our duties towards our environment.

Keywords: Priest, cosmic sacrament, Eucharist, cosmotheandric order, environment, ecology, mystery.

Introduction

Environment is God's gift to human beings. The cosmos is the divine sacrament through which the divine presence and bounty are manifested. There is an inherent and inevitable relation between God, human beings and the cosmos and human beings are partners with God in this covenantal relationship. "The salvation of (hu)man and the transformation of nature are one, since in the thought of the Greek fathers (hu)man is a "microcosm" whose destiny is inseparably connected with that of creation."¹ This interrelatedness is well expressed in the **cosmotheandric vision**.² The whole creation which is the *macrocosm* is intimately and inseparably connected with

humans – the *microcosm*. The destiny of the universe is in the hands of humans who co-work with God to lead it to fulfillment. The Holy Eucharist symbolizes this *cosmotheandric mystery* and it is the cosmic sacrament where God and humans meet. Priests who are the celebrants of this cosmic sacrament are stewards and co-workers of God and are called to be alert and vigilant over the whole cosmic family for the faithful preservation of it. In this era of ecological crisis, this vision has great significance.

In this article, we shall analyse the *cosmotheandric vision* in the light of the present ecological crisis and show how the Eucharist becomes the cosmic sacrament. We shall also analyse the role of a priest as the celebrant of the whole cosmic sacrament who is accountable to his Master for the welfare of the whole cosmic family. His priestly ministry is not only cultic but also prophetic which finds its expression in the *cosmotheandric spirituality*, embracing the whole creation with attentiveness and compassion.

World as Sacrament

God is present in the world in and through the creative processes of the world. God's continuous presence is manifested in the world processes and everything in nature in one way or the other proclaims the presence and glory of God. In the Holy Eucharist the creative process, through which God recreates and saves the world is unfolding. The unfailing divine presence is throughout the world and God protects and maintains the world without falling apart.³ Creation is the manifestation of God's gratuitous love and all creatures are products of the divine love and recipients of that ongoing love.⁴ In that way,

every being is a *Theophany* – the manifestation of the Divine albeit in a limited way. If God is the Giver of holiness and the One who sanctifies, then the world could be seen as the sacrament of God. We can see this sacramental notion in two dimensions – symbolic function and instrumental function. In the first dimension, the world is a symbol for “it is a mode of God’s revelation, an expression of His truth and beauty which are ‘spiritual’ aspects of its reality.”⁵ Secondly, the world is instrumental because “God is effecting instrumentally through it (world), what He does for men in and through it.”⁶ The whole world could be seen as an instrument and ground of life. “The Earth, however, not only grounds reality, she yields reality. The Earth is fertile; she is the womb of beings. She receives the seed of the Divine and transforms it into abundant life. The Earth is where – and how – the Divine manifests its bounty and its power to man.”⁷ In Genesis, the Priestly author explains to us that God Himself has declared that every aspect of creation is ordered and good.⁸ The Oriental Theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes: “God blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day(that is time) and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all this ‘very good’.”⁹ Corroborated by the Genesis understanding we can maintain that all things can be a revelation of the divine wisdom and goodness.¹⁰ When we say that we are God’s creation we are affirming indirectly that God’s voice is constantly speaking within us and saying to us, ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.’¹¹ In the words of Teilhard de Chardin, “Everything that is active, that moves and breathes, every physical, astral or animate energy, every fragment of force, every sparkle of life is equally sacred:

for in the humblest atom and the most brilliant star, in the lowest insect and the finest intelligence, there are radiant smiles and thrills of the same Absolute.”¹² According to A. R. Peacocke, “the whole world of creation, then will be good and the revelation of the Divine, and therefore, human had to do with one supreme Creator God, whose will was steadfast - and so the created order should in principle be a regular manifestation of the supreme ‘mind’ of the Creator.”¹³ All the worldly processes are sacramental and the world is a sacrament of God’s continuous actions. In sacraments, especially in the Eucharistic celebration, we are using the natural things as the medium of God’s grace and we believe that the invisible grace is coming down to us through these visible natural objects. In the same manner the whole nature should be seen as the divine sacrament through which we receive the grace and blessings of God. The world is viewed as the *instrument* whereby God is effecting some cosmic purpose by acting on it. The world is our family where God’s continuous presence is felt.

Since God is immanently present in the world, the world is to be seen as the manifestation of God’s action. God is everywhere and at all times in the processes and events of the natural world, which could be seen as the vehicle and instrument of God’s action and as capable of expressing His intentions and purposes – as our bodies are agents of ourselves. A human being should have respect for nature, in the same way he or she has respect for his or her own body or those of other persons. We do not consider the body of the other as a mere aggregate of flesh, but as a person. In the case of the natural world, if it is God who is the agent, who is expressed therein, human attitude to nature should show a respect, which is

transmuted into reverence at the presence of God in and through the whole of created order, a derived sacredness or holiness as the vehicle and instrument of God's own creative action. In other words, humans have the sacred duty to revere the nature as they do to other persons.

Eucharist - A Call to Cosmotheandric Order (*ṛta*)

In the Indian religious tradition, harmony among the Divine, human and the cosmic is well expressed in the notion of *ṛta*. *Ṛta* is the upholding of the cosmic order where God the Creator, the cosmos and the humans are in perfect harmony. *Ṛta* in its deepest sense means *dharma*, the right action and behavior, as opposed to *adharma* – the wrong and unnatural action. *Dharma* implies a fundamental concern and respect for the whole creation and includes a moral and social order and symmetry. The whole creation itself could be seen as a passage from chaos to order. Human beings are called to uphold this harmony in which all the forces of nature, from electromagnetic to divine, from angelic to human are intertwined and interrelated. The Holy Eucharist is the sacrifice (*yajña*) by which, the *ṛta* or the order of the universe is maintained. Sacrifice by nature is a *cosmotheandric act*, an act in which God and humans have to work together in order that the world be conserved; it is a cosmic act because the sustenance of the world depends on it.¹⁴ The sacrifice, the sacrificer and the sacrificed meet together in the Holy Eucharist. The goodness and order in creation are celebrated in the Eucharist. It is well expressed in the *Eucharistic Prayer* by raising the offerings to God. "The divine liturgy – the continual ascent, the lifting up of the church to *heaven*, to the throne of glory, to the unfading light and joy of the kingdom of

God – is the focus of this experience, simultaneously its source and presence, gift and fulfillment.”¹⁵ The Holy Eucharist is the climax of the triune oneness of Reality. All the three dimensions, God, the cosmos and human are brought together on the same altar of creation. The *cosmotheandric* covenant between God, humans and the cosmos is renewed and strengthened in the Holy Eucharist.¹⁶

Eucharist: Symbol of the Cosmotheandric Mystery

In the Eucharistic celebration, the bread and wine placed upon the altar symbolize the whole creation. They act as vehicles of the whole world in its entirety.¹⁷ The word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word, ‘eucharistein’ which means thanksgiving. There is a predominance of the themes of praise and thanksgiving in the whole “Eucharistic prayer.”¹⁸ In the offertory prayer of the Holy Eucharist we see this great notion of praising and thanksgiving: “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.”¹⁹ In the Eucharistic Liturgy, the goodness of the Creator is acknowledged. The whole cosmic family offers thanksgiving to its Creator.²⁰ The Holy Eucharist is, in fact, an “offering back” of the whole world to God in thanksgiving.²¹ It is the cosmic sacrifice or *yajña*, offered to God by the whole creation. The whole world is a God-given gift to humans whose task is to protect and conserve it. In the Holy Eucharist, we see this great symbolism of **cosmotheandric unity** which proclaims the interdependent, interrelated and harmonious structure of creation which is entrusted to human beings. In other words, Eucharist calls us to

maintain *ṛta* – the cosmic order through *dharma* – the right action. In the present ecological crisis this symbolism has got great relevance. Human beings, who are supposed to maintain the ecological well-being and order, go against the will of the Creator, and as a result there are so many climatic changes and disorders in the atmospheric conditions, such as global warming, tsunami, acid rains, ozone depletion, tornados, earth quakes, etc. Any laxity in maintaining this cosmic order or *ṛta* has an effect on every web of life and it adversely affects the mutual and intimate relation among God, humans and the cosmos.

Experience shows that the development in the physical realm makes humans more and more unhappy. We cannot claim that we are better or happier than our ancestors, though we have made all types of advancements in science and technology. Modern facilities and technological devices (at least most of them) make humans a foe to nature rather than a friend. Most of the modern technologies are provocative than evocative. They do not evoke in us any respect for nature but alienate us further from both God and nature. The distance between human beings, God and the world becomes wider and wider with every new scientific discovery. For instance, the splitting up of the atom in the name of scientific progress seems to be a cosmic abortion, which jeopardises the natural balance. For the sake of scientific achievements we experiment and explode atom bombs and launch missiles with high explosive chemicals which affect the rhythm and balance of the cosmic system. Nowadays, even the deserts are not deserted but they have become places of destructive experiments. Modern human beings want to have *mastery* even on the *mysteries* of the cosmos. They cannot digest the word “mystery,” forgetting the fact that

their life itself is a mystery.²² They try *experimenting* on everything rather than *experiencing*. They seek the *maximum* over the *optimum*. Agriculture which was a kind of love-making with the earth has become *agri-business* – taking the *maximum* from a small piece of land, and exploiting the earth. Therefore, for the modern human being, the emphasis has gone from *quality* to *quantity*. The modern human being is always on the go and he or she thinks “the quicker, the better” in order to gain time. Acceleration is the great discovery of modernity. The most important characteristic of techno-centric civilization lies in having introduced acceleration, less in the mathematical-physical than in the global sense: acceleration of rhythms, of times, of all happenings on this earth.²³ Humans want to speed up everything including the natural processes. Nature has a spontaneous rhythm and we cannot accelerate it without causing harm to nature itself. This natural rhythm serves to keep the equilibrium of the cosmos. If this equilibrium is lost, nature cannot tolerate it, rather it will respond aggressively. This violent reaction of nature is manifested as tsunamis, acid rains, earthquakes, drought, flood, etc. The polluted atmosphere, the contaminated rivers, the stained seas, the extinct species, the exhausted natural resources and the denuded forests stand as plain evidence to this ecological disaster. All these show the human failure to live up to our vocation to protect the earth. As Vladimir Lossky rightly points out, “To the universe (hu) man is the hope of receiving grace and unity with God, and also the failure and fallenness.”²⁴ The present ecological crisis is, in fact, a result of the human failure in not maintaining fellowship, right relationship and harmony with God and nature.

Reckless borrowing against the earth’s exhausted

bounty is driving the planet toward an ecological “credit crunch”. Growing demand on natural capital – such as soil, air and biodiversity already outstrips the earth’s capacity to renew these resources by a third. If our demand on the planet continues to increase at the same rate, by the mid 2030’s we would need the equivalent of two planets to maintain our lifestyles. That is why it is said that *the earth is sufficient for everybody’s need but not enough for everybody’s greed*. A European Union study calculates that the world is losing between two and five trillion dollars in natural capital every year due to the degradation of the ecosystems. The world is currently struggling with the consequences of over-valuing assets. However, a more fundamental crisis looms, an ecological credit crunch caused by undervaluing the environmental assets that are the basis of all life and prosperity.²⁵

The Holy Eucharist invites us to respect nature and cherish a fellowship (*koinonia*). It reminds us of the great truth that *nature is not a slave to be raped but a partner to be cherished*. The offering of bread and wine in the Eucharist reminds us of the *offering of the whole world back to God* in thanksgiving and thereby demands our sincere effort to make it a perfect offering pleasing to God. That is why the world is both, a gift and a task at the same time.²⁶ Any offering which is not flawless and perfect cannot fulfill the aspect of thanksgiving. However, an offering of thanksgiving is to be offered with an unblemished heart which seeks the welfare of each and every creature in this cosmos. This depends on a radical *metanoia* – a complete turning of mind, heart and spirit. The Holy Eucharist challenges us to take a radical turn back (*metanoia*) that would motivate us to regain the lost harmony and confluence in the whole cosmos. As we

partake in the mystery of the body and blood of Christ we become one with the *cosmotheandric* web of life and become partners of the mystery of creation. Receiving the Holy Communion the priest says silently: “In my hand I take you, Lord, who hold and sustain the universe in the palms, and on my tongue I receive you Lord, who rule the depths of the universe.”²⁷ This shows the intimate relationship - the great *cosmotheandric* unity between the Creator and creation. The Holy Eucharist reminds us of our connectedness with the Divine, manifested in the whole creation which participates in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice in and through the natural symbols used.²⁸ The Holy Eucharist (*yajña*) demands from us a radical action (*dharma*).

Priest: Celebrant of the Cosmic Sacrament

To be a priest means to be a *mediator*. So a priest has the sacred duty to gather together the offering of creation and present it back to God. “The priest is first and foremost the **sacrificer**.”²⁹ He is the one who can say “**thank you**” to God.”³⁰ A Priest stands at the centre of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing of God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God – and by filling the world with the Eucharist, he transforms the life, the one that receives from the world, into life in God, into communion. This meeting or encounter between God and humans is the centre from where one moves to God and to the world.³¹ The Eucharist where humans meet God, is the sacrifice of the whole world to God, the intercession for the whole world before God. In fact, the ideal world is the one where humans and all the created beings co-exist in peace and tranquility. The Eucharist is directed towards the “whole” - to the entire creation and

the whole world. In this sense, a priest is an intermediary between God, human beings and the world. He is cooperating with God in the creative activity and fulfils God's purposes within it. He facilitates the re-bonding of the lost harmony and peace between God, human beings and the cosmos. He mends the broken relationship which is endangered by human greed and selfishness and brings about atonement (**at-one-ment**).

Being the celebrant of the Eucharist the priest is the minister of the whole cosmic sacrament. As it has been mentioned earlier, the Eucharist symbolizes the whole cosmos through which the divine love is manifested. The Eucharist challenges every priest to cultivate a sense of responsibility (**response-ability**) and duty to work for the welfare of the whole cosmos. In the New Testament we see Jesus asking his disciples to be watchful and vigilant for the whole household. The one who is managing the household vigilantly is well appreciated by the master and is put in charge of the master's possessions.³² The whole cosmos becomes the household of priests who are accountable to the master and responsible for the able management of the whole household. A priest's responsibility does not end in the four walls of his parish or the church. He should not confine himself to the cultic ministry, rather his liturgical ministry should extend to the outside world which is the locus of his teaching and prophetic ministries. As the minister of the church he cannot be indifferent and impassive to the lost relationship between the Creator, human beings and the created order.³³ As a prophet he should be sensitive to the happenings in the outside world and must be able to read the signs of the time. Being a teacher, a priest has the sacred duty to conscientize people that the natural

resources should be used in such a way that immediate benefits do not have a negative impact on the whole cosmic web of life.³⁴ Serving the Lord and serving the cosmos are the two sides of the same coin. That is why it is announced at the end of every Holy Mass, “the Mass is ended, go and serve the Lord.”³⁵ It shows that the service to the Lord takes place not only in the Eucharistic liturgy (inside the church) but also in the service to the world (outside the church). Serving the cosmos is an extension of serving the Lord. When the priest utters the consecration words, **“This is my body, which is broken and given up for you”** and **“This is my blood which is shed for you,”** he becomes one with Christ Himself who has given His life for the whole world, so that the world has life and life in abundance. As his Master did, a priest also must be broken and given up for the life of the whole cosmic family. As a good shepherd, he has to sacrifice his whole life for the entire cosmic sheepfold. By the very nature of his special vocation he is a man for others. The whole cosmos is the altar and the Eucharist is the cosmic sacrament which symbolizes the **cosmotheandric mystery** where the priest sacrifices his whole life for the welfare of the whole world. A mystic like Teilhard reminds us of this great *cosmotheandric* vision as he writes in his book, *Mass at the Altar of the Universe*, “Since once again, Lord...I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the real majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all labors and sufferings of the world.”³⁶ A meaningful celebration of the Holy Eucharist should awaken in every priest a sense of the divine presence in the cosmos, enabling him to cultivate a **cosmotheandric spirituality** that revitalizes him to work for the well-being and integration

(*lōkasamgraha*) of the whole cosmos that is crippled and wounded.

Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs, we were trying to see the different perspectives of Eucharist and Priesthood in the light of the present ecological crisis. We have seen that the present ecological crises are human-made if we look at it through the prism of *cosmotheandric* vision which proclaims the undifferentiated unity between the Divine, human and the cosmic. We have seen how the God-given ecosystems were exploited by the human-made cultures and technologies. Human beings have exploited the earth for their own selfish motives and tried to subjugate it like a slave. As a result, the harmony between the Divine, human and the cosmic was lost. In this crisis, the Eucharistic sacrifice is the cosmic sacrament (*yajña*) which helps us regain the lost harmony and order (*rta*) through the right action (*dharma*). As the minister of the Eucharist, the priest is called to foster a *cosmotheandric* spirituality which would lead us to live a life of harmony, respect and love with humans, the cosmos and thus, with God Himself. It is a spirituality that listens to the groaning of the earth with compassion and helps us move into concrete action. This spirituality reminds us of our mission, sacred duty to be catalysts of spreading the ecological consciousness and asserts the sacredness (*sacramentality*) of the whole cosmos.³⁷ As a teacher, prophet and shepherd, a priest is the one who facilitates the cosmic harmony through a meaningful celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice.

¹ Zizioulas, "Ortodossia", in *Enciclopedia del Novecento*, Vol. 5, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1980, 17.

² This term is coined by R. Panikkar in order to show the radical relativity of The Divine, human and the cosmic.

³ Cf. *Malankara Qurbono, English Taksa*(1986), 8.

⁴ Cf. Psalms 136: 1-9.

⁵ A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, 290.

⁶ A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, 290. Brackets are mine.

⁷ R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*, ed. Scott Eastham, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983, 132.

⁸ Cf. A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, 279.

⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1965, 15.

¹⁰ Cf. A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, 279.

¹¹ Cf. Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Eschatology", *Sobornost*, 7/1, 1985, 13.

¹² Ursula King, *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.: Selected writings*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1999, 46.

¹³ A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, 280.

¹⁴ Cf. R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 34.

¹⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988, 164.

¹⁶ Taken from the Message of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, on the World Day of Peace published on 8. December 2009.

¹⁷ Cf. Alexander Schmemmann, "The World as Sacrament" , *Church, World, Mission*, ed. Alexander Schmemmann, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979, 217-227.

¹⁸ Cf. *Malankara Qurbono, English Taksa*(1986), 28.

¹⁹ Offertory prayer in the Holy Eucharist of the Latin rite.

²⁰ In the Malankara Qurbono, it is well expressed in the *Anaphora* of St. James: See *Malankara Qurbono Taksa* (2001), 44.

²¹ In the prayer before consecration, there is expressed so well the human duty itself of giving thanks to God continuously for the great gift of creation.

²² Here, I remember the distinction between mystery and problem proposed by Gabriel Marcel.

²³ Cf. R. Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, trans. Annemarie S. Kidder, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993. 26: "Nowadays one thinks that the natural rhythms, the changes of day and night, of walking and sitting, of winter and summer – as in farming, for example – are no longer sufficient. One wants to progress faster. And the kind of acceleration resulting from this shatters the rhythms of the whole environment and of being in general."

²⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi –Watson, New York, St.Valdimir's seminary Press, 1973, 117.

²⁵ Cf. *Times of India*, Pune Edition, October 31, 2008, 13.

²⁶ Cf. Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, Cumbria, Paternoster Press, 1999, 117.

²⁷ *Malankara Qurbono Taksa* (2001), 66. Translation is mine.

²⁸ Cf. Siji Noorokariyil SJ, *Children of the Rainbow*, Delhi, Media House, 2007, 124

²⁹ The word "priest" is derived from the Greek *Presbyteros* (elder), and is, in the hierarchical sense, equivalent to the Latin *Sacerdos*, the Greek *Iereus*, the Hebrew *Kahane* and the Syriac *Kohane*. By the term is meant a (male) person called to the immediate service of the Deity and authorized to hold public worship, especially to offer sacrifice. In many instances the priest is the religious mediator between God and humans and the appointed teacher of religious truths, especially when these include esoteric doctrines.

³⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, "Sacrifice and Worship" *Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, 129-135.

³¹ Cf. Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 116.

³² Cf. *Lk* 12:35-48; *Mt* 24: 42-48.

³³ Pope Benedict in his message on the world day of peace 2010 asks: "Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss

of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes, and deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?”

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid*.

³⁵ Cf. *Eucharistic Liturgy* (Latin rite).

³⁶ Ursula King, *Pierre Teilhard De Chardin,: Selected Writings*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1999, 80.

³⁷ Cf. Siji Noorokariyil SJ, *Children of the Rainbow*, 108.

The Ecclesial Vocation of the Priest. A Vatican Council II Perspective

Errol D'Lima, S.J.

De Nobili College, Pune 411014.

Abstract: An overview of priesthood in history is provided. The change in the understanding of priesthood that Vatican II brings is highlighted, especially the noteworthy aspects of its teaching regarding priesthood for today's world. Different dimensions of the ecclesial vocation of the ministerial priesthood are presented. Serving the people of God, sacramentalizing Christian leadership and fostering dialogue as a way of life are among the major elements of a relevant priesthood for today.

Keywords: Priest, history of priesthood, Vatican II priesthood, ecclesial vocation, ministerial priest, common priesthood, sacramental service.

The year of the priest may have been declared in the context of many concerns, e.g. the scandals caused by pedophile clergymen, the alarming increase of priest-less parishes, etc., but it offers Catholics an opportunity to reflect seriously on the vocation of the priest. Further, as the sub-title indicates, the Vatican II documents *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius* offer suitable points of reference to elaborate on the function of the priest in the Church—*aggiornamento* (updating) being the overall aim of the council.

