



PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

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1.

SERVANTS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A few years ago, at a meeting of the representatives of the various Religious Congregations, chaired by Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo, I said that a comprehensive Course on Religious life must be given at the National Seminary, Ampitiya, Kandy, so that all the diocesan Seminarians will come to know the spirit (charism) and the history of the Religious Congregations. I made this observation since I was also aware of the dispositions, attitudes and the pastoral practice of many Bishops and many Diocesan priests (presbyters) in Sri Lanka.

Consecrated Religious life belongs to the Church

The Second Vatican Council declared that the Consecrated Religious life constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels belongs undeniably to the life and holiness of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, no 44). It spoke also of the co-essentialness of the hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts (cf *Lumen Gentium* 4). Consecrated Religious life enriches the Catholic Church.

During the Synod on Religious life (Consecrated life) in 1994, Bishop Vincent Nichols, the Auxiliary of Westminster, London said, “*Religious are not dependent on bishops to authenticate their apostolic activity. Citing the way in which the Religious had been providing the laity with leadership in such fields as work with the deprived and prayer, he said that these pastoral experiences showed that the participation of the Religious in the Church’s apostolic activity was born of their own intimate spousal love of Christ. Their activity and*

*leadership is not derived from Episcopal mandate or the hierarchical structure of the Church but flows from their proper consecration by God in the power of the Spirit.”*¹

Archbishop Joseph Tobin, CSsR, former Secretary of the Congregation for Institutions of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life had said, “*The Document Lumen Gentium (no 44) makes the point that Religious life is a fact of the Church and I dare say a constitutive part of the Church*”²

Charisms of Consecrated Religious to be respected

Quite aware of the way the ordained presbyters and the bishops in the Catholic Church are ministering, the Jesuit Pope (himself a Consecrated Religious) says: “*The charism of the various Institutes needs to be respected and fostered because they are needed in the dioceses. I know by experience the problems that can arise between a bishop and the religious. I also know that the bishops are not always acquainted with the charisms and works of the religious. We bishops need to understand that the consecrated persons are not functionaries but gifts that enrich the dioceses. The involvement of religious communities in the dioceses is important. Dialogue between the bishop and the religious must be rescued so that due to the lack of understanding of the charism, bishops do not view the religious simply as useful instruments.*”³

“The value of reciprocity which involves Pastors and

¹ *The Tablet*, 15 October, 1994. Bishop Vincent Nichols is now the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, U.K. ²*The Tablet*, 6 October 2012, p 8-9). Archbishop Joseph Tobin is now in Newark, USA). ³Pope Francis to the Union of Superiors General of Men Religious on November 29, 2013.

*consecrated persons is to be deepened. Mutual relationships do not exist where some make demands and others submit out of fear or convenience.”*⁴

Need for a comprehensive Course on Religious Life

Open to the spirit and teaching of the Second Vatican Council, of Pope Francis, of Cardinal Vincent Nichols of London, and of Archbishop Joseph Tobin, CSsR of Newark, USA, a comprehensive course on Consecrated Religious life needs to be part of the curriculum of the Major Seminaries in Sri Lanka so that the diocesan Seminarians also will come to know and appreciate the charisms of the Consecrated Religious and learn also to adopt a new way of being ordained presbyters (leaders of christian communities).

⁴ Pope Francis to the participants of the International Congress for Bishops and the Religious on October 28, 2016.

2.

PARTNERSHIP FOR GOD'S KINGDOM

Men are ordained as presbyters in the Catholic Church to be servants of the Kingdom of God, by preaching the Word of God (in the Sacred Scripture), guiding the people with the inspired Word of God and the teachings of the Catholic Church, performing the Sacraments, freeing the oppressed, building solidarity and community spirit among people, helping the people to live with dignity, and thereby enabling them to enjoy fuller life promised by Jesus Christ (Jn 10:10).

Similarly, the Consecrated Religious men are also ordained as presbyters in the Church to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, motivated and energized also by the particular charism (spirit) of their Religious Congregations, which the Church has acknowledged and approved. Pope Francis wants today's Religious to be prophetic. The charism of each Religious Congregation therefore manifests itself in new creative ways in the life of the Church, especially by responding to the emerging new needs and pains of human and infra-human beings in the socio-cultural contexts.

Therefore both the diocesan and the Religious presbyters need to serve the Kingdom of God in a spirit of mutuality, friendship, collaboration, solidarity and fraternity, avoiding the worldly spirit of competition, rivalry and desire for power, prestige and monetary gain which Jesus also disapproved in the life of the Apostles, saying **“It should not be so among you”** (Mk 10:43).

Dioceses and Parishes

The dioceses and the parishes are structures established by

the hierarchical Church in order to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, namely evangelization. The bishops and the presbyters (the diocesan and the Religious) ministering in the dioceses / parishes are servants of the Kingdom of God. During the Eucharistic celebrations, they pray to God saying, **“Your Kingdom come”**. It is to promote God’s Kingdom (Reign) that they are ordained. Therefore the diocesan and Consecrated (Religious) presbyters need to manifest a spirit of partnership to be faithful to the mission entrusted to them.

The Second Vatican Council, speaking of the common mission of all the priests said, *“In virtue of their common sacred ordination and mission, **all priests are bound together in an intimate brotherhood** which should naturally and freely manifest itself in mutual aid as well as material, pastoral as well as personal, in meetings and in community of life, of labour, of charity”* (L.G,28, para 5).(emphasis mine)

It is very unfortunate to note the **“ownership”** mentality of many ordained diocesan presbyters (priests) and of the bishops in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. By the mode of their behaviour, they project that the dioceses geographically and territorially belong only to them, forgetting that they, together with the Consecrated Religious who are ordained as presbyters and ministering in the dioceses, are servants of God’s Kingdom, to promote sacred Gospel values and virtues, the ultimate norm and criterion of pastoral behaviour and action. Therefore there is the felt-need for mutual dialogue and collaborative socio-pastoral action

Some diocesan presbyters and bishops consider the Consecrated Religious who are also ordained as presbyters (leaders of Christian community) and ministering in the dioceses as **‘hired missionaries’** (by the bishops) or **“loaned”** by the Provincials (Religious leaders) to the bishops

for a specified ministry and for a specified time in the dioceses. It is very sad to note that such institutionalized attitude and behaviour patterns are very much pronounced and visible in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka.

Different perceptions regarding evangelization can also exist in the diocesan and the Religious presbyters who are ordained and ministering in the dioceses in Sri Lanka. But prayerfully listening to each other can bring about a collaborative spirit in order to give glory to God through joint socio-pastoral mission.

The Example of St. Peter and St. Paul

The ordained ministers of today, can learn from the lives of St. Peter and the other Apostles (who were at the centre) and of St. Paul and his companions (who were from the periphery) how to exercise the pastoral leadership and resolve the 'pastoral' conflicts when they arise. Conflict was and is a fact of life. It is said that St. Paul even opposed St. Peter when he was manifestly in the wrong. However, these leaders of the Church, (from the centre and from the periphery), knew how to listen to each other's opinions and faith convictions prayerfully and resolve their conflicts. They were persons filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is also said that they shook hands as sign of partnership at the end of their mutual sharing and decision-making (Gal. 2:1-11). Today's ordained ministers need to follow their example.

