The Fragile Ones
Campaign for Child Protection
Sumedha is a centre for renewal of body, mind and spirit using insights and practices from psychology and spiritual traditions. It is located in the rejuvenating lush green Kumaon foothills of the Himalayas, 18 km south of the tourist town of Nainital.

2017 Programmes

Sumedha Dhyana (Retreat) (Open to all aged between 22 and 62)
May 21-30

Sumedha Dhyana, a spiritual retreat designed as a desert journey modelled on the experience of Jesus in the desert (Mark 1, 12-13) provides participants an opportunity to spend time in solitude in the metaphorical desert around the Word of God to experience “Wilderness & Paradise,” to encounter their “inner demons” and their “ministering angels”, to recognise their weakness and helplessness and surrender in faith and trust (1 Kings 19, 1-8) to a loving God who calls them to deep intimacy with him (Hosea 2, 16-17), to renew the enthusiasm and the passion they had at the beginning of their vocational journey (Rev. 2, 4), to open themselves to the healing, forgiveness and reconciliation God offers (James 5.13-15), and in this way be renewed and transformed as Jesus of Nazareth was through his desert experience.

Facilitation: Fr. Jose Parappully SDB, PhD

Sumedha Sadhana – Mini (for Young Religious, Age limit 25–45)
August 06- September 03

In Sumedha Sadhana-Mini, focus is on the psychological dynamics that affect spirituality. Participants are helped to become more aware of the unconscious dynamics behind their thoughts, feelings and defensive reactions; identify obstacles to spiritual growth; heal from negative emotions; and unleash the powers of the unconscious to move toward greater wellbeing and wholeness. This transformative and integrative process is further enhanced through an exploration of childhood and adolescent developmental experiences, psychosexual integration, holistic spirituality and religious life.

Facilitators: Fr. Johny Dominic, SDB, PhD & Fr. Jose Parappully, SDB, PhD

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“Let The Children Come To Me”

The month of April is nationally recognized in the U.S. as Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and Child Abuse Prevention Month. As the Delhi high court rightly observed, ‘child sexual abuse is now an epidemic.’ It is difficult, if not impossible, to have certain information about the practice of pedophilia because even the families of the victims rarely denounce the crime for fear of revenge and to keep the good name of the own family.

This process never ends up unless the family, schools and institutions, each for its part but all within an organic and joint project, do not engage to ensure that young people grow up educated, trained, assisted and aided steadily and attentively. We must agree that sexual abuse or exploitation of children is increasingly frequent and it is a crime on the rise. Perpetrators take advantage of sophisticated means of communication and networking, and it becomes more complicated to intervene in their harmful activities. The need for awareness and protective measures are imminent. So the commitment of all of us is crucial, not only to denounce cases of pedophilia that have already occurred, but above all to make a continuous and uninterrupted prevention.

The Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, the archbishop of Denver, USA, once said: “Child abuse is a topic that no one likes to talk about because of how horrible it is. But we need to talk about it; we need to name it and fight it.”

We must support and promote all those who work to prevent the abuse of children, who are the most precious gifts God gives us. They are great examples of innocence and simple life. Let us recall the encouraging words of Jesus: “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt. 19:14). When we are celebrating the paschal mystery of Christ’s passion, crucifixion, death and resurrection, let us not forget that Jesus died for all of us, including the children. Also let us take a strong and mature decision, in this Easter season, to stand up for the children. May our Church, society and world rediscover the gift, dignity and beauty of children, and may we work to protect them and their innocence!

Happy and blessed Easter to all!

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Pedophilia is an abuse over the children. Does the Catholic Church take some measures to protect children who are created in the image, especially in the vulnerable image of God?

Sexual abuse is a human problem everywhere in the world today and pedophilia is the worst of all. Pedophilia is an abuse of power over a weaker individual, a child, triggered by a sexual life disorder. Pedophilia is terribly sickening. Pedophilia indicates a deterioration of moral values in families and societies. The sexual abuse of children, minors and vulnerable persons by parents, teachers and religious leaders can cause enormous pain, anger and confusion, whereby a parent becomes an abuser, a healer turns to be a violator and a teacher becomes a perpetrator. It is breach of trust.
It is devastating. John Paul II, in his address to the Cardinals of the United States and Conference Officers, on 23 April 2002 said that the sexual abuse of children is “by every standard wrong and rightly considered a crime by society; it is also an appalling sin in the eyes of God.” Sexual abuse of a child or minor is a crime in the universal law of the church as well as in the civil jurisdiction of India under the ‘Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012.’