As one of the seven sacraments in the Church, the priesthood is a constitutive element of the Church. The need for priests is tied up with the Church's self-understanding as a worshipping community organically united to Christ the head and celebrating its liturgy

through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The common priesthood of all the members forming the Church is given visible, concrete and efficacious expression through the ministry of the priest. In turn, the ministerial priesthood achieves its intended purpose in the midst of the People of God called to be identified with Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit.

If the sacraments in the Church are meant to build up community—the Body of Christ—centred on the Eucharist, the ecclesial aspect of the vocation of a priest should merit more attention in writings celebrating the year of the priest. Too often, the priesthood is viewed mostly as the personal vocation one lives out individually in response to the call of God. The priest's life of prayer, self-introspection, selflessness, closeness to God and personal holiness are viewed with little concern given to his ecclesial ministry. Left out of consideration is the fact that it is the Church that requires the ministry of the priest for specific tasks—primarily the building up of the Body of Christ—and sets down the job description into which he must fit! Hence, wanting to be faithful to God's call in the Church is not a sufficient reason for a person to enlist for the priesthood. It is the Church that decides and calls him to fulfill the requirements of the ministerial priesthood. And this is what takes place at the ordination of a priest.

In this essay, an effort is made to articulate the different dimensions that make up the ecclesial vocation of the ministerial priesthood. When the Church calls a person to the priesthood it is these dimensions that give substance to the vocation to the priesthood. Another way of saying the same thing is to inquire how the job description of a priest enables him to carry out the authentic priestly mission of Christ in the Church and in the world. We shall try to

understand the priesthood by examining its meaning in the pre-Christian era, considering what the New Testament and Catholic Tradition tell us about the Christian priesthood, and then understanding how Vatican II looks at the priesthood. In the light of the council's intuitions and official church documents a concrete vision for today's priest is offered.

I. An Overview of the Priesthood in History

In general, the function of the priesthood has been linked generally to that of offering religious sacrifice. At the same time, the notion of sacrifice itself is complex and varied. Sacrifice is well described in the following words:

The offering of something, animate or inanimate, in a ritual procedure which establishes, or mobilizes, a relationship of mutuality between one who sacrifices (whether individual or group) and the recipient—who may be human but more often is of another order, e.g. God or spirit. Sacrifice pervades virtually all religions, but it is extremely difficult to say precisely what the meanings of sacrifice are—perhaps because the meanings are so many. Sacrifice is clearly much more than technique: it involves drama, ritual, and action, transforming whatever it is that is sacrificed beyond its mundane role: in general, nothing that is sacrificed has intrinsic worth or holiness before it is set apart; it is sacrifice that gives it added value. Sacrifice has been understood as expiation of fault or sin; as propitiation of an angry deity; as apotropaic (turning away punishment, disaster, etc.); as purgation; as an expression of gratitude; as substitutionary...as commensal, establishing union with God or with others in a community; as maintaining cosmic order; as celebration...as catharsis;¹ as a surrogate offering at the level of power and its distribution.

(A) Priesthood in the Greco-Roman World

In the Greco-Roman urban world the practice existed of men and women being chosen to serve gods and

goddesses.² Those serving in that capacity were referred to as “priests” or “priestesses”. Among them, some served as priests throughout their lives whereas others were given fixed terms. One finds evidence of the hereditary nature of priestly office. In other instances, there were publicly elected persons who fulfilled the priestly office. This priesthood was an honoured function yet it could also be sold to the highest bidder. Sometimes priests performed their duties only on special occasions, as required, but would continue carrying out other mundane tasks, e.g. social and political activities. Leadership roles were reflected in the jobs done by the father in a family, the head of a social group or officials in a city. Priests assisted those exercising leadership roles. Priests are also seen as expounders of sacred texts and mediators of divination. In the Greco-Roman world, the understanding of the priest was very different from what we find today.

...in English, ‘priest’ is used as a generic term ...but implies a potentially misleading unity of conception and an analogy with the roles of priesthood in later religions. Pagan priests did not form a separate group or caste and seldom devoted their whole lives to religious activity; characteristically, they performed their religious duties on special occasions or when required and otherwise continued with the same range of social or political activities as other members of their social groups. Above all, there was no religious community, separate from the civic community, with its own personnel or power-structure. Nor did priests monopolize religious action or communication with the gods and goddesses: fathers of families, leaders of social groups, officials of the city, all had the power of religious action, with priests as advisers or helpers.³

In the priesthood of the Greco-Roman world, one does not find resemblances to the three levels of Christian Order (deacons, priests and bishops) present in the Catholic priesthood.

(B) Priesthood in Israel

In Judaism, priests belonged to the hereditary class entrusted with “the performance of the cultic ceremonies of the Jerusalem Temple.”⁴ Besides ritual functions, they also conducted sacrificial services.⁵

According to Numbers 1:48-53 and 3:5-40, the Levites were singled out for the service of the Tabernacle... The changing role of the Levites in relation to the Temple reflects the consequences (and conflict) resulting from the building of the Temple, the centralization of the cult and the reordering of the Temple after the Exile, through all of which the priesthoods of Aaron and Zadok had to be accommodated. Levi was the only tribe to lack fixed territory in the Promised Land and in consequence of their religious duties received tithes. The Levites seem to have been subject to priests, the descendants of Aaron, although, according to Deuteronomy 18:6-9, all Levites are fit to serve in the Sanctuary. During the period of the monarchy, the Levites became state officials in their administration of the cult; they became eventually the Temple singers.⁶

Playing his part in a structured society, the priest in Israel was one who took care of varied services.⁷ At the same time, group pressures obliged the priest—perhaps against his better judgment—to accommodate the commands and wishes of secular society. At the time of the monarchy, the priest busied himself with giving oracles using the *urim* and *thummim*, providing religious instruction to the people and offering sacrifice.⁸ By New Testament times, the sole function of the priest was to offer sacrifice and when Jesus appeared the Jewish priesthood had become decidedly cultic.

(C) Priesthood in the New Testament

While there are references to Jesus as priest in the NT (e.g. Hebrews), he does not come from a priestly family.

Even more, Jesus is seen making a prophetic critique of the religious leaders through his actions and words.⁹ As is well known, the gospels do not depict the mission of Jesus in terms of cultic ritual. Yet, the reference point in the life of Jesus is the Father from whom he comes and to whom he will return. Doing the will of his Father is the vocation of Jesus and within that vocation he manifests his love, care and concern for people in his world. Hence, when we find the Letter to the Hebrews depicting Jesus as the high priest, the significance of that priesthood obtains from

(a) his solidarity with humankind in all things except sin (2:17-18; 4:15), and (b) his divine sonship, manifested through his perfect obedience in suffering (5:7-10)... Jesus is [thus] both a natural priest (in virtue of his divine sonship), and professional priest (because of his 'ordination' by God).¹⁰

The Eucharistic institutional text in Matthew refers to the covenantal sacrifice that Jesus offers for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26/28). As the perfect high priest Jesus has offered, once and for all, the sacrifice that makes any other sacrifice unnecessary (Heb 7:11-28; 8:1-10:18). In fact, the type of sacrifice found in the OT has no place in the NT since Jesus himself is the perfect priest as well as the perfect victim whose offering is already made through his life, death and resurrection.

The NT community that witnesses through its life and deeds to Jesus Christ now has the task of making concrete or actualizing the priestly function of Jesus. What Jesus did throughout his life, the NT Church must continue doing. I Peter 2:9-10 describes the church community in the NT as follows:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9 interprets Exodus 19:6 "...you shall be to me a kingdom of priests a holy nation." What God had done for the people of Israel, he has now done for the Christian community. The status of being "God's own people" will be seen in declaring the mighty works of God that have found their fullest expression in the person of Jesus (Isaiah 43:21 "...the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.") Clearly, it is the whole Christian community that is priestly by fully giving itself over to God and by doing the will of the Father. It is this action that shows Jesus to be a priest and the Church in offering itself to the Father as Jesus did, follows in his footsteps.

The New Testament community is gifted with charisms for carrying out its different ministries. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul instructs his audience about the charisms (gifts of the Spirit) that are to be found in the community and their finality. Charisms are for the common good, for building the Body of Christ. However, among these charisms we do not find the priesthood mentioned. Further, one does not encounter a monolithic Church as we see in present times; rather there were many Christian communities that were structured differently one from another. It is with Ignatius of Antioch (110 CE) that one finds a Church headed by a monarchical episcopate.¹¹ Church structures varied significantly from place to place; however, by the second century the following must be noted:

While the New Testament shows a trend towards the development of (such) a mono-episcopal structure, it remains faithful to its insight that the mediating priesthood is restricted to Jesus and to the community he has founded. Church officials, even in the latest strata of the New Testament, are

never called or thought of as sacral persons or cultic priests. They are seen as pastoral ministers, exercising a charismatic ministry of service and oversight.¹²

Already at this stage one can see the unity of the worshipping Church that is founded on the relationship between the person who animates, leads and facilitates the community's worship and the members of the worshipping community. The function of worship exists in the community because the Church as a whole (the Body of Christ) makes its offering to the Father. The specific identity of the priest is tied up with the church community even while the priest is the one authorized or ordained for carrying out his ministry.

(D) Priesthood in the History of the Church

With the era of Constantine (ca. 288-337), Church and State become partners and the pomp and circumstance of the secular rulers invade the Church. By the 4th century, sacerdotalism enters the Church and is reflected in the Christian clergy whose task was to offer sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic table becomes the altar on which the sacrifice takes place in an unbloody manner! Sacerdotalism is the setting apart of a cadre of persons who are separated from the people and who function as a privileged group enabling the community to worship. The priestly "caste" was born in the Church. Sacerdotalism suggests that the form and function of the OT priesthood was introduced into the priesthood of the NT. Gradually, the priest's focus was on the cultic ritual and less on leading the community to fulfill its role of declaring "the wonderful deeds" of God as stated in 1 Peter 2:9-10. The main cultic ritual was the Eucharist.

During the fifth century, when Augustine referred to

the Eucharist as Body of Christ he meant the presence of Christ in and together with the worshipping community. The Eucharistic presence of Christ in the sacred species was acknowledged tacitly as we see in the accounts of Justin Martyr who speaks about the Eucharistic species being taken to those unable to be present at the Eucharistic sacrifice. However, by the 9th century we come across efforts to explain how Christ (*Christus solus*) is present in the Eucharistic species. As a result, the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacred species begins to take shape in the writing of two monks: Radbertus (Christ physically present) and Ratramnus (spiritually and mysteriously present).¹³ Since the priest celebrated the Eucharistic sacrifice, he was seen as the one who effected the change in the bread and wine so that Christ became (substantially) present. The whole Eucharistic action reflected the traditional function of the priest which was to offer sacrifice and to bring about the Real Presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine...

By the twelfth century, the era of Berengar began and in response to the questions about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, emphasis on the sacred species became the main focus of the Eucharistic cult, especially the cult of the Eucharist outside the mass. In 1088, "absolute ordination" was permitted which weakened the link between the priest and the community he served.¹⁴ Much later in the sixteenth century and in the atmosphere of the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the sacrament of Order that conferred on the priest the *potestas ordinis*. The emphasis on the cultic character of the priest was further accentuated with particular reference to the celebration of the Eucharist and Penance/Reconciliation.¹⁵ In considering the sacramental

action, little emphasis was laid on the word of God as compared to the power exercised by the ordained priest in celebrating the mysteries of salvation.

The reforms of Trent produced seminary training for the priest that not only educated him but also made him a more pliable instrument in the hands of the bishop. Such seminary training was not contextual and produced priests with a worldview, knowledge and spirituality that were scholastic and European. Such training gave rise to a clerical mentality in priests that was reflected in their way of life—supported in part by church law regarding the observance of celibacy—and it underlined the privileged status of priests (and bishops) in society. In 1947, the encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII, while confirming the Liturgical Movement that sought people's participation in the liturgy, felt the need to emphasize the difference between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood (ND 1731-1734).

Vatican II heralded a change in the understanding of the priest. While it did not disregard the cultic function of the priest it situated it in his ministerial identity so that the common priesthood of the Christian community was the point of departure for the ministerial priesthood. It also stressed the fact that the priest acts as the extension of the bishop who remains the head of the local Church.

II. The Priesthood and Vatican II

Vatican Council II was an event of unique importance during the Church's history in the 20th century. It was a moment when the Church began to understand itself not merely in itself but in relation to the whole world. This appeared clearly in *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and in *Gaudium et Spes*,

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The first document viewed the Church as the People of God because of God's call addressed to all persons. The second saw the Church as a partner with the world of the secular facing modern-day challenges. Vatican II was a council that invited Catholics to rethink their identity and mission as members of the Church situated in the world.

Such rethinking would surely have an impact on at least two discernible groupings in the Church: the laity and the hierarchy. All, even members of the hierarchy begin their Christian life by first becoming part of the People of God and therefore sharing in the common priesthood. What then could Vatican II say that was specific and concrete about the hierarchy which would apply to bishops and priests in so far as they celebrated divine worship? We shall try to answer this question by looking first at the texts of *Optatam Totius*, Decree on the Training of Priests and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the ministry and Life of Priests.¹⁶

(A) Noteworthy Aspects in the Documents

Optatam Totius

In sharp contrast to the single pattern of seminary studies envisaged by the 16th century Tridentate reforms, Vatican II asks that "each nation or rite should have its own *Programme of Priestly Training*." (OT 1) The Priests' Charter for India, already revised once, was the result of the new thinking.

Major seminaries were to train future priests "for the ministry of the Word," "for the ministry of worship," and "to undertake the ministry of the shepherd." (OT 4) These are also the main functions of the bishop whom the priest represents in the ministry. The three functions mentioned

are proper of the bishop as well as the priest and focus on a common goal: the building up of God's People into the Body of Christ.

The priest is to be a man of prayer. (OT 8) The priest must be and seen to be a man of God whose assessments in this world must use both sound reason and deep faith. To lead the community in prayer, he must have familiarity with God that accompanies him in the three functions that he is asked to perform: proclamation of the word, sacramental celebration and exercising pastoral care.

During formation the priest should be trained in the exercise of responsible freedom. (11) The priest is ordained for the community of faith. He is accountable to different constituencies: ecclesiastical superiors, the tradition of the Church and the very community that he serves through his priestly ministry.

Priestly formation should envisage sending persons for higher studies. (18)

Chances for ongoing formation should be made available throughout a priest's life. (22)

Presbyterorum Ordinis

This document spells out in three chapters salient aspects of the life and ministry of the priest.

The introduction states that the priest receives his ordination and mission from the bishop to serve and build up the People of God (PO 1).

The first chapter teaches that through his anointing at ordination the priest can act *in persona Christi, capitis* (PO 2) and affirms that priests are set apart to carry out what God has ordained for them among his people. (PO 3)

The function of the priest in his sacramental capacity is situated in the midst of a worshipping community. (A concrete consequence was the discouraging of private masses. i.e. without a congregation.)

The second chapter describes the priest's task: to proclaim the word of God, celebrate the sacraments and build community. (PO 4, 5) The priest is not to serve any ideology or party. (PO 6) The Priests' Senate is a concrete manifestation of the sharing of the priesthood by the bishop and the priests. (PO 7) Lay participation in serving the Church is to be fostered by the priest. (PO 9) Priestly vocations should be shared among Churches and those going to new areas of apostolate should prepare themselves suitably to undertake the tasks awaiting them. (10).

The third and final chapter dwells on the life of the priests. It teaches that a priest is sanctified through his ministry. (PO 12) The idea held by some that the priestly ministry will so exhaust a priest that he must return to fill himself with God's love and grace in order to go back and minister to his people must be reassessed. Such reassessment does not suggest that the priest has no need of personal prayer. However such an idea reveals a theologically questionable understanding of both the priestly ministry and priestly sanctification. If the priest is not sanctified through his ministry, could it not be that the celebration of the sacraments has become a mechanical function that satisfies the requirement of ritualistic action and no more? Hence PO 13 states that those in the ministry "will acquire holiness in their own distinctive way by exercising their functions sincerely and tirelessly in the Spirit of Christ." Mention is then made of the humility and obedience that are proper to a priest. (PO 14-

15)

About celibacy, PO 16 says the following:

It is true that it is not demanded of the priesthood by its nature. This is clear from the practice of the primitive Church and the tradition of the Eastern Churches where in addition to those—including all bishops—who choose from the gift of grace to preserve celibacy, there are also many excellent married priests.

The same number also says that what (celibacy) is legislated by law in the Latin Church “is liberally granted by the Father, provided those who share Christ’s priesthood through the sacrament of Order, and indeed the whole Church, ask for that gift humbly and earnestly.” It must be noted however that celibacy refers to a state of life that required no more than an individual’s personal choice, whereas the priesthood is a function that is a constitutive part of the Church. Each of the two options must be discerned for what they are!

PO 17 while inviting the priest “to embrace voluntary poverty” is also mindful of the Christ-like stewardship that he should practise in the use of temporal goods.

PO 19-20 reminds the priest that the proclamation of the word as well as the celebration of the Eucharist will sustain him; ongoing formation as well as deeper studies should accompany his priestly life. A priest should be given a just remuneration.

Three points stand out in these two documents: 1) the priest is the bishop’s representative and exercises in his priestly ministry the functions of the bishop (proclamation of the word, celebration of the sacraments and pastoral care); 2) the sanctification of the priest takes place through the exercise of his ministry; 3) the community over which

he exercises pastoral care is the context of his sanctification.

(B) The Vocation of a Priest according to Vatican II

Vatican II has done well by clearly stating the precise functions of the priest in his ministry and not labouring the point of how the ordained ministry is different from the common priesthood not only in degree but also in essence. (PO 2, LG 10) In addition, OT 1 realizes that the ministerial functions must be contextualized thus opening the possibility for creativity in one's ministry so that the community is served and its specific needs met. Through these functions, the priest sanctifies himself. The vocation of the priest in Vatican II is spelt out more elaborately in the following three areas:

(a) Serving God's People

The Church universal is to be realized in the local Church. The *ecclesia* is to be formed in each of the contexts in which the priest exercises his ministry. In the first place, it is the parish community that must witness to the presence of Christ in the world. In today's India, rural and urban societies are more educated than before. Knowledge and new technologies are more accessible to persons and the priest is called to initiate processes by which the presence of the Church in the secular world acts as a leaven in the dough. This is also an age where the social sciences have assisted in bringing awareness to society of the achievements and setbacks present in our civilization. Since the Church affirms a rational basis for its Christian faith, these sciences could assist in assessing truth of claims made by the Church with regard to Christian practices and their effects. For instance, surveys that yield quantitative data can show whether the

traditional ministries of the Church are producing the desired fruit or whether foundationless presumptions are being made by interested parties. The claims of spirituality in the face of formal religion must be scrutinized and New Age movements need to be assessed. To enable the Church to contribute to the humanization of men and women and build them into a community, bishops and priests are called to fulfill complex and varied tasks. This is what *Gaudium et Spes* asks of those who constitute the People of God. Can the priest offer the required leadership to God's People seeking to make Christ present in the world?

The priest's vocation is not merely the celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. His vocation calls him to sacramentalize Christian leadership in as many forms as possible. He is called to represent the likeness of Christ when dealing with those whom he serves. In turn, the people will more easily realize the Christ-likeness in their own lives by drawing inspiration from the priest. This would mean that the fulfillment of a priest's vocation would lie both in the sanctuary and in society. After all, the Eucharistic community does not cease to exist when the mass ends. In fact, because a community is Eucharistic—in that it lives the word of God in everyday life—it is drawn to participate in the sacrifice of the altar and is united in Jesus Christ.

To serve God's people as a priest is the office to which the Church calls the priest. That the person called must be celibate is a free choice that the person must make, in keeping with the stipulation of the Latin Church. Such a choice must be made *a-priori*. A person must first ask himself if he is truly called to live out the celibate life before wanting to serve the Church as a priest. Even

though the celibate life has been lived out by persons throughout the history of the Church, it remains God's free gift given to a person. (PO 16) A gift can be requested; it cannot be presumed! One has still to justify theologically the claim made in PO 16 that "the gift of celibacy, so appropriate to the priesthood of the New Testament, is liberally granted by the Father, provided those who share Christ's priesthood through the sacrament of Order, and indeed the whole Church, ask for that gift humbly and earnestly."

One may sketch out a vision of the priesthood that is captivating and inspiring. One may point out that the priest is called to be an *Alter Christus* and through his life and ministry witnesses in a unique manner to the Christ event present in the Christian Tradition. However, the ministerial priesthood—even though constitutive of the Church—remains a function of the institutional Church. The decision to offer oneself to carry out that function is the result of a man's personal discernment. But since the Latin Church requires a candidate who is called to celibacy, a man must first discern whether or not he is called to celibacy before he offers himself for the priestly ministry. Celibacy is a state of life that obliges one to make a serious discernment before he decides on the ministerial priesthood in the Latin Church.

The ultimate source of strength to serve God's People in the priesthood must come from the person of Jesus Christ. This reminds the priest that in his baptism he was identified with Christ and that the sacraments in the Church are meant to make that identification more complete. His ordination is another opportunity for him to conform more totally with Jesus Christ.

(b) The Specific Functions the Priest is called to Perform

The first duty of the priest is to proclaim the word of God from the small bible and the big bible. The small bible refers to the sacred scriptures, the revealed word that speaks of God's love, mercy, forgiveness and his providential care for every human person as manifested in the life and work of Jesus Christ. The big bible is the whole of creation—humankind in general—and reminds all persons of goodwill that a caring God presides over the destiny of all persons even though it may not always appear to be so. It will not be enough for the priest to pray and perform his spiritual duties (his annual retreat) yet neglect ongoing formation and updating himself in the study of the sacred scriptures (DV, chapter 6) and the sciences in general. While canon law obliges the priest to make an annual retreat it is regrettable that a similar obligation does not exist for him to update himself for his ministry.

