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**VIDYAJYOTI JOURNAL OF  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

**Bend Down to Lift Others Up**

**‘Collective’ Mass Intentions**

**Cardinal Newman and *Dei Verbum***

**Celebrating Asian Indigeneity &  
Synodality**

**Is Islam in the Plan of God?**

**Vatican II Series**

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**IWTF Statement 2025**

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# *Vidyajyoti*

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### **Editorial**

#### **BEND DOWN TO LIFT OTHERS UP**

The story of Dashrath Manjhi of Bihar (1934–2007) is a tale of perseverance, determination, and selfless love. Manjhi, known as the “Mountain Man,” spent 22 years carving a road through a mountain, using a hammer and a chisel. His motivation behind accomplishing this feat was personal: Manjhi’s wife, Phaguni Devi, died due to lack of medical care in their remote village near Gaya, in the northern state of Bihar. Instead of resigning himself to fate, Manjhi bent down both literally and figuratively to create a passage through the mountain so that no one else would suffer as he did. His extraordinary labour reduced the distance to the nearest town from 55 km to 15 km, transforming the lives of his community. Manjhi’s story is not just about physical endurance but also about humility, service, and dedication to a cause greater than himself. His posture—bending and toiling—underscores a spiritual truth: the power of bending down in love and service.

#### **1. God’s Act of Bending Down in the Old Testament**

The act of bending down to lift others is reflected in the very nature of God. In the Bible, the image of “God bending” is

significant and appears in the second story of creation itself. Genesis presents God not as a distant or indifferent one but as one who bends down and works with his own hands (cf. Gen 2:7). While God created the world by his mere words (cf. Gen 1), he chose a different approach to create human beings: he bent down, took the dust of the earth, and shaped it with great care. He was not ashamed to get his hands dirty. This intimate act of creation reveals a God who draws near, touches, and remains engaged in human life.

God's bending does not stop at creation; he continues to incline his ear towards his people. In Exodus, he tells Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people... I have heard their cry" (Ex 3:7). The Psalms often depict God as bending down to hear, rescue, and bless his people. Psalm 116:2 says, "Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live." The Hebrew verb *nātāh* means "to stretch out" or "to incline," indicating that God actively leans towards his people to hear their prayers. This divine act is not passive; it reveals a God who is personally involved, responding to the needs of those who call upon him. Similarly, the Psalmist in Ps 86:1 pleads, "Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy." This portrays the experience of the Psalmist of a God who bends down to listen and respond. Ps 103:1 links divine bending with the act of blessing. The Hebrew word *barak*, often translated as "bless," also means "to kneel." When God blesses his people, he metaphorically kneels, lowering himself to bestow favour. This image of divine humility finds its fullest realization in the incarnation, where God bends down in the most radical way to dwell among us.

Another image of divine bending appears in Hos 11:1-4 where God lowers himself to meet his people's needs. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness by offering sacrifices to Baal and incense to idols (11:1-2), in verse 4, the phrase "I bent down" signifies that God willingly lowers himself to care for his

people like a parent bending down to a child in need. Though the Israelites rebel, God neither abandons them nor remains distant; instead, he reaches down to feed and sustain them.

## 2. Jesus: The Paradigm of Bending Down

The ultimate act of divine bending is found in Jesus Christ. The incarnation itself is the greatest act of humility, i.e., God taking human flesh, entering the world not as a ruler but as a vulnerable child (cf. Jn 3:16). Paul describes this self-emptying (*kenosis*) in Phil 2:6-8, highlighting how Christ, though divine, “emptied himself, taking a form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” This self-emptying reaches its climax on the cross, where Jesus bends not only in service but in ultimate sacrifice; true greatness is not found in rising above others but in lowering oneself in service (cf. Mk 10:43-45).

The posture of Jesus’ bending down (*kato kupsas*) in Jn 8:6, 8, is evident throughout his ministry. When confronted with the woman caught in adultery (John 8), he does not react with condemnation but with compassion. He bends down and writes on the ground, placing himself at the same level of the frightened and humiliated woman. Then, in verse 10, he *looks up* and asks her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” Jesus speaks to her from a lower position, emphasizing his posture of humility and restoration. Unlike the accusers who stand in judgment, Jesus bends down to meet her where she is—only to lift her up. Even in his miracles, Jesus demonstrates this bending. In John 9, when encountering a man born blind, he does something striking: he bends down, mixes mud with his saliva, and applies it to the man’s eyes. This act recalls God’s creation of humanity from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7). By bending and using the very dust of the earth, Jesus signals a new creation, restoring not only the man’s sight but also his dignity.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of Jesus bending down occurs on the night before his crucifixion. During

the Last Supper, Jesus does something unexpected and unthinkable; he bends down to wash his disciples' feet (Jn 13:3-5). In the ancient Mediterranean societies (cf. Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Jud 19:21), foot washing was a common activity, performed by slaves. In Israel, this duty was assigned to non-Jewish slaves that is why the disciples of Jesus were surprised when Jesus took on this role. However, Jesus redefines leadership, showing that true greatness lies in serving others. Saint Augustine reflects on this humility:

You must take on somewhat of the affliction from which you want the other person to be freed through your efforts, and you must take it on in this way for the purpose of being able to give help, not achieve the same degree of misery. Analogously, a [hu]man bends over and extends his[/her] hand to someone lying down, for he[/she] does not cast [her/] himself down so that they are both lying, but only bends down to raise up the one lying down (*Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. David L. Mosher, 181).

### **3. Pope Francis' Model of Bending Down**

Pope Francis continuously invites us to bend down in service. His ministry remains marked by gestures that speak louder than words. On April 14, 2022 in Civitavecchia, he washed the feet of prisoners, refugees, and the marginalized, mirroring Christ's humility (cf. Jn 13:12-15). He draws our attention to the Good Samaritan who comes close to the wounded person, gets off his donkey, ties his wounds, and pours oil and wine. He gets his hands soiled and clothes dirty. These acts remain not merely a symbolic posture but a radical commitment to engage with the suffering of others. Perhaps one of Pope Francis' most outstanding moments occurred in April 2019, when he knelt to kiss the feet of South Sudanese leaders, urging them toward reconciliation and peace. This act stunned the world not as a mere diplomacy, but as an embodiment of Christ's love and humility.

## Conclusion

Bending down is at the heart of Christian witness. To follow Jesus is to embrace a life of humility and service, to bend down to lift others up. True discipleship is not about seeking power or recognition but about standing with the marginalized, forgiving generously, and loving unconditionally. In a world obsessed with status and dominance, Christ's call is radically countercultural: to bend, to kneel, to serve, and to love. We worship a God who bends to create humanity, who leans down to hear our cries, and who humbles himself in the incarnation and demonstrates the depth of his love on the cross. The challenge remains: will we stand indifferent to God's love, or will we bend down, and 'dirty' our hands?

**Keywords:** Bending Down, Lifting Up, Dashrath Manjhi, Incarnation, Pope Francis.

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## **'COLLECTIVE' MASS INTENTIONS IN LIGHT OF THE DECREE *SECUNDUM PROBATUM***

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**Abstract:** *Secundum probatum*, a Decree of the Dicastery for the Clergy on the discipline of Mass intentions dated 13 April 2025 rearticulates the teachings of the Church on 'collective' Mass intentions. It is a decree approved in *forma specifica* (specific form) by the Roman Pontiff, Francis. After giving a short explanation of the historical development of 'collective' Mass intention, the article explains juridical status, structure, and reasons for the publication of this document. The main focus of this article is on the normative part of the document describing the legislation on 'collective' Mass intention. Conditions for accepting and applying several intentions for one mass and other regulations connected to it are explained.

**Keywords:** Collective Mass Intention, *Secundum probatum*, *Mos iugiter*, Exception, Offering, Commemoration.

### **Introduction**

On 13 April 2025, the Dicastery for the Clergy issued a decree having the incipit *Secundum probatum*.<sup>1</sup> It deals

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<sup>1</sup> The Dicastery for the Clergy, Decree *Secundum probatum* (13 April 2025), <https://www.vatican.va/content/romancuria/it/dicasteri/dicastero-clero/>

with ‘collective’ Mass intentions. Code of Canon Law in its canon 948 states: “Separate Masses must be applied for the intention of those for whom an individual offering, even if small, has been made and accepted.” The offering made for the celebration and application of the Holy Eucharist is a very delicate subject because it also has a financial dimension. All the more so when there is an exception, the general norms of the Code of Canon Law say it should be interpreted strictly.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is important to understand the mind of the Church with regard to the norms on ‘collective’ Mass intentions. All the normative articles of the document are explained in this article.

## 1. Historical Development of ‘Collective’ Mass Intentions

The 1917 Code offered adequate regulation on Mass intentions in its canons 824-844. While updating the Code, a discussion was found in the 1975 schema on the sacraments. In canon 114 §2, it stated that it is permissible to celebrate and apply one and the same Mass for several intentions that have contributed to the common offering offered for the celebration and application of the same Mass at their own will.<sup>3</sup> During the discussion, the commission’s secretary pointed out the existing report about the abuses of the so-called community Mass. According to him, this paragraph might encourage such abuses. Therefore, a suggestion was made to delete this paragraph. The vote was four against three, so the commission suppressed this paragraph from the canon.<sup>4</sup>

On 22 February 1991, the then-called Congregation for Clergy (now Dicastery for the Clergy) issued a decree with the incipit *Mos iugiter*.<sup>5</sup> It established, in derogation

documenti/20250413-decreto-intenzioni-messe.html (accessed on 20.05.2025). The original text is in Italian, so far no official English translation is available.

<sup>2</sup> CIC 1983, Canon 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Communicationes* 13 (1981): 434.

<sup>4</sup> *Communicationes* 13 (1981): 434.

<sup>5</sup> Dicastery for the Clergy, Decree *Mos iugiter* (22 January 1991), in *AAS* 83 (1991): 443-446; [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/dicasteries/cclergy/](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dicasteries/cclergy/)

from canon 948, that if there are cases in which the donors, previously and explicitly warned, freely consent to their offerings being cumulated with others in a single offering, this can be satisfied with a single Holy Mass, celebrated according to a ‘collective’ intention. To do that, the day, place, and time at which such Holy Mass will be celebrated must be publicly indicated, and it should be done no more than twice a week.<sup>6</sup> Those who celebrate a “pluri-intentional” Mass are permitted to retain only the amount of one offering established in the diocese, while the residual sum exceeding this offering must be handed over to the Ordinary, who will allocate it according to the law.<sup>7</sup> The decree *Secundum probatum* is an updated version of *Mos iugiter*.

## 2. Juridical Status of *Secundum Probatum*

As per the general norms of *CIC*, “General decrees, by which a competent legislator makes common provisions for a community capable of receiving a law, are true laws and are regulated by the provisions of the canons on laws.”<sup>8</sup> But this type of a general decree, which is a true law, cannot be made by one who has only executive power.<sup>9</sup> “Within the limits of their competence, those who have executive power can issue general executory decrees, that is, decrees which define more precisely the manner of applying a law, or which urge the observance of laws.”<sup>10</sup> But in a particular case, if the legislator has expressly authorized it in accordance with the law, and provided the conditions prescribed in the act of authorization are observed, those who have executive power can also issue a general decree that has legislative power.<sup>11</sup>

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documents/rc\_con\_cclergy\_doc\_22021991\_miug\_it.html (accessed on 20.05.2025).

<sup>6</sup> *Mos iugiter*, Article 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Mos iugiter*, Article 3.

<sup>8</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 29.

<sup>9</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 30.

<sup>10</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 31 §1.

<sup>11</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 30.

The Roman Curia ordinarily assists the Roman Pontiff in exercising his supreme pastoral office and universal mission in the world.<sup>12</sup> “A curial institution cannot issue laws or general decrees having the force of law, nor can it derogate from the prescriptions of the current universal law, except in individual and particular cases, and with the approval of the Roman Pontiff *in forma specifica*.<sup>13</sup> Two possibilities are available for the dicasteries to give a General Decree with the force of law or to derogate from something of the universal law. The first is the delegation of the legislative power to the dicastery, and the second is the specific approval of a draft developed by the dicastery.<sup>14</sup> *Secundum probatum* is a decree of the Dicastery for the Clergy, which is part of the Roman Curia, approved *in forma specifica* (specific form) by the then Roman Pontiff, who also ordered its promulgation. Therefore, it is a general decree having the force of law, taking its legal effects from 13 April 2025.<sup>15</sup> This may be the last decree approved *in forma specifica* (specific form) by Pope Francis.

### 3. Structure of *Secundum Probatum*

The decree can be divided mainly into two parts. The first part is the introductory part, which explains the reason for the promulgation of the decree. Along with the reasons, the first part gives a synthesis of the theological-pastoral meaning of the Mass offering and its relevance in the present time. The second part is the normative part, which is divided into six articles with various paragraphs.

<sup>12</sup> Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022), Article 1, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html) (accessed on 20.05.2025).

<sup>13</sup> *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 30.

<sup>14</sup> J. H. Provost, “Approval of Curial Documents in *Forma Specifica*,” *The Jurist* 58 (1998): 215-216.

<sup>15</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Concluding Part.

#### **4. Reasons for *Secundum Probatum***

Before the end of the introductory part, the decree itself gives the motive behind the promulgation of the new norms. More than thirty-four years after the entry into force of the Decree *Mos iugiter*, based on the experience accumulated so far, in response to the observations, questions, and requests received from various parts of the world, not only from Bishops, but also from members of the clergy and lay faithful including the persons and communities of consecrated life, Dicastery for the Clergy, having considered in depth all aspects of the matter, and after an extensive consultation with the other interested Dicasteries, *sive ratione materiae sive alia ratione* (whether for material reasons or for some other reasons), has reached the judgment that new norms are now needed to regulate the matter, adapting it accordingly. The purpose is also to make it more explicit in excluding certain practices that have occurred abusively in various places. Therefore, the decree *Secundum probatum* updates the discipline currently in force about the ‘collective’ Mass offerings.<sup>16</sup>

#### **5. Conditions for Accepting and Celebrating ‘Collective’ Mass Intention**

Article one discusses the conditions for accepting and celebrating a single Mass for ‘collective’ intention. This article refers to canon 945 §1, which says, “In accordance with the approved custom of the Church, any priest who celebrates or concelebrates a Mass may accept an offering to apply the Mass for a specific intention.” It is also necessary that the provincial council or the assembly of the Bishops of the province, taking into account various conditions like the number of priests in relation to the requests for intentions or the social and ecclesial context, within the limits of its own jurisdiction, orders by a decree to accept ‘collective’ Mass intention. This means that only after the provincial council

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<sup>16</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Introductory Part.

gives a decree concerning the ‘collective’ Mass intention, the priests can accept several offerings from different offerors, cumulating them with others and satisfying them with a single Mass, celebrated as a ‘collective’ intention. The following condition is that the offerors should be informed that there will be a single Mass for all the intentions and they should give their consent freely for such celebrations.<sup>17</sup> This consent can never be presumed and if such explicit consent is absent, it is always assumed that this consent has not been given.<sup>18</sup> The decree also reiterates that when a ‘collective’ Mass intention is accepted and celebrated, the celebrant is permitted to keep for himself the offering of a single intention only.<sup>19</sup>

The decree *Secundum probatum* asks every Christian community to be careful to offer the possibility of celebrating daily Masses for a single intention. And in accordance with canon 952,<sup>20</sup> the decree says, the provincial council or the meeting of the Bishops of the province fixes the determined offering.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, ‘collective’ Mass intention should be seen as only an exception to the law. The Church always encourages one intention accepted and applied for one Mass.

## 6. Bination or Trination

Without prejudice to canon 905, which gives the condition for bination and trination, when a priest legitimately celebrates

<sup>17</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 1 §1.

<sup>18</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 1 §2.

<sup>19</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 1 §3; Cf. *CIC* 1983 Canons 950-952.