During my presbyterial life, I have seen and experienced the collaborative spirit in a few diocesan presbytes (for example, Fr .G.Joseph (Joe) Fernando in the Archdiocese of Colombo and Frs. Peter Rodrigo and Don Emmanuel in the diocese of Chilaw), who were people-oriented and committed, assuming also the servant-image to promote the people's salvation,

namely the flourishing of life of the people, promised by Jesus Christ (Jn 10:10).

Socio-Pastoral partnership needed

Trying to be innovatively faithful to their charisms, many Religious presbyters do not postpone their compassionate love and care when people in distress need it. They are able also to point out to the bishops and diocesan presbyters certain human situations which often cry out for active presence, availability and sensitivity to the struggles, needs and pains of the different categories of people. Therefore, it is necessary that the bishops and the diocesan clergy understand the charisms and the giftedness of the Consecrated Religious as explained by the Vatican Council 11, the Synod on Religious life, and by Pope Francis and adopt a collaborative way of ministering in order to promote the values of God's Kingdom in Sri Lanka. Prayerful listening to each other is necessary for evangelization since perceptions regarding evangelization often differ among them. A spirit of partnership is very much needed.

For example

1. Diocesan Pastoral Conventions which include the Consecrated Religious (men and women) labouring in the dioceses
2. Dialogue between the Hierarchy and the Executive Members of the Conference of the Major Religious Superiors (CMRS)
3. Diocesan Committees for special apostolates which include the Consecrated Religious (men and women)
4. National Committees for special apostolates which include the Consecrated Religious (men and women).

It is important that the above-mentioned Committees begin to function in the dioceses in Sri Lanka adopting dialogue and mutual listening as a means of arriving at meaningful decisions to promote the Kingdom (the reign of compassionate love) of God in the dioceses. Such a way of acting will respond to Pope Francis' call for a Synodal way of being and acting in the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka.

“I have made it a rule, ever since the beginning of my episcopate, to make no decision merely on the strength of my own personal opinion without consulting you (the presbyters and the deacons), and without the approbation of the people” (St. Cyprian, 3rd century A.D.)

3

CLERICALISM IN THE CHURCH

Clericalism is the superiority complex that is associated with one's clerical garb. Pedophile is not the only form of abuse issuing from clericalism. Clerical ambition for power has damaged the whole Church's authority. It started in the early Church (cf St. John's 3rd letter). St. Peter speaks of bishops who were greedy for both power and money (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Clericalism springs from a distorted image of ministers and their ministries that has crept into our catechesis and formation programme in the seminaries. Ordination doesn't mean being raised to a higher rung in the ecclesiastical ladder of power and domination.

Images of power and prestige eclipsing the image of humble service are the cause of and conveyer of clericalism. At the last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of the apostles and persuaded them to become one another's servants (Jn 13: 13-17). Jesus said among the gentiles, they "lord it over one another, but among you, it shall not be so" (Mt 20:20 ff).

A person is ordained to be the servant (minister) of the people as Jesus exhorted his immediate disciples (Lk 22:24-32). Succumbing to the Gentile culture, Church leaders have acquired the habit of wielding power and gradually lost the art of exercising authority and the image of servanthood. Fully conscious of one's fragility and sinfulness, one needs to be humble enough to serve rather than to be served, following the example of Jesus as well as responding to the request of Jesus to be humble servants (Lk 22:26-27). . Authority springs

from authenticity which is a reflection of one's credibility. One is credible when s/he is faithful and seen to be faithful to one's calling.

We lament with Pope Francis that clerical ambition for power has damaged the whole Church's authority. 'Power' is what Mammon offers its slaves whereas 'authority' or credibility is a 'grace' that God bestows only on power-renouncers dedicated to serving the powerless.

One of the several root causes of clerical hunger for power today's Church is a grave theological confusion of the notion of 'priesthood'.

Ordained as Presbyter in the Church to serve

In the Document, "*Presbyterium Ordinis*" of the Second Vatican Council, the term 'priest', understood in the cultic sense (one offering sacrifice to God), is applied to all the baptized while the person ordained to lead the priestly community is referred to as 'presbyter'. The same Document employed the word presbyter to indicate a 'community leader' (a pastor) and the word *sacerdos* to designate a 'person offering a sacrifice', i.e., 'a cultic priest'. The same Council's Document, "*Lumen Gentium*" calls the whole Church or the People of God a *communitas sacerdotalis*, "a community of (cultic) priests", i.e., a community celebrating the Eucharist with the Presbyter (a priest among priests) presiding at the celebration as their ordained (i.e., legitimate) community leader. The same is true of a Bishop (*episcopus*, Greek for "overseer"), originally a synonym for presbyter and never as someone higher in rank than a presbyter until the second century.

Purpose of Presbyterial ordination

The purpose of the presbyterial ordination is not the celebration of the Eucharist, which, rather, is a right the ordained already share with all God's People. That is why Canon Six of the Council of Chalcedon anathematized *ordinatio absoluta* – a technical term for ordaining presbyters only for celebrating Mass. Presbyters (who are already priests by baptism) are ordained primarily to guide (to shepherd) Christian community which is essentially a community of priests. As community leaders, the ordained presbyters preside over their communities also during the liturgy. It is therefore strange that the newly ordained presbyters announce the date of celebrating their “first Mass” (which they might have done so many times since their baptism). What is really new is that they are presiding over the Eucharistic assembly for the first time as presbyter (leader) of a Christian Community. **They are ordained “presbyters” or servant leaders to exercise pastoral leadership in a shepherdic way.**

Who effects the miracle of the species during Eucharist?

Thanks to the Second Vatican Council's recovery of the original meanings of presbyter and the (cultic) priest, there was a tendency, in the post-conciliar decades, a tendency to abandon the phrase “words of consecration” as misleading and to replace it by other formulae such as *verba Domini* (Lord's words) or *narratio coenae* (narration of the Supper), both of which recall the context of the sacramental celebration rather than invest the celebrant's words with a divine power.

Many Eastern Churches treat the whole canon (ending in the Great Amen) as one unit and thus they have avoided the theological insinuation of the phrase “words of consecration”.

In every canon, the Presbyter clearly invites the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) to graciously effect this miracle of the species into the Body and Blood of Christ. **Therefore the miraculous change takes place through the intervention of the Holy Spirit.** On 11 January 2001, CDF Prefect Cardinal Ratsinger with the approval of Pope John Paul II confirmed the sacramental validity of the ancient Chaldean Anaphora which clearly omits the so-called “Words of the Institution”.