A sacramental spirituality reassures people that God is ever present in the midst of human activity and that God offers himself to each one as the fulfillment of his/her life. Sacraments are the symbols of our relationship to God and the celebration of the sacraments is the articulation of a shared love, hope and strength to support men and women in their pilgrim journey to the promised land. Given his office of serving the community, the priest is a visible and concrete reminder of this sacramental articulation.

Pastoral care of the faithful is not a one-way street. The priest is asked to share, not merely give! Vatican II asks the priest to exercise a ministerial priesthood which first originates in the common priesthood of the faithful. The whole People of God comes from the Father and by

identifying with Jesus Christ—through the power of the Spirit—returns to the Father. The ministerial priest sacramentalizes (i.e. makes visible and accessible) the ministry of Jesus Christ himself (*ex opere operato*) so that the People of God can worship the Father and surrender themselves to him.¹⁷ The liturgy is the *locus* where this takes place. Both, the priest and the people have their respective roles to perform. Parish teams formed for attending to the different needs of people express the diversity of the Church's sacramental action in the unity of one mission of Christ.

In addition to the priest or religious who work fulltime for the Church, one can also envisage laypersons who continue in their secular life in the world yet find themselves able to offer quality time for serving the Church. Such a vocation could be referred to as Lay Ecclesial Ministry. Such a ministry could be carried out by committed men and women who want to distinguish themselves in serving the Church but keeping to their state of life in the world, i.e. continuing as single individuals or as married persons without religious vows or promises.

(C) Priesthood and the fostering of Dialogue as a Way of Life

In the Indian context where many faiths exist side by side, there is need to build up humane communities where persons of all persuasions—Christians included—share common values and strive towards a humanizing goal. Dialogue begins with an understanding of unity underlying diversity and the presumption that the God whom the Christian worships in faith has also left his footprints in religions other than Christianity. It is the same God who calls all persons into unity. The Christian

paradigm of faith should enable the believer to recognize God's action in the world of pluralism and to collaborate actively in bringing about a just and humane society based on the values of God's Reign in this world. Dialogue is a means of achieving both.

Dialogue is at ease with an enriching pluralism for the benefit of all peoples. God's plan is to bring about fulfillment in human history as a whole (one plan of salvation). True dialogue does not mute the prophetic element of the gospel message nor does it ignore the 'option for the poor' that must characterize the Church's mission to the poor and oppressed. It is an occasion for understanding and feeling with the other. It seeks to discover how God has been working in the hearts and minds of those belonging to different faiths. Such discovery is mutual and is a path to common sharing and community building.

The road to dialogue begins with recognizing the other and as a consequence the relativizing of the self. Initially, there is a feeling of threat from, or even hostility towards, the other. Then both parties continue in a state of uninvolved existence. Finally, a curiosity develops and (mutual) interest begins to grow. At this stage, the course is set for dialogue. For the Church in India as well as for the priest who serves the Church in his local community, promoting such dialogue must be seen as essential to the mission of Christ in today's world. Such activity would fittingly realize the Christian community as a World Church and, in the process, fulfill the dream of pope John XXIII's *aggiornamento*.

¹ John Bowker (editor): *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 1997, 'Sacrifice', p 833.

Jeffrey Carter (Editor): *Understanding Religious Sacrifice (a Reader)*, Continuum, New York/London, 2003, pp 2-7.

² Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Editors): *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition revised, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp 1245-6. The ideas expressed in this paragraph are taken from this source.

³ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1245.

⁴ John Bowker (Editor): *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 1997, p 767.

⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier (Editor): *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1985, pp 821-823.

⁶ *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, pp 574-575.

⁷ *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, p. 821: (Jewish priestly identity): "The priesthood was limited by Pentateuchal law to the Levites, that is, members of the family of Levi, the son of Jacob. According to Deuteronomy, all the levitical families had a right to the priesthood since they did not receive an inheritance of land like the other tribes (Deut. 10:8-9). Aaron and his sons exclusively received the anointing oil and were attired in special clothing of the priesthood (Exod. 28-29). The families of Eli at the temple of Shiloh (1 Sam. 14:3), Zadok in Jerusalem (Ezek. 40:46), and Amaziah at Bethel (Amos 7:10-17) were not specified as Aaronides but were of levitical descent."

⁸ "Christian Priesthood in India Today," A Biblical Reflection by George Soares-Prabhu, p 219 in *A Biblical Theology for India*, Volume 2, edited with an introduction by Scaria Kuthirakkattel, Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, Pune 1999.

⁹ Seen as the eschatological revelation of God, Jesus could be better referred to as the eschatological prophet.

¹⁰ George Soares-Prabhu, p 223.

¹¹ Nathan Mitchell: *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist outside the Mass*, Pueblo Publishing Company, New York, 1982, p 48.

¹² George Soares-Prabhu, p 233.

¹³ Nathan Mitchell, pp 85-6: "Against Paschasius' perhaps exaggerated realism, Ratramnus (thus) proposed a more emphatically sacramental understanding of eucharistic (sic!) and presence. Like

Augustine before him, Ratramnus stressed the spiritual nature of eucharistic eating and drinking, actions that appeal to faith and not to any sensate or materialistic perceptions of flesh and blood. He recognized that the sacrament celebrates both the *corpus Christi mysticum* (eucharist) and the *corpus Christi quod est ecclesia* (church).”

¹⁴ The Council of Chalcedon (451) through its 6th canon, had prohibited “absolute ordination” or ordaining a priest without a specific charge in the Church, i.e. without a person being assigned to a city, village church, a martyr’s shrine or monastery.

¹⁵ ND 1707. Refer *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* edited by Jacques Dupuis, Theological Publications in India (TPI), Bangalore, seventh revised and enlarged edition, 2004.

¹⁶ A scheme of the two documents is offered:

Optatam Totius

Each nation/rite (Individual Church) should have its own programme of priestly training (1).

Vocations to the priesthood require the fostering of a sound way of life (3).

Major Seminaries to train for Ministry of Word, Worship and pastoral caring of people (4).

The spirit of prayer is to be an essential part of training to be a priest (8).

Training in responsible freedom (11).

The need for sending persons for higher studies (18).

Ongoing formation (22).

Presbyterorum Ordinis:

Ch. I: The Priesthood in the Church’s Mission (refer 1 Peter 2/5)

The Bishop’s ministry (proclamation of the world, celebration of the sacraments and pastoral care of the faithful) is handed to the priest as a subordinate. (1)

Sacramental anointing configures the priest to Christ so that he can act *in persona Christi, capitis*. (2)

Priests are set apart but remain amid God’s People to carry out the task that God has chosen for them. (3)

Ch. II: The Ministry of Priests

To proclaim God’s word and build community. (4)

Preaching the word should have as its end point: The

celebration of the Eucharist and Sacraments. (5) [The priest makes the bishop present in individual assemblies]

Pastoral Care to be shown especially to the poor. The Eucharist is the foundation on which we build. (6) [The priest is not to be the servant of any ideology or party]

Priests' Senate. (7)

Encourage participation of the laity in serving the Church. (9)

Sharing vocations and preparing for new fields. (10)

Ch. III: The Life of Priests

The priest is sanctified through his ministry. (12)

Sacramental celebration should take place with the intention of and according to the ministry of Christ. (13)

Humility and Obedience of the Priest. (14-15)

Celibacy. (16)

Voluntary poverty and income of the priest. (17)

What should sustain the priest: Proclamation of the word and celebration of the Eucharist. // Ongoing formation. // Material security. (19-20)

¹⁷ 'ex opere operato' = by the performance of the rite. The 'opus' of Jesus is to effect humankind's salvation; the Church witnesses to the 'opus' of Jesus through celebrating the sacramental mysteries, and the priest makes that 'opus' present in the celebration of individual sacraments. Far from being a thing of magic, the 'ex opere operato' refers to the salvific action of Jesus Christ that the priest makes present to the community he serves.

The Challenges Priests Face in India Today*

Kurien Kunnumpuram, S.J.

Papal Seminary, Nagar Road, Pune 411014.

Abstract: Three models of priesthood – *sacerdos*, builder and leader of the Christian community, and prophet of God's kingdom – are elucidated. Opting for the third model, the challenges that priests face are presented: globalization, atheism, freedom, fellowship and communion, justice, peace, joy and ecology. The steps needed to be taken to meet these challenges are also proposed.

Keywords: Models of priesthood, *sacerdos*, presbyter, prophet, community leader, challenges.

I have been asked to present a paper on the challenges priests face in India today. On reflection it has become clear to me that the kind of challenges priests face depends on their understanding of the priesthood and priestly ministry. Hence, the paper begins with a discussion of the different ways of understanding the priesthood. It goes on to deal with the main challenges priests face in India today. By way of conclusion it points out some of the steps priests need to take if they are to meet these challenges effectively and creatively.

I. Models of the Priesthood

In the history of theology several models of the priesthood have emerged.¹ But for the purposes of this paper three models of the priesthood, I believe, are sufficient².

1. The Priest as Sacerdos

In this model the priest is understood as a sacred person with sacred power to fulfill certain sacred functions. This was undoubtedly the understanding of the priesthood in the Church for centuries before Vatican II. Even after the Council, this image of the priest continues to exert a lot of influence on the thinking of a large number of Catholics. And yet, this model has very little basis in the New Testament.

It is true that “the New Testament in several key passages portrays Christ as high priest and the Christian people as an essentially priestly community.”³ However, it is remarkable that the same New Testament, while speaking about Christian ministers, scrupulously avoids using any of the terms which in Greek were applied to the secular and religious authorities of the time – *arche*, *time*, *telos*.⁴ Nor does it employ a sacerdotal terminology. Instead it calls them supervisors (*episkopoi*), elders (*presbyteroi*) and servants (*diakonoi*).

However, from the third century sacerdotal terminology began to be used for the Christian ministers. There were two reasons for this change. First, the early Christians learned to look upon themselves as the new people of God, as the new Israel. As a result, they began to appropriate the sacred terms of the old Israel. J.A. Mohler explains the process thus:

Christianity must be the true Israel, because Jesus fulfilled the prophecies, and they cannot be fulfilled twice. The new Israel with its new temple, sacrifices, priesthood and ritual purity became normative for the 3rd and 4th centuries. As synagogue terminology was replaced by that of the temple, elders became priests, and bishops, high priests.⁵

Secondly, the Eucharist came to be regarded, especially in the East, as the mystical renewal of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Here the mystery religions of the East may have exerted some influence. Besides, the Gentile converts to Christianity deeply felt the need for a cultic priesthood. As a result,

By the end of the 4th century, sacerdotalism had become the ordinary mode of speaking of the Christian clergy... Since the pagan mysteries and priesthood were dissolving in the 4th century, there was no danger of confusing Christian ceremonies and terminology with those of the pagans. No doubt the pagan converts as their Jewish forerunners still felt the need of a cultic priesthood. This may have been a factor in the increasing Christian sacerdotalism of the time. At any rate, Christian Episcopals became high priests, presbyters became priests, deacons levites, the Eucharistic banquet a sacrifice on a table that is now an altar in a sanctuary, the Holy of Holies of the New Israel.⁶

A slightly different development took place with regard to the power of the priest. For about a thousand years there was in the Church a 'sacramental' understanding of the ministry.⁷ According to this understanding, the minister was the sign of Christ's presence and activity. In him and through him Christ preached the word, administered the sacraments and took care of the people. But in the 12th century this conception began to change. A possession-of-power theory came to be held. According to this view, Christ gave sacred power to the apostles who transmitted it to their successors, the bishops, in an unbroken chain of succession. And the bishops in their turn share it with the priests. Hence the bishops and the priests are endowed with a sacred power hierarchically handed down.

In course of time, the priesthood came to be defined primarily in terms of the power to offer the Eucharistic

sacrifice. Actually, the New Testament does not tell us who really presided over the Eucharist at the time of the apostles. But it is generally believed that the leader of the local community was also the president of the Eucharist. According to Ignatius of Antioch it was the bishop who presided over the Eucharist. And it is known that priests were allowed to preside over the Eucharist in the absence of the bishop. In 1215 Lateran IV decreed that the Eucharist can be celebrated only by a validly ordained priest.⁸ And the Council of Trent went a step further and defined the Catholic priest purely in terms of his cultic activity. In the words of Trent:

Sacrifice and priesthood are by the ordinance of God so united that both have existed under every law. Since, therefore, in the New Testament the Catholic Church has received from the institution of Christ the holy, visible sacrifice of the Eucharist, it must also be acknowledged that there exists in the Church a new, visible and eternal priesthood into which the old one was changed. Moreover, Sacred Scripture makes it clear and the Tradition of the Catholic Church has always taught that this priesthood was instituted by the same Lord our Saviour, and that the power of consecrating, offering and administering His body and blood, and likewise of remitting and retaining sins was given to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood.⁹

It was this narrow view which defined the priesthood entirely in terms of the power to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice and to remit sins that got accepted in the Church during the last five centuries and in many ways still continues to influence the thinking of many Catholics.

2. The Priest as the Builder and Leader of the Christian Community

Presbyters played an important role in the earliest

Christian communities. They were intimately associated with the apostles in the ‘Council’ of Jerusalem (see Acts 15:2-29). They continued to be part of the leadership of the Jerusalem community at the time of Paul’s final visit (see Acts 21:18). It is not only the Church at Jerusalem that had presbyters. Acts 20 speaks of the presbyters of Ephesus. And the Pastoral Letters also refer to them (see 1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-19; Tit 1:59). That the presbyters were servants of the community whose service consisted in the pastoral care of the people is clear from 1 Peter 5:1-3:

Now ‘as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge but be examples to the flock.

The New Testament does not tell us how the presbyters came to be in charge of the communities. Paul and Barnabas are said to have appointed presbyters in each of the churches they founded (see Acts 14:23). But in none of the authentic letters of Paul is there a direct reference to presbyters. It is however true that in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 Paul speaks of “those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord”. Could this be a reference to presbyters? In any case, as E. Schillebeeckx unhesitatingly affirms:

It can no longer be denied that towards the end of the first century there was a Church order according to which a group of presbyters was responsible for the leadership and pastoral care of the local communities (see Acts 14:23; 20: 17-30; 1 Pt 5:1; Tim 3:1-17; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5, 11; James 5:14; 2 John 1:1; also in the extra canonical literature: 1 Clement 44; Didache 15,1). The presbyters are also called *episcopoi* without any perceptible difference, among other reasons because they had the function of oversight (*episcopē*).¹⁰

That the priestly ministry is essentially related to the community was a significant part of the early Christian tradition. In 451 the Council of Chalcedon in Canon 6 declared the ‘absolute ordination’ of a minister null and void. According to Schillebeeckx:

This text displays a clearly defined view of ministry in the Church. Only someone who has been called by a particular community (the people and its leaders) to be its pastor and leader authentically receives ordination... ordination is an appointment or incorporation as minister to a community which calls a particular fellow Christian and indicates him as its leader... And ‘absolute ordination’, i.e., one in which hands are laid on someone without his being asked by a community to be its leader, is null and void.¹¹

Chalcedon has thus a deeply ecclesial view of the ministry.

This canon of Chalcedon was faithfully observed in the Church till the 12th century. Towards the end of that century ‘absolute ordination’ began to be tolerated, at first on compassionate grounds. But then ministry began to be slowly detached from the local Church and related to the Eucharist. It was at this time that the Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215, decreed that the Eucharist can be celebrated only by a priest who has been validly ordained. From then on the priesthood was defined not in relationship to the community but in terms of the power to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice and to remit sins.

In the theology of the priesthood Vatican II marks a new beginning. The Council was convinced that ministries exist in the Church “for the nurturing and constant growth of the people of God” and that the ministers are servants of their brothers and sisters “so that all who are of the people of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian

dignity, can work toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, and arrive at salvation.”¹²

Hence it is a priest's task to gather the faithful and build a true Christian community by the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the Eucharist and pastoral care. As the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests expresses it:

They gather God's family together as a brotherhood of living unity, and lead it through Christ and in the Spirit to God the Father... The office of a pastor is not confined to the care of the faithful as individuals, but is also properly extended to the formation of a genuinely Christian Community.¹³

But Vatican II has yet another view of the priesthood.

3. The Priest as the Prophet of God's Kingdom

One of the significant insights of Vatican II was that the mission of the priest must be derived from the mission of Jesus. After a careful examination of the Council's Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Bonaventure Kloppenburg points out the theological underpinning of the Council's understanding of the priesthood:

The nature and mission of the presbyters must be derived from the nature and mission of bishops; the nature and mission of bishops must be gathered from the nature and mission of the Apostles; the nature and mission of the Apostles must be seen in the light of the nature and mission of Christ.¹⁴

Now the kingdom of God was central to the life and ministry of Jesus. It was the main theme of his preaching (Mk 1:14-15), the referent of most of his parables (Mt 13:1-52), and the content of his symbolic actions like the table-fellowship with publicans and prostitutes (Mk 2:15-17).¹⁵ And his miracles too were signs of the advent of the

Kingdom (Lk 11:20).

In the popular understanding, a ‘prophet’ is a person who foretells the future. And the Old Testament prophets are believed to have predicted future events, especially the coming of the Messiah. This view is not correct. The term prophet is the English equivalent of the Greek noun *prophetes* which is derived from the verb *pro-phemi*. And *pro-phemi* means to speak for someone, actually to speak on behalf of God and to interpret His will.¹⁶ This is the original meaning of the word. And if the prophet often does in fact speak about the future, it is always in function of the present. Because of his vocation, because of his deep religious experience, he is able to decipher the designs of God in the events of the day and consequently interpret His plans for His people.

According to Abraham Heschel, prophecy is ‘the exegesis of existence from a divine perspective’.¹⁷ In the name of God, in the light of his experience of God, the prophet interprets the existence of the community and challenges his people. As a result, he is often a threat to the established order, since he disturbs and disrupts the people’s accustomed ways of thinking and acting. Unlike the priest and the king, the prophet is an extra-institutional person. But because of the challenge he poses, the extra-institutional prophet will inevitably be branded as an anti-institutional transgressor by the institutional leadership of his people and will become a victim of institutional forces reluctant to change.

As prophet of God’s Kingdom, the priest is the builder of the alternative community. “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and

perception of the dominant culture around us.”¹⁹ Like the prophets of old, the priest has to criticize and dismantle the feudalistic, capitalistic society in our country, and project the vision of a new society – free, just, egalitarian and non-exploitative. Here it is useful to recall the wise words of Walter Brueggemann:

Prophetic ministry does not consist of spectacular acts of social crusading or of abrasive measures of indignation. Rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God’s freedom and His will for justice. The issues of God’s freedom and His will for justice are not always and need not be expressed primarily in the big issues of the day. They can be discerned wherever people try to live together and worry about their future and their identity.¹⁹

In the multi-religious context of India, the priest should devote his energies to the task of building human communities based on the values of the Kingdom – freedom, equality, love, justice, peace and joy.

If one holds the first model of the priesthood, then the challenges priests face will be related to the proper celebration of the Eucharist and the administration of the sacraments. But if one adopts the second model then the challenges will be connected with an inward-looking pastoral care of the Christian community and with convert-making. But if one prefers the third model, then the challenges priests face will be related to the totality of human existence and the entirety of human history. This paper adopts the third model.

II. The Challenges Priests Face

As George Soares-Prabhu has shown, the kingdom of God is Jesus’ vision of a new society.²⁰ In his opinion,

“Freedom, fellowship and justice are thus the parameters of the kingdom’s thrust towards the total liberation of humans”.²¹ According to Paul, “the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14: 17). Putting together all that the New Testament says about the kingdom of God one can describe it as a new human community which is consciously rooted in God, which is characterized by freedom, fellowship, justice, peace and joy and which lives in harmony and communion with the cosmos. Thus the members of this community have a three-fold relationship – a relationship to God, a relationship to the cosmos and a relationship among themselves.

The challenges which priests as prophets of the kingdom face are related to such an understanding of the kingdom of God.

1. The Challenge of God

These days one notices a tendency among many people to reduce the kingdom of God to a set of values like freedom, equality, love, justice and peace. This is not right. For the kingdom of God primarily denotes God and God’s activity. As Soares-Prabhu points out:

For our ‘Kingdom of God’ translates the Greek *basileia tou theou* of the Gospels, and this in turn stands for the Aramaic *malkut di ‘elaha’* or *malkut di yy* which Jesus would have used. To his listeners the Aramaic formula would have indicated not so much a place ruled over by God (which is what the English word ‘Kingdom’ suggests), as the activity through which God reveals himself as a king. For ‘Kingdom of God’ (*malkut di yy*) is used in Jewish literature, and notably in targums (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Old Testament), as a circumlocution for Old Testament expressions like ‘God reigns’ (*malak yhwh*) or ‘God is King’ (*melek yhwh*), which are judged too ‘concrete’ to be used of God. Awed by the immense majesty of Yahweh

‘the great, the mighty, the terrible God’ (Deut 10:17), the Judaism of Jesus’ time tended to avoid verbal statements about him (God *does* this or that) replacing them with abstract noun forms.²²

While one may legitimately use the term ‘kingdom of God’ for the fruits/effects of God’s kingly activity such as freedom, love and justice, the term primarily means God’s kingly activity.

There are two manifestations of the challenge of God: The challenge of globalization and the challenge of atheism.

a. The Challenge of Globalization

People tend to look upon globalization predominantly as an economic process. But there is a theological dimension to globalization.

Money or the making of money reveals itself as Mammon. Mammon is money or material wealth when you put your trust in it.²³ Globalization places before us a fundamental choice: God or Mammon.²⁴ For worship of Mammon is basic to global capitalism. As Ulrich Duchrow points out:

Anthony Sampson introduces his book on ‘money, people and power from East to West’ by describing money as the central tenet of a faith which has gathered around it the sort of accretions of reverence and ritual fitting to the present-day universal religion. He writes: ‘...everywhere the same screens display the same magic numbers, subjugating a hundred different cultures and traditions to the same universal homage to its language, proclaiming with total faith the first commandment: that money makes the work go round.’ It is this universal religion of money combined with the subconsciously stimulated consumerism that makes the majority of people follow capitalism.²⁴

b. The Challenge of Atheism

In the world today we are faced with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand there is the growth of atheism and on the other there is a remarkable resurgence of religion.