<sup>20</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 952 §1: The provincial council or the provincial Bishops’ meeting is to determine by decree, for the whole of the province, what offering is to be made for the celebration and application of Mass; and it is not lawful for a priest to ask for a greater amount. Nonetheless, it is permitted to accept, for the application of a Mass, an offering voluntarily made, which is greater, or even less, than that which has been determined. §2 Where there is no such decree, the custom existing in the diocese is to be observed. §3 Members of religious institutes of all kinds must abide by the decree or the local custom mentioned in §§1 and 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 1 §4; Cf. *CIC* 1983 Canon 952.

the Eucharist more than once on the same day, if necessary and required by the true good of the faithful, he can celebrate different Masses even for ‘collective’ intentions. Even in such cases, it is understood that he is permitted to take, daily, only one offering for a single intention among those accepted.<sup>22</sup> First and foremost, a priest is expected to celebrate the Eucharist only once a day.<sup>23</sup> But the law gives exceptions for bination and trination. “If there is a scarcity of priests, the local Ordinary may, for a good reason, allow priests to celebrate twice in one day or even, if pastoral need requires it, three times on Sundays or holydays of obligation.”<sup>24</sup> Here, decree *Secundum probatum* gives a provision for a priest to celebrate a Mass with a ‘collective’ intention if he celebrates more than one Eucharist a day, provided that he does it lawfully and it is necessary and required for the true good of the faithful.

## 7. Offerings Made for the Mass

The decree quoting canon 848 reiterates that for the administration of any sacrament, the minister should not ask for anything beyond the offerings which are determined by the competent authority. For the ‘collective’ Mass intention, the competent authority is the provincial council or the meeting of the Bishops of the province. It is also the duty of the priests to ensure that the needy are not deprived of the help of the sacraments because of poverty. It also quotes the recommendation given in canon 945 §2, which states: “to celebrate Mass for the intentions of Christ’s faithful, especially of those in need, even if they do not receive an offering.”<sup>25</sup>

Decree demands that for the destination of the offerings, the norm of canon 951 shall be applied, *congrua congruis referendo* (“according to what is appropriate for each

<sup>22</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 2; Cf. *CIC* 1983 Canons 950-952.

<sup>23</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 905 §1.

<sup>24</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 905 §2.

<sup>25</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 3 §1.

case").<sup>26</sup> This is the clarity for the destination of the rest of the offering, other than the one offering retained by the celebrant. Canon 951 states that a priest who celebrates a number of Masses on the same day can apply each Mass for the intention for which an offering was made, but he should retain the offering for only one Mass. The exception is only for Christmas Day. The rest of the offering he should transmit to purposes prescribed by the Ordinary. There is also provision for some compensation on the ground of an extrinsic title.<sup>27</sup> But if a priest who concelebrates a second Mass on the same day cannot accept an offering for that Mass under any title.<sup>28</sup>

In 1987, the then Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law (Now the Dicastery for the Legislative Text) clarified a doubt. The doubt raised was whether the Ordinary referred to in canon 951 § 1 is to be understood as the Ordinary of the place where Mass is celebrated or as the Ordinary proper to the celebrant. The answer was negative to the first part and affirmative to the second, unless it concerns parish priests and vicars, for whom the Ordinary is understood as the Ordinary of the place.<sup>29</sup>

The Diocesan Bishop, taking into consideration the specific circumstances of the particular church and his clergy, can make provisions for the allocation of such offerings to parishes in need by the particular law. These parishes could be in his own diocese or in other dioceses, especially in mission countries.<sup>30</sup>

## 8. Role of the Ordinary to Supervise

The Ordinaries are responsible for educating their respective clergy and people about the content and meaning of norms

<sup>26</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 3 §2.

<sup>27</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 951 §1.

<sup>28</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 951 §2.

<sup>29</sup> Dicastery for the Legislative Text, Response to the Doubt, 23 April 1987, in *AAS*, 79 (1987):1132

<sup>30</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 3 §3.

given in *Secundum probatum* and supervising their correct application. They must ensure that the number of Masses to be celebrated, the intentions, the offerings, and the celebrations are carefully recorded in the appropriate register, and they must examine these registers each year, personally or through others.<sup>31</sup> It is the reiteration of canon 958.<sup>32</sup>

The decree asks in a special way both the Ordinaries and the other Pastors of the Church to ensure that the distinction between the application for a specific intention of the Mass even if it is ‘collective’ and the simple commemoration during a celebration of the Word or in some moments of the Eucharistic celebration is eminently clear to all.<sup>33</sup> The application of Mass intention and just commemoration or recollection during the Eucharistic celebration are different. Simply recalling the donor’s name or intention does not constitute applying the intention of the Mass. The replacement of the application promised in the Mass with only the intention of prayer during a celebration of the Word, or with a simple mention in some moments of the Eucharistic celebration, would be illicit. The failure to apply a Mass in relation to the accepted offering is judged contrary to justice.<sup>34</sup>

*Secundum probatum* makes it known to everyone that the solicitation or even the acceptance of offerings for the simple commemoration during a celebration of the Word or in some moments of the Eucharistic celebration is gravely illicit. It also asks the competent Ordinaries where such use is unduly widespread, not to exclude the

<sup>31</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 4 §1; Cf. *CIC* 1983, Canon 958.

<sup>32</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 958 §1 The parish priest, as well as the rector of a church or other pious place in which Mass offerings are usually received, is to have a special book in which he is accurately to record the number, the intention, and the offering of the Masses to be celebrated, and the fact of their celebration. §2 The Ordinary is obliged to inspect these books each year, either personally or through others.

<sup>33</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 4 §2.

<sup>34</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Introductory Part.

use of disciplinary and/or penal measures to eradicate this deplorable phenomenon.<sup>35</sup>

## 9. Encouraging the Offering Made for Mass

Pastors of souls should take care to appropriately encourage the faithful to maintain in view of the supernatural values connected with the venerable and praiseworthy practice of receiving the offering given so that a Mass may be celebrated according to a specific intention as per canon 948, and where it is weakened, to reinvigorate and promote it. It should also be done in view of promoting the appreciable custom of transferring the intentions of excess Masses with the corresponding offerings to mission countries. It may also be done through appropriate catechesis on the *novissimi* (last things) and on the *communio sanctorum* (communion of saints).<sup>36</sup>

## 10. Provision for the Transitional Period

The decree *Secundum probatum* also makes provision for the transitional period. It states: Where the provincial council or the meeting of the Bishops of the province make no provision on the matter, the provisions of the *Mos iugiter* Decree of 22 February 1991 remain in force.<sup>37</sup> The general norms of *CIC* says universal ecclesiastical laws takes effect only three months have lapsed from the date appearing it on the particular issue of the 'Acta,' unless because of the nature of the case they bind at once, or unless a shorter or a longer interval has been specifically and expressly prescribed in the law itself.<sup>38</sup> The decree *Secundum probatum* establishes a shorter period for it to take the force of law. Because the document concludes with the statement that the Supreme Pontiff, on 13 April 2025, Palm Sunday, approved in *forma specifica*

<sup>35</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 4 §3.

<sup>36</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 5.

<sup>37</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Article 6.

<sup>38</sup> *CIC* 1983, Canon 8 §1.

(specific form) this decree and ordered its promulgation, providing for its entry into force on 20 April 2025, Easter Sunday. Though the decree takes force of law on 20 April 2025, the decree demands that the Provincial Council or the Assembly of the Bishops of the province promulgate a decree in accordance with the norm of *Secundum probatum*. Till such decree is issued, the provision of the Decree *Mos iugiter* of 22 February 1991 will continue in force. The decree also spoke about the possible updating of the norms. It says the Dicastery for the Clergy, ten years after the entry into force of these norms, will promote a study of the practice and of the current legislation on the matter, with a view to verifying its application and a possible updating.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

A careful reading of the decree *Secundum probatum* and the previous decree *Mos iugiter* clarifies that celebrating the Eucharist according to ‘collective’ Mass intention is an *exception* to the universal law. Church encourages accepting and applying one intention for one Mass. The decree *Mos iugiter* stated that ‘collective’ Mass intention should not be more than twice a week, and this restriction is not found in the new decree *Secundum probatum*. But in the introductory part, referring to *Mos iugiter* it says that if ‘collective’ Mass intentions become excessively widespread, it must be considered an abuse and could gradually lead the faithful to disuse offerings by celebrating Masses for individual intentions. Therefore, the provincial council should take note of it while issuing the decree for ‘collective’ mass intentions.

The new decree allows priests to celebrate Mass for ‘collective’ Mass intentions even during bination or trination. The decree asks the ministers to make sure that the poor do not suffer because they are not able to give offerings for the Mass. Applying a single Mass for multiple intentions, for

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<sup>39</sup> *Secundum probatum*, Concluding Part.

which multiple offerings have been accepted, is prohibited in normal circumstances. Therefore, if a minister receives an offering to celebrate a Mass, he is duty-bound to celebrate it; non-application of the offering is contrary to justice. Just commemoration or mention during the Eucharistic celebration is not sufficient.

Supervisory role of the Ordinaries is emphasized, and a clear distinction is made between the application of the intention and mere commemoration. The Ordinaries are asked to take disciplinary or penal actions against the clergy if there are abuses with regard to the Mass intentions. The decree also encouraged the offering made for the celebration of the Mass. Provision is made for the transitional period. Since, in normal circumstances, applying the same Mass to several intentions for which several offerings have been accepted is prohibited, the conditions given in *Secundum probatum* must be fulfilled to accept and apply a ‘collective’ Mass intention. Accepting and celebrating ‘collective’ Mass intention is an exception to the law, and it should not be considered a normal or regular practice.

# **SAINT CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND *DEI VERBUM* On the Idea of Revelation and Self-Manifestation**

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**Abstract:** Theological thinking on divine revelation is fundamental. The Vatican II's Constitution *Dei Verbum* established, in magisterial terms, basic coordinates to understand the Christian concept of "revelation" in order to live, to preach, and to think. Coming back to this document is important to understand the mystery of Jesus Christ as revealer of the Father: "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him" (John 1:18). To bring out *Dei Verbum*'s core message we need theological tools. Saint John Henry Newman's thought on revelation is very helpful to understand what this Constitution clarifies and teaches even today. Newman refers to God's self-communication as 'impression.' Newman in his concept of 'revelation as impression' represents revelation as (a) an interpersonal relationship of God and human; (b) God's presence in historical events and divine-human collaboration; (c) the self-manifestation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ; (d) deification of human beings and divine sharing; and (e) the divine presence among the believers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

**Keywords:** Revelation, Self-Manifestation, Impression, *Dei Verbum*, Incarnation, Cardinal Newman.

## Introduction

Newman was convinced that revelation is “the initial and essential idea of Christianity,”<sup>1</sup> but in his writings, he did not give a comprehensive treatment of the theme. Indeed, some scholars have deplored what they consider to be his lack of an adequate theology of revelation.<sup>2</sup>

Tyrrell credited Newman’s ‘*Essay on Development*’ as having an original, although implicitly articulated, ‘idea of revelation.’ The content of revelation is not a statement, but an ‘idea’-embodied, in certain statements and institutions but not exhausted by them. Institutions and formulas have developed, but revealed ‘idea’ or faith do not develop. In this notion of an ‘idea’ as a spiritual force or impetus, not as an intellectual concept, Newman identified himself with the modern mind and separated himself from the Scholastic mind. It is the tool that Modernists obtained from Newman and used against the majority of the system that he had framed in its defence.<sup>3</sup> In short, for Newman, the idea of Christian revelation is a ‘living idea’ since it is based on revealed truths, and as a faith, it cannot be developed.

### 1. Revelation as an Idea / Impression

The question arises: what types of idea-embodied? Dulles comments that one might think that Newman regarded revelation as an inner experience, a matter of historical fact, which is identical to the teaching of Scripture, or as a system of dogma. None of these answers are fully correct. For Newman, revelation can be either an ‘original impression’

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. J. Svaglic (ed.), *Apologia pro vita sua* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Misner, “Newman’s Conception of Revelation and the Development of Doctrine,” *The Heythrop Journal* 11/1 (1970): 32-47.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Cornell University Library, 2009), 32-33.

that God makes on one's mind or an 'idea' that God gives of himself. When he calls revelation an impression, as he occasionally does in his Anglican writings, Newman's terminology is influenced by David Hume,<sup>4</sup> who meant by an impression an instant datum of experience, vivid and powerful than concepts produced in reflection. Newman uses the term 'impression' to refer to Christian revelation, to suggest that God's revelation of himself is unique, divinely generated, and consistent with the object it represents. When he speaks of revelation as an idea, Newman is using the term 'idea' in a rich but fluid sense, somewhat personal to itself.<sup>5</sup>

For Newman, God's revelation is an idea or an impression given by God of himself imprinted on the human heart. But Newman prefers the term impression over the idea for revelation because the central idea of Christian revelation is the self-manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. By over-emphasizing the term impression, Newman is highlighting the personal notion of God. His approach is Cristo-centric in general.

### 1.1 Idea as an Invisible Principle

Is the idea of revelation remaining a personal notion for Newman? In *Essay on Development*, Newman explains more fully what he means by an idea. He makes it clear that by an idea in this context, he means an invisible principle that takes hold of the mind and becomes an active force leading to an ever new contemplation of itself.<sup>6</sup> Here, Newman makes it clear that the idea of revelation is an invisible principle which leads to new horizons.

<sup>4</sup> "The only difference that Hume sees between impressions and ideas is their degree of force and liveliness, or force and vivacity. Impressions are more forceful and lively than ideas: for example, actually feeling pain is more forceful and lively than merely thinking about pain." *David Hume: Imagination*, <https://iep.utm.edu/humeima/#:~:text=The%20only%20difference%20that%20Hume,merely%20thinking%20about%20a%20pain> (accessed on 25.07.2023).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Dulles, "From Images to Truth: Newman on Revelation and Faith," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 252-267.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green, 1906), 1, 4.

## 2. Chronological and Logical Model of Divine Revelation

William J. Abraham in an article, “Reception of Newman on Divine Revelation,” urges that Newman inherited a vision of divine revelation that was based on two steps, chronological and logical. The first proved God’s existence by natural theology, and the second established that divine revelation actually took place through a miracle. The chronological model, was associated with natural religion and general revelation; whereas the logical model, focused on Christ as Messiah and Son of God, but this in turn was associated with a high view of the divine inspiration of scripture. Newman shared dissatisfaction with the material content of these claims; he found them intellectually and spiritually unsatisfactory; nevertheless, their general chronologically and logically ordered structure remained intact.<sup>7</sup>

Through this vision of revelation as chronological and logical, one can easily perceive and extract the idea of God’s self-revelation through creation (chronological model), and in the logical model the self-manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ through Incarnation.

## 3. Holistic Picture of Revelation

Abraham’s analysis that Newman started with the actuality of God revealed in natural religion and conscience, then proceeded to the possibility of prior divine revelation, which made both the specific revelation given to Israel and the particular revelation offered in Christ accessible. This fundamental perspective on divine revelation has its roots in a comparatively traditional conception of creation, fall, and redemption.<sup>8</sup> In short, Newman presents a ‘holistic picture of revelation,’ i.e., the notion of pre-history in the form of natural religion (preparation for the gospel) and the Salvation

<sup>7</sup>Cf. W.J. Abraham, “Reception of Newman on Divine Revelation,” in *Receptions of Newman*, eds. F.D. Aquino and B.J. King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 199-200.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

History through historical salvific events and actions of God in Israel and finally, the fulfilment and perfection of revelation in Jesus Christ. It comprises all three basic and fundamental elements or stages of salvation history namely, creation, human fall, and redemption.