Even today we hear preachers proclaiming during the so-called “first Mass” of the newly ordained presbyters, that the newly ordained is elevated with supernatural power since even Christ obeys him at his words. **The so-called “first Mass” is a misnomer for what actually happens, namely that the newly ordained presbyter is presiding over the Eucharistic assembly as a presbyter (i.e. as a servant leader) for the first time.**

(**N.B.** This chapter, almost verbatim, is based entirely on the Book, *“Leadership Crisis in the Church”* by Aloysius Pieris, SJ, Tulana Jubilee Publications, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, 2019)

“Crisis of faith in the West is the visible fruit of the self-seeking clericalism of their pastors as well as their bookish theology which is ineffective and spiritually sterile” (Aloysius Pieris, SJ, *The Missionary Oblate*, July- Dec., 2018, p13)

4.

“BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU”

(A slightly expanded version of the Conference
given for presbyters of the diocese of Anuradhapura
on the Day of the Recollection, on Jan., 28-29, 2019)

My dear friends, I chose to reflect with you on the homily of Pope Francis to the new Cardinals on 28th June 2018 because there is enough material in that homily for us to reflect prayerfully. He told them during the Papal Mass in the Vatican Basilica, ***“But it shall not be so among you.”*** When I read and reflected on this homily, I could feel the great spiritual and pastoral concern Pope Francis is having right now due to what is happening in the Catholic Church, even in the Vatican. I also read what he had told the young people at the Synod 2018 in the Vatican City, ***“If you want to live as a Christian, live the beatitudes, not worldliness or clericalism, the worst perversions in the Church.”*** We, priests, are also Christians, and hence this call of the Pope to the young people also touches our hearts.

Once, “the Apostles were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them” (Mk 10:32). He walked ahead of them and he kept going and arguments among them evoked Jesus’ intervention. **Jesus saw power struggle among those called to a discipleship of equals in the Movement that arose around Him.** “What are you arguing on the road”, asked Jesus from the Apostles (Mk 9: 33-35; Mt 20: 20-28). Jesus was asking them to examine the source of their conflict.

When Jesus confronted them, they became silent and embarrassed because they were grasping for power, ranks, position and personal greatness in the presence of the One whose life was devoted to empowering others to a discipleship of equals. The Apostles were embarrassed when Jesus questioned them because they were influenced by the values of the world than by the values and virtues of God's Kingdom which Jesus preached and demonstrated by His life.

Love which Jesus preached, practiced and wanted the Apostles to practice creates equality, collaboration and mutual support, not competition for power and social prestige. Jesus was one who opposed the abuse of power.

The answer to the question raised by Jesus is also rooted in the social context in which the Apostles were brought up and which rank-ordered the people, animals and things. In their social set-up greater value was given to those on the top and lesser value to those at the bottom in the Jewish society. For example: men had more value than women, Male children had more value than female children, Israelites had more value than the Samaritans, Children had more value than the slaves, Healthy had more value than the deformed; oxen had more value than the swine. Hence the practice of viewing through the hierarchical lenses influenced the way the people thought, including the disciples and Apostles of Jesus.

And Jesus told the Apostles forcefully: "But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (*Mk 10:43*). Jesus was asking the Apostles to disregard the system which assigned rank-order values in His Movement (the Church) and maintain the values and virtues of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was careful to walk ahead of his disciples. Jerusalem represents the defining and decisive moment of his life. All of us know that at important and crucial times in life, the heart can speak and reveal the intentions and tensions within one's life. These turning points in life challenge us; they bring out questions and desires not always evident to our human hearts. This is what is presented, with great simplicity and realism, in the Gospel passage we have just heard.

At the most troubling announcement of the Lord's passion, the Evangelist does not shrink from disclosing secrets present in the hearts of the disciples: their quest of honours, jealousy, envy, intrigue, accommodation and compromise. This kind of thinking not only wears and eats away at their relationship, but also imprisons them in useless and petty discussions. Yet Jesus is not concerned with this: he walks ahead of them and he keeps going.

And he tells them forcefully: "But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (*Mk* 10:43). In this way, the Lord tries to refocus the eyes and hearts of his disciples, so that there will be no fruitless and self-referential discussions in the community. Jesus wanted them to become humble servants of others, imitating His life style.

What does it profit us to gain the whole world if we are corroded within? What does it profit us to gain the whole world if we are living in a stifling atmosphere of intrigues (carrying on underhand plots) that dry up our hearts and impede our mission? Here, as someone has observed, we might think of all those palace intrigues that take place, even in curial offices.

“But it shall not be so among you”. The Lord’s response is above all an encouragement and a challenge to his Apostles and disciples to recoup their better part, lest their hearts be spoiled and imprisoned by a worldly mentality blind to what is really important. Jesus became very human and clothed Himself with the gesture of servanthood, with the image of a slave. The voice of the Lord saves the community of the Apostles and disciples from undue introspection and directs its vision, resources, aspirations and heart to the only thing that counts: the Mission.

Jesus teaches us that conversion, change of heart and Church renewal are and ever shall be in a missionary key, which demands an end to looking out for and protecting our own interests, in order to look out for and protect those of the Father.

Conversion from selfishness will never be an end in itself, but is always a means of growing in fidelity and willingness to embrace the Mission. At the moment of truth, especially when we see the distress of our brothers and sisters, we will be completely prepared to accompany and embrace them, one and all. In this way, we avoid becoming effective “roadblocks”, whether because of our short-sightedness or our useless wrangling about who is most important.

When we forget the Mission, when we lose sight of the real faces of our brothers and sisters, our life gets locked up in the pursuit of our own interests and securities. Resentment then begins to grow, together with sadness and revulsion. Gradually we have less and less room for others, for the Church community, for the poor, for hearing the Lord’s voice. Joy fades and the heart withers (cf. *Evangeli Gaudium*, 2).

“But it shall not be so among you”. Jesus goes on to say,

“Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mk 10:43,44). This is the Beatitude and the Magnificat that we are called to sing daily. It is the Lord’s invitation not to forget that the Church’s authority grows with this ability to defend the dignity of others, to anoint them and to heal their wounds and their frequently dashed hopes. It means remembering that we are here because we have been asked “to preach good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19).

Pope Francis addressed the Cardinals: “Dear brother Cardinals and new Cardinals! In our journey towards Jerusalem, the Lord walks ahead of us, to keep reminding us that the only credible form of authority is born of sitting at the feet of others in order to serve Christ. It is the authority that comes from never forgetting that Jesus, before bowing his head on the cross, did not hesitate to bow down and wash the feet of the disciples. This is the highest honour that we can receive, the greatest promotion that can be awarded us: to serve Christ in God’s faithful people, in those who are hungry, neglected, imprisoned, sick, suffering, addicted to drugs, cast aside; in real people, each with his or her own life story and experiences, hopes and disappointments, hurts and wounds. Only in this way, can the authority of the Shepherd have the flavour of the Gospel and not appear as “a noisy gong or a clanging symbol” (1 Cor 13:1). None of us must feel “superior” to anyone. None of us should look down at others from above. The only time we can look at a person in this way is when we are helping them to stand up.”