For long it was thought that modernization of society would lead to a secularization of the population. As a result, the influence of religion would decline. This has not happened. In fact, there is evidence to show that the influence of religion has increased. As K.N. Panikkar reports:

A national survey conducted by the centre for Developing Societies, New Delhi, testifies to the growing influence of religion in India society. According to this survey, four out of 10 people are very religious and five out of 10 are religious. That is to say that 90 percent of the respondents claimed to be religious – performing rituals, visiting places of worship and undertaking pilgrimages. Among them, 30 percent claimed to have become more religious during the last five years. An increase in the number of religious institutions is also an indication of the greater hold of religion on society. Enlightenment and modernity in India have not led to the decline of the influence of religiosity. If anything, it has only increased.²⁶

This is true also of some other countries in the world.

However, many international studies have shown that there is a steady growth of atheism in the world. Phil Zuckerman has examined a number of studies made in this 'decade' – 2001 to 2008 – and prepared a table of fifty countries which contain the largest number of atheists. His comments on the data are quite significant.

From the fifty-plus countries above, the total worldwide number of atheists, agnostics, and nonbelievers in God is somewhere between 505 million and 749 million. These

numbers are conservative; were one to factor in a mere 0.25 percent of such highly populated countries as Egypt, Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, Burma, Tanzania, and Iran as nonbelievers in God, estimates would be significantly larger.

Given the above estimates, we can deduce that there are approximately 58 times as many atheists as there are Mormons, 41 times as many atheists as there are Jews, 35 times as many atheists as there are Sikhs, and twice as many atheists as there are Buddhists. Finally, nonbelievers in God as a group come in fourth place after Christianity (2 billion), Islam (1.2 billion), and Hinduism (900 million) in terms of global ranking of commonly held belief systems.²⁷

It is in this context that priests as prophets of the kingdom of God have to champion the cause of God.

2. The Challenge of Freedom

Way back in 1965 Vatican II made this perceptive comment: "Never before today have humans been so keenly aware of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance".²⁸ Think of all the liberation movements that have sprung up in recent years in different parts of the world and different areas of human existence. Think also of the many subtle ways of controlling and manipulating human beings that have been used by dictators, opinion-makers and those who own the mass media.

One of the significant signs of the times is the upsurge of the Dalits, the tribal people and women. They are fighting for their dignity and freedom. They are refusing to be treated like doormats. Obviously, there is a backlash. The atrocities being committed against them are on the increase. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Dalits are slaughtered every year. The tribal people are also being increasingly discriminated against. Crimes against women

like rape, murder, etc. are also increasing rapidly.

It is therefore imperative that priests get actively involved in movements for the liberation of the Dalits, the tribal people and women in our country. As we Christians are a small minority in India, we cannot contribute much to the liberation of the oppressed unless we cooperate with all those who are working for the same cause. Priests would do well to take the initiative to start a mass movement of all people of good will for the strict enforcement of Fundamental Rights and the effective implementation of the Directive Principles of State Policy spelt out in the *Constitution of India*.²⁹ The Founding Fathers of the Republic dreamed of a just and egalitarian society in which all the citizens would be able to live in freedom.

Further, the growth of Individualism, too, is a cause for worry. With the rapid spread of capitalism in our country, more and more people are imbibing such bourgeois values as blind competition, ruthless efficiency, self-interest, personal gain, craze for success and narrow individualism. Keen observers of the contemporary scene seem to think that global capitalism is deliberately spreading the 'gospel' of modern culture. According to Michael Amaladoss, the characteristics of this culture are:

A materialistic outlook on life and reality, a spirit of individualism and competition, an attitude of consumerism, an approach of autonomy in the name of science from ethical and religious control, profit-oriented commercial activity.³⁰

A South American Thinker, James Patras believes that U.S. cultural imperialism is involved in the promotion of individualism. Here's how he forcefully expresses it:

Cultural imperialism and the values it promotes have played a

major role in preventing exploited individuals from responding collectively to their deteriorating conditions. The symbols, images and ideologies that have spread to the third world are major obstacles to the conversion of class exploitation and growing immiseration into class-conscious bases for collective action.³¹

What we need to realize is that capitalism and the culture it fosters are downright individualistic. Today, global capitalism is systematically using the media to desensitize the public, thereby to prevent the rise of consciousness based on the sense of solidarity of the oppressed.

It is here that priests have to intervene in order to counteract the culture of individualism by promoting a 'civilization of love' and a 'culture of solidarity'. They should make use of the Church's educational institutions, social centres and the mass media to bring home to people the harmful consequences of a culture of individualism and to make them aware that we humans belong together and that our destinies are intertwined. Unfortunately, many Catholic schools, colleges and other Church-related institutions are spreading the individualistic culture of global capitalism. If effective steps are not immediately taken to liberate these institutions from this pernicious influence, we shall one day wake up to the realization that we have done a disservice to the people of India. For, just as in the heyday of colonialism, we consciously or unconsciously collaborated with the colonialists, so too, in this era of globalization, we will be making a similar mistake by promoting the cause of global capital.³²

As prophets of the kingdom, priests are called to work for the freedom and liberation of people.

3. The Challenge of Fellowship/Communion

More than forty years ago the Second Vatican Council called our attention to a strange anomaly in the world. In the Pastoral Constitution it stated:

Although the world of today has a very vivid sense of its unity and of how one person depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which would reduce everything to ashes. True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems.³³

This statement of the Council is even more true today than when it was first made. Because of fast travel and the communications revolution, the world has really become a global village. As a result, there is a growing awareness of the solidarity of all humankind. And yet, economic disparity between the developed and the developing countries, political differences that exist in various part of the world and 'the clash of civilizations' are a cause of deep division in the world today:

This is also true of India. Though our country recently celebrated 62 years of Independence, it has not yet achieved a cohesive unity. Fissiparous tendencies are noticeable almost everywhere. There are at least four major factors at work in our country which lead to serious conflict and division. First, there is the legitimate demand of the poor that they be provided with the wherewithal for decent human living. Even after 57 years of planned development, a large percent of our population live on or below the poverty line. The utter deprivation these millions suffer is a permanent cause of tension and

division in India. Secondly, there are the political formations which are using religion to promote their economic and political interests. Their machinations have led to the revival of religious fundamentalism and communal conflicts. These are all divisive in nature. Thirdly, there is the caste conflict which is becoming virulent day by day. The high castes who held sway over the masses for centuries feel threatened by the upsurge of the Dalits who refuse to accept passively the indignities heaped on them and the atrocities perpetrated against them. Fourthly, there are the ethno-cultural conflicts caused by groups and areas clamouring for equality and participation in the national policy. What is happening in the Northeast and Kashmir bear witness to it. The growing popularity of the regional parties, who articulate the aspirations of the people in different areas of the country, is a related phenomenon.

As prophets of the kingdom, priests have to respond to this situation by promoting unity and solidarity among people.

4. The Challenge of Justice

Recently Amrtya Sen has published a book on *The Idea of Justice*.³⁴ In it he invokes a distinction from the Sanskrit literature on ethics and jurisprudence. He points out that the two words – *niti* and *nyaya* – both of which stand for justice, have different meanings:

Among the principal uses of the term *niti* are organizational propriety and behavioural correctness. In contrast with *niti*, the term *nyaya* stands for a comprehensive concept of realized justice. In that line of vision, the roles of institutions, rules and organizations, important as they are, have to be assessed in the broader and more inclusive perspective of *nyaya*, which is inescapably linked with the world that actually emerges, not

just the institutions or rules we happen to have.³⁵

From the point of justice as *nyaya*, there are some areas where we have not done enough. Thus there is the injustice of poverty and hunger:

It is very shocking that we have not done more on the right to food for everyone, including children. We have not done more to eliminate gender inequality, maternal undernourishment. These are essentially the real problems. We have such a widespread incidence of maternal undernourishment and underweight babies, child undernourishment and their inability to grow into healthy boys and girls. There is deprivation after you are born too, but a lot of it goes back to the womb. And that goes back to gender inequality. So gender deprivation, gender inequality and child deprivation are very closely related. And now we have the medical argument that undernourished babies tend to develop more cardiovascular diseases. Undernourishment of mothers, undernourished babies and high incidence of cardiovascular diseases in India are interconnected where the neglect of women plays a central part.³⁶

Then there is the injustice of casteism:

I think that caste policy has been driven by *neeti*: certain reservation of this kind and reservation of that kind and so on. We need a more *nyaya*-based perspective in dealing with caste distinctions in India. The focus does relate to a deficiency in Indian political thinking on this matter, mainly over concentration on *neeti* compared to *nyaya*.³⁷

It is true that perfect justice is very hard to come by. In fact it is not easy to agree on what it might be. And yet “if we are not eliminating removable injustices, then we are living without justice in a practical sense.”³⁸

It is here that priests as prophets of the kingdom have to take a clear stand for justice.

5. The Challenge of Peace

In the conflictual situation of our country/the world today, priests face the challenge of peace and reconciliation.

For centuries India had the reputation of being a land of peace and harmony. This is no more true. Today our country is faced with conflicts of various kinds. Let me now highlight some of these conflicts:

a. First of all there is a religious conflict. India is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and many tribal religions. And from ancient times she has welcomed to her shores Judaism, Christianity and Islam. By and large, the followers of these different religions lived together in peace and harmony. But the situation has now radically changed. As a Research Seminar held recently at Ishvani Kendra, Pune, pointed out:

Today what we are up against is a situation of 'religions in conflict'. These conflicts are not arising out of merely theological factors but also socio-psychological ones, and have four important roots: (a) religion as a source of identity is closely linked to culture and may be further strengthened by ethnic identity, (b) defensive fundamentalism in every faith tradition that leads to exclusivistic tendencies, (c) communalism that uses religion as a political tool raises its ugly head in most religious groups, which in turn leads to the branding of the other as enemy, and (d) hurting memories of the unsavoury past associated with domination and even persecution, etc., that continue to burn within the hearts of religious groups. The combined might of these factors frequently lead people to set up 'institutionalized riot systems' as evidenced in Gujarat, Orissa, Utter Pradesh and other places.³⁹

b. Further, there is the upsurge of the subaltern groups, which creates a conflictual situation. Movements of the

Dalits, the tribal people, women and the other backward castes are meant to liberate them from injustice and oppression, which has robbed them of their human dignity and condemned them to a life of poverty and powerlessness. As has been remarked:

The specific problem of Indian subaltern groups is that their rank in society is determined by birth which makes any improvement in their social, educational, cultural, religious, psychological, political and economic status well nigh impossible.⁴⁰

c. Finally, there is growing violence in the country. The land of the Mahatma is fast becoming a slaughterhouse where innocent people are mercilessly butchered every day. The causes of violence are many and varied. The criminalization of politics and the political involvement of criminals have led to the growth of violence. Religious fanaticism and ethno-cultural diversity too give rise to violence. Besides, secessionist movements as well as trans-border terrorism are also factors that explain the growth of violence in India today.

It is in such a conflictual situation that priests are called upon to be agents of peace and reconciliation.

6. The Challenge of Joy

When Jesus was born the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:10). According to Mark, Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God has come (see Mk 1: 14-15). Joy is one of the fruits of the kingdom (see Rom 14:17).

In the world today there is so much suffering and sorrow. Many people despair of finding peace and joy in

their life. It is here that priests as prophets of the kingdom have to spread the sunshine of cheerfulness and joy. In this task they have to follow Jesus who declared: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). As Albert Nolan points out:

Joy was in fact the most characteristic result of all Jesus' activity amongst the poor and the oppressed. The meals he had with them were festive celebrations, parties. Jesus obviously had a way of ensuring that people enjoyed themselves at these gatherings. The Pharisees were scandalized by this. Rejoicing and celebrating with sinners was incomprehensibly scandalous (Lk 15:1). They could only assume that he had become a pleasure-seeker, 'a drunkard and a glutton' (Lk 7:34)."⁴¹

7. The Challenge of Ecology

It is undeniable that we are now facing a serious ecological crisis. As Samuel Rayan remarks: "The earth system is being polluted and destroyed through wasteful, profligate and predatory practices by modern profit-oriented scientific-technological culture, be it industrial, agricultural, or communicational. The earth's standing, meaning and history as the Home of Life are under threat of death."⁴²

It is not easy to identify the causes of the ecological crisis, as it is a very complex phenomenon. But one of the causes is certainly the unbridled growth of the economy. Capitalism which looks for an ever increasing production and ever greater profit is fast becoming the ideology of the whole world. People everywhere are striving for rapid economic development without seriously taking into account its natural and social cost. They do not seem to be concerned about the enormous harm they are doing to nature. Then there is the development and application of

mega-technology, which appears to be almost beyond all human control. Though created by human beings, it seems to have enslaved them. Besides, there is the emergence of large institutions, which are becoming increasingly unmanageable. The rapid growth of the consumerist culture and the conspicuous consumption of the rich nations as well as the rich individuals in poor countries have also contributed to the ecological break-down. Perhaps greed and selfishness, both individual and collective, as well as a utilitarian attitude to nature are at the root of this crisis.

As prophets of the kingdom priests have to creatively respond to this challenge and sincerely strive to restore the ecological balance.

III. By way of conclusion

I would like to make two practical suggestions which will help priests to respond to the challenges enumerated here.

1. Priests should energize the Christian communities in such a way that they really become the sacraments, signs and agents, of the kingdom. Vatican II has asserted that the Church has received from Christ the mission to proclaim and to establish the kingdom of God.⁴³ It has also pointed out that the Church is meant to be an initial budding forth of the kingdom.⁴⁴ To the extent that the Church embodies the love of God and lives by the values of the Gospel, to that extent it is an initial realization of the kingdom. Richard McBrien offers a neat synthesis:

In summary, the Church has at least a threefold mission: to announce the Kingdom of God, to work here and now to bring it about, and to show by the quality and character of her own life as a community what the Kingdom is all about and what is

to be the final destiny of humankind and of all history.⁴⁵

2. Priests have to devote their energies to the task of building human communities based on the values of the kingdom – freedom, fellowship, justice, peace and joy. This is what is realistically possible in large areas of our country, where Christians are a small minority. In such communities the followers of all religions can collaborate in the work of establishing the kingdom of God. As Pope John Paul II affirms:

It is true that the inchoate reality of the kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church, among people everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8).⁴⁶

In the multi-religious context of India priests as prophets of the kingdom should foster collaboration among the followers of all faiths in the work of establishing a new human society which is consciously rooted in God, which is characterized by freedom, fellowship, love, justice, peace and joy and which lives in harmony and communion with the cosmos.

Notes

- * This is a revised version of a paper I presented at the National Seminar on *Priests in India Today: Challenges and Prospects*, held at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, on 11-12 December 2009.
- 1. A Dulles, *Models of the Church*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1974, p. 157. In this book Dulles speaks of five models of the priesthood corresponding to the five models of the Church he has described in the book.
- 2. See K. Kunnumpuram, “Priests as Prophets of the Lord” in K. Kunnumpuram (ed.), *Shaping Tomorrow’s Church*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2006, pp. 347-373.

3. A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, p. 157.
4. See H. Kung, *The Church*, London: Burns and Oates, 1967, pp. 388-389; Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, London: Chapman, 1964, pp. 21-39.
5. J.A. Mohler, *Origin and Evolution of the Priesthood*, Staten Island: Alba House, 1970, p. 49
6. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
7. Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty*, p. 62.
8. Neuner-Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, n. 21
9. *Ibid.*, n. 1707
10. E. Schillebeckx, *Ministry. A Case for Change*, London: SCM Press, 1971, p. 15
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39
12. *LG* 18.
13. *PO* 6.
14. B. Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974, p. 296.
15. See G.M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society", in F. D'Sa (ed.), *Collected Writings of George Soares-Prabhu*, Vol. 4, Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 2000, p. 225.
16. See G.M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Drama of the Biblical Prophet", in *CRI National Assembly Report*, 1988, pp. 85-109; W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
17. A. Heschel, *The Prophets*, Vol. I, XIV.
18. See W. Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, p. 109..
19. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
20. G.M. Soares-Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society", pp. 230-231.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.
23. See C.H. Gundmann, "Mammon – Its Biblical Perspective" in *Mission Studies* 12 (1995) 2, pp. 157-163.
24. See U. Duchrow, "God or Mammon: Economies in Conflict" in *Mission Studies* 13 (1996) 1 and 2, pp. 32-67.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
26. K.N. Panikkar, "Religion in the Public Sphere" in *The Hindu*, Vijayawada, September 8, 2009, p. 8.
27. P. Zuckermann, "Atheism: Contemporary Numbers and Patterns" in M. Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 55.
28. GS 4.
29. See *Constitution of India*, nos. 14-51.
30. M. Amaladoss, "Globalization from the Perspective of Victims of History" in *Integral Liberation* (1987), p. 131.
31. J. Patras, "Cultural Imperialism in Late 20th Century" in *EPW*, 1994, p. 2073.
32. See F. Wilfred, "Church's Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalization" in *Vidyajyoti* 62 (1998) 2, p. 89.
33. GS 4.
34. A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, London: Penguin Press, 2009.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
36. A. Sen, "An Unequal Country" in *India Today*, August 24, 2009, p. 19.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
39. "Conclusions of a Research Seminar on a Vision of Mission in the New Millennium" Ishvani Kendra, Pune, 9-12 March, 2000, in T. Malipurath and L. Stanislaus (eds.) *A Vision of Mission in the New Millennium*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2001, pp. 201-202.

40. *Ibid.*
41. A Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977, pp. 41-42.
42. S. Rayan, "The Earth is the Lord's" in *Vidyajyoti* 54 (1990) 3, p. 129.
43. *LG* 5.
44. *Ibid*
45. McBrien, *Do We Need the Church*, New York: Harper and Row, 1969, p. 131.
46. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 20.

“You are ... a royal priesthood ... so that you may announce ...” (1 Pet. 2:9). Reflections of two lay female theologians

Anna Findl-Ludescher and Teresa Peter

Theologische Fakultät, Innsbruck, Austria.

Abstract: Beginning with an informal and personal conversational style that attracts the reader's interest, two female theology faculty teaching staff members present their honest feelings and convictions, which lead them to a theological reflection on the priesthood, from their perspective as women. Different aspects of vocation and identity are uncovered. The concept of empowerment is discussed. A brief overview is given of changes in the understanding of priesthood in history. Findings of a priest-survey provide four 'priest-types'. Aspects of the contemporary situation are given. Specific examples are cited for raising questions and drawing inferences.

Keywords: Women, priesthood, common priesthood, mediator, vocation, identity, empowerment, types of priests.

This article is really in need of a special introduction. This is so because it intends to build bridges between worlds which are quite far away from each other and which seem to work quite differently. It needs a serious introduction because this article tries to contribute some thoughts and feelings to try and reach a mutual understanding between dialogue-partners, between members of the same Catholic Church, between people who are trying to follow the same person and work for one and the same Kingdom of God, and at the same time between persons whose backgrounds, basic experiences and fundamental convictions might be quite different or even opposing ones. So dear readers, please do not skip

this introduction part (as one is tempted to do quite often) but allow yourself for a short period of time to be taken into another part of the world, to be introduced into another perspective which surely is not the only one, but which is one alongside other ones.

This article on the priesthood is written by two *lay* theologians. This article about priesthood in the Catholic Church is written by two *female* lay theologians. And this article about priesthood in the Catholic Church, published in an Indian journal, is written by two lay female theologians from the *West*, from Austria, a small European country. To accept the request to write this article was by itself an adventure for us. Dear readers, we invite you to join us on this adventure-journey into maybe unknown areas of experience and thought. (We will surely do the same as we go through the other articles of this journal once it is published.) Come, let's go, "Chalo"!

What shapes our reflection on this sensitive topic?

- An introduction to our view-point in the form of a conversation

Teresa (T): How did you feel and what did you think when I asked you if you are interested to write together with me this article about priesthood? What kind of difficulties did you see and in what way did it challenge you?

Anna (A): It was in the middle of summer and it was like a request from another planet. It was just bizarre to be asked to write something about this topic when at the same time it is very clear that so many things around this topic of priesthood – like priesthood of women – cannot be said and done. Still I felt this topic is somehow important for

me, for my reflection, but also for what I would call an existential practice of religion and faith. Priesthood has a significance according to me. That was the reason why I accepted to write this article, presupposed that we do it together. There is within me a deep conviction that something like priesthood is needed in a religion. And what about you?

T: First of all, I was quite happy to write something for the JDV journal, principally as I am interested very much in the Indian context. But the problem was the topic; I really felt quite uneasy with it. I felt mainly that this priesthood-topic has nothing to do with me personally, it simply does not touch me existentially in any way. Priestess is something I will never be, something I will never be allowed to become, officially, something I am not even allowed to think about. It simply does not affect me. And what challenged, and in the end convinced me to start working on this topic, was the fact that I think it is simply unjust and wrong that I am not allowed to consider priesthood as something which can also be a part of my world.

A: And what about the impression which I described that priesthood is something essential for religion. Is this impression also familiar to you?

T: This impression is hardly there for me. Although when I start reflecting how religion works and how I personally grew up in a Christian surrounding, then I have to say that, yes, my family participated regularly in parish activities. We went for weekly mass and of course I saw the priest presiding at the Eucharist. But at home my family was critical towards the Church and still pious at the same time. My brother and I were told that priests are

also just human beings and that what they say has to be critically evaluated like all other people's opinions. Just the fact that a priest is a priest was irrelevant.

A: That means this numinous dimension is not closely connected for you with priesthood?

T: Yes, that is right. When I think of priests I think more of pragmatic, administrative people than of mystical ones.