Interestingly, during Scholasticism, the same three terms (creation, fall, and redemption) were presented for the question of 'Status of grace' in salvation history: The grace could have had three statuses: first, the status *naturae integrae* (status of Original Justice); second status, the status *naturae lapsae* (status of sin; which is the condition of human in sin); finally, the status *gratiae* (status of grace or restoration of a person after Christ's redemption). For medieval theology, the nature of the *homo* could not be given unless in spite of the tripartition, human's nature is always in relation to God.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Ways of Divine Communication

In 'Apologia,' Newman remarks, that through nature, the symbols of Scripture, liturgy, and dogma, God communicates mysterious and heavenly truth to which the human mind is receptive but nevertheless unequal. The Christian idea is the living impression on the human mind made by the truth, which is without change or alteration, communicates itself in various ways.<sup>10</sup>

Newman describes the ways of divine communication through (i) nature and (ii) the Christian idea of revelation. In the former, God communicates with human conscience but the human mind is not in a capacity to fully comprehend the divine mystery of God. Although human being is a rational being with intellect, his or her 'reasoning' ability can grasp the divine mystery only to a certain extent because of its limitation. In latter, i.e., communication of God through

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Arici, "Questioni di Antropologia teologica: La visibilità politica del corpo di Cristo," (appunti del corso), *La Facoltà Teologica dell'Emilia-Romagna*, sessione 2020-2021.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Svaglic (ed.), *Apologia pro vita sua*, 36-37.

the Christian idea of revelation in various ways, since it is a living impression, based on revealed truths, it is able to communicate perfectly. The Christian idea of revelation cannot be changed or altered.

## 5. New Revelation and Continuous Revelation

Misner proposes that we must distinguish continuing revelation in two senses: (i) a revelation of new truths after the close of the apostolic age; (ii) the continuing action of God who reveals and communicates himself to the successive generations of those who receive his word in faith. For Misner, the second kind of continuing revelation serves as a basis for Newman's theory of development and is non-objectional as regards to Catholic orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup>

Here, the idea of new revelation and continuous revelation is defined and clarified. Although the revelation closed with the death of the last Apostle, it is continued in a new form in the life of the baptized faithful. It is a way of passing on the revelation from one generation to the other. The Sacred Traditions of the Church are bound with the divine revelation and not separate from it. The Fathers of the Council at Vatican II also clarified that Scripture and Traditions are not two sources of divine revelation rather they are united and one. In short, God's salvific actions of revelation continue in the 'deposit of faith,' but require obedience to the Word of God.

## 6. Fullness of God's Revelation

If God reveals himself through continuous revelation and is received in faith, then what is the fullness of God's revelation for Newman? Newman demonstrated in his famous '*Oxford University Sermons*' that revelation is fulfilled by the eternal Word of God Incarnated in Jesus Christ. Revelation is not described as an entity existing either in Scripture or

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Misner, "Newman's Conception of Revelation and the Development of Doctrine," 32-47.

Tradition. Instead, for Newman, revelation is a God-given implicit understanding of faith. Human being who has not yet developed the ability to express their religion verbally is affected by revelation.<sup>12</sup>

Although revelation is communicated through actions, transmitted and interpreted by the Church authority, and passed on from one generation to the next, neither of them has revealed the fullness of revelation for Newman. The fullness of revelation is fulfilled and perfected in the person of Jesus Christ. The Incarnation is a central mystery of Christianity for Newman. For Newman, revelation is a gift, and God implicitly gives it in faith.

## 6.1 Central Doctrine of Incarnation

Evans' analysis shows that for Newman, the fundamental 'Object' of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ, who is distinct in his Incarnate reality and multifaceted in the life and beliefs of the Church. For Newman, the central doctrine of Christianity is the Incarnation. He calls it "the central truth of the gospel," the article of belief upon which the Church stands or falls, which "occupies the principal place" in the gospel's "system of truth." This is because the mystery of the Incarnation essences all of the truths that can be known about God, either from natural reason or from the revealed Words of Scripture, into the form of a real person, and so "addresses itself to our senses and imagination."<sup>13</sup>

## 6.2 Attributes for the Person of Jesus Christ

The attributes Newman used for the person of Jesus Christ as the revealed Word of God are numerous; Jesus is the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. S. Hansson, *John Henry Newman and Revelation: A Case Study for A Contemporary Understanding of the term Closed Revelation* (MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, Thesis for Master in Theology, 2021): 39-40. [https://mfopen.mf.no/mf-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2734545/1004\\_Hansson,%20Sebastian.pdf?sequence=1](https://mfopen.mf.no/mf-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2734545/1004_Hansson,%20Sebastian.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed on 25.07.2023).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. B.A. Evans, *Objective and Subjective Elements of Faith in John Henry Newman and Joseph Ratzinger* (Minnesota: University of St. Thomas, 2017), 102.

fundamental object of the Christian faith, centre to the life and belief of the Church, Incarnation (the central mystery of Christian faith), central truth of the gospel, etc. Newman wants to say that Jesus Christ is the Lord of heaven and the earth. The Lord of history, the cosmos, and the universe. The Christian faith is witnessed through the words and actions of the believer whose whole life revolves around the person of Jesus Christ.

## 7. Revelation as an Economy

Latourelle suggests that Newman presents revelation as an economy in his writings. It is made up of three successive stages, following progress in quality and quantity, up to the fullness of Christ. God, in his condescension, has adapted himself to human conditions and the weakness of his people. The Incarnation is the type par excellence of this divine economy.<sup>14</sup> No doubt, the Incarnation is the central mystery for Newman. The fullness of Christ is revealed in the divine economy. The ‘Word of God’ embraced human nature for the salvation of human, became weak and vulnerable, suffered, and died.

Newman’s in-depth description of ‘Economy’ occurs in his book: *The Arians of the Fourth Century*. Like the Alexandrian Church Fathers, Newman understands ‘Economy’ in a broad sense to mean “any Divine procedure, greater or less, which consists of means and an end,” the end being the deification of human beings.<sup>15</sup>

Newman, a faithful disciple of the Church Fathers, chooses the same road they already travelled. He follows the Alexandrian Fathers. It is important to remember that the Alexandrian School always emphasizes the divinity of Jesus Christ (divine nature). Revelation as Economy means for Newman as the deification of human beings. As St. Athanasius of Alexanderia says, “God became [hu]man so [hu]man may become God.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation: Including a Commentary on the Constitution Dei Verbum of Vatican II* (New York: Terence J. Cooke, 1966), 198-199.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2001), 74.

When analysing Newman's views on Jesus and the Holy Spirit, scholars concentrate on his recovery of the Greek patristic theology of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and his equating of the economy of redemption with the personal mystery of the God-human.<sup>16</sup> Actually, the scholars do so because the divine economy, in Eastern Orthodoxy, not only refers to the actions of God to bring about salvation and redemption of the world but also refers to his interactions with the world including the Creation.<sup>17</sup>

Newman considered the Incarnation as the key to safeguarding the doctrine of the Trinity *in se* and to deepen the doctrine of God *pro nobis*. For Newman, the Incarnation is God's self-revelation in the history of salvation, the disclosure of the 'gracious mercy' and 'salvific work' of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the dispensation or economy of salvation, which Newman described as follows:

Thus, it is applied by the Fathers, to the history of Christ's humiliation, as exhibited in the doctrines of His incarnation, ministry, atonement, exaltation, and mediatorial sovereignty, and, as such distinguished from the "*theologia*" or the collection of truths relative to His personal indwelling in the bosom of God.<sup>18</sup>

Newman spoke of this economy as 'Condescension' without which "[hu]man would not have existed, [hu]man would not have been redeemed or illuminated," for "that Economy is the state of things into which we are all born."<sup>19</sup>

## 8. *Theologia in Oikonomia*

Newman's Trinitarian theology is a *theologia in oikonomia*: the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, for the Incarnation

<sup>16</sup> Cf. D. Graham, "The Pneumatic Christology of John Henry Newman," *Louvain Studies* 28 (2003): 277.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York St. Vladimir Seminary, 1985), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J.H. Newman, *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908), 192-193.

is the very revelation of the immanent Trinity.<sup>20</sup> In other words, for Newman, the Incarnate Word of God has performed three major tasks; first, the Incarnation is a self-manifestation of God. It made visible the divine mystery of God which was hidden and invisible from the centuries throughout salvation history. Second, the Word of God through the Incarnation also revealed the graciousness of God, an image of a loving Father, who is merciful, forgiving, and caring. The visible deeds and actions of the Son of God. Third, the salvific work of God is revealed through the Incarnate Word of God. Jesus Christ died on the cross for the reconciliation of human beings with God. To restore the relationship between God and human. God is our saviour and redeemer, who does not leave the fallen race under the burden of sin, but rather, through the salvific work of Christ, ransoms humanity. Therefore, God manifested in Incarnation is our saviour and redeemer.

In Luu-Quang's opinion, for Newman, God *in se* is now revealed to us in the economy of salvation. He revealed himself in the economy as in eternity God was and ever has been. God manifested himself to us as what he is *in se*. In addition, Newman saw the economy of salvation as not simply the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but above all as the manifestation of the 'Sonship' of the Only-begotten Son with the Father.<sup>21</sup>

Three attributes of the economy of salvation for Newman: (a) eternal self-manifestation of God; (b) fullness of God is revealed; God manifested himself *in se*; (c) a revelation of the 'Sonship' of the Only-begotten Son with the Father. In short, although the economy of salvation is the work of the whole Trinity, but in the self-manifestation of God, the Word of God has a unique and exceptional role.

Newman refers to God's self-communication as 'impression.' This communication of a relational nature

<sup>20</sup> Cf. K. Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 22.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. V.B. Luu-Quang, "Newman's Theology of the Economic Trinity in His Parochial and Plain Sermons: 1835–1841," *Newman Studies* 7/2 (2010): 75–97.

indicates God and human action. First, human beings were created in the image of God and in the economy of salvation God reveals himself in historical events, and divine actions continue through the Church; second, the unveiling of God in the person of Jesus; and third, the purpose of revelation, human deification, sharing divine life, and indwelling among the believers which is a mediation continued through revelation.<sup>22</sup>

## 9. Revelation as Impression and *Dei Verbum*, No. 2

Five expressions are presented by Newman in his concept of ‘revelation as impression’: (a) an interpersonal relationship of God and human; (b) God’s presence in historical events and divine-human collaboration; (c) the self-manifestation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ; (d) deification of human beings and divine sharing; (e) the divine presence among the believers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Newman elaborated the nature, the purpose, and the aim of the divine revelation here. Newman’s idea of ‘impression’ is not limited to the self-manifestation of God, but rather, it comprises the creation of human beings in God’s image, salvation history, God-human relationship, divine communion, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and deification. As Newman shows that revelation connects all the other fields of theology, he wants to clarify that the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the core ‘impression’ of divine revelation. It starts with human beings created in the image of God and leads to deification and the beatific vision.

In other words, self-manifestation of God takes human beings on the path of reconciliation, deification, communion, divine sharing, and beatific vision. So, self-manifestation has a double role to play. On the one hand, Christ’s manifestation and on the other hand, human perfection and salvation in the divine company.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. D.J. Lattier, *John Henry Newman and Georges Florovsky: An Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue on the Development of Doctrine* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University, 2012), 4-21.

It starts with the events of salvation history and ends up with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the deification of the believers. The idea of ‘revelation as impression’ is the hallmark of Newman’s doctrine of revelation. Its best expression is *Dei Verbum*, no. 2. Here, Newman’s idea of impression is presented as it is. DV 2 shares the same structure, construction, and stages. The Fathers of the Council were aware of the Modern conspiracies against divine revelation, and they did not want to contaminate the idea of revelation with abstract notions of revelation. DV 2 has Biblical foundations and Newman’s idea of ‘impression’ provides it a solid ground in the battle against Modernism.

## 10. Revelation and Relationship

Horner comments that in *De fontibus revelationis*, revelation is depicted in terms of doctrinal content and its interpretation or explanation, whether that has been transmitted orally or using Scripture. In contrast with *De fontibus revelationis*, nos. 1-3, DV 2 shifts from an emphasis on revelation as doctrinal content to revelation as God’s self-communication in Christ, in order to establish a relationship with humanity.<sup>23</sup> There is a big contrast between the approaches of the two documents “revelation as doctrinal content” and “revelation as God’s self-revelation.” In fact, *Dei Verbum*’s approach leads to an “interpersonal relationship between God and human.”

Rush states that Vatican II emphasizes that revelation is not primarily ‘instruction’ from the divine teacher and a ‘communication of truths’ (information about God and God’s vision for humanity, although it is certainly that); rather, at a deeply personal level, it is the communication of God’s very Self in love to human beings.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cf. R. Horner, *The Experience of God: A Phenomenology of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University, 2022), 80.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. O. Rush, *The Vision of Vatican II: Its Fundamental Principles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), 41.

The most intimate truth revealed about God and human salvation shines forth for us in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation (DV 2). Revelation in its primary modality comes to us as an invitation into relationship. The Father speaks to us through Jesus Christ, who is the mediator and the fullness of revelation. He doesn't merely communicate to us by the way of a text or proposition.<sup>25</sup>

Informed by *Dei verbum*, Marion expresses the importance of God's self-revelation: "The non-epistemological intention of revelation aims to manifest God in person; God's intention is not so much to make himself known as to make himself recognized."<sup>26</sup>

Hansson comments that the Neo-Scholastic intellectualist view of revelation was mainly doctrines of divine truth. In contrast, Vatican II defined revelation as God's self-communication to human, as the totality of God's words and deeds with its consummation in Christ.<sup>27</sup> In other words, it is a leap from propositional truths of revelation to revelation as self-manifestation of God. But Newman is in between. For him, propositional revelation means to say, "truths of revelation" and along with self-revelation is equally important, but the personalistic notion of revelation is superior. According to Newman, revelation is both a fact and a message from God. He believes that revelation is the manifestation of the living God to human in Jesus Christ. A self-manifestation of God, in the words of Newman: "What Catholics, what Church doctors, as well as the Apostles, have ever lived on, is not any number of theological canons or decrees, but the Christ Himself, as He is represented in concrete existence in the Gospels."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R.R. Gaillardetz, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge companion to VATICAN II* (New York: Cambridge University, 2020), 158.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Horner, *The Experience of God*, 172.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hansson, "John Henry Newman and Revelation," 79.

<sup>28</sup> J.H. Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans, Green, 1907), 388.

In short, Newman claims that revelation is the ‘Good News’ of a living Christ, which the Apostles and the Church both proclaim, live, and give witness to. It is not a law or decree, which is promulgated by a human authority, rather, the origin of divine revelation is God himself.

The knowledge of God that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ is the kind of knowledge we obtain in a personal relationship. Revelation comes to us in the Person of Christ and it is received by the whole Church, although in different ways.<sup>29</sup>

## 11. Importance of the Biblical Text

The biblical text is a means of God’s self-revelation, “this economy of revelation is made through intrinsically connected deeds and words.”<sup>30</sup> The pinnacle of the Old Testament economy is revealed in the New Testament, when the “Word became flesh” and “perfects revelation by fulfilling it.”<sup>31</sup> In the Christian tradition, God does not first reveal a law or precepts but reveals himself. Revelation is the act of God revealing himself through the events and words that interpret him. The revelation coincides with the gift of a Person.

## 12. Commonality between *Dei verbum* and Newman

*Dei verbum* and Newman have several commonalities. Both accept revelation as a self-manifestation of God and a message of reconciliation is hidden in revelation. Revelation is neither a doctrinal collection nor a law but a living person Jesus Christ, a self-manifestation of God; God himself is revealed in Christ.

*Dei Verbum* taught that God’s self-communication in history, witnessed in Scripture, reaches its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ (DV 2). Thus, its view of revelation is personal rather than propositional; it is Trinitarian in

<sup>29</sup> Cf. R.R. Gaillardetz, “Vatican II’s Noncompetitive Theology of the Church,” *Louvain Studies* 37 (2013): 3-27.