Pope Francis is sad that clerical ambition for power has damaged the whole Church’s authority. It is the superiority complex that is associated with one’s clerical dress and this

attitude does not enable an ordained minister to serve others with love. On the contrary it dehumanizes.

Citing examples from the Holy Bible and from the life of the Church, Aloysius Pieris, SJ says clericalism which springs from a distorted image of ministers and their ministry has been a constant threat to the mission of the Church. Images of power and prestige eclipsing a Shepherd's office of humble service are the cause and the conveyer of clericalism.¹.

I would like now to share with you a part of the spiritual testament of Saint John XXIII, quoted by Pope Francis to the new Cardinals. Progressing in his own journey, Saint John XXIII could say: *“Born poor, but of humble and respectable folk, I am particularly happy to die poor, having distributed, in accordance with the various needs and circumstances of my simple and modest life in the service of the poor and of Holy Church which has nurtured me, whatever came into my hands – and it was very little – during the years of my priesthood and episcopate. Appearances of wealth have frequently disguised thorns of frustrating poverty, which prevented me from giving to others as generously as I would have wished. I thank God for this grace of poverty to which I vowed fidelity in my youth; poverty of spirit, as a priest of the Sacred Heart, and material poverty, which has strengthened me in my resolve never to ask for anything – money, positions or favours – never, either for myself, or for my relations and friends”* (29 June 1954).

Speaking on the Young People at the Synod of Bishops in 2019, Pope Francis said: *“It is therefore necessary, on the*

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¹ Aloysius Pieris, SJ, *Vagdevi* 25, vol.13, no 1, Tulana Research Centre,, Kelaniya, 2019, p 2).

hand, to decisively overcome the scourge of clericalism. Listening and leaving aside stereotypes are powerful antidotes to the risk of clericalism, to which an assembly such as this is inevitably exposed, despite our intentions. Clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given. This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything. Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church: we must humbly ask forgiveness for this and above all create the condition so that it is not repeated.”

“Give a shepherd’s care to the flock of God that is entrusted to you; watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as God wants; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock.” (1 Peter 5: 2-3)

5.

THE SYNODAL WAY OF THE CHURCH

Within the Church some are ordained as presbyters and bishops to proclaim the Reign of God, form Christian communities, preside during the Eucharistic celebration and guide the people to experience fuller life. The sacred ordination empowers them to exercise a type of leadership which resembles Jesus' way of being and acting (Mk 10:41-45) and also of St. Peter (1 Pet. 5:3) and of St. Paul (Tit. 1: 7). Therefore the presbyters and the bishops need to remember that they are ordained in the Church to be humble servants of the people and not to be lords, greedy for money, seeking power and social prestige.

Unfortunately the history of the Church continues to tell us that the presbyters and the bishops have not manifested the evangelical way of Jesus and of the Apostles. Their dominating and oppressive ways have been the cause for many leaving the Catholic Church in many countries, including Sri Lanka. The present pastoral praxis of the ordained presbyters and bishops often show that they are acting like lords of their territories (parishes / dioceses), with the exclusive ownership of the Kingdom of God.

Pope Francis mourns the dominating and oppressive spirit and behaviour of presbyters and bishops and works tirelessly to create a synodal way of acting within the Church. He had already taken the initiative in 2013 to set up a Committee of eight Cardinals from around the globe to advise him. He is

convinced that the entire Church must live in a synodal way. Pope Francis outlined his vision for a "Synodal Church" on Oct 17, 2015 in an important speech to mark the 50th anniversary of Pope St. Paul VI's official establishment of the Synod of Bishops. In his address, he had said, **"it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."** The synodal way is a collaborative way. It is a way of being of the ordained ministers who listen to others respectfully and also pray and discern before acting. Such a pastoral praxis will also promote fuller life for the people.

What Pope Francis had told the participants in the International Congress for Bishops and the Religious on October 28, 2016 is certainly applicable to our Sri Lankan situation as well. He told them: **"The value of reciprocity which involves Pastors and consecrated persons is to be deepened. Mutual relationships do not exist where some make demands and others submit out of fear or convenience."**

Already in 1995 at the National Pastoral Convention of the Catholic Church Sri Lanka, the participants had voted for a participatory Church in Sri Lanka. In other words, it had voted for a collaborative and synodal way of being the Church in Sri Lanka. The document on the Lay faithful, no 38 had stated: **"Meaningful steps need to be taken to facilitate lay people sharing in decision making process at all levels."** However, through my participatory observation at the way the pastoral leadership is exercised in Sri Lanka, I can say it is highly hierarchically institutionalized.

Today's Catholic Church in Sri Lanka needs a Synodal way of ministering through mutuality and adult relationship within the hierarchical set-up. Mutual communication between the bishops / presbyters and the enlightened lay faithful and the consecrated persons (the Religious) is very much needed. There is a felt-need for proactive listening on the part of bishops and presbyters and also for prayerfully discerning God's will.

“Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound “decentralization”. (Pope Francis, EG 16).

“There is a legitimate and ancient theology which defines magisterium as a teaching ministry which is neither identified with nor limited to the body of the bishops or the Church officials in Rome” (Cardinal Avery Dulles, Survival of Dogma, Garden City, Doubleday, 1970, ch 6)

6.

SHARING LEADERSHIP

The rapidly changing situation in Sri Lanka calls for a new way of exercising pastoral leadership in Sri Lanka. Both our country and our Church are facing new problems affecting sexuality, marriage, family life, education of children and youth, leadership, oppression, poverty, and the care of elders and of the poor. Of late, Sri Lanka is also confronted with several issues which affect also our natural environment.

In this present situation, the Catholic Episcopal Conference needs to be equipped with new knowledge and skills to provide meaningful answers and guidance to the People of God. Faced with these new questions, today's young generation also wants genuine answers to their new questions, anxieties and fears. They do not want old answers to some of their new questions. Therefore the Episcopal Conference needs to consider setting up of a special committee composed of some persons qualified in the Sacred and secular sciences to assist its pastoral leadership. The bishops need to meet, listen to the competent persons, share information and prayerfully discern (seek God's will together) and select the mode of action and communicate to the people of God.

Today it is not leadership (secular or religious) that is being questioned but the way leadership is being exercised by elected leaders. Social scientists tell us that there are different styles of leadership, namely dictatorial (dominating), laissez-faire (permissive), accommodative (giving in to others'

opinions) compromise (win / lose) and collaborative (consensual). Though the ideal form is the collaborative way of leadership, certain situations may demand discretionary ways of acting after prayerful discernment.

Jesus, our Saviour, showed the Apostles the way to exercise their leadership in the Ecclesial community. In the spirit of humility, he bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper, requesting them to imitate his servant leadership. St. Peter, the leader of the Apostles, exercised his servant leadership by listening to the community of believers on different occasions before making decisions, for example, before accepting Matthias to the community of the Apostles (Acts 1: 15-26), before the election of the leaders to distribute food items (Acts 6:1-6) and to resolve the questions which arose regarding the imposition of circumcision on the new recruits from non-Jewish communities (Acts 15:6-12).