**Child Abuse is contrary to human dignity and inviolable right to life:**

Every human is an image of God (Gen 1:26). A child is the most vulnerable image of God. The Catholic Church believes in the sanctity and the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. In the moral sense, a child is a human person and has dignity from the moment of conception. In the catholic theology, because every person is an image and likeness of God, the absolute inviolability of God demands the inviolability of human life, too. While the principle of inviolable right to life claims an absolute protection for all human lives, the principle of vulnerability calls for a special protection of children and minors, the handicapped and the sick because they are the most vulnerable and dependent humans. They should not be harmed physically, psychologically, mentally or sexually. A physical violence affects the whole person. That is why, we need to restore the physical, mental, psychological and social health of the victims.

Any type of abuse is contrary to human dignity. Human dignity is the source of inherent, universal and inviolable rights. Right to life, i.e., integrity of human body, is the most fundamental of all those rights. No one, no group, no authority and no state can change or harm these rights, because these rights find their source in God himself. The inviolability of the person which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. The Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World) issued by Pope John Paul II on December 30, 1988, says that the personal dignity of every human being demands the respect, the defense and the promotion of the rights of the human person (no. 38). When one part suffers, all parts suffer (1 Cor 12:26). This is especially true when it comes to victims of sexual abuse and the church. The issue of child abuse, particularly sexual abuse is most unholy and undignified act.

The human being has these rights in every stage of development from conception until natural death; and in every condition whether child or adult, healthy or sick or handicapped, rich or poor. The Second Vatican Council openly proclaimed: All offenses against life itself, such as every kind of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture [sexual abuses], undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where humans are treated as mere tools for [sexual pleasure] profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like are certainly criminal: they poison human society; and they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme disonor to the Creator (Gaudium et Spes, 27).

Addressing the violence against children, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, under #2356, states: “Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.” As the Charter for Protection of Children and Youth by the US Bishops Conference states, “The damage caused by sexual abuse of minors is devastating and long-lasting.”

**Protection of Children is an Obligation:**

The church document *Familiaris Consortio* speaks directly on “The Rights of Children”: “Special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a pro-
found esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. This is true for every child, but it becomes all the more urgent the smaller the child is and the more it is in need of everything, when it is sick, suffering or handicapped” (no. 26). To every affliction against human life, the church must defend and protect every human person from all who plot against life (no.30).

Bishops must make a clear policy on child protection in the wake of abuses. No authority should hide the issues under the carpet. We must acknowledge the mistakes, apologize, deal with them with stern action. Only a transparent and truth-based action can bring healing to the victims and restore the person and credibility of the moral authority of the church. We have the responsibility for “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18) and ask forgiveness for the sins from all those victimized, offended and wounded of this scandal in order to be reconciled to God and one another. We must stand by the victims. The offender must be punished. Sexual abuses of children and minors by clerics must be lawfully dealt with. For immediate reference, here are a few canonical norms to deal with sexual abuses by church personnel.

1. When there is an allegation of sexual abuse of a child/minor by a priest, an immediate investigation must be initiated promptly and conducted objectively (CIC: c. 1717; CCEO: c. 1468). The accused enjoys innocence until the investigation proves otherwise.

2. When there is sufficient evidence for the sexual abuse, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith shall be notified and the bishop shall withdraw the accused from active ministry and prohibit public participation in the blessed Eucharist (CIC: c. 1722 or CCEO: c. 1473).

3. When even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest is established after an appropriate canonical process, the offending priest shall be removed permanently from active ministry and dismissed from the clerical state (CIC: c. 1395 §2 or CCEO: c. 1453 §1).

There are other legal provisions in the catholic church to deal with the cases of sexual abuses by church personnel: Canonical Delicts Involving Sexual Misconduct and Dismissal from the Clerical State, 1995; Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 18, 2001; Article 13, “Procedural Norms” for Motu proprio Sacramentorum sanctorum sanctitatis tutela, Acta Apostolica Sedis 93, 2001, p. 787. A canonical advisor can be asked to assist in the process. There is also a Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors for reform on the child sexual abuse scandals. Pope Francis wants the offenders to be brought to moral and legal accountability and the victims to be loved and cared for pastorally. In addition to the canonical process, the church authorities must allow and facilitate the civil law to take its action.

We have the responsibility for “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18) and ask forgiveness for the sins from all those victimized, offended and wounded of this scandal in order to be reconciled to God and one another.