<sup>30</sup> *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Dei Verbum*, no. 4.

form, historical in mediation, and Christological in its fulfilment.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the revelation is Trinitarian and Christological in nature and is communicated in history through the Incarnate person of Jesus Christ, who is not an abstract idea or proposition. Here, *Dei Verbum* confirms ‘the purpose of revelation’ demonstrated by Newman in the light of the Scriptures and Church Fathers.

It is a revelation of God that would be unthinkable were it not already realized in the person of Jesus, and “represented in the Church using certain sacramental extensions of the Incarnation.” For Newman, Christian faith is a response to God’s unprecedented action in history in Jesus Christ. Newman’s theology is radically incarnational. “All the providences of God centre” in Christ, he wrote in the “*Grammar of Assent*.<sup>33</sup> For Newman, there may be many revelations in the world, but it is only the Christian revelation that comes to us as revelation. It is a revelation of the Triune God.<sup>34</sup>

### 13. Scripture Is Prophetic

Ola states that for Newman all Scripture is prophetic: God is reached through the analogy of the signs which reveal him. The central subject of Scripture is Jesus Christ, the Man-God. So, to learn the Scripture means to understand the text in its deepest and holistic meaning which is the revelation of the Son of God. If faith is the summit to which everything leads and from which everything proceeds anew, faith in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh means that in him we find all grace and holiness. His Humanity is made Holy by the

<sup>32</sup> Cf. T.P. Rausch, “Roman Catholicism since 1800,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, eds. L. Sanneh and M.J. Mcclymond (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2016), 611.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. T. Merrigan, “Revelation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, eds. I. Ker and T. Merrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 55-56.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. G. Mansini, “*Lumen Gentium*,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, eds. M.L. Lamb and M. Levering (New York: Oxford University, 2017), 78.

anointing of the Word, and in it, He is the mediator of our salvation.<sup>35</sup>

The account given in DV 2 focuses on the mystery-bearing realities of salvation history, which the biblical texts present and accurately interpret. The first account functions on a theory of communication and text.<sup>36</sup> In *Dei verbum*, there is continuing emphasis on how revelation is at work in Scripture and Tradition, but there is also a reference to the capacity for recognizing divine intervention in history as well as the relationship between salvific events and their proclamation. *Dei verbum* is not ground-breaking in the sense that it reaffirms the notion that God's revelation to humans is personal; rather, it is decisive in re-establishing that view.<sup>37</sup>

#### 14. Common Elements in Newman and de Lubac

For de Lubac, revelation is primarily the life of the Son of God made human. This gift is a perfect, complete, and inexhaustible self-manifestation of God and his divine plans. The growth or development of doctrine cannot consist in the addition of new content, nor is it the case of a seed growing into maturity. "The case of revealed truth," writes de Lubac, "is unique." There is perfection and inexhaustible fullness at the beginning. The Church's reception of revelation should be in a certain way complete and perfect from the beginning. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the Church expresses and enacts its perfect reception of the deposit of faith in time. Accordingly, her reception of the *depositum fidei* involves a temporal unfolding that finds expression in the development of doctrine.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cf. D.D. Ola, "The Evolution of John Henry Newman's Spirituality," *Logos* 8/1 (2011): 102.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. W.M. Wright IV, "Dei Verbum," in *The Reception of Vatican II*, eds. M.L. Lamb and M. Levering (New York: Oxford University, 2017), 84.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. R. Horner, *The Experience of God: A Phenomenology of Revelation* (New York: Cambridge University, 2022, 80-81.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. N.J. Healy Jr., "Henri de Lubac on the Development of Doctrine," *Communio* 44 (2017): 679-680.

De Lubac agrees with Newman that unfolding of revelation comprises a propositional aspect, meanwhile part of explicating the original gift is to express it in words, certainly, in binding propositions. Indeed, the propositional aspect also corresponds to the form of revelation itself, since Christ is the Word made flesh: God's own eternal, personal self-revelation stepping forth to declare itself once and for all in space and time.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the common elements of Newman and de Lubac on the 'doctrine of divine revelation' are: Jesus Christ is the subject and life of revelation; he is the self-disclosure of God and his divine plan; both negate the new revelation or new content of revelation through development; from the beginning revelation is complete and perfect; the Church's reception of revelation is also complete and perfect from the beginning; and finally, the Church's reception of the *depositum fidei* involves a temporal unfolding that finds expression in the development of doctrine.

## 15. Communication through Words and Deeds

In revealing himself, God makes known truths about his divine will for human beings. Revelation transforms a person and leads him towards divine communion. This emphasizes on revelation as establishing a friendship with God. DV 2 continues by noting that in the economy of revelation, both words and deeds are important, and neither is separable from the other. The communication of revelation involves the communication of truth about the mysteries of realities of faith, but this communication is always bound up with deeds. It highlights that revealed doctrine has to do with mysteries and transcendent realities.<sup>40</sup>

DV 2 concludes by emphasizing that Jesus Christ himself is the fullness of saving truth in Person. Therefore, those who suppose that they can involve revelation only by

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. M. Levering, *An Introduction to Vatican II as an Ongoing Theological Event* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University, 2017), 35-36.

unfolding propositional truths have made an error. Jesus communicates saving truth. This truth is Christ himself. In revelation, we receive, the Person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, revelation establishes a relationship with this Person of Jesus. The truths that God reveals for our salvation are summed up in Jesus Christ, who reveals God to us and invites us to share in his life of wisdom and self-giving love. Of course, this does not mean that we can know the Person, Jesus, in a non-propositional judgment. Furthermore, Jesus' propositional teachings and the Apostles' teachings about him inform and instruct our encounter with Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

Newman is convinced that the Scripture is an inspired and revealed 'Word of God.' He has presented reasons to prove this argument: Scripture is prophetic; God revealed himself through historical events; Jesus Christ (Man-God); the central subject of the Scripture as witnessed in Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col 1:16); Scripture is the self-manifestation of Incarnate Word; from faith in Christ flows grace and holiness because he is the '*Messiah*' and mediator of our salvation.

Newman's idea of 'revelation as impression' refers to the self-communication of God. The self-communication of God happened through historical events and involved both divine and human actions. The climax of self-communication of God is in the person of Jesus Christ but he also includes the final destiny of human beings which is possible only through self-revelation. The Fathers of the Vatican II in DV 2 borrowed Newman's idea and in the 'nature of revelation' they not only remained at intellectual assent level but from there they moved to the personal notion and also elaborated and included the eschatological notion of revelation.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

# CELEBRATING ASIAN INDIGENEITY AND SYNODALITY

## An Introductory Reading

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**Abstract:** The article spans the Asian Forum on *Celebrating Synodality & Indigenous Living Traditions in the Asian Church*, held in November 2024 in Kathmandu, Nepal. The highlights are presented in two parts: (I) Process & Encounter and (II) Emerging Voices, Key Learnings, & Recommendations. Simultaneously, the author develops an Emerging Theological Framework around Indigenous peoples, Synodality, and the Asian Church through the lens of alienation, synodality, inculcation, and discipleship. The article proposes a new approach to synodality within the Church, advocating for greater inclusion and respect for Indigenous cultures and learning from existing synodal practices within Indigenous communities. It offers the Asian church an opportunity to have a deeper inculcation and recovery of her identity as disciples of Jesus and covenant partners with the poor and the indigenous.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Peoples, Alienation, Synodality, Asian Church, Inculcation, Discipleship.*

### Introduction

The Asian Forum on *Celebrating Synodality & Indigenous Living Traditions in the Asian Church* brought together some

45 participants including Indigenous peoples and pastors representing more than 20 Asian tribes. There were young people, women, men, sisters, priests, and bishops from 13 countries of Asia, creating a vibrant atmosphere of unity and celebration as one family in Kathmandu, Nepal from 10 – 16 November 2024. Witnessing the richness and diversity of Indigenous cultures and traditions through their sharing, exhibit of cultural materials, morning rituals, and presence was an enriching and educative experience, converting hearts and minds.

The journey began in October 2023 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, when a small group of persons and organizations came together to share and discern the way forward for the Indigenous peoples, Synodality, and the Asian Church. Initially, called the *Circle of Sacred Rice*, the voluntary group has now adopted the name, *ROOTS – Catholic Network among Indigenous Peoples of Asia*. They have launched some activities namely training of leaders to pass on Indigenous wisdom, Communications skills for the young indigenous, feature articles on persons and initiatives engaged with the Indigenous peoples across Asia. This forum is more popularly known as the Nepal Forum.

The objectives of the Forum are summarized as follows:

- (i) Celebrate the face of Jesus in the Indigenous Peoples of Asia;
- (ii) Create a platform for dialogue and discernment among the various living traditions of Asia;
- (iii) Learn from ongoing approaches and models of the FABC's triple dialogue-inculturation across Asia;
- (iv) Support the church in Asia to walk with the Indigenous peoples in understanding and responding to the challenges

The intended outcome of the Forum is to “Foster an Asian synodal church that welcomes, respects, cares and creatively integrates the Indigenous peoples and the richness of their living traditions and cultural diversity in Asia...”

The strong endorsement from the Vatican dicasteries for Integral Human Development, Education and Cultures,<sup>1</sup> the Nuncio of India and Nepal,<sup>2</sup> and participating bishops, with their shared affirmative messages, was a pleasant surprise and was edifying to the spirit. As one Indigenous woman aptly said, “The cosmos is aligning with us.” The Forum touched on a deeply felt need in the Asian psyche and local churches of Asia—and flowed with the openness created by Pope Francis universally through his exhortations in *Laudato Si* and *Querida Amazonia* related to the 2019 Pan Amazonian Synod in Rome.

### Part I: Process and Encounter

The Forum captured the local churches and Indigenous communities’ theological and pastoral concerns and hopes. As one archbishop said, “A thousand hearing is not valuable, one’s seeing is valuable. Through this [Forum], I experienced this very much, a real indigenous spirituality.” In their evaluation reports, all the participants committed themselves to continuing or renewing their efforts with the Indigenous peoples in their churches and encouraged the organizers to “continue building this initiative and develop the nexus of Indigenous Peoples” in Asia. “It is important to follow through with the needed research and study,” said another.

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Culture and Education, highlighted the importance of synodality and the integration of Indigenous knowledge in the Church’s approach to environmental and social issues. He called on the Church to approach intercultural dialogues with a spirit of “receptive learning.” Peter Monthienvichienchai, “Bishop Tighe calls on Church to embrace Indigenous perspectives and synodality,” *Vatican News*, 13 November 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-11/bishop-paul-tighe-asian-synodality-indigenous-forum.html> (accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Monthienvichienchai, “Apostolic Nuncio urges recognition of Indigenous traditions in Synodal living,” *Vatican News*, 15 November 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-11/leopoldo-girelli-nunio-nepal-asian-church-synodality.html> (accessed on 07.01.2025).

Building a network among the participants, the local churches, and persons engaged in Indigenous ministries in Asia was endorsed by all—with the felt need for accompaniment at various levels: (i) to accompany the *participants* as they share the learning from the Forum on the ground or community level, (ii) to accompany the *priests* so they can speak on the need for Indigenous ministeriality, (iii) to accompany the *bishops* to help them communicate with their fellow bishops on the pastoral care and preferential options needed in this area, and (iv) most of all, to continue to accompany the *Indigenous Peoples of Asia* in their struggle for a fuller life as a synodal church.

## 1. Synodal Methodology in Practice

The forum employed a Synodal methodology, characterized by the inclusivity of various inputs and voices and shared discernment. This approach was guided with clarity and conviction. A team of priests and laity had jointly worked to systematically develop the contents and process. The program schedule, summary of presentations, and the notes on the *Conversations in the Spirit*. The information presented in the Handbook was valuable. The online preparatory meetings and regular communications also prepared the participants well.

The meticulous planning and execution of the Forum proceedings were greatly appreciated. The meals and accommodation were excellent, with no complaints recorded. The hospitality, responsiveness, and gentleness of the hosts, i.e., the local church and Caritas Nepal were heart-warming. The overall execution of the Forum was highly appreciated by all, even if there were minor shortcomings.

## 2. ‘Conversation in the Spirit’: A Transformative High-point

The practice of ‘Conversation in the Spirit’ at the end of each day stood out as the highlight of the Forum. This approach created a safe space for participants to share thoughts and

questions freely, without fear of opposition or judgment, fostering meaningful dialogue in small groups.

It was surprising to note that for the majority of participants, this was an important discovery and methodology of listening and discerning in the Spirit. Young people, women, priests, and bishops felt comfortable sharing and listening reciprocally with full respect. This was followed by the Eucharistic celebration which concluded the day with thanksgiving, dinner, and viewing of short movies made by the young indigenous.

Two moving moments for the young indigenous were the prize given to the winners of the “*Namancura Young Indigenous Film Festival*” organized earlier by the Don Bosco Technical School in Kep, Cambodia – part of the *ROOTS* network; and the reading out of the declaration of the Young Indigenous Peoples crafted by them earlier in March 2024 at a workshop on *Communication Skills for Young Indigenous Peoples of Asia*. The latter was sent to the Synod Secretariat, Rome, and was graciously acknowledged by them.

### **3. Indigenous Christians Are Central, Not Peripheral**

The most widely recognized and comprehensive definition of Indigenous peoples comes from the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). According to UNPFII, Indigenous peoples are characterized by: (i) Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-invasion societies; (ii) Strong cultural and social ties to traditional lands, resources, and ecosystems; (iii) Distinct social, economic, and political systems, often marginalized by mainstream governance; (iv) Self-identification as indigenous peoples and recognition by their communities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html> (accessed on 07.01.2025).

The terms “tribal,” “Aboriginal,” and “Indigenous” possess unique definitions, although they are occasionally used interchangeably. The primary distinction lies in the breadth of their application: “Indigenous”<sup>4</sup> serves as a global descriptor, “tribal”<sup>5</sup> pertains to more localized groups, and “Aboriginal”<sup>6</sup> is often specific to certain regions. In practice, “Indigenous” is frequently employed in international discussions, including legal contexts. Conversely, “tribal” is typically found in anthropological and regional analyses, while “Aboriginal” is predominantly utilized in nations such as Australia, Canada, and parts of Malaysia. The implications of “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” highlight the concept of original inhabitancy, whereas “tribal” emphasizes social structures. Recognizing these differences is essential for fostering respectful and precise communication, particularly in matters related to rights, representation, and cultural acknowledgment. In India, the designation “Scheduled Tribes” (ST) was established for administrative reasons, providing legal protections and broadly encompassing tribes, Adivasis,<sup>7</sup> and/or Indigenous peoples. At the Forum, and in this article, the term Indigenous is used in a global and inclusive sense.

The Forum highlighted the fact that the majority of Christians worldwide and in Asia are indigenous, making

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>; International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169: <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/indigenous-and-tribal-peoples>(both documents were accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India (Definition of Tribal), <https://tribal.nic.in/>; The World Bank on Tribal Peoples, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples> (both documents were accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>6</sup> Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), <https://aiatsis.gov.au/>; Government of Canada on Aboriginal Peoples, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/> (both documents were accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>7</sup> National Adivasi Congress, <https://www.tribal.nic.in/>; Forest Rights Act, 2006 – India, <https://www.tribal.nic.in/Content/ForestRightsAct.aspx> (both documents were accessed on 07.01.2025).

up about two-thirds of Christians in Asia.<sup>8</sup> This statistic is striking and startling. It is imperative to recognize that Indigenous peoples are not on the periphery—they *are* the Church. While Indigenous peoples form only 5% of the world’s population, they account for 80% of the world’s cultural diversity. This widely accepted statistic is grounded in reports from UNESCO, the World Bank, and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Indigenous peoples constitute about 476 million individuals globally, or 5% of the population, yet represent over 6,000 distinct cultures and languages, accounting for 80% of the world’s cultural diversity.<sup>9</sup> In addition, environmentalists say they may occupy only 20% of the world’s land surface, but they nurture 80% of the earth’s remaining biodiversity,<sup>10</sup> which is under the communal care or guardianship of Indigenous peoples. Their role in environmental conservation and communal resilience is paramount as their traditional ecological knowledge ensures sustainable guardianship of biodiversity-rich areas.