Pope Francis prefers to consult, listen, share information and seek God's will together. Therefore he consults competent persons before writing and publishing his important documents. He meets regularly with the special committee of Cardinals which he set up to advise him. After such meetings, he communicates relevant messages to the People of God. Mutual sharing within the special committee of Cardinals and information-sharing with the People of God has become important and necessary for Pope Francis to continue also the renewal (*aggiornamento*) and the fellowship/ community spirit (*koinonia*) in the Catholic Church begun at the Second Vatican council.

7.

TO BE LIBERATORS AND RESCUERS

Right from the beginning of the arrival of the missionaries in Sri Lanka, the hierarchical leadership, had tried to respond to many felt needs of the people. They began schools and colleges in all the dioceses for the education of the boys. The Religious Congregations, also enlightened and energized by the Word of God and their consecrated prophetic vocation, did not remain silent and voiceless in the given historical and socio-cultural contexts. They responded to the crying needs of our people in Sri Lanka in various ways. Schools, Colleges, Nursing Homes, Homes for Elders, Orphanages and Institutions for delinquents in our country continue to be visible signs of their compassionate actions.

I like to mention also the new initiatives of innovative personalities to rescue people living in dehumanized situations in Sri Lanka and enable them to have a better quality of human life.

Fr. Ignatius Perera, a diocesan presbyter, highly qualified in radio electronics and engineering, initially encouraged and supported at St. Joseph's College, Colombo by Oblate Fr. Peter Pillai, produced a **Radio Laboratory** at Kotahena, Colombo to help young men from low-income groups. Oblate **Fr. B. Antoninus** founded the **SETIK and Kandy Institute of Technology** in Kandy to educate and train the poor in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. **Salesian Fr. Henry Remery**

began the **Don Bosco Technical School** in Negombo in 1963 for the technical education of the poor boys, irrespective of race, religion and language. The education in that School included Refrigeration, masonry, carpentry, welding, metal works, motor mechanism, computer sciences etc. **Bro. Hermenegild Joseph, FSC** founded **Sri Lanka Technical Institute and Diyagala Boys' Town** at Ragama in 1963 to provide opportunities to underprivileged school drop outs, the destitute from broken families, irrespective of religious affiliations to improve their education and skills for better quality of life. The training included theoretical and practical training in welding, lathe, electrical and auto mobile, agriculture and animal husbandry etc.

In 1966, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and in collaboration with **Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI** (the second Rector of Aquinas University College), **Mother Good Counsel Mills, RGS** together with the Conference of the Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) began the **Sister Formation Institute** at Aquinas University College to provide a 2-year Course for groups of Sisters drawn from different Religious Congregations. Mother Good Counsel Mills also responded to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people in several areas.

After the Second Vatican Council, with the publication of the Document on the Church in the Modern World (GS) and the Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Development of the People, there were new initiatives taken by a few diocesan presbyters supported by the Religious Congregations to promote the social and economic development of the poor

people in Sri Lanka. There were many joint efforts made by the Religious and the diocesan presbyters to liberate the depressed masses from their sub-human conditions.

The setting up of the **Social and Economic Development Centre (SEDEC)** in 1967, through the joint effort of **G. Joseph Fernando**, a diocesan presbyter of the Archdiocese of Colombo and **Oblate Fr. Lucien Schmitt**, with the recognition of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka, to promote the socio-economic development of the different categories of poor people (fisherfolk, the farmers, the estate population, the shelterless etc) through mutual help (eg. co-operative credit societies and other group actions), needs special mention. This initiative (SEDEC) emerged out of the grass-root experiences of Fr. Joseph (Joe) Fernando in Ngombo with an enterprising team of presbyters for ten years and of the support given by Fr. Lucien Schmitt who was a pioneer of several projects in the parish of Hanwella

In 1972, **Satyodaya Centre** in Kandy was started by **Jesuit Fr. Paul Caspersz** with the support of bishop Leo Nanayakkara, OSB with the idea of improving the living standards and secure the rights of plantation worker and peasants.

“A Church in which the prophets have to keep silent declines and becomes a spiritless organization and its pastors would become mere bureaucrats. In such a Church people would be suffocated by the fumes of a decaying sacerdotalism...History has shown that when prophets are not given their say within the Church they rise up and condemn it from outside ‘ (Avery Dulles, SJ, Successors of Prophets in the Church).

Special mention must be made also of the Centres which energized and supported theologically and spiritually the above-mentioned programmes and projects. **The Centre for Society and Religion (CSR)** was co-founded by the late **bishop Leo Nanayakkara OSB and Oblate Fr. Tissa Balasuriya** to promote social justice and transformation of society. **Tulana Research Centre for Encounter and Dialogue** was begun by **Jesuit Fr. Aloysius Pieris** in 1974 as a response to the challenges of Theology, Spirituality and philosophy and the challenges faced by the highly educated and the marginalized rural youth.

With the blessing of Bishop Leo Nanayakkara, OSB, and the consent of Fr. Anselm Silva, OMI, Provincial Superior, **Fr. Michael Rodrigo, OMI** ventured on July 11, 1980, for deeper involvement with the suffering farmers and peasants of Lower Uva, Buttala. He associated very closely with the poor. While living at Buttala and working with the poor, he faced many threats. On November 10, 1987, while celebrating Eucharist in his small house, **Suba Seth Gedara**, he succumbed to the bullet shots of an assassin. Fr. Michael Rodrigo laid down his life for the poor peasants and farmers of Lower Uva,

Our Christian discipleship embodies love manifested through material assistance (charity) to the needy and also acts of justice which enables the oppressed to be alive. What saves us is Love which in God coincides with justice.¹

Today when the poor are struggling to be accepted in the

1 Aloysius Pieris, sj, *The Missionary Oblate*, no 60, July-Dec. 2021, p17

society as equals, efforts made by some Major Religious Superiors to educate the poor must be appreciated. They send their members to the un-reached and un-touched areas in our country to be present among people and become catalysts of meaningful change. The Religious by their vocation are pathfinders. However, the Sri Lankan Conference of the Major Religious Superiors (CMRS), as a recognized Body in the Church, has been silent and voiceless on many occasions when people faced problems connected with socio-economic development and issues of social and ecological justice.

Both the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Conference of the Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) need to hear the call of Pope Francis to the Religious to be prophetic (to wake up) and to be close to the oppressed and the wounded and collaborate to rescue and heal them.

Pope Francis says, *"I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm hearts of the faithful. It needs nearness, proximity"*.

"I am convinced of one thing: the great changes in history were realized when reality was seen not from the center but rather from the periphery. It is a hermeneutical question" (Pope Francis. Meeting with 82nd General Assembly of the Union of Superiors General of religious men, November 29, 2013).