The primary duty of the church is to protect the life and dignity of all human persons. Preventing child abuse and protecting children is an urgent obligation. Let the children come to the church. Don’t prevent them from coming due to suspicion, fear and abuses. The church should not become a place of fear, but we must make and keep the church the safest place for children. Child protection training is must. The Church must be a safer place for children:

Children must grow in a loving and safe environment. The emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of a child will allow God gifts to enrich the Church and the world. “We must provide acceptance, love, esteem, emotional, and spiritual concern for every child that comes into this world” (Familiaris Consortio, no. 26). Teaching on protection of children, through Sunday homilies and in schools, families and formation of priests, will provide safety for and give assurance to children, particularly, to those who have experienced the trauma of sexual abuse. Knowledge and awareness of moral values educates potential offenders.
a symbol of trust and compassion for children.

“An Ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” so goes a saying in English. Sexual abuse is part of the human condition, but we can definitely diminish its occurrence by effective policies. In his address to his fellow bishops at the Capuchin Bishops Meeting at San Giovanni Rotondo in September 2011, in which I participated along with my late Capuchin Bishop Peter Celestine, the Capuchin Cardinal Sean O’Malley recommended the following policies against child abuses to be implemented in the dioceses:

1. Any allegation of sexual abuse of minors (children under 18) should be reported to the civil authorities.
2. Any cleric who has sexually abused minors will permanently be removed from active ministry and not function again as cleric.
3. Use of proper screening and background checks for all church personnel and volunteers.
4. Child safety training programs for all church personnel, clergy, religious and laity.
5. Adoption of a rigorous program of human formation in seminaries and the implementation of codes of professional conduct and ministry.
6. Provision of pastoral outreach to victims and family members that includes therapeutic health ministry services and opportunities for spiritual healing.

It is need of the hour for Indian bishops to remind the priests and families on moral issues periodically through their newsletter. Having successfully dealt with the sexual abuse crisis in the USA and Ireland at the request of Pope Benedict, Cardinal Sean was earnest when he said that we must address the clerical sexual abuse not only by preventing it from happening but also by training the priests for moral life and ministry. The hope is that “prevention is possible.”
Pedophilia is defined as sexual perversion in which children are the preferred sexual object. It can be said to be a psychological disorder in which an adult has sexual fantasies about or engages in sexual acts with a prepubescent child.

Pedophilia can be either exclusive or non-exclusive. Exclusive pedophiles are attracted only to children. Non-exclusive pedophiles are attracted to both adults and children. A large percentage of pedophiles are homosexual or bisexual in their orientation to children, meaning they are attracted to male children or both male and female children.

It is a common assumption that only males are pedophiles. However, female pedophilia does exist. Although rare, female pedophiles display the same cognitive distortions as males. Females who exhibit pedophilia tend to suffer from psychiatric disorders more than males and may have a history of sexual abuse as a child more often when compared to males.

Causative Factors in Pedophilia

The causes of pedophilia are both biological and environmental in nature. Brain dysfunction may be a contributing or dominant factor of pedophilia. There are
also problems in the areas of self-control, extreme urge and cognitive distortions. In many cases, child sexual abusers suffer from traumatic experiences that have affected them during childhood. Many of them have also faced sexual and physical abuse as a child.

Pedophiles may have also faced molestation as children. They lacked the ability to control the situation then and when they grow up they attempt to re-live the trauma they experienced and they learn how to master it by assaulting children sexually. A complete role reversal during the act boosts their self-esteem and prevents them from feeling as a victim. Overall, their sexual urges and desires for children become deeply impinged within their sexual belief system.

There is significant research evidence that structural abnormalities are present in the brains of pedophiles. Abnormalities in the brains of pedophiles may result in compulsive sexual behaviour, poor judgment and repetitive behaviour.

The use of neuroimaging techniques like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRIs) and positron emission tomography scans (PET) has revealed that the abnormalities of pedophiles exhibit appear in the frontal and central regions of the brain. In particular, there is decreased gray brain matter in these regions. A reward deficiency disturbs the neurotransmission of dopamine and causes pedophilic behaviour. Using brain-scanning technology, it has been discovered that significant differences in white matter the substance that connects one brain region to another exists in pedophile brains suggesting a connection deficit.

Pedophiles are burdened with repetitive thoughts and urges. Most pedophiles express shame and guilt after partaking in their immoral behaviour.

Treatment of Pedophilia

Pedophilia, like many types of sexual disturbances does not have a complete cure. The sexual urges associated with pedophilia may never permanently disappear. Pedophilia is a life-long disorder. Recent studies have demonstrated that psychotherapy and drug therapy can be combined to bring about the most effective treatment to someone suffering from pedophilia.

Therapy includes dealing with traumatic events, especially those from the childhood. During therapeutic treatment, therapists may try to correct the distorted cognitions which may include distorted perceptions that pedophiles may hold.