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<sup>8</sup> The claim that Indigenous peoples make up a significant proportion of Christians in Asia stems from demographic interpretations and missiological studies. While exact numbers vary, the World Christian Database estimates over 70% of Christians in Asia belong to marginalized or Indigenous communities, often concentrated in South and Southeast Asia. Many Asian Christians retain their Indigenous heritage, evident in contextualized theologies and practices that bridge faith and culture. For further exploration, cf. Peter C. Phan (ed.), *Christianities in Asia* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). This comprehensive volume explores the history, development, and current state of Christianity across Asia, offering detailed insights into the diverse expressions of Christian faith throughout the continent. Cf. World Christian Database, <https://worldchristiandatabase.org> (accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. UNESCO: Cultural Diversity and Indigenous Peoples, <https://www.unesco.org>; and World Bank: Indigenous Peoples Overview: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples> (both documents were accessed on 07.01.2025). Some of these data were also presented by different speakers in their overview.

<sup>10</sup> This data is frequently cited in reports by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Cf. FAO: Indigenous Peoples: Custodians of Biodiversity: <https://www.fao.org>; IUCN: Indigenous Peoples and Nature Conservation: <https://www.iucn.org> (both websites were accessed on 07.01.2025).

#### **4. Catholic Faith and Indigenous Peoples – Harmony or Alienation?**

Despite the facts cited above, the face of the church both in Asia and globally remains very Western and reflects the more dominant groups in the respective countries and churches. Most Asians see the church as a Western entity. A young Indigenous woman from Nepal shared that Nepalese people consider Christians a Western church, where very little or no Indigenous traditions are incorporated into the church practices or rituals. She said, “Christians are not even considered as Nepali. We need to work towards removing this misconception and be accepted as Nepalese.”

A Korean professor of religions intoned, that despite the Indigenous origins of the church in Korea, it is underrepresented and the shamanistic roots and historical martyrs' contributions are overlooked. In Timor-Leste, a young Salesian priest said people experience alienation from the church due to a perceived loss of its cultural identity and urbanization.

The Forum honoured the contributions of Catholic missionaries to the culture, language, and education of Indigenous peoples. Thanks to them, these communities have educated their sons and daughters in mainstream knowledge and found access to modern professions. However, it also acknowledged that in the processes of mission and education, much of the Indigenous knowledge and cultures were looked down upon and alienated—as part of being mainstreamed and becoming Christians. The church fails to integrate proportionate Indigenous participation in its faith expressions, its leadership, structures of governance, and decision-making.

Alongside this, national development policies fail to sufficiently protect and provide for the role of the indigenous as guardians of the local forest domains, oceans, and territories in their ancestral domains or homeland. Indigenous populations are increasingly being assimilated or subjected to forced acculturation by the dominant society,

whether through direct colonization or contemporary market capitalism and political frameworks. Current socio-economic challenges are distancing these communities from their spiritual and cultural foundations. Urbanization has led to a disconnection from Indigenous customs and traditions. The existing socio-economic structures in many Asian countries compel these groups to abandon their ancestral lands, coercing them to align with local political entities and submit to the demands of free market capitalism—which means cheap unskilled labour with little rights. The experience of alienation is a concrete reality that the indigenous encounter daily. Despite variations in historical and contextual backgrounds, Indigenous peoples experience analogous forms of oppression, being alienated from their land, deprived economically, excluded politically, stigmatized socially, colonized culturally, and looked down upon religiously.<sup>11</sup>

The long history of colonization and missionary ventures from various mainstream religions have left them with a deeply ingrained sense of inferiority and debasement. Even in religious practices among Christian tribal communities in North-East India, the tendency is to identify with Jesus of the missionaries and not Jesus of their land—their culture, tradition, and social reality. As an Indigenous Baptist theologian narrates, it is as if the image of Jesus needs to be “fully re-incarnated as [an indigenous] among [indigenous] and dwelt among us; so that we [indigenous] will see his glory as the only Son from the Father (cf. Jn 1:14). He goes on to describe Indigenous peoples’ common perception of Jesus as follows: “He still remains an American...we worship a distant, otherworldly Jesus...or we adore him in *mysterium tremendum...*”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wati Longchar, “Liberation or Assimilation: An Indigenous Perspective,” *Journal of Tribal Studies* 24/1-2 (2019), 1-19.

<sup>12</sup> Renty Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message* (Guwahati: CLC, 1995), 18, 25. As quoted in Yangkahao Vashum, *Faith Seeking Transformation*:

Indigenous peoples need to reclaim their identity as being made in the likeness and image of God. But for the indigenous around the world, their identity is linked to the land or ancestral domain. Indigenous theologians use the concept of land and space which affirms the integrity of the whole creation and takes this as the starting point or *locus standi* for their life and theologizing. This differs from Western or classical Christian theology, which is heavily influenced by Western philosophies and is anthropic or human-centred. The Baptist theologian Yangkahao Vashum asserts, land and space together with the incarnational faith of the Church must be taken as the starting point of Indigenous theology.<sup>13</sup> Land to the indigenous is a pure gift of the Creator God, and because it is a gift it is sacred. To them, the land is the only temple of God, the place where the Creator, spirits, ancestors, and living beings are united as one family.<sup>14</sup> Land stands for freedom and identity—they have a filial relation with the land and creation, as mother Earth and children—no land means no freedom and identity.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the indigenous' claims for land rights against corporations and state authorities who encroach and desecrate their lands and ancestral domains are also claims for human rights, the intrinsic rights of all creation, and the wholeness of life.

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*Rethinking Faith, Theology and Mission in North East India*, (Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2020), 15-18. Both Baptist theologians call for the indigenization of the gospel and Christian theology, and re-incarnation of Jesus as an indigenous.

<sup>13</sup> Vashum, *Faith Seeking Transformation*, 17-18.

<sup>14</sup> Wati Longchar, *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education: An Indigenous Perspective*. PTCA Series no. 4 (Tainan: PTCA, 2012), 29 as cited in Vashum, *Faith Seeking Transformation*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller understanding of land and identity among the Indigenous peoples, and in the Old Testament, cf. Vashum, *Faith Seeking Transformation, chapter 5. Theology of Land. A Naga tribal-Indigenous Perspective, & chapter 6. Space, Creation, and Land. An Indigenous-Tribal Eco-Theology of the North East India*. Note: the study focuses on the Naga people from North-East India.

## 5. How Ancestral Wisdom can Reshape Our Thinking?

Despite the daily challenges to existence and the minority status they face, the Asian church recognizes in the Indigenous peoples a significant resource and contribution they can make to our modern societies. At their plenary assembly, the Asian bishops affirmed,

Close to nature, they retain the values of a cosmic view of life, a casteless sharing, and a democratic society. They have preserved their simplicity and hospitality. Their values and cultures can offer a corrective to the culture of the dominant communities, to the emerging materialistic and consumeristic ethos of our modern societies.<sup>16</sup>

The Church is cognizant that their emphasis on community, social cohesiveness, care for Creation, and a non-accumulative lifestyle, are all values that align closely with her teachings on social justice and common good. But how is this to be put in place? And are there some models and places in Asia to turn to?

This requires a paradigm shift from seeing the indigenous as ignorant, backward, and in need of handouts – to seeing them as active agents of their development, capable ministers of their communities, and sources of local wisdom and synodal governance. Identifying and animating Indigenous faith communities within some parishes and dioceses in Asia can help to bring out the narrative or ‘story-telling’ of Indigenous peoples’ practices, especially concerning development and environmental challenges and how they seek to move towards community-defined self-reliant development.

The Rice-Merit Network solidarity in northern Thailand is an indigenous example. It highlights how reconnecting

<sup>16</sup> Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service: The Final Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences,” Samphran, Thailand, January 3-12, 2000. This is available at <https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-93.pdf> (accessed on 07.01.2025).

with ancestral wisdom could reshape and save our world.<sup>17</sup> In response to the massive drought in the North-East of Thailand in the 70's, the Karen leadership working with the Diocese Social Action Centers (DISAC) and the Research and Training Center for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC) galvanized the Indigenous communities to cultivate a sustainable, rice-based local economy, grounded in their identity and cultural values. This has grown to numerous village communities. It offers a way to balance economic and spiritual well-being.<sup>18</sup>

There are several stories of resilience of Indigenous women from rural provinces who had to transition from agrarian life to urban factories and their exploitation into the sex trade. These stories highlight the underbelly of Asia's

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<sup>17</sup> Niphon Thianwihan is a Catholic priest from the Diocese of Chiang Mai, who has devoted over half a century to supporting Indigenous communities re-appreciate and integrate their ancestral wisdom and has been instrumental in promoting the Rice Merit Network with his co-workers. The "Rice Merit-Making" initiative bridges Karen traditions with Buddhist and Christian teachings. For example, it draws from Buddhist "Pha Pa" charity practices and Christian Lenten values of sacrifice and sharing. This fusion reinforces the cultural and spiritual foundation of the network, making it inclusive and adaptable. In many parts of Asia, rice serves as a source of nourishment and an integral aspect of cultural identity and communal values. This significance is particularly pronounced among Indigenous populations. In these communities, rice goes beyond its basic function as food; it embodies spirituality, and tradition, acts as a cohesive element for the group, and even a symbol of resistance and resilience. They conduct ceremonies to pay tribute to the "spirit of rice" before each harvest, demonstrating appreciation for nature and recognizing rice as a revered gift that supports life. Cf. Albeiro Rodas Inca Moyachoque, "How reconnecting with ancestral wisdom could reshape and save our world," *LiCAS News*, 10 June 2024, <https://mybrotherthetree.licas.news/2024/06/how-reconnecting-with-ancestral-wisdom-could-reshape-and-save-our-world/> (accessed on 10.01.2025).

<sup>18</sup> Niphon has crafted an Asian theology centered around rice, embodying the paschal mystery of Christ. This theology illustrates the intricate cycles of life and nature. The demise of each rice grain, which dies three times, symbolizes not an end, but rather the dawn of new possibilities for various forms of life. Cf. Original Thai Text by Kamoltip Vongleethanaporn, transl. by June Nattha Nuchsuwan, "RICE | The Soul of Life and Community," *LiCAS News*, 03 Jan 2025, <https://spotlight.licas.news/rice-the-soul-of-life-and-community/> (accessed on 10.01.2025).

rapid industrialization policies and the consumer-driven economy. The shift towards a monetized economy dismantled traditional or Indigenous self-sufficient communities, fostering dependence on an exploitative system and eroding cultural pride. Using grains of rice which symbolizes life, and coins which symbolizes exploitation, these women fought to reclaim their dignity and find new ways to live.<sup>19</sup>

The Pulangiyen community in Bendum, South Philippines, has progressively acquired water system security in its ancestral domain. When the Indigenous community first began to try and recover the water source, there was no life—the land was barren after being over-logged and the soil severely depleted. What is significant is the awareness that assisting forest regeneration is highly linked to the value the community puts into strengthening its culture.<sup>20</sup> The young become engaged in this regeneration of their ecosystem. Faith-based organizations also help Indigenous leaders tackle challenges and preserve their way of life by drawing on their religio-cultural wisdom.

*Indigenous spirituality and governance* are based on an internalized spirituality regulating all life aspects. Contrary to popular ignorance, the Indigenous peoples have developed and practiced more consultative, and what we call today, synodal practices in governance across different countries and regions. Colin Nicholas of the Center for

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kamoltip Vongleethanaporn, “Back to the Future | ‘Nine Grains of Rice’,” transl. June Nattha Nuchsuwan, *LiCAS News*, 10 Jan 2025, <https://spotlight.licas.news/back-to-the-future-nine-grains-of-rice/> (accessed on 20.01.2025).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Mark Saludes, “Water Over Troubled Forests,” *LiCAS News*, 30 Sept 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2024-09/jesuits-philippines-logging-forest-protection-part-1.html>. Cf. also Lucy Linantad, Rufino Sagula, Eric Bruno, Pedro Walpole, “Assisting Forests: The Pulangiyen Approach in Bendum (2010),” *Apu Palamguwan Cultural Educational Centre*, <https://apupalamguwancenter.essc.org.ph/?p=246>; “APC youth reflect on biodiversity, ecosystems, and the interconnectedness of all life,” <https://apupalamguwancenter.essc.org.ph/?p=3779>; “Bendum Youth regenerate Forests (2009),” <https://apupalamguwancenter.essc.org.ph/?p=668> (all documents accessed on 07.01.2025).

Orang Asli Concerns writes, “Indigenous spirituality is location and people specific...it varies from community to community and environment to environment ... Indigenous spirituality brings the social, ecological, and spiritual contexts into alignment in a way that distinguishes, but does not separate, human communities, the natural world, and the realm of the spirit powers.” The indigenous worldview affirms the wholeness of life, the integrity of all creation, and the sacredness of life—the interrelatedness of all creation. They do not suffer dualism—the polarization of secular and sacred.<sup>21</sup> The overriding aspiration of this spirituality is “to ensure continuity and harmony—continuity as a viable people, and harmony between humans and humans, and between humans and Nature.”<sup>22</sup> But influenced by the Western Christian worldview, Indigenous Christians begin to compartmentalize their Christian lives too.<sup>23</sup>

Traditional Indigenous spirituality, spiritually-inspired Indigenous leadership and governance, and their knowledge and management system of the environment can all offer viable alternatives to modern development issues. Even the initiatives aimed at addressing climate crises and environmental issues will lack sustainability “unless the knowledge of Indigenous peoples is integrated into every sensory domain of the landscape, with which they have been intimately acquainted for generations,”<sup>24</sup> as they engage with natural processes deemed ‘God-given.’ The ground experiences of ecclesial networks like RAOEN (River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network) and Caritas affirm this. Their work has also opened the space for dialogue with faiths and cultures.

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<sup>21</sup> Vashum, *Faith Seeking Transformation*, 6-8.

<sup>22</sup> Colin Nicholas, *Looking Back and Looking Forward: Orang Asli Self-Governance and Democracy*, AIPP Series on Indigenous Self Governance and Democracy (Malaysia: Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), Thailand & Center for Orang Asli Concerns (COAC), 2021), 59-72.

<sup>23</sup> Vashum, *Faith Seeking Transformation*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Pedro Walpole, head of RAOEN ecclesial network in his interventions at the Nepal Forum.

***Religio-cultural wisdom of the people.*** The community-based work of DISAC and RTRC in the North-East of Thailand, helped them discover the ‘local people’s wisdom’ and the ‘wise persons’ or organic intellectuals in these communities who embody the knowledge and wisdom. There is “a deep sense of ‘theology’ and ‘spirituality’ embedded in the traditions and local wisdom of the people.” Realizing the wholeness and interconnectedness between people, nature, and Supreme Being (God), the vision-mission of DISAC was formulated as, “*Aware of the Kingdom values and the power of redemption in the history of humankind as reflected in the religio-cultural approach.. of the people...*”<sup>25</sup> The statement strongly highlights that the power of redemption is at work in the history of all peoples. Since then, the axiom, “The history of the people is not empty” has become the *leitmotif* of RTRC in its work with Indigenous peoples.<sup>26</sup> It encapsulates the shift that occurred at the Vatican II Council, from a euro-centric banking model of faith and development to the recovery of the religio-cultural wisdom of the people, pregnant with hope.<sup>27</sup>

The mission of the church is to foster *koinonia* or a life of communion among all people. The 50 years of FABC’s *triple-dialogue* in Asia have seen pioneer men and women

<sup>25</sup> RTRC, *Historical Documentation: Diocese Social Action Center (DISAC) and the Research and Training Center for Religio-Cultural Communities (RTRC)* (Chiang Mai, 2019), 34-37. Cf. also Shinichi Shigetomi, *Development and Institutionalization of Communitarian Thought in Thailand*, Institute of Developing Economics (IDE), Discussion Paper 423, July 2013. The study affirms that community culture manifests local wisdom and legitimizes the rights of local people. It became an ideology of social movement which pushed the state sector in Thailand to realize that communities were the actual elements making up the state governance. This assured deliberative citizen participation in public decision-making and fuelled the social reformation movement (p. 30).