8.

NOT TO THROW AWAY PEOPLE

Casteism in Sri Lanka

Aboard the Papal plane, during the flight from Manila to Rome on January 19, 2015, answering questions posed to him by a journalist regarding the situation in Sri Lanka, (visited by Pope before going to Manila), Pope Francis referred to two issues in Sri Lanka, namely poverty and caste. He said, *“The poor are the victims of the throwaway culture. We throw away people. And discrimination is a way of throwing away. These people are discarded. And there comes to mind a bit of the image of caste. This can’t go on. But today, throwing away seems normal.”*

Caste differences exist in Sri Lanka. Caste differences have created a system and such a system has been legitimized and institutionalized in certain areas it continues to cause much pain, woundedness and marginalization in many people in Sri Lanka. Such people in pain feel socially segregated lacking social esteem and prestige. Intermarriages also do not take place. Caste system has created a throw-away culture. This evil system is present in some of our parishes / dioceses where some ordained ministers are obsessed with their church-buildings rather than building the People of God as a Christian community (the Church) composed of persons belonging to different castes and races.

Catholics believe God becoming a human person in Jesus of Nazareth has raised human beings to a dignity beyond

compare and that whatever disfigures or damages a human being is an insult to God's own self. That God actually became one of us leads us to value all human beings as gifted with a tremendous dignity precisely as human.¹

How sad, those 500 years of Christianity in our land is still infested with this miserable black mark, the caste system. It is a living scandal to the non-Christians. In a special manner, we, the ordained ministers and the Consecrated Religious need to accept our fault since we have miserably failed in this crucial challenge, our work of evangelization.

St. Eugene de Mazenod, the Founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, of which I too am a member, wanted the Oblates to be innovators and not mere improvisers when they, as evangelisers, are faced with new pastoral needs. He said, "*Love embraces all; for new needs, it invents new means when necessary*". When he started sending the Oblate missionaries to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1847, he told them: "*What I want are new Christians made in a new mould. A new generation must be formed.*" "To form new Christians with a new mould"! But history shows that the Oblates had organized many parishes on caste basis. Perhaps the Oblate Religious Superior (Leader) would have thought that there were other urgent missionary needs, such as the instruction of the Christian doctrine and rectifying marriages which demanded immediate pastoral care.

The lay faithful today want to see the presbyters and the consecrated men-Religious, transcending their caste and racial differences, living together and ministering together. They

¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, Consider Christ, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, N.Y. 10017., 1990, p 22-33)

also want to see similar way of living and ministering among women Religious. The Kingdom of God demands this form of evangelization in our country. We, the ordained ministers and the consecrated Religious, need to commit ourselves also for joint action in the apostolate of community building, thereby to give glory to God.

To become Healers

St. Paul presents us with a list of ministries through which Church's mission-vision can be fulfilled. He says, "*And God has appointed in the Church first the apostles, second the prophets, third teachers, then the workers of miracles, the healers, the helpers, the administrators, the speakers in various kinds of tongues*" (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Implied in this statement is that these ministries are supposed to be permanently present in the Church with clear defined roles and functions for the well-being of the People of God.

Faced with the reality of discrimination and neglect caused by the caste system, I feel there is the need of a healing ministry through active caring presence in those areas where the people wounded by casteism are living.

We, the ordained ministers and the consecrated Religious, believe that the Good News which God in Jesus was proclaiming was bad news for the powers that be. Jesus, who in the power of the Spirit did challenge the exclusivism of the Jews, was rejected by the Pharisees. But it was welcome News for the victims of social injustice and all disadvantaged and peripheral people. So the Good News is revolutionary. Jesus mixed with the excluded people. He ate with them and

thereby became a boundary breaking and frontier crossing Saviour. Jesus was crucified for standing up for the dignity of every man and every woman, and for his stand on equality, unity and solidarity of all peoples. Even today, His message is addressed to everyone, without distinction and discrimination.

Jesus has taught us to address God whom He affectionately called Abba as our Father, our Maternal Father of all the people in the world. It is an inclusive prayer. Hence we believe that everyone everywhere belongs to the family of God.

As missionary disciples of Jesus, we are called to proclaim the Rule of God's unconditional love for all the people belonging to different castes in Sri Lanka through word and loving deeds. Following Jesus, we feel called to defend by both word and deed everyone's intrinsic, universal, inviolable and inalienable dignity and treat as equals those who are excluded due to caste. Both the Religious women and men and the diocesan clergy (bishops, presbyters, deacons) must appear as signs and promoters and architects of unity in the eyes of the people, imitating Jesus who was born to bring together the scattered children of God (Jn 11: 52).

As mentioned above, the history of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka shows that there is division among some Catholics. Though through institutionalized resistance, human weakness, division and disunity had taken place and continue to exist, we, as followers of Jesus, should commit ourselves to the vocation to which we have been called by God, namely to live like brothers and sisters.

Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. Every ordained minister (diocesan and Religious) while celebrating the Eucharist prays for unity (2nd epiclesis). Therefore as Eucharistic ministers they cannot forget or neglect their mission of being community builders.

The greatest revolution in the world today is the awakening of the oppressed masses to obtain their human rights. Such a situation also should awaken the presbyters and the Religious in Sri Lanka to commit themselves to improve the quality of education of the children suffering due to caste system and enable them to experience self-appreciation, self-esteem and social recognition and acquire also good attitudes, good values, virtues and skills. Thus having received good education and training, they will also joyfully contribute to the development of our country.

*“As for God, who creates and redeems out of love, God is glorified not by the diminishment but by the enhancement and growth of the beloved creature. Thus, the more human we become, the more God is pleased.”*²

“Reject violence as a solution to any situation, no matter how unjust it may be. Put your trust in the methods that respect the rights of all and that are fully in accord with the Gospel” (Pope John Paul II, homily during the beatification of Fr. Joseph Gerard, OMI in Lesotho, 15.Sept. 1988.

² Ibid., p 22-33

9.

ADOPTING A SIMPLE LIFE-STYLE

In the West, the deviant way of life of many ordained ministers (presbyters and bishops) in the Catholic Church has made many Catholics to leave the Catholic Church. Some point out clericalism and the Pre-Vatican II formation / accompaniment of clerics and of the Religious as the main causes for this 'exodus'.

Today in Sri Lanka, the style of life and the image projected by some of the clergy and the consecrated Religious are being challenged by many lay faithful. They do not see also social concern and the prophetic dimension articulated and manifested very much in their lives.

The lay faithful see them living in well-furnished houses / buildings, having expensive vehicles for transportation, getting special medical care and attention in expensive hospitals and nursing homes, pursuing studies in institutes of higher learning in Sri Lanka and abroad paying large sums of money, undertaking also international travel and when they retire from active ministry, being well looked after by their respective Institutions. They also do not appear to lack the purchasing power and other facilities, which most well-to-do people enjoy, although they say they have dedicated their lives to follow Jesus who was born poor, lived poor and died as a pauper.