In more serious cases, hormonal therapy can reduce testosterone to extremely low levels along with pedophilic urges. While hormonal therapy has side effects it has been found to be very effective.

One of the few treatments these patients can seek out is medication that lowers testosterone levels, to blunt the intensity of the erotic desire. Clinicians also sometimes prescribe antidepressants, both to address co-existing psychiatric problems and for the common side effect of lowering sex drive.

Prevention, more than treatment, is the great hope for pedophilia. Pedophilia; is a medical condition, rather than a moral failing. Nobody chooses to be a pedophile from birth.

A federal law in the United States passed in 1996 authorizes local law enforcement agencies to notify the public about convicted sex offenders living, working or visiting their communities and has helped expose the pedophile and allows parents to better protect their children. In India, this is still to become a reality.

Characteristics of Pedophiles

- Often the pedophile is male and over 30 years of age.
- Single or with few friends in his age group.
- If married, the relationship is linked to poor sexual relations.
- He may have a loss in employment for questionable reasons.
- He is fascinated with more children like activities rather than adult activities.
- He prefers to describe children in innocent and angelic terms with exaggeration.
- He may keep exotic toys, exotic pets and games that attract children.
- Children may love his company and enjoy playing with him.
- They may have a special children’s room in their house which may attract children.
- They may be employed in positions that often involves contact daily with children.
- They may volunteer to work with underprivileged and impoverished children.
- Pedophiles work to master their manipulative skills and often unleash them on troubled children by first becoming their friend.
- They may refer to the child as special or mature, appealing to their need to be heard.
The easiest child to victimize is the one with absent parents, single parent children who yearn for a particular parent, busy working parents who leave children alone at home, a child facing divorce amongst his parents and children in orphanages or adoption homes.

- They may show the child sexual content such as x-rated movies or pictures.
- They seek out shy, handicapped, and withdrawn children, or those who come from troubled homes.
- They shower them with attention, gifts, taunting them with trips to desirable places like amusement parks, malls, zoo’s and other such places.
- Many times pedophiles will develop a close relationship with a single parent in order to get close to their children.
- It is not unusual for the child to develop feelings for the predator and desire their approval and continued acceptance.
- Many of them believe that what they are doing is not wrong and that having sex with a child is actually healthy for the child.
- One factor that works against the pedophile is that eventually the children will grow up and recall the events that occurred.

### Protecting Children from Pedophiles

1. When children disclose they were sexually abused, it is important to believe that they are telling the truth 98-99 percent of the time. Believe them!
2. Sexual abuse happens when a child is alone with the predator in a car, an empty class room, an; empty home, a private office, a public place bathroom or a movie theatre toilet. Avoid putting your child in such situations.
3. Adults unknown to the child must not have private communication with your child via text, email, phone calls, or be alone with them. Make sure that you as parents are aware of who all speak to your child outside the house and on social media.
4. If an adult tells your child dirty jokes or let’s them get away with unacceptable behavior like smoking or bad conduct, they may be setting the child up to keep secrets with them.
5. Make sure your children know and use the correct words for their private parts: penis, vagina, scrotum, testicles, anus, breasts, nipples, etc. If they begin to refer to their body parts with special names please find out the source of interest with the regard to the use of such special terms.
6. The easiest child to victimize is the one with absent parents, single parent children who yearn for a particular parent, busy working parents who leave children alone at home, a child facing divorce amongst his parents and children in orphanages or adoption homes. A sad, lonely, or conflicted child is easier to manipulate.
7. A child often delays telling anyone about the abuse and the longer the delay. Children tell their story in bits and pieces, starting with a small detail to see how negative the response will be. Listen to your child when he wants to speak to you.
8. Children who are subjected to battering, physical punishment and harsh discipline are less likely to tell their parents about sexual abuse because they are afraid they will be punished for telling.
9. If a child tells you that he or she has been molested or abused, take them to a doctor immediately and also lodge a complaint with the police. These professionals are often trained in asking children questions and recording the story.
10. Do not take them to meet someone unless he or she is fully trained in interviewing children who have been sexually abused. You’ll make it harder for the child to deal with the abuse if you do so.
11. It is very important to make the child realize that it is not his or her fault at all and that you are always there to support him and that you love him despite anything that might have happened. The earlier abuse in any form is treated, the earlier it resolves and can be managed without long term sequel and effects.
Syria continues to suffer and struggle. March 15th marks the sixth anniversary of the bloody Syrian war. This afternoon (March 14th), a bomb blast in the city of Homs killed one and injured several. On March 12th, a double bombing near a popular Shiite shrine in Damascus killed over fifty and scores more were left injured. Since December, the eastern areas of Aleppo have been evacuated, but the bombings continue. The Syrian war, over these six years, has resulted in the deaths of thousands and caused the largest displacement in human history. After experiencing widespread destruction and insecurity, there is a certain desperation and a sense of fatigue among the Syrian people. The general feeling is that most are ready to clutch at any straw, to fan any glimmer of hope. They yearn for peace, security and stability and want the bombarding and the air strikes to stop now.