A: As I see it, on this point my approach is different. First of all my family was not against the clergy, not at all. The youngest brother of my mother was supposed to become a priest. In the end he did not become one. But becoming or being a priest was connected with high esteem. And, yes, I had the impression, that being a priest is something special, something extra-ordinary. Still as a young girl I never had the wish to become a priestess. This exclusion was not important for me at that time. Only later at the age of around 20 I started to think more about the impossibility for women to join priesthood, and I realized that there is something at the bottom of these traditions which I am not ready just to agree to. One more experience which I would like to share at this point is the following. Personally I never felt the vocation to become a priestess. However, I remember one course which I taught at the Theological Faculty, during which two female students shared that they do feel very clearly about this particular vocation. And to hear that so directly from the mouth of committed, intelligent and nice young women, really impressed me a lot. These were not some crazy women, like we are made to believe sometimes, that those who would like to opt for priesthood are just crazy and narcissistic. These were very simple, honest and

committed women who feel ready to serve the Church as woman priests.

T: When I was a young girl I was rejected from being an altar girl. And there is the deep sentiment that basically the Church is more frightened than happy about my contributions, that at the level where I am very much myself I have no place in the Church, but that I disturb the order. Earlier I said, I do not want to become a priestess, but I want to have the right to decide about that. But nowadays I think maybe this statement was made too fast and mainly served as a protection for me. If I tell myself that I am not interested to work in the Church as a priestly leader then I do not have to feel the pain of rejection. Today it is very clear to me that I am called to and that I want to grow in openness, faith and spiritual depth and that I want to help others to do so. I am very sad about the fact that the official Church teaching wants me to believe that there is something basically wrong about my body which is completely contrary to my personal experience.

Vocation and identity. Vocation – “Discovery of who one is and what one has to say”

Whenever one hears the term “vocation” or the call to “pray for vocations” most of the Christians are tempted to think primarily of the vocation to become priest or the vocation to join a religious congregation. Depending on the personal attitude towards the Catholic Church in general and celibate life in particular, this kind of vocation is associated with appreciation, esteem and recognition or with amazement, suspicion or even rejection. Too easily one loses sight of the fact that each and every human person is called by God and that each woman and man, each girl and boy carries a vocation which we believers

are supposed to be thankful for, and for whose discovery we are supposed to pray for. Following this understanding, vocation is not a very particular event, which happens from time to time and to very extra-ordinary persons, but vocation becomes a call which remains a promise and a challenge to all of us. It is a promise because it assures us that according to the Christian understanding God calls each individual person, be it a small or a big person, a young or an old person, a more intelligent or a more simple person, a sick or a healthy person, be it a female or a male person, a homosexual or a heterosexual person. At the same time, vocation remains a challenge because it reminds us of the fact that each person is asked to depart again and again from what we have considered to be our permanent home, and to travel towards a deeper understanding and realisation of the Divine Truth.

One more very interesting aspect of vocation is that the conviction that vocation is not something which affects only a few, but something which affects everyone, does not turn it into something banal, but radicalizes it. With vocation it is not the way it is with precious stones, which means the less you find, the more precious they are. In this context it is completely the opposite way, the more people are able to live out their vocation, the closer we are to the realisation of the Kingdom of God. Following this line I agree with Klemens Schaupp¹, a pastoral theologian from Austria, who defines vocation as “discovery of who one is and what one has to say”. In describing vocation in this way it is very close to the description of what we call identity. To develop one’s identity means to discover one’s vocation and vice versa. Before I continue with this link between identity and vocation (in part 2.2) I want to stress once again that this broad understanding of vocation

should not be considered as something ephemeral or something which we can easily agree to in order to pass on to the so called “extra-ordinary” vocation. If we are really interested to understand what vocation means, it is wiser to look at the ordinary than at the so called extra-ordinary. The astonishing and radical truth is not that a few are chosen, but that all are called; the extra-ordinary is that all ordinary people are anointed to be extra-ordinary. In order not to miss this, we are in need of a deep awareness which will enable us to develop the courage to live an ordinary life carrying the extra-ordinary mystery.

This ‘extra-ordinary ordinary’ truth is at the same time not something which is limited to the Christian anthropology, as we can see when we listen to Mahatma Gandhi, the great Indian mystic, who says: “The divine music is continuously there within us, but our noisy senses drown this subtle music, which is completely different and enormously more awesome than anything else, which we are able to perceive.”²

Still it has been, and is, a struggle to keep this theological-anthropological conviction alive. Also among Christians we can find the longing to look for mediators who shall be in charge of the human-divine relationship and who shall bridge the human and divine sphere. “The temptation to establish traditional sacerdotal priests seems to be a very basic human temptation at times when religious insecurity, fear and doubt are dominating [...]”³ But this bridge between the human and divine sphere has been built in and through the Christ event, he himself has become the bridge on which all of us – lay women and men, children, sisters, brothers and fathers, and even crocodiles, tigers and alpine marmots, to name just a few creatures – have the honour to travel towards the Ultimate

Reality. According to the testimony of the New Testament (cf. 1 Tim 2,5), there is only one mediator between God and humans – and that is Jesus Christ. All other people can strive to become followers of him. Bernd Jochen Hilberath writes: “To be priest means: to give one’s life for the sake of others [...] – as followers of Jesus Christ. [...] Ever since [the Christ event] a mediator is not necessary anymore. He [Jesus Christ] has related us with God for good.”⁴

Vocation – built on the pillars of identity

The link between vocation and identity shall be explored a little further here. Hilarion Petzold speaks of five pillars of identity⁵, by which he means areas of human life which are important for the development of a person. These five pillars are: (1) the body with all its joyful and painful sensations; (2) human relationships of different closeness; (3) work/activity through which a person is able to express what is important to her/him and through which a person can contribute something to society; (4) material as well as intellectual resources (like education) and (5) values which are part of one’s worldview or faith, and which help to stabilise the person in the midst of everyday experiences. If it is argued here that to discover one’s vocation means to develop one’s identity and vice versa, the desire is to show that vocation is not understood as something which is in opposition to the unfolding of a *personality*, but that it goes side by side. All the five factors or areas of human life mentioned above, do have a strong impact on a person’s development, and nobody can just ignore those areas. One day or the other one will feel the importance of these areas, and the need to find a way to integrate these into one’s life. As identity-

development is a life-long process, it is also suggested that vocation be understood more as a development-process than a one-time decision.

When it comes to the question as to why not define vocation as something which goes against human nature and longing, it is preferred to use the expression and the concept of the “three-fold sound of the one Divine voice” which was introduced by Josef Maureder, an Austrian Jesuit and psychotherapist. By this term he wants to express that the one Divine voice which calls each individual person can be perceived in a three-fold way – in what a person *can* become and do, *wants* to become and do, and *is supposed* to become and do. According to him these three dimensions of the one vocation are not in rivalry with each other (e.g., that a person is called to do what he or she is not able or ready to do) but do – when we have a close look – support each other.⁶ Vocation is built on our abilities, our freedom and our longing.

Vocation as self-awareness instead of self-centeredness – “See, there is ...”

If vocation goes along with the discovery of one’s identity, it does also go along with the realisation of an ever growing self-awareness. A person can realise more and more who he or she is and what she or he has to say and to do. This self-awareness is at the same time very different from selfish and narcissist self-centeredness. To develop towards self-awareness as well as to be aware of the temptation of self-centeredness is important for ordained priests as well as for people belonging to the common priesthood. Especially when we are working in religious fields like religious education, pastoral care, spiritual direction, parish activities, liturgical services or

academic theology, we are supposed to speak and act in a way which makes it perceivable that not we ourselves – as conductors, preachers, professors or ordained priests – are the centre of our professional activities and enterprises, but that through our commitments we are trying to point at someone else. The most important criteria of religious teaching, liturgical activity and pastoral care seems to be the question whether these activities point to the doers or ‘conductors’, or to the mystery and reality in our midst, and at the same time beyond these activities. Javier Melloni, a Spain Jesuit, writes: “The theological word about the Mystery gives us a deeper understanding of It [the Mystery] in so far as it [the theological word] is transcended.”⁷ Melloni uses the distinctions “idol – icon” and “dungeon – cathedral” to illustrate his thought. A theological word and a liturgical activity can serve as an “icon” or a “cathedral” and point towards something which is in and beyond the word or the activity, but it can also point at the theological word and the liturgical activity itself in a self-centered manner, and become an “idol” or a “dungeon”.

Thinking about this, there is one person from the New Testament who comes to mind in a special way – John the Baptist, and his pointing towards Jesus. In John’s Gospel he is telling the priests and Levites who come to question him that he himself is not the Messiah, and on the following day when he sees Jesus, he tells the people: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, ‘A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.’ I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel.” (John 1,29-31). All of us are called through

baptism to “prepare the way of the Lord” and to “make straight his paths” (Mt 3,3). So we can tell other people as well as ourselves: “See, there is ...”.

Vocation – in bonds

If we look at our world in general, and at our societies in particular, in a realistic manner, the description “already and not yet” regarding the realisation of the Kingdom of God is very accurate. Besides the truth that all human beings (and maybe also all other beings) are called to discover their extra-ordinariness, it is also true that quite often people are confronted with forces and circumstances which hinder them from unfolding their full capacities. People are kept small or are made to believe that they are unimportant and less precious than other people. Vocation is kept in bonds. Of course the basic vocation through God can never be undone by such worldly mechanics of power and violence, but the flourishing of the vocation can be handicapped tremendously. In the worst case this can lead to the physical or psychic death of people, in a less dramatic but still painful form, it might lead to disappointment and withdrawal. The opposite of the dynamics of bonded vocations would be the dynamics of empowerment. The term “empowerment” in a non-theological sense “means [...] the strengthening of self-power, autonomy and self-direction. Empowerment describes courage building processes [...] in which people in situations of shortage, of discrimination or of social exclusion start to take matters into their own hands by becoming aware of their own abilities, by developing their own strength and by learning to use their individual and collective resources for a self-determined conduct of life.”⁸ Thomas Abraham, Indian professor emeritus for

adult education, defines empowerment as “the means by which the individual, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work together towards enhancing the quality of life of themselves and others.” If we speak about empowerment in a theological context, it is important to stress that all human efforts which are essential for the improvement of the situation, and for the abolishing of structures of disadvantage and discrimination are carried by the empowerment which is given by God. Hermann Stenger, an Austrian pastoral theologian, has been working a lot on this topic and speaks in the field of pastoral work of a threefold empowerment by God. He distinguishes between (1) the empowerment to life, (2) the election to faith and (3) the vocation to pastoral service.⁹ It is only on this three-fold fundamental that it makes sense to start thinking about the development of particular skills.

But as said above, the dynamics of a theologically founded empowerment is the opposite of the dynamics of disempowerment, which unfortunately captures many areas of our living-together. So does it also happen in the Church, and at times, through a certain way of discussing about the priesthood and practicing the priesthood. Surely many ordained priests as well as many people belonging to the common priesthood support empowering processes and help men and women to come up. Still, it is also true that some structures which are closely connected to the usual understanding and practice of priesthood, do serve processes of disempowerment and exclusion. And unfortunately women are affected by this, simply because of their gender. An example from the Austrian context can be given here to make this point more comprehensible.

Maybe it is not a very dramatic example, but it is a good example because it shows the impact of small incidents which are sometimes difficult to be noticed, because they happen so silently or because we are too much used to them. This example is the story of the vocation of Katharina Achrainer an Austrian woman who has been working in different pastoral fields for more than 30 years.¹⁰ She narrates that in 1962 during mass she suddenly heard an inner voice which told her: "I need you. I need you in front." She was touched by "a very subtle and still all-powerful reality, to which all other things were secondary". For many years she did not dare to tell anyone about this experience. At home the family were farmers and she had not gone for higher education so far. Some years later she came to know that in Vienna women could go for a course to become pastoral assistants. She attended that course and thereafter worked for 36 years in different pastoral fields like parish, school and hospital. The terms with which her work and her position were named, changed several times during her life, which shows that the Church is entering here into new areas, and that the tradition has to grow with the changing circumstances. When Katharina Achrainer is reflecting on her life today she describes besides joys, painful experiences as well, which were connected to her vocation, which did not really fit into the structures of the Church. For example, on All Saints' Day when she was told by the priest that maybe it would be better if she – who was responsible for the pastoral work in one part of the town throughout the year – stayed at home, because he did not know where to put her during the ceremony. In three parishes she was the first one to take over the responsibility for the parish after the priests had left (as the number of priests is decreasing). And for many years she had to live with

statements like: “We do not have a priest anymore. And now he is even replaced by a woman!” The people got used to her presence after some time, but always just as a compromise and a temporary solution, because no priest was available. Katharina Achraimer concludes today: “It is not vocation which constitutes holiness, but the fidelity with which vocation is lived out.”

Common Priesthood and the diversity of priestly self-concepts.

- Relation between the common priesthood of the faithful and the hierarchical priesthood

“And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom.” (Mt 27,51). This act shows that the so called holy order which was dominant so far and which allowed only the high priest to have access to the sanctum was abolished by God himself. “Through the death and resurrection of Jesus each person can be equally immediate to God.”¹¹ From a historical perspective on religions it is evident, that traditionally priests have been understood as mediators between heaven and earth, between God/gods and humans. “As persons associated to cult they established the link between the transcendental and earthy sphere. Therefore they are looked upon as somebody extra-ordinary.”¹²

Jesus has broken with this understanding of priesthood radically. He himself did not consider his actions to be priestly. In the early Church the terms for cultic-priestly functions, which are familiar to us today, were not used, but instead terms which originate in societal functions like “episkopos”, the custodian, or “presbyteros”, the eldest or principal. According to the testimony of the New Testament, that which was often considered as the

particular priestly – to establish the link between heaven and earth – is principally possible for each human person. All people can have without any further mediation, access to God. The only true mediator who is between God and humans, is the true high priest (cf. Heb. 5,5) Jesus Christ. “His death on the cross is the completion of all sacrifices and the end of priesthood in the traditional meaning.”¹³ As “holy priesthood” (cf. 1 Pet. 2,4-10) all baptised people have a part in Christ, all share in this vocation, and the priestly ordination takes place in baptism. There is no more need for particular God-mediators, in order to build up a relationship with God. This claim is tremendously radical and it was not always possible to keep it up. The deeply rooted tradition of the sacerdotal priest proved to be strong and so the understanding of priesthood in the Church was soon again shaped by the traditional idea of priesthood as mediation. Nevertheless this traditional idea was also questioned from time to time, as it happened during the time of the Reformation for example.

This tension is perceivable even today in the Catholic Church. In the documents of the Second Vatican Council the common priesthood of all the faithful is stressed. The relation between the common priesthood and the hierarchical priesthood is described in the following way: “If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God. (cf. 2 Pet. 1,1) And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.”¹⁴ What is stated here is an overcoming of the separation

between clergy and laity concerning sanctity. With this the Council opted for an understanding of priesthood which does not go along with an overestimation of the sacral dimension of priesthood.¹⁵

At present it seems that in the western world again a phenomenon is taking place that one could describe as “re-sacralisation” of the priesthood. A strong longing for transcendence can be observed and so people who are expected to be in touch with the holy sphere are in great demand. In times of crises many persons ask for a priest sharing the assumption that the priest has a more direct relation to God. Given this situation the leading Church institutions, academic theology as well as individual priests are challenged to remain rooted in the theology of Vatican II. Depending on the culture and the social situation, this challenge will take different shapes. It might be helpful to become aware of the shape this phenomenon takes in one’s own local Church situation: In what way is the relation between sacred and profane interpreted and lived out in my local Church situation? In what way is the relation between priests and laity lived out and understood? From what or whom (culture, religion, religious communities, ...) do we want to turn away? With what or whom do we want to go along?

Characterisation of different ways of living out priesthood

Of course within each local Church not only *one* view of priesthood or *one* idea of ministry exists, but several different ones. In 2001 an empirical investigation was published which had been conducted among priests in Eastern and Western Europe.¹⁶ It was the aim of this investigation, which was called “Priest 2000”, to survey

the different understandings of vocation and ministry prevalent among priests. So the questionnaire included questions about personal spirituality, about estimation of Church developments, about the joys and difficulties of priestly life, etc. The results of the questionnaire were categorized and on the basis of that, four “priest types” were deduced. A more detailed description of these four types of priests would be interesting in connection with the reflections on common and hierarchical priesthood because the four priest types value and deal with this relation (between common and hierarchical priesthood) quite differently. There are tremendous differences in the style of pastoral activity and proclamation. Furthermore, this investigation is illuminative when it is looked upon from the perspective of the laity, especially from the perspective of women. So the four types are presented below in a brief manner.

- The clergyman who is timeless

This priest sees himself clearly as a priest of Jesus Christ. According to him Christ has established the priestly ministry, and through ordination he has been introduced into the service of Christ. This service is considered to be the fulfillment of his life. Concerning modern life-style and modern culture he behaves in a reserved or even hostile manner. According to him there are more disadvantages than advantages which come along with the culture of (post-)modernism. Accordingly he is sceptical and/or hostile when it comes to an opening of the Church towards this culture. In his view the Second Vatican Council has contributed to an inappropriate secularisation of the Church. The spirit of the time is considered to be a peril for the Church order and structures. The most important priestly activities are the

celebration of the Eucharist and proclamation. Participation of the laity is not particularly desirable.

- The man of God who is open to the present time

This priest looks upon himself as bridge-builder, as pontifex. He stands at the tension between the (official) Church and the world. He supports the opening of the Church towards the world which was initiated by the Second Vatican Council. He is the “born priest”, a man of the middle position, who nevertheless asserts his position. A contemporary proclamation of the Gospel is particularly important to him and he is ready to spend a good amount of time for this through preaching and spiritual direction. He likes to be in public and takes a stand on contemporary topics. His self-concept is a prophetic one. The advice of laity is welcomed by him. Still there are also areas, in which he – being aware of his ordained ministry – does not allow anyone to intervene.

- The man of the Church who is close to the present time

This priest has quite a distinct understanding of his vocation. The personal call of God for serving in the Church is his reliable foundation. The view on the Church as it was established by the Second Vatican Council is according to him, a very stable foundation, and he is very much interested in a consequent realisation of the ideas of the Vatican Council. He is looking for steps for the realization of the teachings of the Council, especially from the side of the Roman headquarters. The conviction of being called by God goes side by side with a striving for professionalism. This kind of priest wants to execute his vocation and his profession in a very professional manner, and is consequently ready to acquire additional

qualifications and skills. At the same time he pays attention to his limits and takes care of his spare time and private life. He is not by all means interested to be rooted in a parish, but is open to work in different and also less traditional fields of pastoral work.

The leader of the parish who is up-to-date

The theology of the common priesthood of all the baptised persons is at the bottom of his acting as a priest. He sees his ministry as being a brother among brothers and sisters. His vision is of a Church which lives the Gospel values and which is at the same time open to the modern world and society. According to him this is the only way to be in touch with the modern culture. The Vatican Council was according to him path-breaking, but the period after the Council more a step backwards than forwards. This priest appreciates highly the decision of individuals, and wants that these decisions be accepted and appreciated also by the Church officials. "This refers to the possibility for remarried-divorced couples to be fully part of the sacramental community as well as to the life-form of priests."¹⁷ He considers the admission of women for priesthood as theologically justifiable and pastorally preferable. In his priestly activity, pastoral care for each individual person and *diaconia* have a high significance. He tries to improve the structures for participation of laity in decision-making processes.

Considering the priest-investigation as a whole, one has to keep in mind that a categorisation or typology like this does always show some relevant aspects, but it can also be misleading. A typology like this should not be understood as being the reality, but it may be a help in perceiving and interpreting realities which we face. In this article this

typology might give us a hint why believing together and working together for women and priests can take different shapes, and that these differences in cooperation are not explainable through personal sympathy alone. The particular understanding of vocation and ministry of a priest shapes the way in which he deals with lay people, especially with women. Of course it is not adequate to speak of *the* woman either. One could also try to develop a typology of women, by asking them about their understanding of ministry and vocation, and in what way they consider themselves as being called and as being in charge of a ministry. Such a survey is not available right now, so we have to help ourselves by using our imagination. For example, it seems to be quite expectable that a woman who is aware of sharing in the common priesthood and aware of her dignity as priestess, queen and prophet, which was confirmed in her baptism, will find it hard to work together – as also to pray and celebrate together – with a priest who sees himself as ‘timeless clergy-man’. Both of them will have to face lots of frustrations in their cooperative work, and quite often it will break after some time. The ‘timeless clergy-man’ as well as ‘the man of the Church who is close to the present time’ have in common their exclusive understanding of vocation. They perceive more the distinctive aspects than the common ground, with regard to the laity.

As this article is being written, one keeps asking oneself if at all this kind of typology is meaningful and helpful for the Indian situation. Surely it would have to be adapted in this so-different context, but maybe the European results can at least be inspiring to provoke a thought about the plurality of types among priests, and about the quite different communication and relation

patterns between priests and women which follow out of this plurality.

What do we dream of when it comes to priesthood?

Ending and starting anew in the form of a conversation

Anna (A): When I look at the Church in Austria and at priests whom I know, or at the seminarians whom I meet at the Theological Faculty and in my courses, I notice two things: Firstly I would say that there is a lot of heterogeneity among priests, and secondly that the young men who study for priesthood today are very different from the seminarians of twenty years ago. Another quite important impression which I have, is the change of the attitude of the believing community towards priests. Let me say that maybe twenty-five years ago a young man encountered mainly esteem and respect when he decided to join the seminary. Today that is really very different. There is a small group which very highly appreciates such a decision, but the majority – even of the practicing Catholics – shows ignorance or even rejection. So what young men encounter today when they want to become priests is not easy to digest. Maybe we also have to keep that in mind when we say that at times it is difficult to cooperate with seminarians or priests. Still, on a more general level, it is very evident today that the Catholic Church in Austria has lost significance and influence dramatically during the last fifty years. And interestingly, and also annoyingly, to me it seems that at the same time within the Church I can observe an over-estimation and stylisation of priesthood in a particular way. It looks like the less importance the Church has in society and in public life, the more the priest is put on a higher platform away from the people.