Frugal living and Prophetic voice in Sri Lanka

Pope Francis has become a witness to a life-style that is

openly simple and frugal, so that others, especially the clergy and the consecrated Religious, may also follow his example. He has also become a prophetic voice inviting them to become witness to a non-consumerist way of life, since there is a global phenomenon of massive poverty, caused by a globalization that elevates free trade to an idolatry subjugating human beings to economic interests, creating disparities and wealth-distribution.

Quite conscious also of the complaints and accusations that are being hurled against the Church, regarding financial scandals on the one hand and of the consumerist tendencies in the society to have more and more at the expense of the poor as well as the destruction of ecological riches on the other, Pope Francis is pastorally very sensitive to the plight of the poor masses and manifests his option for the poor by his compassionate words, gestures, actions and by his frugal life-style, avoiding luxury and waste, applying the ethic of enough. Jesus lived lightly characterized by simplicity of life and warned against getting enticed by wealth (Mt 6:19-21).

Through frugal life-style, the clergy and the consecrated Religious can become also a prophetic witness against the scandal of destitution in Sri Lankan society and work for a better quality of life of our people living in destitution.

Pope Francis longs for a revitalization of the lives of the clergy and the consecrated Religious in the Catholic Church based on Biblical spirituality.

“Today, more than in other ages, the call of evangelical poverty is being felt also among those who are aware of the scarcity of the planet’s resources and who invoke respect for

and the conservation of creation by reducing consumption, by living more simply and by placing a necessary brake on their own desires.” (Pope John Paul II, Vita Consecrata ,no 90).

We often forget that there is a difference between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’. Our human nature often creates the wants and leads us to cherish them. We need to learn to discern prayerfully and apply the ‘ethic of enough’ in our lives. . Prayerful discernment will always help to make the right and the best choices (actions) which will also speak louder than mere precepts.

“Whole theologies have been constructed without any reference to social justice because those people who constructed such theologies lived in a social context where questions about poverty and oppression did not arise at all, let alone as faith questions.”

- Albert Nolan, OP in *Hope in the Age of Despair*, p 14-15.

10.

LOVING AND CARING

Every human being is an embodied spirit and s/he is sexual (female / male). Persons called to become ordained ministers (clergy) and / or consecrated Religious in the Catholic Church need therefore to have a good understanding and appreciation of human sexuality and befriend bodiliness in order to relate respectfully and lovingly with everyone and serve them. Human sexuality is also energy for relationships and intimacy. Human genitality is only one aspect of human sexuality.

Since human beings are sexual, sexual stirrings are normal. *“Sexual desire is as natural and normal as is desire for food and drink. Desire for food and drink is a sign of health. Similarly sexual desires and feelings are an indication of a normal personality. No reason to feel guilty about it. Sexual fantasies make their appearances early in a person’s adolescence and continue throughout his / her life time.”**The tendency to characterize them as bad thoughts should be avoided. They become bad only when they are thought of in a bad way.”* (Felix Podimattam, OFM Cap, *Consecrated chastity*, p 138).

A Celibate: a sexual person and a selfless lover

A celibate is a sexual person and celibacy is a voluntary positive choice of a person either as a Religious (woman / man) or as a deacon or as a priest (presbyter) to bear witness to God’s unconditional love by refraining from conjugal relationship and romantic behaviour. In giving up genital, exploitative and manipulative expressions of her / his sexuality, a celibate does not give up her / his respectful and affective relationships. Affective sexuality consists in all

qualities of tenderness, compassion, kindness, and care, which make sexuality truly human. Compassionate love is also the supreme sign of a well-integrated human sexual life. Jesus said: “*Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate*”(Lk 6:36).

Although as human beings, the celibates too experience sexual feelings and desires, they however channel their sexual generative energy affectively (non-biologically) energising others and facilitating their growth and enhancement through their apostolic services such as teaching, preaching, counseling, nursing, care of the orphans, elders, unwed mothers, drug addicts, HIV/AIDS patients, refugees, displaced people, victims of injustice, victims of disasters, eco-care etc. Integration of sexuality in the life of a celibate is assumed in a work of love and communion where one seeks the good of another or others, always in a relationship with people as persons. The life-giving, vital energy – through gestures of goodness, truth, service and tenderness – is gratified by the loving inner experiences that these gestures bring namely joy and inner peace. Celibate chastity is selfless love. It is laying down one's life for others (Jn 15:13).

A Celibate: sister /brother to everyone

A celibate Religious (Sister /Brother) or an ordained minister (deacon, priest, bishop) also knows that s/he is called to be a sister/ brother to everyone without being a spouse to anyone. Therefore every consecrated Religious and every ordained minister must be conscious of her / his identity, own it and not allow anyone to misread that identity and her / his relationships. They should keep in mind that the promise, they had made to God during a liturgical ceremony to be celibates, had been public and visible.

Celibate life and friendship

Celibate way of life however can include friendship. Jesus, who was very human and celibate, had many friends. He loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus (*Jn* 11:5). Martha, Mary and Lazarus also loved Jesus. There was friendship between them and Jesus. He loved people affectionately and with all the warmth of a human love. If sexuality is a God-given energy for relationship of love and care, then Jesus is among the most sexual beings who ever lived. He related with others as sexual person and as a friend with dignity, much respect and affection. Hence a celibate can become a friend to everyone.

Friendship is based on self-disclosure. *“Essential to friendship is the practice of sharing, and according to what is shared, we meet people at different levels. So we have all kinds of friends, with some of whom, we may share superficially, while with others, our minds and hearts, our deepest selves.”* (Peter Hanan, S.J in *Nine Faces of God*, p 274). Jesus told his disciples: ***“I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father”***(*Jn* 15:15-16; *Mt* 11:27). Jesus had many friends because he disclosed Abba’s love and also his love by sharing people’s joys and sorrows. People, who trusted him, also shared their joys and pains and became his close friends.

We, human beings, fear to make known to others our likes and dislikes. We fear to be misunderstood and to be rejected. So we are vulnerable. Friendship can be also a risk-taking exercise. Therefore experiencing genuine and respectful friendship takes time. Mutual sharing demands discernment and time in order to make right choices regarding what to disclose and what not to disclose to others in our relationships. It is not appropriate to reveal very personal feelings too quickly to the new acquaintances. Jesus revealed

Abba's love and his love to people because he did not fear of being misunderstood.

The late Cardinal Basil Hume, OSB of Westminster, U.K speaking on friendship said: *"In whatever context it arises, and always respecting the appropriate manner of its expression, love between two persons, whether of the same sex or of a different sex, is to be treasured and respected.....When two persons love, they experience in a limited manner in this world what would be their unending delight when one with God in the next. To love one another is in fact, to reach out to God who shares his loveableness with the one we love."* (Editorial, *The Tablet*, 8/11/2010).

Holy Scriptures tell us friendship is valuable. *"A faithful friend is a sure shelter, whoever finds one has found a rare treasure. A faithful friend is something beyond price, there is no measuring his worth. A faithful friend is the elixir of life"* (Sirach 6:14-17).