On the day of the sixth anniversary of the civil war, here is something that sheds light on the present situation in Syria.
The UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), in a statement for the sixth anniversary says, “While there are some hopes for peace, the needs and suffering of millions of Syrians continue unabated.” Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees adds, “Unless drastic measures are taken to shore up peace and security for Syria, the situation will worsen. Families have been torn apart, innocent civilians killed, houses destroyed, businesses and livelihoods shattered. It is a collective failure. Ultimately, Syria’s conflict isn’t about numbers – it’s about people.”

Today an estimated 13.5 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance and children make up half of that number. Children have lost their childhood; nearly 3 million Syrian children under five have grown up knowing nothing but conflict... More than 6.3 million people are internally displaced within Syria. About 4.9 million others (the majority women and children) have fled to neighbouring countries in the Middle East, including Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq. These have put the host communities under huge strain as they shoulder the social, economic and political fallout. Hundreds of thousands have made perilous sea voyages seeking sanctuary; no one is sure how many may have died at sea.

The plain truth is that the suffering of the Syrian people who are refugees and internally displaced, continues with no end in sight. Harsh weather conditions and limited access to basic resources gravely affect displaced families and individuals. Making ends meet is a daily struggle for both the displaced within Syria and those who have fled the country and sought refuge elsewhere. Sizeable sections of them...
are living in extreme poverty, unable to secure food, water, or medical provisions. Key cities in Syria today have no water, electricity and gas or very little access to these essential commodities. Delivering humanitarian aid to war-affected populations within Syria is still an urgent issue. There is also the ongoing concern that some neighbouring countries are unable to provide adequate assistance to meet the basic needs of refugees. This lack of assistance threatens the safety of vulnerable people and the stability and security of the region. Nevertheless, there is hope! There are innumerable stories of resilience in war-torn Syria among the forcibly displaced and from among the Syrians who have sought refuge in other countries. Majeda, a woman from Damascus who fled with her family in search of safety, still holds onto her dream of becoming a lawyer. Kassem is a young man who, in spite of losing a leg in a bomb blast in Syria, is studying in a school in Lebanon and one day wants to become an art teacher. There is Randa who has escaped the horrors of war but is now writing a book for little children telling them why war is all wrong. There is Mohamed Qasim, who now lives in Jordan. He suffers from cancer, but with a ‘never-say-die’ spirit is determined to give his little children a better future.

The ‘big powers’ and the wide range of vested interests particularly the military-industrial complex continue to play havoc with lives and destinies of the Syrians. There are ‘peace talks’ which take place among the ‘big guys’; not too many however, place too much of hope on them. Majeda, Kassem, Randa and Mohamed are simple, ordinary people. Each one of them has experienced the horrors of war in profoundly traumatic ways. They represent today, the spectrum of innumerable Syrians who have suffered immensely, but look towards a better future for themselves and for their children. They are some of the many, brave individuals who with their indomitable spirit, want to live a normal peaceful life and look to the future with hope.

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) of the MENA Region has been working in the midst of the Syrians who are displaced. Despite the challenges, JRS has stayed the course in Syria during the six years of conflict, addressing and serving those in urgent need while advocating for and with Syrians, for life with dignity. In Damascus and Homs, JRS operates education centres in parallel with child protection programs and psychosocial care for children and adults. In Aleppo, JRS teams provide those most vulnerable with emergency humanitarian assistance of food baskets and non-food items. When medical facilities in Aleppo came under ferocious bombardments, JRS continued to provide health services. In Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, JRS works with hundreds of Syrian refugees, providing them with emergency assistance as well as ongoing educational and psychosocial support.

In spite of the darkness that this conflict casts over all Syrians, JRS staff and volunteers have also experienced many moments of hope. On March 15th this year, JRS will launch a campaign (you can see a preview here http://en.jrs.net/campaigns_focus?TN=PROMO-20120718025148 ) to highlight the stories of Syrians living both inside and outside of the country. The Campaign will focus on the hope and resilience of the Syrians; of light overcoming darkness, Lola Moussa, who originally hails from the countryside near the city of Homs in Syria, sums up the struggles of the Syrian people meaningfully saying “there is still suffering and much pain - but what keeps us going on is our courage to hope and our continued resilience.”