<sup>26</sup> It is a favourite phrase of Niphot Thienvihan, one of the founders of RTRC.

<sup>27</sup> The differences between a Rice Bank and Rice Merit are: economic reasons vs belief & culture of community, ‘problem’ based vs virtue of mutual aid, external or foreign donors vs mobilizing community resources, direct transaction (loan & interest) vs diverse options and networking.

opening new pathways of mission by walking together with their people toward the Kingdom of God. Dialogue has taken many forms by appreciating the smallest contributions of the poor, preserving local traditions and integrating them into faith-based practices, and building inclusive communities through shared values. Seen from this perspective, synodality is not a new phenomenon in Asia—it has been the *modus operandi* of the sons and daughters of the church working with the margins—at the geographical and pastoral mission frontiers. They have been the faces of social friendship and human fraternity that drew these people to Christ.

## 6. Opening Pathways of Reconciliation

A point repeatedly touched upon by various persons, clergy, religious, and laity, was the strong tension acutely felt and silently lived out within the souls of many Indigenous faithful in Asia—clergy, religious, and laity alike—on being Christian and being Indigenous. It was likened to an inner alienation or disharmony. This came up in the spiritual conversation groups. The desire to open pathways of reconciliation within oneself and between faith and culture, as it touches the Asian indigenous psyche and soul, was also expressed.

Local rituals offer the space to deepen inculturation. How does one connect the landscape of Jesus with the rituals of Indigenous peoples and the doctrines of the Catholic Church? How do we reach out to other traditions and values? So much of the mutuality between the people and their participation is lost in the rigidity of Church structures and rituals. This also affects the loss of meaning of liturgical symbols and colours. Liturgy has a significant role to play. Local churches can bring to the fore what lies dormant and obscure in the background of peoples' lives and cultures, especially guided by the wisdom of *Desiderio Desideravi (With Desire I Desired)*.<sup>28</sup> There is a close link between the

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter Desiderio Desideravi, on the Liturgical Formation of the People of God*, 29 June 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/>

Eucharistic assembly and synodal assembly, as both are gathered around the Word of God. The final Synod document affirms “Deepening the link between liturgy and synodality will help all Christian communities, in the diversity of their cultures and traditions, to adopt celebratory styles that make visible the face of a synodal Church.”<sup>29</sup>

Liturgical synodality would mean creating a more inclusive and culturally relevant worship experience, fostering a deeper connection between the Gospel and the lived realities of Indigenous communities, supporting reconciliation, and empowering Indigenous voices.<sup>30</sup>

This underscores the necessity for:

i) *Indigenous Hermeneutics and Theology*: Insights are derived from Indigenous traditions alongside the Old Testament, which also mirrors Indigenous and tribal experiences.

ii) *Oneness and Rootedness*: Investigating Indigenous spirituality through creation narratives, ancestral beliefs, and rituals of healing and gratitude.

iii) *Synodal Communications*: Embracing Indigenous media and cultural expressions within liturgical practices, faith formation, and theological studies.<sup>31</sup>

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content/francesco/en/apost\_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html (accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*, Final Document, 20 Nov 2024, [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf); Jonathan Yun-Ka Tan, *Towards Asian Liturgical Inculturation*, Dec 1999, <https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-89.pdf>. The paper also emphasizes the need for inculturation of the Liturgy. (Both documents were accessed on 07.01.2025).

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Lepecha, in his paper *Celebrating Liturgical Synodality through Inculturation of Indigenous People: Asian Perspectives*, underscored this point at the Nepal Forum.

<sup>31</sup> Vincent B Wilson in his paper on *Indigenous People's Media for an Effective Pastoral Ministry* pointed out that tribal and folk art forms and cultural expressions hold immense potential for enriching pastoral ministry in Asia. He also proposed units to study and promote inculturation and faith formation at the FABC and Bishops' Conferences. This was complemented by Jojo M Fung's call

iv) *Transmission of Religio-Cultural Wisdom*: The church can validate the preservation and advancement of Indigenous wisdom in areas such as governance, leadership, ecology, agriculture, and health within local communities.

v) *Inculcated Liturgies*: The essential examination of local and Indigenous cultures, traditions, and values to incorporate these aspects into liturgical observances.

## 7. Thematic Study Groups

Four thematic Study Groups were created to deepen the reflection on particular aspects that emerged in the discussions. The point of reference was the objectives and intended outcomes of the Forum. The thematic groups constitute a whole with aspects that affect the existence and ministeriality of Indigenous peoples within a synodal church. The four groups are: (i) Ethnic Identity, Land, Forests, Water, Climate, Sustainable Development, Governance; (ii) Culture, Religion, Language, Communications; (iii) Scripture, Theology, Pastoral Liturgical Matters, and Synodality; (iv) Women, Youth, and Laity among the Indigenous Peoples

The groups will continue to meet online to deepen their study and submit their reflections on how to move forward on issues the assembly and larger Asian church must focus on. The Organizing Committee hoped to compile and submit the findings to the FABC Central Working Committee by March 2025. All members of the Study groups are volunteers—as the entire Forum was organized voluntarily.

**To be continued...**

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to develop contextual and transdisciplinary theologizing, especially considering the young, women and people.

## **IS ISLAM IN THE PLAN OF GOD?**

**Dr. Joseph Victor EDWIN SJ**

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**Abstract:** Christians have approached Islam in various ways, as noted by Bernhard J. G. Reitsma. The first approach, known as the antithetical perspective, outright dismisses Islam as a 'false' religion. This viewpoint focuses heavily on differences, particularly its rejection of Jesus' divinity, which limits any constructive engagement with Muslims. The second approach, described as synthetic, takes a more inclusive stance, seeking to highlight similarities between the two faiths while still recognizing their differences. The third approach, termed Christocentric, centers on God's revelation in Jesus. Although it shares similarities with the antithetical view, it also acknowledges God's presence in other religions, aligning with the synthetic perspective. In my discussions with dedicated Christians, I've observed all three approaches in action. When Christians engage in collaborative efforts with Muslims and ground their interactions in the principles of both faiths, they often find themselves challenged to explore how Islam can deepen their own beliefs.

**Keywords:** Christian-Muslim Relations, Islam, Gud Hus, Immigrants, Dialogue, Personal Vocation.

## 1. Two Conversations

I got engaged in a conversation about interreligious dialogue with a Jesuit companion. He asked me about its significance, especially considering the Church's clear teaching that we are called to spread the faith to all nations. He cited the scripture, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9).

I realized that Christianity holds deep theological importance for him because he believes God chose to reveal himself to humanity through Christ, offering faith as a precious gift. Christian believers cherish and uphold this truth within the Church. In his view, however, other religions lack intrinsic theological value, as they do not present any divine revelation from God. Therefore, the idea of interreligious dialogue or a theology of religions seems a misnomer within his theological perspective.

In our open conversation, I expressed my perspective by drawing on my experiences with individuals and groups from various faith traditions in India. I explained that since God gives life to everyone (cf. Acts 17:25-28) and desires the salvation of all (cf. 1 Tim 2:4), those who may not yet be aware of Christ and the Church but are genuinely devoted to their faith and sincerely seek God can, with divine grace, strive to fulfil God's will as guided by their conscience. In doing so, they can ultimately achieve salvation.

In our discussion, we delved into the 'how' of this affirmation. I emphasized that when an individual surrenders their will to God's will, this surrender paves the way for salvation. This surrender creates a connection to supernatural faith and charity, both of which are essential for salvation. I highlighted the insights of St. Augustine, who posits that every person must make a fundamental choice about whether to belong to the divine city, grounded in the love of God—even at the expense of self—or to an earthly city, which is

based on self-love and contempt for God. This decision of loving God and surrendering one's will to the will of God inherently involves an implicit act of faith and charity. Such a profound commitment represents a movement toward Christ and the Church, ultimately leading to salvation. This understanding of salvation, tied to such a commitment, does not exist in isolation from Christ; rather, it forges invisible bonds that connect Christ with all men and women.

We further explored the significant role of religion in shaping the fundamental options available to individuals. Do religious beliefs influence a person's choices? To put it another way, have various religious traditions and rituals impacted people's fundamental decisions? Reflecting on Hans Küng's perspective, the answer is a resounding "Yes." While humanity grapples with the bondage of sin, they are never forsaken by God's grace; instead, they are continually led by it.

Religions are not separate from human experience; they are historical constructs born from the struggles of people navigating a world filled with both sin and grace. It follows that these religions often embody truths that originate from God, who has never abandoned humanity. However, these same truths can also be distorted or misrepresented by humans. If individuals allow themselves to be swayed by the errors and sins within these religious traditions, they may drift away from a true commitment to God. Conversely, if they allow themselves to be inspired by the genuine truths that lie within their faith, they can draw closer to the divine. Ultimately it is God who saves, not religions.

I summarized our conversation by saying that God can work through the sacred traditions of Hinduism and Islam to nurture an attitude of faith and love among Hindus and Muslims alike. This journey towards a fundamental choice—loving God and being devoted to our neighbours—represents the true path to salvation.

Living in India, I observed that both Hindus and Muslims demonstrate a sincere surrender to God. For them, God is not merely an impersonal fate but a real and living presence in their lives. He responded rather brusquely that what God has done in Christ is a revelation, meanwhile, all else is speculation. Our conversation ended without both of us drawing fruits from one another's experiences.

The following day, I was in Fisksätra, a small township close to Stockholm, home to around 8,000 inhabitants from 80 different countries, which shows how diverse Swedish society is today. I was invited to speak to a Christian-Muslim audience on interfaith dialogue from an Indian-Christian Perspective. Just before my talk, I had an opportunity to visit the Swedish Church, where I had pleasant meetings with a few people.

Susana Walther is one among them. She, a Slovakian immigrant who moved to Sweden during her youth, now a social worker with Gud Hus, shared with me how she has found her Christian roots in a multi-religious context. She said the Gud Hus (God's House) represents a pioneering partnership between Christian and Muslim communities in the Stockholm suburb of Fisksätra. Their collective objective is to establish an interfaith community centre that will feature both a church and a mosque, interconnected by a transparent central atrium. This initiative fosters a constructive environment for gatherings, activities, and various opportunities. She added that through the encouragement of collaboration across diverse religious and cultural landscapes, God's House aspires to illuminate a path toward a hopeful and harmonious future. By honouring our differences while also emphasizing our common values, we celebrate the humanity in one another, recognizing each individual as a brother or sister, she said.

Further, she said that after spending several years in Sweden, she began to feel increasingly disconnected from the country's secular orientation. We should keep in mind

that European secularism operates as a belief system that dismisses religion. It promotes the idea that religion should not intersect with governmental matters and advocates for a clear division between religious beliefs and civic affairs.

However, like many others, she is now embarking on a journey to reconnect with her Christian heritage within this diverse cultural context, observing that the presence of Muslims has notably influenced this spiritual awakening. Susana is actively involved in church initiatives designed to assist immigrants.

The two individuals present contrasting perspectives on religion and interreligious dialogue. The Jesuit holds a strict theological stance that leaves no room for engagement with other faiths, leading him to view other religions solely in a negative light. In contrast, Susana sees the potential for greater collaboration among women from various religious backgrounds. She believes that diverse faiths should not be seen as something to dominate or subjugate, but rather be approached as a Christian pilgrim, willing to journey alongside others.

While the first conversation with the Jesuit found an abrupt end, the conversation with Susana led me to ponder: does Islam serve as a catalyst for Christians to embrace their identity as authentic disciples of Christ? What role might Islam play in the contemporary mission of Christians?

## 2. Faith Reflections

The foundation of our faith is rooted in God, who has revealed himself to us through Christ. Christians cherish the fellowship established with God and each other, made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ. These central events mark a profound transformation in human destiny, inviting us to reflect on the divine mystery while also recognizing the mystery of the human person. The Risen Lord actively participates in history through the Holy Spirit, continually unveiling the Father's love and guiding us toward the reign of God.

This fellowship we extend with people of other faiths in dialogue, since the “Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself” (cf. *Nostra Aetate*). Further *Lumen Gentium* reminds every Catholic that the Church, in Christ, is a sign of communion with God and unity among all human beings. Furthermore, the Church as the sacrament of Christ makes Christ present amidst all people, and dialogue, understood correctly as part of the Church’s evangelizing mission, plays a vital role in sharing this message with people of diverse faith traditions in *expressions* that they will understand and appreciate. As a community, the Church discovers God in Christ, remains united with the Father, and stands as a voice for total liberation for all people.

### **3. Role of Islam in the Lives of the Ones Sent among Muslims**

In God’s mysterious and providential plan, Islam possesses a salvific and liberating orientation. The authentic beliefs and practices of Muslims are seen as a divine blessing, constituting the basis for human communion and action. The five pillars of faith—the declaration of faith, the five daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, giving zakat, and undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca—are not just routine rituals; they are profound acts through which believers intentionally open themselves to God, who communicates with them via his words and the teachings of the Prophet. Muslims hold the view that by actively engaging in their faith, they can shape their lives in accordance with God’s will.

The remarkable dynamism of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, is undeniable. He transformed tribes that once worshipped pagan idols into believers in one God. It can be said that through the Holy Quran and the example set by Muhammad, countless true worshippers have been raised. The Church teaches that salvation is a gift from God available to all through Christ. By engaging with Muslims, we gain a deeper understanding of the fullness of Christ’s redemptive work.

J.M. Gaudeul, a well-known Catholic scholar on Islam has noted that the Church, in its mission to the people of other faiths, must imitate Christ: in the hidden life of Nazareth, in the public life of preaching and healing, and his death on the Cross as a priest and victim. He writes, “Strangely enough, this message has reached the Church through people who had first an experience of mission life and inter-religious dialogue with Islam.”

We should take a moment to reflect on the role of Islam in the lives of both men and women who share their journeys with Muslims as Christian co-pilgrims. As Susana observed, her interactions with Muslim women—sharing in their joys and sorrows—have actually deepened her own Christian faith. This experience has enriched her spiritual journey, illustrating how being a Christian amidst Muslims can foster a mutually beneficial exchange of beliefs and perspectives.

### **Conclusion: Personal Note**

During my formation years, I discerned the will of God in my life, as a Jesuit. My spiritual directors taught me that discernment is not an exercise independent of ‘common sense’ but a search in the light of the Spirit of the Lord. It is pondering and noticing interior movements in one’s heart. Discernment involves prayer and weighing of facts and feelings about the several good choices which ultimately leads to a choice about what is the best fitted for an individual in the sight of God. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul teaches us: “Whoever does not have the Spirit cannot receive the gifts that come from God’s Spirit” (1 Cor 2:14-15). The fact of being ordained and sent among Muslims enlivened my heart and brought energy and consolation. I am grateful to God for the unmerited gift of life and faith, for a call to Jesuit commitment, and for a personal vocation to be a Jesuit among Muslims. Over the years, I have deeply recognized that this gift is given through the Church, as I am a servant of the Church in the *Missio Dei*.

## **PIVOTAL FIGURES OF VATICAN II**

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**Abstract:** Numerous avenues are available to access and appreciate the momentous event of the Second Vatican Council. This current piece presents eight influential persons and their contribution to Vatican II. Though not treated here, readers are encouraged to explore the role that the bishops from their own country played during and after the Council. You will be amazed at the marvelous workings of the Holy Spirit in the world-wide Church!

