



Editorial: Pope Francis: Relevance for Today

Pope Francis has become the conscience of the world. No wonder then, he is the most talked about person in the world today. Wherever he goes he draws a large crowd of people who recognize in him a spiritual leader who epitomizes in his life and articulates in his words to a great extent Jesus' vision of being a human in this world. He believes that human beings can experience the true meaning of human existence and be joyful witnesses of the gospel values of love, justice, freedom, compassion, equality, reconciliation in a society that discriminates humans on the basis of their religion, class, caste, gender and nationalities. He pleads with all people of good will to embrace a life of compassion and care for one another and nature trusting in a God who embraces everyone with infinite love and compassion.

When the world recognizes Pope Francis as a man of God and a religious leader with great authority to inspire, challenge, exhort everyone to live a life worthy of their human vocation and demand justice and fairness from governments and political leaders especially in dealing with the poor, the marginalized, the refugees and the migrants what impact has he on the Church? Certainly, his pastoral approach to the vexing problems of the Church is recognized and appreciated by a large majority of the members of the Church. His encyclicals, apostolic letters and exhortations breathe fresh air of pastoral

concern, simplicity and intelligibility that ordinary Christians and even people of other religions can easily comprehend. His universally acclaimed and widely discussed encyclical *Laudato Si'* is the best example of his clear and lucid articulation of the right relationship of humans with nature and the responsibility each human being has in caring for the earth. In matters dealing with faith and morals Pope Francis seems to have adopted a style of articulating his teaching using easily comprehensible theological terminologies and avoiding theological jargons as far as possible. He is trying to liberate the Church from an ecclesiastical Nestorianism which sees the Church dichotomized as an institution and as a spiritual reality as also from an ecclesiastical monophysitism which considers the Church only a spiritual reality.

The Vatican II Council's openness of the Church to the modern world and the post-Vatican II struggles to make the Church relevant to the world were finding road-blocks in the recent past as they found resistance from those who were alarmed with the changes that were taking place in the Church. In fact, those who resist any reform are said to be those who have some benefits from the existing system that they want to preserve. It is very clear that those who would resist any structural changes in the Vatican curia are probably not moved by any spiritual considerations but they fear the loss of their power with all its benefits. Those who resist any liturgical reforms, ecumenical efforts for unity in doctrinal and sacramental matters or inter-religious dialogue etc., are those who are afraid to lose their security and identity in exclusivism, arrogant absolutism and a static understanding of tradition. They resist growing up from their infantile faith to adult faith. Such groups of people including priests, bishops and even cardinals find it difficult to agree with the move of Pope Francis in reforming the Church as envisioned by the Vatican II Council. Resistance to any reform is understandable as some people are afraid to let go of something in which they

found certain security and certainty in the past even if it does not have the same significance any longer.

Trained in the school of Ignatian spirituality it is very important for Pope Francis to use the discernment of the spirits in every decision that he takes that affects the entire life of the Church. The objective criteria of discernment being the christological and ecclesiological congruity of the decisions that whether the decisions make the members of the Church become more identified with Jesus Christ and make the Church grow in communion find expression in Pope Francis' decisions and his vision of the Church. While concerned about living, safe-guarding and teaching the living tradition of the Church he exemplifies the human Jesus in his attitude, life-style and relationships. He recaptures and reaffirms the early Church's Christian identity as 'a community of believers with one heart and one soul' whose life-witness reveals that Jesus is still alive.

The overwhelmingly positive impact of Pope Francis on the Church's life is seen in his promotion of inclusivity, openness to dialogue with all humans of good will, compassionate pastoral approach to those who are marginalized in the Church and in the society, willingness to listen to all including those who oppose his views making it clear that the Church a true home for all who seek meaning in their lives. He has the courage and conviction that he can authoritatively speak to the leaders of the nations reminding of their bounden duty to care for the poor, the needy, the refugees and the migrants as well as for the nature. He walks the talk and makes the prophetic mission of Jesus alive even to those virulent critics of the Church who see the Church only an institution with enormous power, riches and world-wide influence. Pope Francis reveals the human face of the Church in which one can discover the human face of Christ.