Teresa (T): Sometimes I think this is almost like an indigestible cocktail for young men – on the one side they have to face lack of understanding and rejection, and on the other side they hear or read that the priest is supposed to be someone especially pious, immaculate and extraordinary, and that the priest is somehow in opposition to society. That touches already the question of what I am dreaming of when it comes to priesthood. I am dreaming of young people (male and female) who are able to grow into priesthood without going into opposition to society, people who do not base their holiness in trying to be away or apart from the ordinary. So I would say I am dreaming of priestly people who do not feel the urge to separate the profane and the holy but who can feel, live out and develop their vocation in the midst of people who are doing the same. I am dreaming of priestly people who do not have to be so much concerned about their own status but who can – like all other people around them – discover who they are and what they have to say. I am dreaming of priestly people who can let go their extra-ordinary status and develop the courage to be ordinary and at the same time discover the extra-ordinariness within the human nature.

A: That reminds me of the incidents which happened in the diocese of Salzburg (our neighbouring diocese) recently, and maybe your dreams can be a help to understand what actually has occurred there. In the September volume of the diocesan journal of Salzburg, a person in a leadership position at the diocesan department for pastoral care, and who is a married man, wrote that the question of gender justice is an essential question for the future of the Church, independently from the question whether there are sufficient male candidates for priesthood

or not. And just this statement was enough to start a hurting internet-discussion. In the end he had to apologize publicly in the same journal, and “correct” his statement. For me it is an alarming sign that a little scratching at the male priest image to which we are used to, creates so much irritation. Questions which are so evident and so pressing in our society today seem to be “taboo” in certain church circles. So it looks to me that the Church is not in a relation of companionship with “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” (*Gaudium et Spes* 1) of the people, but in opposition as you would say.

T: I am sure that there are social, political and economic questions in which it is right for the Church and for us as Christians to be in opposition. I think this prophetic role of Christian testimony is a very important one, but this prophetic role has to be based – according to me – on a fundamental solidarity and awareness that the Kingdom of God has already started to exist in the midst of our world, and that basically we can trust in the hope that inspiring and life-giving ideas can come towards us from those areas, movements and people who are not so closely connected to the visible official Church.

A: When I think of the future of the Church the first word which comes to my mind is change or transformation. And this will not happen all of a sudden but slowly. And in this transformation process spiritual people who are ready to work in the different fields of pastoral care will be needed. One more thing which is very much related to the future of the Church according to me, comes to my mind now. Recently I read an article about gender justice in religious life. At the end of this article a few questions for self-reflection are listed. These questions are primarily addressed to Religious Sisters, but I think

they can be reflected upon by any woman – and also by any man. Let me quote these questions to close our sharing and our article: “(1) Biographies of women do often develop from an exclusive ‘existence for others’ to the discovery of an ‘own life of self-awareness’. Do I have the courage as Religious Sister to let go of role-behaviour which is expected by the society and by the Church, and to discover a life-form which is really appropriate for women of our days? (2) Are internalised minority feelings as woman familiar to me? (3) Do I go through spiritual experiences of alienation in a Church which is masculine in many aspects? Do I, do we, create space for authentic female spirituality and liturgy?”¹⁸

As we said in the beginning it was an adventure to write this article. Besides many interesting theological questions which we came across during the process of discussing the content of this article, it became very clear to both of us that even our two perspectives, our basic experiences and convictions differ at certain points even though we share a common ground in many ways. The more attentively one looks at people, the more one discovers their uniqueness. May we as Catholic Church become more and more capable to receive and appreciate the gift of diversity while moving on a common ground.

¹ Cf. Schaupp, Klemens, Gott im Leben entdecken. Einfuehrung in die geistliche Begleitung, Verlagsgemeinschaft Topos plus, Kavelaer 2006.

² Gandhi, Mahatma, Die Religion der Wahrheit, Aus Mahatma Gandhis schriftlichem Nachlass ausgewaehlt von M. S. Deshpande und R. K. Prabhu, translated by Franz Langmayr, Perlinger Verlag, Woergl 1982, 31.

³ Cf. Schmid, F. Peter, Gottesvermittler. Das Beduerfnis nach “dem Priester” als Herausforderung an die Seelsorge, in: Diakonia. Internationale Zeitschrift fuer die Praxis der Kirche, vol. 34. / 1

(January 2003) 178-185, here 184. The translation of these quotes from German to English has been done by the authors of this article.

- ⁴ Hilberath, Bernd Jochen, Mit Gott in Verbindung bringen, in: Diakonia. Internationale Zeitschrift fuer die Praxis der Kirche, vol. 34. / 1 (January 2003) 161-162. . The translation of this quotation from German to English has been done by the authors of this article.
- ⁵ Cf. Petzold, Hilarion (Ed.), Die Rolle des Therapeuten und die therapeutische Beziehung, Junfermann-Verlag, Paderborn 1980, 233-236; cf. Ladenhauf, Karl-Heinz, Integrative Therapie und Gestalttherapie in der Seelsorge, Paderborn 1988, 108-119; cf. Schaupp, Gott im Leben entdecken, 35-36.
- ⁶ Cf. Maureder, Josef, Wir kommen, wohin wir schauen. Berufung leben heute, Tyrolia Verlag, Innsbruck – Wien ²2005, 44-47.
- ⁷ Cf. Melloni, Javier, Ueberlieferung und Uneindeutigkeit der Heiligen Schrift und der Dogmen, in: Concilium. Internationale Zeitschrift fuer Theologie 43. Jg./Heft 1 (2007), Matthias-Gruenewald-Verlag der Schwabenverlag AG Mainz, 57-64, here 59.
- ⁸ Herriger, Herbert, Grundlagentext Empowerment, in: www.empowerment.de/grundlagentext.html (status: 7th December 2009).
- ⁹ Cf. Stenger, Hermann, Kompetenz und Identitaet. Ein pastoraltheologischer Entwurf, in: Stenger, Hermann (Ed.), Eignung fuer die Berufe der Kirche. Klaerung – Beratung – Begleitung, Herder Verlag, Freiburg i. B. 1988, 34-39.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Achrainer, Katharina, Eine wechselvolle Ortsuche. Die Treue zur persoenlichen Berufung angesichts der ausschließenden Strukturen fuer Aemter in der Kirche, in: Panhofer, Johannes / Schneider, Sebastian (Ed.), Spuren in die Kirche von morgen. Erfahrungen mit Gemeindeleitung ohne Pfarrer vor Ort – Impulse fuer eine menschnahe Seelsorge, Matthias-Gruenewald Verlag der Schwabenverlag AG, Ostfildern 2009, 54-58.
- ¹¹ Schmid, Gottesvermittler, 178.
- ¹² Schmid, Gottesvermittler, 178.
- ¹³ Schmid, Gottesvermittler, 179.

-
- ¹⁴ Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 32.
- ¹⁵ In the documents of the Second Vatican Council the term “presbyter” is mostly used while speaking of priests. This term replaces the term “sacerdos”, which goes back to the Old Testament. In the council of Trent and in all the documents following it till the Second Vatican Council, the priest was referred to as “sacerdos” or as “clergyman”. The consequent usage of the term “presbyter” which goes back to the New Testament shows a shift in the understanding of priesthood.
- ¹⁶ Zulehner, Paul / Hennersperger, Anna, “Sie gehen und werden nicht matt” (Jes 40,31). *Priester in heutiger Kultur. Ergebnisse der Studie Priester 2000*, Schwabenverlag AG, Ostfildern 2001. As preparation for this survey 51 qualitative interviews were conducted. These were evaluated and served as basis for the development of a detailed questionnaire, which was answered by around 3000 priests. The majority of the participating priests belonged to German speaking dioceses (Germany, Switzerland and Austria). A smaller, but still representative group, belonged to dioceses from Eastern Europe.
- ¹⁷ Zulehner / Hennersperger, “Sie gehen und werden nicht matt”. *Ergebnisse der Studie Priester 2000*, 160.
- ¹⁸ Schaupp, Walter / Wolfers, Melanie, *Geschlechtergerechtigkeit – im Ordensleben?!*, in: Gruber, Margareta / Kiechle, Stefan (Ed.), *Gottesfreundschaft. Ordensleben heute denken*, Echter Verlag, Wuerzburg 2007, 271.

The Priest and Communications

Jacob Srampickal, S.J.

Director, Communications Studies,
Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.

Email: srampickal@unigre.it

Abstract: The need for priests to understand and use media and communications effectively, and to embody the message of the Gospel, is brought home powerfully, for the purpose of building up the community. The framing of a new ecclesiology, and spirituality from media are proposed. Several important aspects of media are highlighted. Practical suggestions with illustrative examples are provided.

Keywords: Media, communications, priest, ecclesiology, spirituality, message, audio-visual.

Traditionally, priests tend to associate communications with the images of media, technology, violence, manipulation, pornography, mobiles and cyber communications, etc. There are priests, even theologians and church leaders, who believe that communication and media are secular subjects, that have nothing to do with the church. Naturally, they give no serious attention to communications. Also in the church there has been a trend of extreme moralism that focused on the bad effects of media, starting from the days of Luther who used the nascent print medium to propagate his thoughts about the decadent church of his times. In the process, the church thwarted the entire good that communications could do. It was like 'throwing the baby with the bath water'. Living in a media-saturated world, a priest simply cannot say that he is not interested in media, or that he does not care about

these, because the people with whom and for whom he works are much influenced and even led by the media. He also, whether aware or not, is "like fish in the media waters". The life style of pastors, priests and religious speaks loudly about the media influence on their own lives and this realization should make a priest a keen learner of the media messages, so that he can critically sift between the good and the bad, the better and the best and help his people to do the same.

Today, in fact, a priest needs to be more interested in communication, and media must be understood as much more than a mere help to better one's communication. Normally, we use the word 'communications' in plural to include both communication and media.

What kind of communications is needed for a priest?

Priests need to have a clear knowledge of both communication and media. He must become a **communicative person**, and, secondly, he must be **at home with the media culture** which in fact is the very identity of today's generation.

A **communicative person** is someone who has the capacity to build a community, through communion, which is what communication tries to do. For this, firstly, he has to listen and be open to the opinions of others. This leads to dialogue, debates, further clarifications and an understanding of both sides of the issues and this he is able to reach consensus or communion. He allows others to become fully involved in management, and functions as a team person who can receive what the people can offer, to make the institution in which they work to perform better. A communicative person is one who strongly believes in delegating to, and empowering his

subordinates. Clearly, in priestly ministries today, these are important requisites as these are important leadership skills. Like Jesus, a priest is one who is true to his word, and like Jesus he must become both the medium and the message. A person who is communicative also has excellent counselling skills, an extra ability to understand people, and to reach out to help others. Above all, he is a person of compassion, one who feels with the suffering and the marginalized, and who seeks for ways to improve those sufferers' situations.

A. Communication and the priest

Let us look at the power of good communication in a priest's life. The basic purpose of communication is to create unity, harmony, communion and mutual understanding among persons. We accept that the Church is commissioned to create communities of love according to the vision of Jesus. This should convince a Christian as to why communication is so very basic to the Church. The Church simply cannot be true to her mission without proper communication. The Church, in fact, exists only to communicate the vision of Jesus. If she does not do so, she will be betraying her Master. The problem actually is that a lot of people in the Church try to get on with media and technologies without understanding this reality. Hence, an instrumental concept of using media takes the upper hand. In fact all media usage must be directed at building communication.

Communication is a basic need of life. In a social structure one cannot move forward, relate and become oneself without genuine communication. Communication is a basic human skill that can be developed. This is all the more important for priests with a commitment of service to the people as they are supposed to communicate life and

love, hope and freedom, harmony and reconciliation – the Kingdom values and thus to foster communities of love. In that context we can say that the quality of a Christian community is to be measured not in terms of the number of associations, programmes, conventions, etc., but in terms of the unity and mutual care in the community. The communication of Jesus, whether verbal or non-verbal was always pointed to relate to people and to help people relate to each other and to God.

The quality of leadership in any community depends on the quality of communication practiced and fostered by its leaders. If one were to think of a legalistic community then the style of communication is that of dictating rules and demanding observances. But if the community has a vision of communion then the picture changes. The leadership in this community communicates to animate, to motivate, to encourage and to unite, and the characteristic atmosphere is one of freedom and responsibility. In the Indian situation, most priests and religious have leadership roles – small or big – in the Christian community. Hence learning to communicate effectively is a must for all leaders, since their role is to do with building relatedness in the community.

a. Witnessing as a communicative value

In the audiovisual world that we live in today, visuals are more important than audio. Naturally, people expect to *see* how a leader perform. People need role models to imitate. Clearly the youngsters' craze for role models, and the academic quest for good examples to explain theories point to the need for witnessing. Pope John Paul II said it in very brief words, "The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission." (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42).

According to Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase, "medium is the message", the content of a message is conveyed more through the way it is communicated rather than by the message itself. Hence, attractive packaging is crucial for the sale of products. In the Christian context, it simply points to the witnessing aspect of one's life. "Seeing is believing". This is the first criterion for good faith communication. Do the people see Christians as loving, caring, peace-loving, peace-promoting, forgiving, prayerful persons, and not just hear them teaching about these aspects. A familiar saying goes, 'What you are, sounds so loud that I can't hear what you say'. Another explanation of 'medium is the message' is, medium and the message must be same; i.e. there should be no disparity or contradiction between what one says and does. That is why *Communio et Progressio* called Jesus the "perfect and model communicator"(11). Although He was an apparent failure in the judgement of the world, He lived his message to the fullest. This is the clearest example of witnessing – someone whose words and actions tally, someone who lives what he preaches. Gandhi, too said it clearly quoting Jesus, '*My life is my message*'.

Jesus' words and presence equally challenged both the good and the not-so-good, and each responded to that challenge in their own way. It points to the fact that leaders who take a stand, who hold on to the Kingdom values will have to go through unpleasant experiences even to the point of misunderstanding, suffering and rejection. Learning to disagree in an agreeable way, with nobility and with compassion reveals one's strength of character. One who tries to please everyone can end up in a mess, pleasing no one at the end. Every follower admires a leader who takes a stand, who can look beyond self to the mission. That is why Jesus' hearers told him, "Master

you teach us with authority unlike the scribes and Pharisees” (Mt. 7:29).

A good communicator is one who is able to strike a wavelength with the one communicated to. What else is incarnation than God coming to the wavelength and nature of human beings? As a result, the one who is communicated to understands and responds to the communicator, in such a way that effects a change in him. There are many aspects that make communication effective. The language, the expressions, the imagery, the knowledge one has on the subject, etc., but the most important is the quality of embodying the message. This is all the more essential in the case of communicating faith. Commitment calls for conviction and only authentic persons can convince. This is well expressed in the saying: “The only Bible that I have today is you”.

There is an ancient story attributed to Ramkrishna Paramhansa. Lots of people used to flock to this noble sage for advice and direction. Once a woman came to him with a six-year-old daughter, travelling two hours from a village outside Calcutta. She stood in the long queue and when her turn came she told the sage, “My daughter has a problem. She always asks for *rosgollas*. I can neither afford to buy these sweets whenever she asks, nor do I think these are good for health. Can you advice her to stop this bad habit?” The sage looked at the woman, then at the child. Then he quietly said, “Can you come next week?” The woman came exactly a week after. The same process was repeated and each time the guru told her to come next time. This went on for almost three months. At the end of the third month the guru told the girl, “Look here, you should stop eating too many *rosgollas*, it is not good for your health. Besides, your mother can’t afford to buy them

daily for you. Go home and obey your mother” But the mother was not so pleased. “Is that all you want to tell my daughter?”, she asked. “Yes”, the guru said humbly. “You could have said this the first time I came here,” argued the mother. “I couldn’t have said it that time,” said the guru with a humbler smile, “That time, I myself used to eat a lot of *rosgollas*. How could I then give such an advice to this innocent girl? In the last three months I tried to wean myself out of that habit. Hence I can give her this piece of advice!”

Faith educators can get a very important message from this story. More than all the methods and skills of teaching they master, the quality of their life matters. Can they boldly say, “My life is my message”, “Go and tell them what you see me doing”, or “Come and see” like Jesus.

All this points to the fact that a priest as a faith educator is a special person, with a unique call, and integrity must be an essential trait in him. This is because faith education has to do with taming the heart and not just reading out from some catechism books. Faith educators are called to introduce their learners to respond to God’s grace and to establish a personal relationship with him. One reason for so many “faith-less” Christians today may be due to the routine learning of precepts than coming in contact with persons of faith and commitment – right role models of faith.

b. The Homilies

A homily is a privileged exercise for the priest to communicate effectively with the people. Whatever be the length of the homily it must be interesting and inspiring and based on the gospel reading of the day. More than stories or quotes from various sources, what must be stressed is the personal experiences of the priest in trying

to live the faith based on the reading. More than rhetoric and theatrics, what is need most is sincerity and depth of scholarship which many educated people seek from a priest.

The man, the whole man, lies behind a sermon. Preaching is not the performance of an hour. It is the outflow of a life. Good preaching or teaching is not basically a matter of mastering certain techniques. It is, above all, a matter of being mastered by the Master and his convictions. Christianity is a religion of the heart. There are many references to the heart in the New Testament – the purity of heart, sincerity of heart, believing from the heart, heart as the seat of good and bad, etc. The Old Testament also has similar references while narrating the God-man relationship. Unfortunately the overemphasis on theology has led to a situation where faith is reduced to the affirmation of formulas and definitions -- literary gymnastics – while Jesus was very clear and audio-visual in His communication. Our catechesis even today remains much on the head level and refuses to come down to the heart level. Somehow the fear of emotions in matters of faith seems to grip our faith educators. And yet, faith has a lot to do with the heart. Remember Mary Magdalene calling out '*Rabboni*'? Was it an intellectual exercise or a loving response to a love experience?

One cannot really say what kind of a homily must be given. It is an audience-specific issue as in any communication. I am reminded of a theology professor who was keen to get experiences from grass-root bases for his teaching and so would be in parishes on and off to celebrate Sunday mass. Once while he was at a parish, there were just a couple of people only, as most had gone

away for a shrine feast. He approached one of the parishioners, a farmer, and inquired, "I have prepared a 20 minute homily, do you think I must deliver that for just the four of you?" The farmer replied, "Well Father, if you ask me, when I approach my cattle shed with food, even if only two come to be fed, I don't leave them hungry". The priest then delivered the homily. At the end of the Mass he asked the same farmer, "What did you think about the homily?" He said, "Father, when I go to feed my cattle, if only two come, I don't feed them with the entire food I brought for the forty".

c. The use of Group media

In whatever activity the priest may be involved in, the people may be sub-divided into groups, so that everybody has an opportunity to work and contribute in a very carefully planned manner. Here the group media process can be at work wherein the people share openly, everyone listens, questions, challenges, debates, deepens and decides together, and thus their sense of belongingness to the group and responsibility to the work increase. The varied group activities go on to focus more on individual growth for community development.

The priest can also encourage sports and arts clubs activities like tournaments and competitions not simply to encourage talents, but to help the people share, interchange and work together among themselves and thus foster leadership qualities among the people. In such activities even people of other religions too may be included, thus helping the people live in religious harmony.

Community building, inter-relatedness, group animation, decentralization, sharing, etc., are the many

expressions of such a vision. In fact, the philosophy of group media is one of total participation by all the members of a group. In this process, a priest has to be a good communicator – good at listening carefully (not only to what is said, but also to what is not said) and good at responding rightly. Hence he needs to learn to hold interactive sessions in groups. Since the aim of Christian communication is fostering relationships and forming communities, group interactions are very useful and are a major tool in faith education.

d. Framing a new ecclesiology

Moving on from the above and focusing more on the very communicative nature of the priest, we can talk of a new ecclesiology. The capacity to be a sociable person, easily accessible and available to the people can add much to the communicative strength of a priest. This leads to a more human ability to relate with the public in general, especially with persons of other Christian denominations and faiths. Developing such an ecumenical and inter-religious amity and sharing is important in the life of a priest.

Our mental images and concepts, about the Church and about people, are reflected in our relationships. It goes without saying that a priest needs to come a long way from the hierarchical model of the Church. Imbibing the spirit of Vatican II and post-Vatican documents, he needs to change his mindset and learn to see the Church more as a community (Body of Christ which has many members), modelled after the first Christian communities and Jesus' own community. It is here that communication plays a vital role, since the Word of God becomes the convening force of the community and the Bread of Life, the

nourishing and unifying power. Emerging from the above fact is the whole concept of developing a participatory church. Community building, inter-relatedness, group animation, decentralization, sharing, etc., are the many expressions of such a vision. In fact, the idea of group media, as explained above, is basically one of making everyone feel part of, and hence responsible for decision-making. Hardly anyone would give whole-hearted collaboration to a project or decision in which one was not part of, from the beginning. A priest needs to need to learn the art of involving others who are part of the mission/project, in major decisions in their area of service. In this process, he has to be a good communicator – good at listening and responding to every issue raised. This is necessary unless the leader be carried away by the ‘powerful’ of the group, who may have personal agendas, or may get confused and lost amidst different ideas. It is easy to be rulers in an autocracy but so very difficult to be animators in a democracy. Hence, there is the need to learn the art of communication. Obviously this is a major challenge to a priest who may be tempted to a ‘one-man-show’. A priest may assert that the Church is not a democracy. True, but he still cannot deny that it is a community – and that is something more than democracy!

Hence a priest needs also to be sufficiently sociable, warm, caring and welcoming. He has to be genuinely interested in people, selfless, eager to capture every opportunity to share the Father’s love. A genuine smile and a pleasant look can be an asset to help people feel at ease with him as these render him approachable. This has nothing to do with looking pious and sanctimonious. People are too sharp today (media-influenced people) to pick up messages and to sense the sincerity and simplicity

of committed persons. True virtue has to be carefully cultivated, and has nothing to do with 'being nice' as with some receptionists in the corporate sector, who can easily put on a 'plastic' smile.

e. Spirituality from communication

The priest must also be a paragon of **communicative virtues**, like listening, having the capacity to confront difficult situations, forgive and forget the evil done, and be eternally patient.