Holy heterosexual friends

St Augustine and St. Melania,
St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare,
St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila,
St. Francis de Sales and St. Irene de Chantal,
St. Catherine of Sienna and Bl. Raymond of Capua,
St. Martin de Porres and St. Rose of Lima,
St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Countess Ermengard,
St. Philip Neri and St. Catherine of Reici,
St. Boniface and St. Lioba,
St. Margaret Mary and Bl. Claude,
St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac,
St. John Bosco and Mary Mazeralla.

Celibate friendship promotes flourishing of life

Good friendship, that respects also personal and physical boundaries, promotes flourishing of life. Therefore celibates need to learn how to cultivate respectful and genuine friendship. They need to exercise discipline, restraint and discretion. They should also be aware of the culture in which they live and work and be sensitive to the cultural values and customs and respect them. Certain external behaviour patterns and expressions of friendship may not be tolerated in certain cultures. Hence there is need for decorum and demeanour.

A committed celibate life needs prayer

“Living a committed celibate life does not make sense and it cannot be sustained by anyone who does not regularly take time to make himself available to God in order to be touched and moved by God’s Spirit. Prayer is essential to the living of a celibate life..... having taken no time for praying causes anxiety. It is the anxiety of having lived in ways other than those which I profess. I know in my heart that a committed celibate life cannot be sustained without regular and prolonged prayer because the relational void of not knowing experientially that I belong to somebody will erode even my most dogged effort at fidelity....God made me; he decided I was fit to be entrusted with the Good News; and now and then he wants me to himself” (Keith Clark, Capuchin, *Being sexual and celibate*, p175-176.

The friendship, which God seeks with the celibates in prayer, is a very profound kind of intimacy based on the mutual gift of self-disclosure. Sometimes this may also involve restoring an intimacy with God which they may have lost. Although human friendship involves self-disclosure and vulnerability, the celibates too can disclose themselves to God and Jesus

without fear of being misunderstood or of being hurt. Remaining in divine intimate friendship will also bring abundant life and much joy (Jn.15:9-11).

“There is one faith, but there are many theologies. Christian faith, as a commitment to God in Jesus Christ, remains the same at all times and in all circumstances. But theology, as an attempt to answer questions about this faith will vary according to the different historical and social contexts that give rise to different questions.....Our faith questions, then, are always contextual, one of the results of which is that our answers are contextual, too...Any sound theology has to find its answers in the Bible and in Jesus himself as the incarnate Word of God.” (Albert Nolan, OP, *Hope in an Age of Despair*, p 14)

11.

APPENDIX

TRUSTING THE LAY FAITHFUL

The late bishop Frank Marcus Fernando, the bishop of the diocese of Chilaw appointed me as the parish priest of Ambakandawila, Chilaw in 1982 with the consent of my Oblate Provincial, the late Fr. Bernard Quintus, OMI. I spent five unforgettable years as a socio-pastoral animator of the people who were entrusted to my care.

One of my first socio-pastoral actions was to convene the existing parish council of Ambakandawila and to listen to the members regarding the felt needs of the people. The next item was to convince them of the importance of the parish council for the wellbeing of the parish and to appoint a treasurer who could be responsible for the management of the finances. The members of the parish council (men and women, young and old) chose Mr. W. Raymond Fernando for that post and I also congratulated him.

I invited the members of the parish council to participate actively in mutual love to promote fuller life for the parishioners. I also invited the zonal leaders who were also members of the parish council to be active.

The next item of the day's agenda was to inform the members regarding the contents of the instructions (from the bishop) sent to the parish priests regarding the financial management in the parish. I wanted Mr. Raymond Fernando, the treasurer,

to inform the members at the monthly meeting of the parish council, matters relating to the finances. Financial contributions came from the sale of coconuts, the tills (kanikka), and the monthly contributions from the families, plus the Mass stipends. Once a month, I requested the Treasurer (Mr. Raymond Fernando), the Annavi (the parish leader) and the sacristan to open the till (kanikka) and collect the offerings. For my maintenance as the parish priest and for my cook, I told the members that I preferred to get the allowance determined by the bishop from the treasurer of the parish council. The members were rather surprised to hear that I was giving the Mass stipends to the parish and that I was not willing to handle the finances of the parish alone. My role was to guide the faithful while exercising collaborative leadership. I wanted to be transparent and accountable in financial matters of the parish and be free to commit myself for the sacerdotal mission.

When the parish council felt that the old church-building could not accommodate the present population and that they needed a new church-building, knowing very well that majority of the men in the parish were engaged in fishing and that they would take the initiative to do the needful, I invited them to commence work. The zonal leaders in the parish council at Ambakandawila with the generous contribution of the parishioners, especially of the fisher-families, constructed the new structure to meet the felt need of the people.

A statement of accounts regarding financial matters was given to the parish council every month by the Treasurer and it was also displayed on the notice board for everyone's information.

The parish money was always deposited in the bank under joint account of the parish priest and the parish treasurer, while the bishop's name was also included as a signatory, enabling him to withdraw the money if and when necessary. I, for one, had much joy and freedom to concentrate on the socio-pastoral improvement of the parishioners since the lay faithful were able to manage the finances of the parish. They also cared for me with much affection.

Some ordained ministers (presbyters and bishops) and the lay faithful may be surprised to know what I had done as a parish priest at Ambakandavila. I felt that it was necessary to share this information so that many parishes can have lay faithful as treasurers in their parishes since many parishes in Sri Lanka do not have lay faithful as treasurers, managing the finances. I wanted to encourage our priests to trust our lay faithful as they trust us (the priests). I am surprised that some priests do not trust the lay faithful. We, the ordained ministers, need to trust our parishioners. There are competent and trustworthy men and women in the parishes who can help the parish priests (the presbyters) in financial matters, enabling them to devote the time more for the sacerdotal functions, namely to preach the Word of God, explain the teachings of the Church, guide the people to pray, to be compassionate and to lead virtuous lives.

Our lay faithful are looking for authenticity in the life of the ordained presbyters (priests) rather than power. They want to see an honest and sincere witness rather than an exercise of power. The lay faithful want to see the servant-image in the ordained person. Before the Second Vatican Council, in the

Tamil-speaking areas in Sri Lanka, the parish priest was called “Kattalai Swamy” (priest who commands).

I know that in a few coastal parishes at Negombo and at Chilaw, where the greater number of men are engaged in fishing, the lay leaders (the fishermen) are acting very responsibly in financial matters. The priests need not usurp the role of the lay faithful. They are ordained to be servant-leaders in order to exercise collaborative leadership in the parishes.

“There is a legitimate and ancient theology which defines magisterium as a teaching ministry which is neither identified with nor limited to the body of bishops or the Church officials in Rome.” – Cardinal Avery Dulles, *Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1970, ch 6

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Emmanuel Fernando, OMI

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