The present issue of *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* focuses on the life of Pope Francis and the impact of his papacy on the Church and the world. No other leadership in the world is as much discussed as the papal leadership of Pope Francis. With him the world has been once again awakened to look at the Church positively as a community that promotes life and humanizing values. A profile of Pope Francis is sketched in the first article of this issue of *Jnanadeepa* followed by an article that shows clearly the impact of Pope Francis on the world from the reports about the world-wide reception of Pope Francis and his views on the life and mission of the Church in the world of today. This is followed by the prophetic nature of Pope Francis' life and mission.

The next article of this issue, "Gazing at Our World with God's Eyes of Mercy: Pope Francis's Theological Vision" discusses the theological vision of Pope Francis emerging from his striking similarities with St. Francis of Assisi's love of poverty, enthusiasm to renew the Church, his love for nature and his willingness to dialogue with Muslims built on three pillars, namely, community, identity and mission. It is Trinitarian in its origin and end. The fifth article, "Pope Francis: Making a New History of Church Leadership" explains how Pope Francis' style of leadership is different from that of his predecessors, how it makes the Church credible in our times. Reading the signs of the times this paradigm-shift in exercising the ministry of papal leadership expresses the spirit and vision of the ecclesiology of Vatican II.

The next five articles of this issue deal with the themes discussed in the three important encyclicals of Pope Francis, namely, *Amoris Laetitia*, *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*. The article "Pope Francis' Moral and Pastoral Approach in *Amoris Laetitia*" highlights the significant evolutionary changes in Pope Francis' moral and pastoral outlook and how he challenges some widespread attitudes that everything is

solved by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations without sufficient reflection or grounding. The article “Role of Laity in the Vision of Pope Francis” describes the new vision of the Church, as projected by Pope Francis through signs and symbols and words and actions and as expounded in his *Evangelii Gaudium*. Against the background of that vision, the laity’s role is spelt out on the basis of a study of Francis’ writings, interviews, homilies, messages, and discourses.

The article, “The Trinitarian and Christological Dimensions of Ecology in *Laudato Si’*” explains how Pope Francis develops his theological vision on the essential relationship of humans with God and other humans and its implications for human’s relationship with nature based on the Trinitarian and Christic experience of God. The following article, “The Philosophical Foundations of the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* of Pope Francis” discusses the indirect influence of thinkers like Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger and Max Scheler on the encyclical *Laudato Si’* through Romano Guardini. The foundational philosophical vision of *Laudato Si’* is influenced by the critique of Martin Heidegger on the “machinational” interpretation of beings that subjugates humans and commodifies nature as well as Heidegger’s philosophical insights into the way of overcoming it. The last article of this issue, “Pope Francis and Science: A Healthy and Necessary Amalgamation for the 21st Century” discusses Pope Francis’ involvement with the world of science to show how he is open to learn from science and at the same time challenges it when it fails in its commitment to the total welfare of humanity and nature. The article also presents some of the insights from the encyclical *Laudato Si’* underlining the need to be responsible in protecting nature and realize the urgent need for integrating Science and Faith.

In the midst of various crises faced by the Church in the recent past God has raised up Pope Francis, a prophet for our

times, to make the Church a credible witness to the compassionate love of God. His life-style and theological vision, his pastoral heart for those who feel abandoned by the Church though its laws and regulations, his openness to everything human and his challenge to the entire Church to make itself the home for the marginalized make him an authentic vicar of Christ. Pope Francis's ministry of leadership with true authority challenges and devalues all forms of power and power structures that enslaves and dehumanizes. His life is his mission. Indeed a credible witness to Jesus Christ and his Kingdom values!

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