Spiritual leadership has to rise above religiosity to genuine spirituality. A priest's relationship with God has to go beyond rituals and practices, to a deeper experience and search for God. He has to develop the capacity to "encounter God" in all of life's expressions - people, things, events, environment. The measure of true spirituality in a priest is his quality as a 'medium' of Christ. The communication deficits among Christian leadership can to a great extent be solved through proper formation in seminaries and formation houses, although real formation has to take place through each developmental stage of a person from childhood onwards. We also need to address the issue: are we recruiting vocations or job seekers in our seminaries/religious houses? In the corporate world one has to prove his/her mettle for any profession one seeks. Shouldn't that be so for the profession of witnessing Christ and leading his people, too? It is good to remember, "Quality is inversely proportional to quantity". Are we gradually entering a period in the Indian Church history where leadership is up for grabs, as there is no quantity to choose from, and so quality is terribly at stake? In such a situation, formation needs to be more sharply focused.

Taking on from the Trinitarian concept of the Father,

Son and the Spirit in perfect communion, a priest needs to learn to live closely with his companion priests and his co-workers, as someone who embodies God's love and shares this with others. The daily celebration of the Eucharist needs to become the central element of his life wherein he finds the example of Jesus, who through his total self-giving invites him daily to perfect communication i.e., his own total self-giving for his mission. And when it comes to speak up or act, he must always remember that he has to communicate Jesus' love, seeing everything through the eyes of Jesus and acting as per the vision of Jesus. **"What would Jesus do in such a situation?"** needs to be his spring board.

g. Theologising

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a priest must have the capacity to link his theological scholarship with the reality he and the people live with. If not, his theology is purely cerebral, not related to life and good for nothing. This is why communicators who are concerned with Church renewal, constantly insist on theologizing and ask that theology be made more contextual. A theologian needs to definitely connect whatever is happening around him with his faith understanding. This element of 'connect' has to do with communication. It has been said that contextual theology means making faith relevant to one's life situations. In any situation, a priest needs to relate the Christian faith to the living experiences of the people with whom he works. Naturally the problems of the people need to be reflected, and 'what does my faith say to these problems?' must be the concern of real active theology. In other words the priest must be able evoke a constant dialogue with the theology or God talk and the current problems of the people. This means that in each

place a different kind of understanding of God may emerge as per the situation. We can take the Christian God in general, to be a kind, compassionate and loving God. But this same God can be interpreted differently in different contexts. For example, in a situation of injustices where the rich Catholics oppress and ignore the poor, and the rift between the poor and the rich continues to grow wider, the priest may interpret Jesus as a liberator, i.e. as one who can alleviate the pains of the poor and establish justice.

Every human being, despite culture, religion or any other societal bindings longs for and seeks after love, belongingness, happiness and friendship. Christianity is all this. This is what Jesus communicated at every occasion, “I have loved you with an everlasting love”, “I am with you always”, “You are all brothers and you have one Father – God”, “I give my life that you may have life, and have it in abundance” and many more such tender expressions of love. The Church, as the prolongation of the historical Jesus and endowed with his mission, and the priest as his representative, has these beautiful and sought-after messages to communicate to all races and nations. One may see the contradiction in the state of affairs when we see modern men and women turning away from the Church in boredom and seeking love and belongingness elsewhere. Why does this happen? Those who represent Christ and His Church today have to become relevant messengers (credibility and openness to the signs of the times) and appealing medium (witness of life) to be able to communicate the love of God to his people. The package of the Church’s message is so often very unattractive that the content is also shed of its simplicity with too much theology and dogma. This indeed is a matter of concern to

her, as her basic concern has to be people, as it was for Jesus.

B. Being at home with media

Before we talk of how the media can be of any use to the priest, let me outline the power of the media today.

Media power today

Today, as already noted, we live in the media age. Sociologically, it is not that media influence our culture, media IS our culture. Media serve several functions in society. Theoreticians say the primary function is agenda setting, i.e. media tend to tell us what are the most important matters to think and worry about each day. When they say ‘top stories of the day’, or ‘headlines today’ they are underlining what matters, and we think these alone are the matters that need to be cared for. The second function of media is creating public opinion. Any opinion on public matters emerges from what we have read, seen or heard on the media. Through very subtle editorials, articles, features, etc., they supply us opinions on issues that matter, which we tend to share with others. Again, we always depend on the media for information. Human nature, inclined as it is for gossip and instantaneous information, is taken for a ride by the media. Often we tend to gather too much useless information on celebrities of sports, fashion and media. For some the share market has become serious business. Unfortunately we have hardly any interest in more serious issues like global warming, nuclear warfare, political maneuverings, etc. At another level, one cannot deny the importance of ‘made up’ entertainment that the media provide through comedy, suspense, music, drama, dance and other aesthetic considerations. In a world where people are over-

worked these forms of entertainment help to “re-create” and “revitalize” our lives.

Media play a major role in education, not just academic education, but also education for life, gently advising us through inspiring stories of great values, courage, fortitude, etc. In fact one needs to be aware of the kind of values that media dole out, as some of these can be negative.

Media also play major roles in propaganda, proclaiming certain ideologies. The very concept of consumerism, materialism and capitalism are the basic ideas global media continuously proclaim. It is in this context that media get the perfect ally, the commercial sector as it is only through their wheels – publicity – that the media can ever hope to run. We must also realize that if some people take a fancy for a certain type of films or serials, those do answer certain psychological needs of those people, even clarifying and asserting their very own identities. Women taking to a certain type of characters in serials, or youth worshipping certain types of invincible heroes, are clear examples.

Quite a number of faith educators do not have a sense of contemporary audio-visual culture and so fail to understand their students, who form their identities, absorb their values, and find their role models from the mass media. They are to be helped to guard themselves from the cultural deviations of modern society – who mistake 'doing one's own thing' as freedom, who take relationships casually and get into trouble, who fail to respect men and women as persons, and who believe that to have more, is merrier.

The priest and the media

I see the following potential interactions between the priest and the media.

1. Relevant Message

The priest must have the capacity to make the Christian message relevant in today's mediated society. *Redemptoris Missio* said it clearly, "Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the *new culture* created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the *new culture* originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time,"(62) and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment." (RM. 37c). Often priests fail to 'connect' with today's generation. Clearly, priests have to develop the ability to inculturate the Gospel to these new cultures, constantly shaped and reshaped by the influx of media.

Church communications is at times like answering questions which have not been asked, ignoring questions that have been asked, and answering them in a language that is not understood, answering them in places where nobody is listening, and avoiding the marketplaces where people are sure to listen. And what is worse, by the time the Church finds the answers to the questions asked, the

questions may have already changed. Today when a lot of youngsters hardly ever come to churches but are often navigating on social networking sites like Facebook, Open space, Twitter, Orkut, Flixter, etc., the priest could surely be there answering the kind of queries the youth normally tend to ask about religion, spirituality, death, life immortal, values, etc.

2. The Audio-visual, a Sensorial Language

In faith communication, the importance of visuals, symbols, signs, sounds, etc., cannot be overstressed. The teachers of the past used to take the trouble of showing pictures, using signs, telling stories, etc., to communicate with children. Today, these pictures and stories are put away as irrelevant (many of them are). The gap is not filled with new symbols, new stories, new signs. In this process of updating, the modern media can be a great example in the way they use stories, images, signs, symbols, colours and sound bytes.

In all media, the sensorial element is very vital. Modern media thrive on using the five senses, especially the audio-visual senses to communicate powerfully. We are no more 'argued' in but 'allured' or 'drawn' in to their messages. They succeed in captivating every age group, very specially the youngsters, by catering to their wavelength, vibes, tastes, senses, and emotional urges.

The ambience of pilgrim centres, venues of music programmes, ballrooms, etc., have that look and feel which give us a thrill. We become part of the show, charged by the sensorial impact created also by the ambience. The faith educator thus cannot forget to create an ambience of faith experience, whether in the class or at worship, allowing the involvement of the various senses

(Jesus touched the blind man's eye with mud), of participation (bring the five loaves and two fish), of feeling the presence (the *Rabboni* experience of Mary Magdalene), of happy fellowship ('it is nice to be here', 'come apart a while and rest', 'take some fish and eat'). A close look at the Gospels will give us so many examples of faith experience. One can see how the meal together has become a great symbol in Christian fellowship.

Pierre Babin, a noted faith educator, who channeled the power of media for faith experience, was thoroughly 'converted' after he met McLuhan and understood the full implications of his saying, 'medium is the message'. Babin suggests the symbolic way and the way of beauty for effective faith education today. He says we have passed from the Guttenberg age to the electronic age of audio-visual images.

Understanding of media language should motivate the faith educator to use all kinds of audio-visual aids, including charts, graphs, puppets, pictures, posters, role plays, films, videos, cyber-texts, etc., to give an experience of faith.

3. Story Telling

We all know that Grandma's enchanting stories had their thrill. These stories narrated at leisure, generation after generation embodied the cherished values of each society. Today media have become the greatest storytellers, the TV almost pushing out the grandma from her honoured seat in the family.

Children by nature are very fond of stories. In faith-education story-telling has great value. Jesus was a great storyteller. In fact, we call his life itself the "story of Jesus". God's story of love is called the Salvation History.

We celebrate the greatest episodes of Jesus' story during the Paschal season. Stories provide us characters to identify with, to emulate or to dislike, they provide us crises to be resolved and peace to be established, they ignite our imagination and get us involved, they provide us an opportunity to look at reality from far, outside of us so that we can learn from other people's experiences. That is why stories are always popular and powerful. What kinds of stories do our children hear today? Faith educators have to be good storytellers. The heroes and heroines of the salvation story have to be etched in the heart of our learners. Faith educators need to adapt the stories of faith to the times and tastes of their learners, without missing the basic messages.

. Role-plays, skits, dances, audio-visual stories, etc., can be put to great use by the educator. In some areas there is a specific story telling culture like *yakshagana*, *kathaprasangam*, *chavittunatakam*, *nautanki*, *tamasha*, or other forms of dance dramas, ballet, etc. What is important is that faith educators choose the type of storytelling that would fit in with the message to be communicated. They must familiarize themselves with the cultural expressions of the people in their locality so that they also can communicate Christian values successfully through such cultural, artistic forms.

4. Media Analytical skills

The priest must be a media educated person, i.e. becoming a discerning viewer and developing the capacity to help others to become discerning viewers. Normally priests, like other mortal human beings, tend to take the media for pure entertainment, without a critical attitude. At a time when Catholic media worldwide have lost

credibility due to their self-righteous attitudes and self-proclaimed guardians-of-morality syndrome, and Protestant and Jewish media rule the roost, popular views in the international media need not be taken at face value. The alertness to ask “who says these?”, and “why?” must come before accepting any opinion at face value. No Christian leader would feel scandalized to realize that values of the present generation are shaped more by media than by the traditional bastions like parents, teachers and religion. By the time a child is two years old it starts picking up values from the media – cartoons, comic books, sounds, visuals, films, etc. So contemporary leaders, even if they are not media educators per se, should at least be able to demystify the media for the people they serve. That is why, in 'Ratio Fundamentalism Institutionis Sacerdotalis' (1970), Pope Paul VI had advised that all those preparing to be priests and religious go through sound training in the understanding of the media. (RFIS, 4). The priest must be capable of making nuanced criticism of media productions and discern how these influence Christian values. Often media project values contrary to the gospel. He must be able to underline how some of the popular media that the people devour without questioning carry subtle anti-Christian messages. William Fore of the National Council of Churches of Christ points out that the mythic worldview of television programmes contradicts the Gospel on at least four counts: that the fittest survive, that power and decision-making start at the centre and move forward, that happiness consists of limitless material acquisition, and that progress is an inherent good.(4) Whatever *aggiornamento* the Church may be involved in, these values need to be countered. Today, the Catholic Church professes values that are often negated by the secular world. Pro-life issues, gay and

lesbian living, live-ins, cloning, etc. are some such examples. A total defiance of secular ways can make the church a *ghetto*, leading to what is happening now, i.e. having a large number of believers but not practitioners. Accepting secular ways blindly can make the Church lose its real identity. Hence a more acceptable response to the world could be that of a controlled, well thought out and limited accommodation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a kind of *aggiramento* to which John XXIII alluded to at the Second Vatican Council. Many modern Catholics clamour for more freedom, wanting to do things their way. Many go against morals and the teachings of the Church. They assert, why does the Church want to protect us? The country protects us, and if we do anything wrong, the country will punish us. We have only one life and we want to enjoy it thoroughly. Window shopping, watching sports, enjoying food and drink, and other forms of media generated entertainment have replaced their interest for religion and morals. The Church however, believes in eternal life and she wants her people to do good and not just keep away from evil. Unfortunately, even some good Catholics think of God and religion only when they are in trouble or are close to death (following the example of the thief on the right side of Jesus on the cross!). These are clearly signs of an uncontrolled media influence.

5. Creativity encourages everyone

The modern generation, especially the youth, is used to newer and innovative ways, all introduced to them by the creative geniuses working in media. Hence, to make themselves appealing, faith educators need to be constantly creative and inventive. The Word of God is living and active and it has to be transmitted as such. The

art of presenting the same message in umpteen ways without losing the punch is very much the art of media. In fact, the popularity of media today arises from their creativity in appealing to the 'tastes' of their diverse audience. This should make our leaders realize the need to be creative and inventive. They can learn from the language of the media – sensorial, capturing, full of images appealing to the senses, especially the audio-visual senses. This learning can help them to make their communication more audio-visual, symbolically rich, interesting and experiential. This has to be the case also with regard to liturgical celebrations and spiritual exercises. We are all familiar with the fact that people today flock to centres of popular religion where sensorial experiences are provided. The fact the while traditional centres of worship have failed to attract audiences, popular religious centres like shrines, retreat centres, pilgrim centres, sanctuaries, group encounters, etc., have thrived, shows that these have many elements of creative elements in them to capture the audiences.

6. Learning from the media

The media is a source of information on various issues – political, social, economic, spiritual, psychological, etc. It is important that leaders are well read and sufficiently knowledgeable on current issues. They should be interested in all the areas the people are interested in, and must be able to give calculated and well-thought out comments on these. Leaders who are able to communicate at the wavelength of their people find it easier to get their co-operation. This does not mean that one should waste time in front of the 'story box' – the TV, or the computer screen – neglecting one's duties and responsibilities, or take pride in being a cricket fan, serial fan, movie fan.

Disciplined viewing is the key to profitable viewing. This has to be emphasized in priestly/religious formation and leadership training.

7. Using the media

The priest needs to have the capacity to effectively use the media to voice the Church's concerns and the values of Jesus Christ, when an occasion arises. Often secular media have productions with very notable Christian values. He could use these as part of catechesis as well as in homilies, making the people realize that popular media still uphold Christian values. He must also be alert to use as much media productions as possible in his teachings, prayer sessions, discourses, etc.

8. Being on the media

The priest must also have the capacity to be on the media and speak to them authoritatively when necessary. Often good public relations with the local media help him reach out to the media when an occasion arises, and he must know how to speak to the media in an effective manner. Public Relations refer also to the priests' specific capability to relate with the media around him. This capacity is always an asset in good and bad times. This friendliness and rapport can not only help the priest exchange ideas, learn and collaborate with each other, but also project a meaningful image of the mission of the Church among the public. Often it is seen that when a tragedy or a disaster strikes, that the priest runs around to find media persons and do some disaster management. It is good for priests to remember that he leaves an impression, good or bad, on all whom he meets by virtue of his position. He may forget the many faces he sees, but not vice versa.

Suggestions

To conclude let me also suggest a few simple ways that a priest needs to learn from the media:

1. All teaching and preaching activities must be interesting, involving and entertaining. Make these as audio visual as possible. To bore people is a cardinal sin today!
2. One needs to be sharp and clear in whatever one wants to say. Media call for this cryptic style of expression.
3. Build the ability to say what one needs to say, in minimum words. In the media, space and time cost much, and expressions are limited to minimum visuals and words. The media-influenced people of today are used to this type of expressions.
4. Finally, most priests are technology savvy and such knowledge is of great help today in every situation.

Bibliography

- Srampickal, J. & Joseph, L.(2003), *Babel to Babri Masjid and Beyond: Pastoral communications and media involvement in the Indian Church*, Media House, Delhi
- Srampickal, J. (2009), *Communications Can Renew the Church*, Emmaus Publications, Kochi
- Babin P. & Iannone M.(1991) *New era in religious communications*, Fortress press, Minneapolis
- Fore, William (1990), *Myth Makers: Gospel, culture and the media*, Friendship press, New York
- Documents on communications are cited from Eilers,F-J.,(1997) *Church and social communication*, Logos,Manila.

A Sad Chapter Of Church History

Julian Saldanha, S.J.

St. Pius College, Aarey Road,
Goregaon East, Mumbai 400063.

Abstract: An honest look at a very sad epoch in Church history when it dealt with the Albigensian heresy. The terrible role of the Inquisition is highlighted. The ups and downs of history concerning persecution is given. A critique of violent methods is provided.

Keywords: Albigensian, Cathar, inquisition, torture, persecution.

For someone seeking to know more about the Albigensian conflict, the book to read is *God's Heretics: the Albigensian Crusade* (Sutton Publishing Ltd., England, 2002), by A. Burl. It is a book which unfolds the epic struggle of the Albigensians or Cathars to retain their faith against a Church determined to wipe them out. This dark chapter in Church history covers the period from 1208-1328 and is concentrated in southern France bordering Spain, though the movement had also taken root in northern Italy and spread to Spain and Germany. Burl brings alive the cultural and social conditions in the beautiful region of the Languedoc in the south of France. The volume is thoroughly and critically researched, and well illustrated with maps of the area and photos of some of the chief forts and castles, whose ruins still stand as mute witnesses of ferocious battles of yore.

1. The doctrines and spread of the Cathars:

The rise of Catharism marks the first time in Church history that heresies emanate, not from theologians or

bishops, but 'from below'. It reflected the discontent of the lower socio-economic groups. Among the Cathars themselves there were several sects. They were also known as "Albigenses", deriving from the name of the town of Albi in France which was one of their centres. They had a regular hierarchy of hearers, believers, priests and prelates; the priests were known as 'Good Men' & 'Good Women'. Their doctrine was a sort of continuation of Manicheism: "They were dualists who saw an unending struggle between two principles, one good, one evil, and they considered the union of body and soul to be a 'mixed state', caused by the devil. They rejected things of the flesh, and even the eating of animal products. They moved on to reject the sacraments and the doctrine of hell" (*Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*). Some even went to the extent of denouncing pregnant Cathar women, accusing them of carrying unborn devils. The only 'sacrament' they seemed to have was the 'Consolamentum' which ensured eternal salvation. They denied the Trinity and any resurrection, since the goal was to deliver the soul from imprisonment in matter. Jesus, according to them, did not have a true human body but was only one of the pure spirits appearing on earth. They held that the Old Testament came under the influence of the evil spirit. There were other heresies at the time, like the Waldensians; but they are not the object of study in this book.

From 1165 Catharism spread in north Italy. The Church rightly considered their doctrines as heretical, but unfortunately also called for the elimination of the Cathars, after preaching by St. Dominic and others met with only limited success. It led to a genocide (Burl: 44, 159). Trying as they did to lead lives of evangelical

poverty, they earned the admiration of the people and the sympathy of a number of rulers, and of some priests and bishops; they had even gained a following among many clerics, nuns and monks. In 1167 they were able to hold a council at Saint-Félix de Caraman. The aristocratic bishops of southern France (Narbonne, Carcassonne, Béziers) showed themselves indifferent and uninterested in fighting against the Cathars. Top church officials complained that some rulers were reluctant to enforce the measures which they wanted against heretics. There was a plain disparity between the life-style of the Cathars and that of bishops and popes who often came from the nobility and were generally addicted to worldliness and power. For this reason, others called them 'the pure ones' (Cathars). It is no wonder that even St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1286) became suspect of Cathar ideals. Many of the Catholic clergy were well known for their hypocrisy: they gorged and enriched themselves; though preaching chastity they fornicated and raped. All this has been recorded in the songs of some troubadours of the time. Around 1300 no less a person than the bishop of Albi, Bernard de Castanet, had 35 prominent men imprisoned for heresy and fined them, probably to extort money for the building of the gigantic and grandiose cathedral of Sainte Cécile. A Franciscan friar who got a mob to release them, was himself ultimately jailed !

The situation is also reflected in the fact that General Councils of the Church felt it necessary to issue decrees on the subject. Lateran III (1179) noted that the life-style of bishops had become burdensome to people. The Council therefore decreed that on visitations of their dioceses, they should not take with them more than 20 to 30 horses; they are not to seek rich banquets nor burden their subjects with

taxes and impositions (Canon 4). Still the Lateran IV (1215) noted that certain bishops and clerics were illegally extorting money (Canons 65-66). Canon 14 sanctions various punishments for “those (clerics) who are caught giving way to the vice of incontinence”. And the next Canon stipulates: “All clerics should carefully abstain from gluttony and drunkenness”; the Council complained that in some places “that man is most praised who makes the most people drunk and himself drains the deepest cups”.