-Fr. Cedric Prakash SJ
India is home to one fifth of the world’s children and it is shocking to learn that India has the highest rates of child sexual assault in the world.

Introduction

A well-behaved six-year-old child suddenly starts throwing temper tantrums. The child has trouble falling asleep, shows suicidal tendencies, abuses younger siblings, and the mother is unsettled by the animal sounds the child makes from time to time. The mother takes the child to a psychiatrist, who after extensive examination, discovers that the child has been sexually abused by the father. This is one of the many true stories occurring not very far from where you live.

Paedophilia is the talk of today’s Indian society today – thanks to the prevalent scandals which are in the newspapers and most recently of the Catholic priest which was revealed a few weeks ago.

Present Situation in India

The issue of Pedophilia gained prominence in India only after the arrest of Anglo-Indian Goa resident, Freddy Peats in 1991. He was charged with forcing boys into homosexual activities and for possessing drugs and pornographic material.

Sunil Rastogi, a tailor from Uttar Pradesh who regularly raped 500 minor girls since 2004 until he was taken into custody early 2017.

16 girls confessed that they were sexually abused, at an awareness programme, given by Ajeesh Ramachandran, psychiatrist at the Government Hospital in, Kerala. How many more might have been, but afraid to say so.

Few weeks ago, a priest in India was arrested for raping a minor. This episode in the Indian arena is one of the few cases which have been reported.

Again, dozens of young tribal men in Kerala’s Wayanad district have been charged under POSCO in the past three years.
for marrying underage girls as their tradition doesn’t recognise modern definitions of adulthood. A majority of tribal youth in Kerala come from the Paniya tribe, a 98,000-strong community that were mainly bonded labourers for centuries.

One out of every two children in India is sexually abused, most never report it, 52% of the reported cases are boys. These are staggering statistics, and essentially mean that if any one of us thinks that there has been no child abuse in our family – we are probably wrong.

The international tourism industry has acknowledged the problem of paedophilia, but in India we are yet to pay any heed to the problem. The National Women’s Commission has found that Bangalore is one of the five major cities, which supplies 80 percent of the child prostitutes in the country. Karnataka State Commission for Women tracked girls from impoverished rural families who were lured to Goa and pushed into the flesh trade. The coastal areas in Calangute, Candolin and Baga in Goa have been converted into a hub for paedophiles. Statistics of 2015, show over 50 child abuse cases are reported in Goa every 2-3 months: of these, over 80 were of sexual abuse. Kovalam in Kerala, Mahabalipuram in Tamilnadu are also following in the same footsteps.

While efforts are being made by NGOs and the Women’s Commission to address the issue adequately, the Law enforcing agencies are still pretending to be ignorant of the presence of paedophilia in India. Very often the culprits and child abusers have negotiated settlements with victims to the tune of thousands of rupees.

There is no accurate data on the number of Indian children being exploited in pornographic material – either being forced to perverted display or sexual acts – as many victims do not go to the police due to fear and shame. In 2015, 96 reports of children being sexually exploited in online imagery were reported in India – a rise of 140 per cent from 2014, according to National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

According to Ashley Ames, the word paedophile is commonly applied indiscriminately to anyone who sexually abuses a child, but child sexual offenders are not paedophiles unless...
they have a strong sexual interest in prepubescent children. First and foremost, it is a violation of human rights. Very few cases are reported to the police. Even fewer make it to the judiciary, because of the taboo surrounding the subject. According to the Encyclopædia of Catholicism (Frank Flynn, 2007) paedophilia comes from the Greek term, *paîj* “child” + *filia*, “love” which is friendly. It may be directed toward children of the same sex as the subject or children of the other sex. It includes engaging in sexual activities with a child, whether by asking or pressuring, or by other means, indecent exposure of the genitals, child grooming, or using a child to produce child pornography.

In India, it occurs in a variety of settings, including home, school, or work especially in places where child labour is common. Often it is caused by persons known to the child – but could be done by strangers too, because children become easy targets for pathological adults to victimise. Depending on age, the child often does not even understand what is happening and the affectionate way which the adult deals with the child, makes it seem to look as if it is a good and proper thing to do.

A 2009 article in *Clinical Psychological Review*, Clinical Psychology Review reports that the global prevalence of child sexual abuse has been estimated at 19.7% for females and 7.9% for males. Eight years from then, it has possibly increased even more given the ease of pornographic material available through smartphones and ease of Internet access. The article says, that most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims; approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often brothers, fathers, uncles, or cousins; around 60% are other acquaintances, such as “friends” of the family, babysitters, or neighbours; strangers are the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases. Most child sexual abuse is committed by men; studies on female child molesters show that women commit 14% to 40% of offenses reported against boys and 6% of offenses reported against girls.