**Keywords:** Dialogue, Ecumenism, John XXIII, Laity, Paul VI, Renewal, Taize, Women.

### **Introduction**

An appreciation of the vision and importance of Vatican II is enhanced through an identification of some very influential figures. One must remember that the Council was attended by over 2,500 bishops as well as additional theologians, experts, and observers, all adding up to over 3,000 persons. This short essay only highlights eight pivotal figures.

### **1. Pope Saint John XXIII**

In formally convoking the Council, Pope John said: “We make ours the recommendation of Jesus that one should know how to distinguish the ‘signs of the times’ (Mt 16:4).... For this reason, welcoming as from above the intimate voice of our spirit, we considered that the times were now right

to offer to the Catholic Church and to the world the gift of a new Ecumenical Council.” John XXIII saw the Council as a “new Pentecost.” John definitely put his stamp on the Council, though he died in 1963 after the completion of the first Council session.

## **2. Pope Saint Paul VI**

Elected on June 21, 1963, Paul VI immediately pledged to continue the Second Vatican Council. He served as supreme pontiff for 15 years (1963-1978). When the Council reconvened for its second session on September 29, 1963, Paul VI named four priorities: a better understanding of the nature and mission of the Church, continued reforms within the Church, advancement of Christian unity, and better dialogue with the world. Paul VI also stated a continual challenge to the Church from Vatican II: “The first need of the Church is always to live Pentecost.”

## **3. Augustin Cardinal Bea**

A Jesuit priest and biblical scholar, Bea was highly influential at Vatican II. Pope John XXIII requested Bea to serve on the central preparatory commission for the Council. In the mind of John XXIII, promoting Christian unity was an important objective of Vatican II. The pope had established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1960 and appointed Bea as its president. He influenced the writing of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Council’s decree on ecumenism. Bea, a skilled statesman and biblical scholar, offered these gifts to serve the renewal of the Church. Bea died in 1968.

## **4. Yves Congar, Theologian**

Among the many eminent theologians at Vatican II was the Dominican ecclesiologist Yves Congar. He possessed a unique combination of brilliance, loyalty to the Church, and personal holiness. In 1950 Congar published his seminal work *True and False Reform in the Church*. Pope John XXIII,

the father of Vatican II, read this work and asked Congar to serve on the preparatory commission for Vatican II. Congar's pivotal insights focused on renewal and holiness, the living Tradition of the Church, laity and participation, and viewing the Church as the People of God. Congar, made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 1994, passed away in 1995.

### **5. Leo Jozef Cardinal Suenens**

Pope John XXIII found in Suenens a man who shared his views on the importance of renewal in the Church. Suenens provided an overview-agenda for the Council, asserting that the Church needed to examine both internal aspects (*ad intra*) as well as external questions (*ad extra*). Following this two-fold vision, Suenens helped shape two pivotal Council documents: *Lumen Gentium* (Church) and *Gaudium et Spes* (Church in the Modern World). After Vatican II Suenens remained active for thirty years until his passing in 1996.

### **6. John Henry Cardinal Newman**

Newman (1801-1890) has often been called “the Father of Vatican II” because his theological ideas anticipated key themes which entered into mainstream Catholic teaching at the Council. Pope Paul VI affirmed that Newman’s ideas were often “the subjects of the discussion and study of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council,” e.g. ecumenism, the Church-world relationship, emphasis on the vocation of the laity, non-Christian religions and dialogue. Pope Francis canonized Newman in 2019.

### **7. Sister Mary Luke Tobin**

Twenty-three women attended the Council as official auditors. The religious women of the USA were represented by Loretto Sister Mary Luke Tobin; she also served on the commission that drafted the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). Remarkably, until her death in 2006 at the age of 98, Sister

Tobin was an ardent pioneer in the postconciliar renewal of women's religious orders.

### **8. Taize Brother Roger Schutz**

Over sixty “delegated observers” from various Christian communions attended the Council. One such distinguished figure was Brother Roger, founder of the ecumenical community of Taize. He and Brother Max were personally invited by Pope John XXIII to be present for the entire Council. Brother Roger noted: “During those four years, we discovered multiple facets of that unique communion that is the Church.” There was “the discovery of the mystery of the Church … and our hearts rejoiced.”

### **Concluding Invitation**

Marking the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican II (October 11, 1962-2022), Pope Francis asked us “to renew our own passion for the Council.” Let us accept this heartfelt invitation!

## **Document**

# **Statement – Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF) Meeting, 2025**

## **The Prophetic Voices of Women**

### **NBCLC, Bangalore 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2025**

Members of the Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF) gathered at NBCLC Bangalore from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2025, to deliberate on the theme “The Prophetic Voices of Women”.

In the light of IWTF’s mission to theologize from the context of our life experiences, the meeting began with sharing the unsettling questions that remain within each of us.

We expressed deep concern about:

- The growth of right-wing politics that has given rise to hatred, division, violence and fear among minority communities, Dalits and other marginalised groups;
- The definition of nationalism that promotes the dominance of one section of the population over the rest and threatens the very existence of democracy;
- The politicization of religious identity, making it a primary identity and moving it from the private sphere into mainstream political discourse;
- Increasing violence against women in society, families and even the Church arising from the reinforcement of patriarchy that breeds a culture of toxic masculinity;
- The apathy of religious authorities to the shocking suicides of women, including Christian women, women religious and youth, that have exposed the growing alienation in relationships, within the family, Church and society;
- Institutional indifference to abuse that is evident in Church policies that do not have mandated mechanisms for redressal of complaints, and lack of support and

accompaniment for survivors of abuse, compounding women's experience of abuse and violence;

- Gender discrimination and the misuse of power in the Church to control doctrine and thereby the faithful;
- The unaddressed discrimination based on caste that persists in society and even in the Church;
- Economic globalization and development that deprives *adivasis* of their land, leading to their exploitation and impoverishment;
- The internalization of patriarchal norms in social and religious practices leading to women's exploitation and submissiveness in the family and the Church, as well as their active participation in promoting patriarchy;
- The lack of implementation, in the Church in India, of the synodal process that calls for rootedness in the gospels and collective discernment;
- A Church that seems to have forsaken God and community for power, privilege and money.

We discussed these troubling questions under the headings of “The Politicization of Religion” and “Internalized Patriarchy, both Personal and Collective”, reflecting on the life of Jesus to better understand our situations and evolve appropriate responses.

Jesus, because of His oneness with God could dissent, disrupt and challenge people including religious leaders to walk the path of Truth. He broke the silence that shrouded the systemic violence mediated mainly by the religious and political powers of his time. He promoted the relationship between God and humans and declared love of neighbour as the greatest commandment. Washing his disciples' feet was Jesus' greatest disruptive act, demonstrating the depth of His love.

We feel challenged to grow in feminist consciousness, in our understanding of the person Jesus, in our theological commitment to realizing the kin-ship vision mediated by

him through his teaching and his life. In this mission, we feel led to grow in the ‘Christa’ consciousness by assuming the embodiment of Christ in our everyday enfleshed experiences as women. Becoming ‘Christa’ would enable us to recognize our bodies as the site of the Divine, even in its experiences of mortality, pain and abuse. In a world scarred with violence, institutionalized fraud, rapacious human degradation, political suppression, economic slavery and rampant narcissism we need to raise our prophetic voices to lead us back to spiritual sanity. Against the backdrop of our reflections we therefore acknowledge that the task before us includes:

- Critiquing the religious right within the Church along with fighting fascist ideologies at large;
- Working with communities to develop critical thinking and enable resistance to being manipulated to fulfil agendas for gaining political and/or religious power;
- Challenging leaders of the Church who fail to call out violence and injustice and/or court favour with partisan political leaders;
- Resisting patriarchy by dissenting being disruptive and challenging accepted patriarchal attitudes, customs and practices;
- Widening and deepening our base of disruption by creating alternate spaces for women’s voices to be heard and acted upon, spaces where women can find hope, accompaniment and solidarity;
- Developing conversation and dialogue circles that are inclusive, diverse and characterized by intentional listening, to reflect on contemporary issues;
- Developing women’s agency to enable them to make informed choices and distinguish between obedience and consent in situations of violence and abuse;
- Instilling a critical consciousness that identifies and condemns the seeds of violence that lie in all of us;

- Developing a deeper connection with our core selves, others, our communities and the universe;
- Reflecting on teachings in scripture that emphasize the equality between genders, and reading the Constitution of India in the light of the gospel;
- Creating a resource bank of material for women to use to grow in critical consciousness and deepen their spirituality so that together we can transform the Church in accordance with the mind and heart of Christ.

Embodying the death and resurrection of Christ in our enfleshment as women, the Christa consciousness enables us to engage in the mission of Jesus Christ with prophetic courage. Only when we exercise our spiritual agency as individuals and as a collective can we witness the resurrected presence of Jesus Christ in our world today. Through our theologizing we feel affirmed in our call to be a prophetic presence of Christa, to challenge exploitation, reverse subjugating hierarchies following the servant leadership of Jesus and build relationships founded on justice, inclusion and compassion.

## Book Reviews

**Book Review Editor: Anil D'Almeida SJ**

**God's Self-Gift: "Another Paraclete."** By Fr (Dr) Fiorello Mascarenhas, SJ, DMin. & Sr (Dr) Renu Rita Silvano, OCV, STD. ST PAULS, Bandra, Mumbai, 2025. ISBN 978-81-19597-13-0. Pp. 142. Price: Rs. 180.00.

The fullness of the Trinitarian Mystery revealed at Pentecost also reveals the nature of the Church as a communion in the Holy Trinity, and there couldn't have been a more opportune moment to reflect on this fundamental truth of our faith than a Jubilee Year – this time 2025. The well-known spiritual authors of the Indian Church – Fr. Fiorello Mascarenhas, SJ and Sr Renu Rita Silvano, OCV – themselves leaders of the charismatic renewal movement in India – have offered through their new book, *God's Self-Gift. "Another Paraclete,"* a timely catechesis on the Holy Spirit and the role the third person of the Holy Trinity plays in the lives of individual Christians, in the Church and in the world at large.

Every reader will find the five chapters of the book a precious resource for theological and spiritual insights, for meditation and prayer – a veritable jubilee pilgrimage of hope rooted in the Word of God.

A profound biblical reflection on the Holy Spirit as 'Another Paraclete' (John 14:16) in Chapter

One explains the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Father and the Son which is foundational to the apostolic faith of the Church and the reason why the Holy Spirit is God's self-gift to us. Chapter Two is focused on 'The Paraclete and God the Father' to enlighten the reader on the place of the Holy Spirit in salvation history beginning from creation (Genesis), through prophets to the New Testament. The Church's faith has always maintained that the Holy Spirit is Lord and God and inseparable from the Father and the Son; so also, that the mission of the Holy Spirit is to carry forward and complete the mission of the Son – it is a 'joint mission.' This last theme logically dovetails onto the next theme 'The Paraclete and Jesus Christ' in Chapter Three which expounds the following topics: 'the Holy Spirit fashions Jesus' identity,' 'the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus' mission,' 'the Holy Spirit is Jesus' gift,' 'Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit.'

Chapter Four on 'The Paraclete and the Church' is an elaborate description of the birth of the Church at Pentecost with Mary at the centre, and the role of the Holy Spirit thereafter in building up the Body of Christ through the word and the sacraments, the variety of charisms and the gift

of servant leadership so that the Church could faithfully witness to the Gospel of Christ. Chapter Five on the theme 'The Paraclete and the World' enlarges our horizons to realize that the Holy Spirit is not the exclusive possession of the Christians but is active in all men and women of goodwill. This is the teaching of Vatican Council II which stated: "we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (GS 22). This is illustrated in the story of the 16-year-old Sikh girl Gitanjali Ghei who died of cancer in Mumbai in 1977 and whose life-story as well as the poems she penned during her illness have been immortalized in the book *Gitanjali Album*, edited by Fr. P. Divarkar, SJ and published by Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand (Appendix). The Conclusion to the book emphasizes the existential paradox of every Christian, i.e., of being by definition 'Spirit-filled, yet hungry'!

This beautiful little book can answer questions lurking in many minds, both Christian and otherwise, seeking meaning on issues, e.g., the Nicene Creed, the symbols of the Holy Spirit, 'sin against the Holy Spirit,' visible unity of the Church, Scripture and Tradition, magisterium, inter-religious dialogue, mystery of suffering, gift of tongues, mission of the Church, salvation in Christ, etc.

I heartily welcome this book and recommend it to all Catholics and other Christians as well as all people of good will as an invaluable gift of the Jubilee Year 2025.

+Anil COUTO  
Archbishop of Delhi

**Whispers of God: A Theological Exploration into the Themes of the Old Testament.** By Thomas Karimundackal, SJ. Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2025. ISBN 978-93-6065-859-5. Pp. 324. Rs. 850.

*Whispers of God: A Theological Exploration into the Themes of the Old Testament* is a scholarly and informative work consisting of 20 articles based on key themes in the Old Testament. The author of the book, Fr. Thomas Karimundackal SJ, Professor of Sacred Scripture and Head of the Department of the Biblical Studies at Jnana Deepa, Pune, is a prolific writer and has written extensively on various biblical topics. "All the themes dealt with in this book were published earlier in various academic journals" (p. xv). The book invites "readers to hear the subtle yet powerful whispers of God that echo through its narrative."

The themes are chosen from all the four parts of Old Testament: Pentateuch (6 themes), Historical books (3 themes), Prophetic Literature (8 themes), and Wisdom Literature (3 themes). The first and the last chapter deal with

the important theme of creation, thus forming an inclusion. The author shows how the themes in the Pentateuch, like Creation, Sinai Covenant, Election, Land, Sabbath, etc., are present in other parts of the OT.

The first chapter titled: “Reverence for Creation as God’s Good Creation” (pp. 1-15) begins with the burning ecological crisis and mentions how to respond to the crisis by embracing the attitude of reverence towards creation. Doing a comprehensive study of the theme of creation throughout the OT, the author elucidates various aspects related to creation such as (i) foundation of universe and life, (ii) humankind as the apex and beauty of creation, (iii) defeat of chaos, (iv) assurance of hope, (v) delight, (vi) God’s wisdom, and (vii) animals as an integral part of creation.

The second chapter, “Sinai Covenant—A Foundational Response to Divine-Human Relationship” (pp. 17-48), is the longest chapter in the book. This chapter rightly focuses on the aspect of divine-human relationship as the heart of the Sinai Covenant and brings out various dimensions of Sinai Covenant such as its historical background, its content and theology, election and responsibility, its conditionality, its language, transgression and forgiveness as well as renewal and restoration, and finally its significance.

The third chapter, “Chosen and Unchosen: Implications of ‘Election’ in the Hebrew Bible” (pp. 49-65), delicately deals with the sensitive issue of election by carefully explaining the problem implicit in the idea of election. The concepts of the elect, anti-elect and non-elect are beautifully explained. The author concludes with an important message: “The very concept of election does not allow them [“the ‘unchosen,’ the non-elect and anti-elect”] to be outside of the economy of God’s purposes” (p. 63).

The fourth chapter, “The Theological Portraits of Land in the Old Testament” (pp. 67-88), focuses on another very central topic. Crucial dimensions related to the Land such as a Promised Land, Holy Land, good and prosperous land, just land, defiled and suffered land, lost land, restored land are masterfully explained. The author also expounds how this land belonging to Yhwh is given by Yhwh as a gift, inheritance, covenanted and conditional grant and how it is Sabbath bound.

The fifth chapter, “Deuteronomic Portrait of Monarchy in the Deuteronomistic History” (pp. 89-103), first paints a pen-portrait of an ideal Israelite King. The author effectively shows how Yhwh is the true king of Israel and highlights both the negative (“walking in the ways of Jeroboam”) as well as positive (David: a man after the Lord’s own heart) faces of monarchy.