2. The call to war:

Lateran III, convened by pope Alexander III (1159-1181), called Christian people to arms against the Cathars and offered the same indulgences as for the crusade to the Holy Land. Thus the heretic was equated with the infidel and Pope Innocent III († 1216) elected in 1198 at the age of 36, later compared heresy to treason (against God). Bishops were to lead the army. Those who die in this conflict “will receive forgiveness for their sins and the fruit of an eternal reward” (Canon 27). Innocent III would go further and promise each crusader remission for both his past and future sins! He had provided an authoritative precedent for J. Tetzel’s preaching (1516-1519) of indulgences which would bring in money for the building of St. Peter’s Church in Rome and ignite the growing discontent of an indignant Martin Luther. One of the first things Innocent III did, upon his election as pope, was to write letters to a number of bishops in southern France and to the King of France: against heretics they must use excommunication, and if that does not work the sword, “The civil laws decree banishment and confiscation; see that they are carried out”. This is to be enforced under pain

of ecclesiastical censures. Heretics, he said, are "traitors to the faith of Jesus Christ" (Vacandard: 44). Innocent III was the first to use the term "Crusade" against fellow-Christians. He dispatched preachers to various countries in order to enthrill people to join the Crusade. The distressing part of it is that this Crusade was to take place in a region where Catholic and Cathar lived at peace together. In a letter of 1207 to Philippe-August, King of France, he called the Cathars 'a monstrous breed', which should be obliterated 'making their memory perish with the trumpet's blast'. In 1212 he imposed a 'Hearth Tax' across the Languedoc to pay for the costs of the Crusade. But when the 'strongman' died his body was shamefully neglected: "In the church next day the corpse was found stripped of its rich vestments, naked and decaying in the summer heat" (Burl: 148). The cardinals were preoccupied with electing his successor.

Among the leaders of the Crusade against the Cathars was the ubiquitous and "unforgiving prelate" Arnaud Amaury, Abbot of Citeaux and papal representative. On the lay side matching his zealotry was the tenacious military leader Simon de Montfort. But religion and politics got mixed up, when under cover of the Crusade he made it his principal aim to establish a minor kingdom for himself. Others created their own baronies and flaunted concubines. The Church had unleashed a holy war in 1209, which became a corruption by 1218. About 400 villages and towns were obliterated during those years of devastation. In 1219 Prince Louis, son of the King of France, assembled an awesome army of 10,000 archers and foot-soldiers, 600 knights, besides 20 bishops and 33 counts. After slaughtering around 5000 men, women and children in the town of Marmande, he proceeded to

Toulouse. There Bertrand, Cardinal of Rome, goaded on the army: 'Death and slaughter must lead the way' he said, 'that in and around Toulouse there will remain no living man, neither noble lady, girl nor pregnant woman, no created thing, no child at the breast, but all must die in fire and flames' (Burl: 159). Amaury and (Cistercian) bishops generally accompanied and urged the troops into battle. Durand, bishop of Albi, even designed a 'trebuchet' (a contraption to hurl boulders) which played a decisive role in the capture in 1244 of Montségur, a seemingly impregnable fort.

There were some atrocities on the part of the Cathars, but these could have been dealt with through ordinary recourse of law and did not justify a declaration of war; often they were committed in self-defence or retaliation.

3. Enter the Inquisition:

Though the military campaign was considered successfully completed, it failed to stamp out Catharism. So Gregory IX (1227-1241) took the first steps which would conclude with the institution of an official body of the Inquisition in 1233, with the assistance of the Dominicans.¹ 'Delivering a criminal to the secular arm' and 'animadversio debita' became euphemisms for 'death at the stake'; if for some reason the person is spared the stake, he must have his tongue pulled out. Thus was revived an ancient Roman pre-Christian custom of sending Manicheans to the stake (Vacandard: 119). Lateran IV (1215) decreed in its "Constitutions" (N. 3): "Let those condemned be handed over to the secular authorities present, or to their bailiffs, for due punishment." Mere suspects are to be excommunicated "unless they prove their innocence by an appropriate purgation ... If they

persist in their excommunication for a year, they are to be condemned as heretics.” Secular authorities must publicly take an oath to defend the faith and do all in their power “to expel from the lands subject to their jurisdiction all heretics designated by the church in good faith.” A temporal lord who fails to do this, shall be excommunicated by the metropolitan and other bishops of the province. (This would imply, among other things, that his subjects would automatically be relieved of loyalty to him.) The Council added: “Moreover, we determine to subject to excommunication believers who receive, defend or support heretics”. Even while conceding that the same person should not be accuser and judge, the Council used casuistry to state that the “rumour” and the resulting “outcry” played the role of accuser for the judge (“Constitutions”, N. 8).

The number of prisoners, even with a life sentence, was rather considerable. In Toulouse alone between 1244-6 the Inquisitor sentenced 27 heretics to life imprisonment. Heretics released from prison were condemned to wear single or double crosses (Vacandard: 140-1). Gregory did his utmost to enforce everywhere the death penalty for heresy (94). However he did not meet with much success in urging the bishops to further his plans (81). Vacandard (105), in his magisterial study of the Inquisition, avers: “It is therefore proved beyond question that the Church, in the person of the Popes, used every means at her disposal, especially excommunication, to compel the State to enforce the infliction of the death penalty upon heretics. This excommunication, moreover, was all the more dreaded, because, according to the canons, the one excommunicated, unless absolved from the censure, was regarded as a heretic himself within a year's time, and was

liable therefore to the death penalty.”

One-third of the goods of a condemned person were assigned to those making the denunciation; this led to many abuses. The Inquisition could claim the rest. That is why, in point of fact, their zeal for the faith languished whenever pecuniary gain was not forthcoming (*idem*: 148).

Gregory also decreed: prohibition of any appeal to other tribunals, denial of any legal assistance for the accused and social ostracism of the descendants of the condemned. The only way in which the prisoner could invalidate the testimony against him was to name all his mortal enemies [90]. The criminal procedure of the Inquisition was markedly inferior to the criminal procedure of the Middle Ages [96]. In the *inquisitio* the prisoner would not know who his accuser was. The Inquisitors formulated the content of the interrogation of suspects: ‘The accused shall be asked if he has anywhere seen or been acquainted with one or more heretics, knowing or believing them to be such by name or repute: where he has seen them, on how many occasions, with whom, and when ... whether he has had any familiar intercourse with them, when and how, and by whom introduced ... whether he has received in his own home one or more heretics; if so who and what they were; who brought them; how many times they stayed with the accused; what visitors they had; who escorted them thence; and where they went ...’ (quoted in Burl: 185). The penalty for sheltering or only not revealing a Cathar could be death. The Papal Legate Romano forced the resentful Raymond VII, Count of Toulouse, to implement certain harsh measures to eradicate the Cathars: a silver mark was to be paid to any informer; the houses of all

condemned persons were to be pulled down and their goods confiscated, so that their children would get nothing; any dwelling which could become a refuge for heretics was to be pulled down; those helping the Cathars were to be despoiled of all their possessions. Catholics were angry at the shameful interference with their ordinary lives and, on occasion, attacked their own clergymen. The Inquisitors were quite insensitive. For example, the exhumation of Cathar bodies led even Catholics to mob fury against them.

Already in 1227, under the guidance of the Papal Legate Cardinal Romano Frangipani, certain methods were codified: the possession of the Old and New Testaments, psalters and breviaries by anyone not in Holy Orders, was forbidden; sleeping households were awakened in the middle of the night by teams of two laymen and a priest, the home searched from cellar to outbuilding, books confiscated, people taken away for questioning. In 1231 the bishop of Toulouse initiated steps to hunt down Cathars. If they had died, their corpses were to be exhumed and burned, as Gregory IX had decreed. All boys and girls over 14 and 12 years of age respectively were obliged to identify unbelievers, even their own families and friends: "Like hungry packs of hunting-dogs, Inquisitors searched for them (Cathars) with the prospect of pyres in their minds" (Burl: 180). A reign of terror had been unleashed, a forerunner of Hitler's Gestapo. A pall of fear spread through the land.

4. Executions:

Actually the first of many executions occurred in 1209 at Tonneins, where the bishops condemned several Cathars to be burnt at the stake. With monks intoning the

hymn “Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful”, the army overran Carcassonne the same year. On 21 July that year Béziers was taken and hundreds of women, children and old persons were massacred in the church of La Madeleine. In 1210, after taking the town of Minerve, all the Cathars therein, 140 men and women were gathered together. Arnaud exhorted them: ‘Be converted to the Catholic faith or ascend this pyre’. Not one recanted; so a huge pyre was kindled. Not only did they go willingly to their horrible death, but many rushed into the fire of their own accord. The Premonstratensian provost Eberwin described a scene he witnessed around the middle of the 12th century: “They (Cathars) bore the torment of fire not only with patience, but even with joy” (quoted in Jedin: 100). By 1212 some 600 Cathars had gone willingly to their deaths, about 400 at Lavaur alone. The bishop of Toulouse, Raimon de Fauga had a dying Cathar woman carried in her bed and burned alive in a meadow. Hundreds were burnt in this holocaust: 210 at Moissac alone. In 1232 the Inquisitor Robert the Bulgar, who had been given extensive powers by pope Gregory IX, personally supervised an ‘auto-da-fé’ (burning of heretics) at Mont-Aimé. He granted an indulgence of thirty years to all who would attend the execution: 183 Cathars were burnt. He called them ‘worse than dogs’. It was a literal enactment of the proverb, “Call someone a dog and kill him !” In 1244 over 200 Cathar men and women were burnt at Montségur.

In 1211 in the presence of other Churchmen, Arnaud Amaury read out to Raymond VI, ruler of Toulouse, certain definite conditions which he must fulfill. Among them, Jews were to be persecuted and heretics were to be banished within a year. When he failed to comply with the

conditions, he was excommunicated by a local council; the Decree was confirmed by the pope two months later. Some of the Inquisitors fulfilled the duties of their office in a spirit of hatred and impatience, contrary both to natural justice and to Christian charity [Vacandard: 133]. Thus on 29 May 1239 Robert the Dominican sent about 180 citizens of Montwimer in Champagne to the stake, together with their bishop (ibid.: 133-4). In 1232 the bishop of Toulouse and his entourage had led a cartload of 19 men and women outside the city walls, where they were burnt alive before a large crowd. All this was a far cry from the Sermon on the Mount, but support for it was sought in other texts of the Bible, especially the Old Testament: 1 Sam 15.18, 33; 1 Kg 18.40; Dt 13.6-9; 17.2-5 (these texts speak of the death penalty for those who practice idolatry or lead others to it). Also quoted were New Testament texts like: Mt 5.17 (Jesus has come not to abolish but to fulfill the Old Law); Mt 13.24-30 (the weeds which had grown with the wheat are to be burned); Jn 15.6 (those who do not abide in Jesus are like withered branches which are thrown in the fire);

5. Use of Torture:

From Gregory IX up to the General Council of Vienne (1311-1312) six popes sanctioned the use of torture on the accused in the Inquisition. Innocent IV in 1252 tried to justify this, by naming heretics "true thieves and murderers of souls" (Vacandard: 108). Describing heresy as a "monstrous infection", the General Council of Vienne stipulated that torture may be used on the accused, provided the bishop and inquisitor agree (Decree 26). Whereas the torture of witnesses (!), according to the casuists, was left to the sole discretion of the Inquisitor:

this became the accepted rule. Starvation, in fact, was reckoned by the Inquisition one of the regular and most efficient methods to subdue unwilling witnesses and defendants. The accused could be tortured into betraying his friends. Thus in many places the prisoners, even before their trial, were treated with great cruelty.

The most common forms of torture were: a) *the rack*: one's limbs are stretched, sometimes resulting in dislocation of joints; b) *the strappado*: a person is lifted up to the ceiling (sometimes with heavy weights attached to the feet) and then suddenly dropped down; c) *the flaming torch*: the victim's feet are rubbed with grease and then brought close to fire, till they might sizzle or burn. At the very beginning, the victim was shown all the various instruments of torture, in order that the mere sight of them might terrify him into yielding. Nevertheless, the record was carefully made that the confession was free and spontaneous, without the pressure of force or fear. In the beginning the torturer was always a civil official, as laid down by Innocent IV. But from about 1260 the Inquisitors did not scruple to appear in person in the torture chamber.

It speaks much of the strength of the Cathar faith, that inspite of such genocidal persecution, they continued in secret into the 14th century. Thus the Cathar William Autier was ferreted out of hiding and after nearly a year of torture and questioning, was burnt at the stake in 1310 outside the cathedral of St. Sernin. Perhaps the last of the 'Good Men' to be burnt to death was William Bélibaste, in 1312. The Church had succeeded, at an enormous cost to her credibility and evangelical mission, in stamping out Catharism. She had been more successful in eradicating Catharism than the Roman Emperors had been in suppressing the Church herself! All the same, we find

today in Europe not only adherents of various Christian churches and religions or of no religion, but also large sections of Catholics who have distanced themselves from the Church: some to such an extent that they even want their names struck off from the baptismal register!

6. The earlier tradition of the Church:

The above described doctrine and practice of the Church stands in stark contrast with her earlier tradition. It was a time of persecution, which grew in intensity until the peace of Constantine in the year 313. In confessing her faith, even at the cost of martyrdom, the Church had implicitly, but decisively, rejected the principle of ‘cuius regio eius religio’ (people must acquiesce in the imperial faith). As late as the middle of the 4th century and even later, all the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers are opposed to the use of force against heretics, even if such heresy was incidentally the cause of social disturbances.

In his treatise “On Idolatry” (chp. 17) Tertullian (ca. 160-225) describes the calling of Christians as “binding no one, imprisoning or torturing no one”. He writes: “Obstinacy must be conquered, not coaxed” (“Scorpiace”, N. 2). When Celsus criticised Christians by quoting certain texts of the Old Testament (such as those referred to above in section 5) which decreed the death penalty for apostasy, Origen (ca. 185-254), affirmed that the law of Christ had superseded that of Moses: “... it is impossible to harmonize the legislation of Moses, taken literally, with the calling of the Gentiles ... for Christians cannot slay their enemies, or condemn, as Moses commanded, the contemners of the law to be put to death by burning or stoning” (“Contra Celsum”, quoted in Vacandard: 3). The remarks of Lactantius (ca. 240-320) are incisive and

insightful: "For religion is to be defended, not by putting to death, but by dying; not by cruelty, but by patient endurance ... For if you wish to defend religion by bloodshed, and by tortures, and by guilt, it will no longer be defended, but will be polluted and profaned. For nothing is so much a matter of free-will as religion" ("The Divine Institutes", Bk. V, chp. 20). The Church had always expressed a horror for bloodshed: "Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine" (Canons of Hippolytus, 3-4 C). In the context of Arian Emperors persecuting Catholic bishops, Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-367) exclaimed: "To-day, alas! while the power of the State enforces divine faith, men say that Christ is powerless" (Vacandard: 5). In his commentary on the Gospel of Mathew (13.24-30) John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) comments on that phrase 'lest you uproot the wheat too': "And this He said, to hinder wars from arising, and blood and slaughter. For it is not right to put a heretic to death, since an implacable war would be brought into the world" (Homily 46, N. 1).

As Christianity came into a position of strength, the views regarding the use of violence also began to change. Vacandard (113) concludes his survey of the facts: "The data before us prove that the Church forgot her early traditions of toleration, and borrowed from the Roman jurisprudence, revived by the legists, laws and practices which remind one of the cruelty of ancient paganism."

Though Augustine (354-430) was initially against the use of violence, he later justified it in relation to the Donatists. They should have no reason to complain even if they were put to death, for: "They kill souls; they are afflicted in their bodies. They cause eternal deaths; they complain that they suffer temporal ones ... Schism and heresy are crimes which, like poisoning, are punishable by

the State” (On the Gospel of John, Tract 11, chp. 15). The same chilling reasoning would be repeated by Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) who lived in the times of the Albigensian crusade: Heretics “deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death. For it is a much graver matter to corrupt the faith which quickens the soul, than to forge money, which supports temporal life” or to commit any other crime which the State punishes with death. Therefore “much more reason is there for heretics, as soon they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death” (Summa II-IIae, Q. XI, Art. 3). When there is no danger of uprooting the wheat, violent measures may be used. We have to wait till the time of Vatican II² for a refutation of this logic: “It is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a person, even when he is flawed by false or inadequate religious notions” (GS 28).

During all the intervening period of about a millennium and a half, pope Nicholas I’s (866) appears as a lone voice raised against torture. He is quoted by pope Pius XII in an Allocution delivered in 1953 to the 6th International Congress on penal law. He introduces his reference to pope Nicholas with the comment that legal examination should exclude physical and psychological torture. Pope Nicholas was responding to an inquiry from the Bulgarians who had recently come into contact with Christianity: “If a thief or a brigand is captured and denies what is imputed to him, you affirm that the judge ought to beat him mercilessly on the head and pierce his sides with pointed metals until he speaks the truth. This is acceptable neither to divine nor human law; confession must not be

forced, but spontaneous; it must not be extorted, but voluntary; finally if it happens that after having inflicted these pains you discover absolutely nothing of what he is charged with, do you not feel ashamed at least at that moment and do you not acknowledge how impious your judgment was ? Likewise if the accused, unable to bear such tortures, confesses the crimes which he has not committed, who I ask you bears the responsibility of such impiety if not the one who has compelled him to make this false confession? Furthermore one knows that if someone utters that which is not in his spirit, he does not confess, but he talks. Therefore renounce these things and reprove from the bottom of your heart that which up to the present you have had the folly to practice; in effect, what fruit have you derived from that which you are now ashamed of?"³ Pius XII adds his own comment, after noting that 1100 years have elapsed since then: "Who would not desire that during the long gap of time since then, justice would never swerve from this rule!" In making this remark, he probably did not have in mind the actions of some of his own predecessors! Finally the General Council of Vatican II confirmed this rejection of torture, thus reversing earlier teaching. The Council termed torture an "infamy". Such practices "poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator" (GS 27).

7. Concluding reflections:

The book of Burl brings out the various dimensions of the Albigensian Crusade and places before the reader the full horror of the enterprise, in an unpartisan manner. In 1997 John Paul II instituted a 26-member theological-

historical Commission to study anti-Semitism and various forms of Inquisition (Tablet, 25/1/1997). The pope also addressed an international Symposium on the Inquisition which was held in the Vatican, 29-31 Oct 1998. He told the participants, that the question involves the cultural context and political ideas of the time, also the outlook on the essence of the Church.⁴ With reference to the cultural and political factors operative in the Albigensian Crusade, we must bear in mind that theologians & canonists and even the civil authorities, did not concern themselves much with the evil effects of heresy upon the social order, but viewed it rather as an offence against God (Vacandard: 115). Often the Church forced the civil authorities to execute heretics. Besides, earlier the Church had decisively rejected the principle of 'cuius regio eius religio', when she insisted on her right to exist in the Roman empire. Even admitting that the age was a cruel one, the Inquisition was unjust as compared to the civil Inquisition of those times: secrecy of the trial, the prosecution carried on independently of the prisoner, the denial of advocate and defence, use of torture, etc. (idem: 186). Even if some inquisitors committed excesses, the fact remains that the popes were responsible for the basic thrust of the Inquisition. The pope's reference to "the outlook on the essence of the Church" may be more to the point, if he is referring to the axiom 'Outside the Church no salvation'. It is a reminder that a negative view of other religions can lead the Church to violence and disregard for human dignity. It is sobering to realise that since the Church continues to espouse certain theological positions which are negative towards other religions and Churches, similar actions could follow, given appropriate circumstances.

During a ‘Day of Pardon’ Mass on 12/3/2000, there were “Prayers of the Faithful delivered by Pope John Paul II”.⁵ He observed that the Church counts some members “whose disobedience to You contradicts the faith we profess and the Holy Gospel”. Under the heading “Confession of sins committed in service of the truth”, he made Cardinal Ratzinger (Prefect of CDF) confess: “We recognize that even men of the Church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the faith”. The Pope added: “In certain periods of history Christians have at times given in to intolerance ... sully in this way the face of the Church, Your Spouse ...” This unprecedented admission of sins needs to be accompanied by effective steps to dismantle those structures and mind-sets which support such sins. For example, Canons 1718 and 1720 speak of administrative or “extra-judicial” penal procedures. This, it would seem, only doubtfully guarantees the right to self-defence; “the bishop can easily manipulate the proceedings” (Huysmans). He is prosecutor, judge and imposes punishment. All this is contrary to the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 11/1) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Art. 6.1). The Church’s peculiar ‘divine-human’ constitution is no ground for not observing, in these matters, the said conventions. Boff (38) refers to the “psychological torture” exercised on those who are accused of error; it is “a Kafkaesque process” in which the same person is accuser and judge. In short, history remains an invaluable teacher.

References

Boff, L., *The Church: Charism and Power*, Crossroad Publishing Company, N. York, 1986

- Duffy, E., "What about the Inquisition ?", *Priests & People*, 1999, N. 1, pp 3-8.
- Glazier, M. (ed.), *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 1997: "Heresy: Catharism"
- Huysmans, R., "The Inquisition for which the Pope did not ask for forgiveness", *The Jurist*, 2006, N. 2, pp 469-482
- Jedin, H. (ed.), *Handbook of Church History*, Vol. IV, Herder & Herder, N. York, 1970
- Saldanha, J., "Violence in Mission History", *Jnanadeepa*, 5(2002), N. 2, pp 65-74
- Tanner, N. (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. I, Sheed & Ward, 1990
- Vacandard, *The Inquisition*, Longmans, Green & Co., N. York, 1921

¹ According to Jedin (102) the seeds of the Inquisition were planted by pope Alexander III in 1163, when he asked officials to proceed *ex officio* against heretics, without waiting for accusations to be made.

² Basing itself on "Pacem in Terris" (1963) by pope John XXIII: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS), 1963, pp 299-300.

³ Translated from the French: AAS, 1953, pp 735-736.

⁴ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 11/11/1998, p 3.

⁵ *The Pope Speaks*, 45(2000), N. 4, pp 245-248

Jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

Master's Programme In Indian Christian Theology

Special Features:

Academic study and experience of

- Indian Spirituality at Sameeksha, Kerala.

- Inter-faith Dialogue at Varanasi.

Emphasis on 'Doing' theology.

Address all correspondence to:

The Registrar,

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth,

Ramwadi, Nagar Road, Pune 411014, India.

Phone: 91-(0)20-41036111.

E-mail: regisjdv@gmail.com

ISSN 972-33315