**Paedophilia Among Clerics**

Nothing has damaged the Catholic Church at the turn of the millennium more than the paedophile scandal. Many clerics have left a wreckage of victims – children – both girls and boys, some who were now grown up with families of their own, some even seminarians, who later became priests.

Pope Francis opened his papacy in March 2013, with an attitude of openness to confront this scourge and begin some therapeutic exercises within the church, especially asking pardon from those who have been victims of this painful syndrome.

Outsiders tend to attribute the paedophile scandal to priests’ rule of ‘celibacy’, but experts discount that. In fact, a debate held at NVSC - Pune (2010), under the leadership of Fr. Joe Matthias SJ, the students clearly and scientifically defended the fact that, sexual abuse of minors has no causal relationship whatsoever with celibacy. In the general population even in India, most paedophiles are married fathers of children who victimise their own or others’ children.

A report indicated that the priests involved in sexually abusing minors were not paedophiles in the strict sense of the term, but immature lonely men who burdened with the demands of priesthood and finding themselves in vulnerable situations, lacked the personal integrity to resist abusing the power they had. The clinical data of priests who have been treated, for paedophilia exhibited intimacy deficits, often emotional congruence with adolescents and other problems, e.g stress, obesity, alcohol, gambling, etc. Majority of offenders have serious difficulty in normal peer relationships. It
is an aberration that has its origin in the ‘confused’ and disturbed sexual identity of the offender as a man. (AJVF – NVSC, 2011)

Reasons

Bishops and religious leaders have failed to heed Jesus’ dire warning: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6). But how would one follow Christian ideals, when they don’t have the tools to do so. Pope Francis in Amoris Laetitia, recalls the importance of the family and need for love and affectionate treatment within the family as one of the most important factors for holistic growth and maturity in adult lives.

In Indian Seminaries and Religious Houses like in all others, initial years of formation are most crucial. It must be the time when the religious or seminarian is to prepare himself/ herself psychosomatically for a celibate life. Enough of exposure programmes and psychological and practical tools, for integration of sexuality and celibacy must be mandatory. When the formators and formandee take this for granted then the questionable issues turn up in later life. Often among many religious and clerics prayer life is given a back seat. This in fact is the most important of all. For silence and connection with the divine are real and only the Celibate Jesus can help us live celibate lives.

Solutions

Virtuous Paedophiles: It is an Internet-based mutual support group for paedophiles who acknowledge having a sexual interest in children and do not act on their desires. Members support each other in trying to lead normal lives without committing child sexual abuse. There are over 1900 users registered including parents of children, parents of paedophiles, a few sex researchers and many paedophiles of both genders.

Prevention: Another, solution is to protect the children. In today’s Wi-Fi-wired world, how do we promote digital safety and privacy? Attempting to protect students by blocking access to the internet is not the solution because they need to gain experience in safely navigating it. If they are unfortunate enough to encounter uncomfortable situations online, we need to provide support as well as building on any teachable moments that arise. But we can begin by modelling good online behaviour and offering guidelines. Safety guidelines can help students develop strategies to protect themselves and their peers from online predation. Privacy guidelines can help students limit the amount of personal information they share online. It is important to remind them to tighten their privacy settings on social networking sites in particular, warn them of fake profiled predators and bullies.
Government Policy: The Indian Government has ratified and accepted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 35 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “all appropriate national, bilateral and multinational measures will be taken by the state to prevent abduction, sale, trafficking, and coercion to engage in unlawful sexual activity and forms of exploitation such as prostitution, pornographic performances”. However practically, greater political will, more effective enforcement and adequate allocation of resources are needed to give effect to the spirit and letter of existing laws and conventions, policies and programmes.

Since a few years now, India has strong law in place – the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act – which passed in 2012. Parents, teachers, children, police and medical personnel, still need to be sensitized on it. Besides, India got its first internet hotline in August, 2016 run by Aarambh initiative under anti-trafficking NGO Prerana to encourage people to report online child pornography, aimed at curbing a surge in photographs and videos on the internet showing children being sexually exploited and making the internet a secure place for children.

In conclusion, does the integral formation of persons, within families, schools, seminaries or religious houses, need to be evaluated? The lack of or distorted priority of ideals and incomplete forms of education which often highlight only the academic development of the mind, rather than integrated and holistic personality development, even in schools, colleges, seminaries and convents are one of the reasons, why adults turn out to be sadistic or voyeuristic towards children, using sexual overtones in their behaviour to inflict violence.