The sixth chapter, “Nazirites in the Old Testament and Sainthood” (pp. 105-118), is an excellent study of Nazirites which explains its etymological significance, and shows how they were people separated unto the Lord, who maintained holiness of life, practiced ascetic practices, and engaged in ministerial service. The author concludes: “Today, when we witness and experience a spiritual vacuum and void in life, *nazirites* remind us that we can all journey towards God with self-abnegation and consecration and the life received from God as a gift to be used following the divine will” (p. 117).

The seventh chapter, “*Sabbath* in the Hebrew Bible” (pp. 119-125) is the shortest article which gives insightful information about *Sabbath* and shows “the bond between the Sabbath observance and the destiny of Israel” (p. 123).

The eighth chapter, “When the King Crosses the Line: The Figure of David in 2 Sam 24” (pp. 127-151) is an interesting study of the figure of King David in 2 Sam 24, which helps us to appreciate both the lofty and languid sides of the legendary king. Different angles of King David’s personality such as his arrogance, his repentance, his surrender, his receiving favour, his shepherding role, his obedience. The author concludes: “He [David] brings redemption through his repentance and submission to God” (p. 149).

The ninth chapter, “‘Maintain Justice, and Do What is Right’: Justice and Righteousness in the Book of Isaiah” (pp. 153-166), brings out the important theme of Justice, rooted in God’s being. Various dimensions of justice such as moral and social justice, justice for the *persona miserabilis*, the orphan, widow and poor, justice and righteousness, justice and mercy, justice and hope are carefully expounded. The author underscores “the inseparable connection between faith and ethical living” in Isaiah (p. 165).

The tenth and eleventh chapters deal with the similar theme of judgment and mercy found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The tenth chapter, “‘To Pluck Up and to Break Down, to Build and to Plant’: The Mission of Retribution and Restoration in Jeremiah” (pp. 167-180), highlights “a complex interplay of judgment and grace” in Jeremiah (p. 178) and shows how the themes of retribution and restoration are complementary and not contradictory. The eleventh chapter, “Ezekiel: A Prophet of Judgment and Restoration” (pp. 181-194), shows how in Ezekiel “Interwoven with the warnings of judgment are promises of restoration and hope” (p. 181).

The twelfth and thirteenth chapters show how the themes of religiosity and Day of the Lord are treated by several Prophets. The twelfth chapter, “Religious Practice – A Prophetic Critique” (pp. 195-

205), points out how Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Zephaniah, Micah, and Malachi critique religious practices. The thirteenth chapter, “The ‘Day of the Lord’: A Theological Leitmotif in the Biblical Prophecy” (pp. 207-218), explains the judgmental and restorative aspects in the important concept of the “Day of the Lord” and highlights how Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi speak about it in different ways.

The fourteenth and fifteenth chapters are taken from Prophet Amos. The fourteenth chapter, “Amos: A Prophet Who Roared for the Renewal and Reformation of Society” (pp. 219-228) reveals how Amos has become a voice (i) of the poor and the oppressed in Society, (ii) of justice and righteous in Society, (iii) of social conscience in society, (iv) of moral conscience in society, (v) of God in society, (vi) of true religiosity, (vii) of covenantal relationship, and (viii) of hope and repentance. The fifteenth chapter focusses on “A Call to Prophetic Priesthood: A Hermeneutical Reading of Am 7:10-17” (pp. 229-240). Through a structural and close reading of the text, the author invites the readers “to resist the natural inclination to cling to the establishment” exemplified in Amaziah (p. 238) and “to rediscover the greatness of priesthood” exemplified in Amos (p. 239).

The fifteenth chapter is a highly scholarly and enriching article on “Yhwh, the Good Shepherd: Exegetical and Theological Implications of Ezek 34,11-16” (pp. 241-265). Through the analysis of 19 finite Hebrew verbs, the author shows how the “bad shepherd’s negligence of duty is corrected by Yhwh’s actions by the same verbal root” (p. 248) and how the text “provides a mandate for the shepherds in Israel” (p. 252).

The next three articles are taken from Wisdom Literature. “The Book of Job: A Faith-filled Response in Crisis and Suffering” (pp. 255-265) conveys a powerful message of holding on to God in crisis situations like the Covid-19 pandemic. “Does the Hebrew Bible Endorse Punitive Discipline of the Child?” (pp. 267-285) clears the misunderstanding about the references related to the corporal punishment in the Bible and states: “Disciplining of children in the Hebrew Bible goes beyond physical punishment; it encompasses a pedagogical approach rooted in parental love and responsibility, aiming to educate and guide children in moral and character development” (p. 283). The article, “Wisdom Metaphors (Wis 7:25-26) and Indian Traditions” (pp. 287-305), follows an analytical and inculcated approach, analyzing five metaphors for wisdoms given in the Deuterocanonical book of Wisdom such as (i) breath of God, (ii) emanation, (iii) reflection, (iv)

mirror, and (v) image, and showing how some of these metaphors are found in Upanishadic and Vaishnavite traditions.

The final article, “Contribution of the Creation Accounts in Genesis to the Dialogue of Science and Religion” (pp. 307-322) engages in dialogue between science and religion. The article focuses on the elements of convergence between Genesis 1 and the latest scientific understanding.

This book is an excellent compendium of biblical knowledge and wisdom. The insights in the book are not entirely new, but the comprehensive treatment of the important themes will be immensely helpful for the students and researchers in the field of biblical scholarship. A better editorial work is desirable, especially in terms of the consistency in giving biblical references, Divine Pronoun, the transliteration of Hebrew words, etc. Some articles are without footnotes, which reduces their scholarly value.

Contextual issues such as ecological crisis, human rights abuse, poverty, Pandemic, etc., are touched upon. At times, quotes from Upanishads are given. The author gives superabundance of biblical references connected to each theme and sub-theme. Besides providing extensive bibliography from the key researchers in the field, the author gives highly informative footnotes, giving the readers insights into various

important concepts in the Bible. The book is highly recommended for the students of the Bible, priests, religious, and lay people to improve their capacity to listen to the whispers of God.

**Edwin RODRIGUES SJ**

**The Crucified People and their God.** By Dhyanchand Carr, Aloysius Irudayam, and Jebamalai Susaimanickam. Delhi: ISPCK, 2024. ISBN: 978-81-19434-50-3. Pp. 175. Rs. 495.

*The Crucified People and Their God* by Dhyanchand, Aloysius, and Susaimanickam confront the harsh realities of human suffering caused by supremacist cultures, exploitation, exclusion, and oppressive forces. The authors offer a theological critique of distorted understandings of God and propose a more just and liberating perspective. The book is structured into three parts: the first explores “Crucified People and Their God,” the second examines “In Search of the God of Justice,” and the third presents “The True Story of God.”

The first section, *Crucified People and Their God* examines the identity of the crucified people through real-life examples and raises thought-provoking questions: If innocent people are crucified, how do they understand God? What is God’s role in human suffering? Who are today’s crucifiers? The authors highlight various marginalized groups, including wom-

en, Dalits, the poor, past slaves, and victims of religious hatred, economic exploitation, and war. They also expose religion's role in perpetuating oppression. A particularly striking historical account reveals that white Catholics enslaved Black people and that Catholic chaplains blessed missions in which Catholic pilots dropped bombs on Nagasaki, a heavily Catholic city, during World War II (pp. 42-52). The authors identify everyday oppressors, such as abusive husbands, racial and caste supremacists, profit-driven industrialists, warmongers, and religious fanatics. The key issue is that many crucifiers justify their actions (p. 53). This raises a challenging theological question: Did an omniscient and omnipotent God allow such suffering to happen?

The second section, *In Search of the God of Justice*, critiques the misconception that God intervenes when human autonomy leads to injustice. The authors argue for a non-interventionist understanding of God, challenging traditional religious narratives that normalize dehumanization. They explore the evolutionary origins of humanity and the theological implications of an all-knowing, all-powerful God, ultimately rejecting images of God that justify injustice (pp. 67-74). They also discuss how science, technology, and religion are misused and how Christian

theology is used for political gain.

The final section, *The True Story of God*, presents God as the anguished companion who suffers alongside humanity. The authors advocate a non-retributive theology, emphasizing that true transformation requires human cooperation. Rather than waiting for divine intervention, people must actively work toward a new humanity. The book critiques how Jesus, who embodied liberation and inclusivity, has been misrepresented by later followers, leading to prejudice and suffering (p. 143). One striking example is drawn from a parish in Southern India, where a church is built in the center of a cemetery. The wealthy and high-caste members are buried near the church, while the poor and so-called low-caste Christians are relegated to the outskirts of the graveyard. The authors also critique how religious communities often prioritize rituals and laws over compassion for the poor in their midst.

This book offers a convincing theological vision that challenges complacency and calls for action. The authors use clear and accessible language, avoiding complex theological jargon, making the book approachable for any reader. This profound yet inspiring theological insight deserves to be widely read and discussed among Christians.

**Pruthvi Ryanal RODRIGUES SJ**

## BOOK INFORMATION

**Title: FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE SECOND SESSION**

**Sub-Title:** *Communion, Participation and Mission*  
**Synod of Bishops, CCBI**

‘With this Final Document, we have gathered the fruits of at least three years in which we have been listening to the People of God in order to better understand how to be a “synodal Church” – it is by listening to the Holy Spirit – at this time. The biblical citations at the beginning of each chapter indicate the content by linking it to the gestures and words of the Risen Lord, who calls us to be witnesses of his Gospel, first with our lives and then using words.’

This Final Document is a gift to all the faithful people of God, by the variety of its expressions. All this is the gift of the Holy Spirit: it is he who makes harmony. The Holy Spirit is harmony, and may the Breath of the Risen One help us to share the gifts that we have received.’

**2024 ed. 96pp. Rs 140 ISBN: 9788119664283 Rights: Asia**  
**Paperbound 130x205mm 100g**

**Title: A THEORY OF RELIGIOUS PRAXIS**

**Sub-Title:** *A Complete Resource Book*

**Author:** Roy Lazar A.

This is a very elucidative guide for theologizing in the context of India. It admirably connects the theoretical foundations of theology with the lived experiences and unique challenges faced by Indian society. Fr. Roy Lazar’s approach is rooted in the belief that theology should not just be theoretical, but must have practical implications for daily life. It provides a valuable framework for understanding and engaging with the complexities of Indian society through the lens of Christian theology. The comprehensive presentation of the discipline and

the lucid analysis of the sub-topics make the book all the more interesting and useful, both for the experts and for the students of theology. It is a must-read for those seeking to deepen their understanding of Pastoral Care in the Indian context and of how theology can play a vital role in shaping social transformation in this microcosm that we call India.

**2024 ed. 342 Rs. 400 pp. ISBN: 9788119664870 Rights: World 140x210mm**

**Title: THE SOCIAL DYNAMISM OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

**Sub-Title:** *With a Special Reference to India*

**Authors:** Adrian Fernandes with Dorothy D Souza

This book is an endeavour to present the Catholic Church's educational vision and efforts towards common good and solidarity and is beneficial for both, individuals acquainted with education and those lacking familiarity with its foundational elements. The emphasis on the universality of the Catholic social principles makes this book a prophetic endeavour with an appeal to foster social cohesion, vitality in communities and fraternity.

This book delves deeply into how Catholic education has embodied these principles, contributing significantly to the holistic development of individuals and communities, particularly in the diverse and multifaceted context of India. It will inspire all educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to embrace the true spirit of Synodality and walk together in our shared mission to educate and uplift every child and community.

**2024 ed. 268 pp. Rs 380 ISBN: 9788119664641 Rights: World Paperbound, 140x210mm 275g**

**Title: TOWARDS LIVING CHRISTOLOGIES IN THE WORLD**

**Author:** A. Alangaram, S.J.

The author has made a valuable contribution in this book by systematically presenting the ‘living Christologies’ found in the continents such as Africa, Latin America, Europe and Asia, especially amidst the oppressed, deprived and marginalised people who are discriminated by colour, race, caste, class, gender, culture, religion, region and language. He brings out the characteristics of ‘living Christologies,’ prominent among them being: experiential, liberative, contextual, collective, communitarian, synodal, dialogical, plural, inclusive, inter-cultural and transformative.

This book portrays Christological discourses in the light of contemporary contextual Christologies across continents. It draws inspiration from Jon Sobrino’s critique of European Christology’s inadequacy in Latin America and it explores various regional approaches. It discusses Africa’s effort to create a Christology that affirms black identity, Latin America’s focus on liberation theology addressing systemic sin, and Asia’s pursuit of an inclusive Christology through the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences.

This unique book aims to deepen our understanding of Christ’s message for the oppressed and vulnerable worldwide. This book is not only for the libraries and research works, but also for personal and communitarian transformation.

**2024 ed. 212 pp. Rs 300 ISBN: 9788119664658 Rights: World Paperbound 140x210mm 175g**

**Title: REMEMBER AND DO NOT FORGET**

**Sub-Title:** *God’s Command to Israel in the Book of Deuteronomy*

**Author:** Fr (Dr) Manoj Thomas Parackal MST

This book is a significant contribution to the study of the book of Deuteronomy. It is an excellent exegetical presentation of the Deuteronomic message. The author brings forth new insights into the theme of ‘remembrance’

by exploring the significance of memory in the book of Deuteronomy with special attention given to the verbs ‘to remember’ and ‘not to forget.’

‘Remember the past benevolent acts of God in order to live a life of divine grace in the present leading to the future.’ This summary statement is the essence of this book. This erudite exegetical study analyzing all the root words in Hebrew is a model for everyone who wants to study the Bible exegetically, scientifically, systematically, and in depth. All readers can profit richly from his learned and significant analysis.

**2024 ed. 276 pp. Rs 400 ISBN: 9788119664894 Rights: World Paperbound, 150x215mm 325g**

**Title: PURGATORY: THE GIFT OF DIVINE MERCY**

**Authors:** Gracious Thomas and Elvis G. Thomas

‘Purgatory’ is one of the three entities of the Church; the other two being the Pilgrim Church and the Church Triumphant. These three states constitute the ‘Communion of Saints’ of the Mystical Body of Christ. This Book: “Purgatory: The Gift of Divine Mercy” has been compiled to provide the much needed information and knowledge associated with life after death, in the context of the purification of the soul towards ‘perfection’.

It passionately discusses various aspects that touch the core of the spiritual life of a Christian. These discussions are based on the robust foundation of the scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, teachings of the Doctors and Fathers of the Church, various Councils of the Church, visions and apparitions by Holy Souls to Saints and Mystics, and letters, Encyclicals and lecture services of Pontiffs.

Some of the unique topics included are: Faith in God and Communion of Saints; Indulgences for self and the Holy

Souls; Twentieth Century gift of Divine Mercy Devotion; and Mary: The Mother of Purgatory.

This is a resource document for educating and creating awareness about one of three states of the Church namely, Purgatory or the Suffering Church. This book will be useful for every Catholic as a resource document for Catechism classes, retreats, conventions and curriculum in the formation houses especially to those interested on a topic of 'Life after death'.

**2024 ed. 240 pp. Rs 350 ISBN: 9788119664214 Rights: World Paperbound 140x215mm 305g**

**Title: FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE SYNOD DOCUMENTS**

**FABC**

Asia is the continent of great religious traditions and of multicultural peoples who share in the common quest for Peace, Justice and Harmony. Drawing on the Gospel, the Catholic Church shares in this common quest. As bishops of Asia and as representatives of the People of God, gathered to read the signs of our times, to discern, to seek guidance and to discover new pathways.

Reaffirmed, renewed, and revitalized through our General Conference, we went forth on our synodal journeying with our communities, parishes, dioceses, episcopal conferences and together with our peoples in Asia. This book is an invitation to journey with our Lord building societies and Christian communities which leave no one behind. It calls for connection with the universal Church to contribute to a better Asia, to a more peaceful, just and harmonious humanity and to the protection of nature.

**2024 ed. 138pp. Rs 190 ISBN: 9788119664689 Rights: Asia Paperbound, 140x210mm 135g**

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