It is a sad case that often, authorities discourage parents from reporting child sexual abuse. But even one child’s silence is massively dangerous because on average, statistics say that, a single molester abuses 48 more victims. Despite this risk, police and doctors make statements like “the child’s hymen is torn. Don’t report it. No one will marry her.” The subtext of these statements is that quintessential Indian fear – What will people say? What will people say? It’s time to rewrite this phrase. We need a safer India.
RENEWAL COURSE ON
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY FOR PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS
WHO ARE PROSPECTIVE COMMUNITY LEADERS,
ANIMATORS, FORMATORS, COUNSELLORS AND THOSE WHO ARE
INTERESTED IN PERSONAL SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

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It was not too long ago when the ‘doctor’ was our family physician. We went to the doctor for minor and major ailments. We were listened to and given some good counsel. Our family doctor was privy to husband-wife problems; the concerns parents had with their children and vice-versa; and of course, those with the ‘in-laws’. Some hard-to-swallow powders and bitter medicine were given. One often felt better, not depressed, after visiting one’s doctor. Most often we were cured before the medicine dosage was completely finished. When we were just too ill, the doctor visited us in our homes. Of course, there were the big hospitals for major illnesses, surgeries etc.

Times have changed! The family doctor in most places has become as prehistoric as a dinosaur. Every illness necessitates that a specialist and a super-specialist see us. Then there are the innumerable tests to be done and reports to be got. At the end there is a huge bill to pay. Several of the ‘posh’ hospitals are able to generate astronomical billings – no patient and not even a corpse can be taken out of that hospital until every rupee has been settled. However, these expensive medical services in the country cater to a particular clientele who can afford it; for the teeming millions it is just beyond their means.

Healthcare, which is accessible and affordable, equitable and qualitative, is the right of every single citizen. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 25 states, “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes additional accommodations for security in case of physical debilitation or disability, and makes special mention of care given to those in motherhood or childhood.

In the Constitution of India however, the ‘right to health’ is not an explicit fundamental right. Most provisions related to health are in Part-IV (Directive Principles). Article 38 says that the state will secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people. Providing affordable healthcare is one of the ways to promote welfare. Article 39(e) calls the state to make sure that health and strength of workers, women, and the tender age of children are not abused. Article 41 imposes duty on state to provide public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness etc. Article 42 makes
Poor and the marginalised. In the last Union Budget presented at the end of January 2017, the allocation for the health sector as a share of GDP has seen a marginal increase from 0.26% in 2016-17 to 0.30% in 2017-18. This falls abysmally short of meeting the long-standing demand (articulated in the Draft National Health Policy, 2015) of increasing the total allocation for health sector to at least 2.5% of the GDP. On the other hand, the Defence allocation was hiked by a further 10%, making it scandalously to about 12.78% of the total Government expenditure.

The fact that health has not reached millions of the men and women of our country is certainly depressing news. Making health for all – a right for all, has to necessarily be our next step.

World Health Day will once again be observed on April 7th, with a focus on ‘Depression’, which “affects people of all ages, from all walks of life, in all countries. It causes mental anguish and impacts on people’s ability to carry out even the simplest everyday tasks, with sometimes devastating consequences for relationships with family and friends and the ability to earn a living”.

The fact that health has not reached millions of the men and women of our country is certainly depressing news. Making health for all – a right for all, has to necessarily be our next step.
1 **Cardinal Gracias**

**Vatican**

Barely a fortnight after being re-elected as head of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Cardinal Oswald Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, was granted the title of Lawyer of the sacred Roman Rota on February 15. The Roman Rota is part of the government system established in Rome by which the Pope discharges the duties that are devolved on him as Head of the Catholic Church. “It is one of the tribunals through which the Pope exercises his sovereign power of administering justice in ecclesiastical matters,” said Father Nigel Barrett, spokesperson, Archdiocese of Bombay. The Rota consists of 10 judges of equal status, and the Pope makes the appointment of a judge in person.

2 **Indonesia pedophile**

**Jakarta**

Indonesian Catholics have voiced alarm over pedophile rings targeting children through social media. Their fears were heightened last week when Jakarta police announced the arrest of four suspects accused of luring children via Facebook. The four were arrested in connection with a Facebook page called ‘Official Candy’s Group’ where members shared tips and tricks to lure children, police said. Two suspects were group administrators while the other two were teenage boys under 17-years-old.

Indonesia has the highest number of recorded pedophile cases in Asia, according to Interpol and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data. The church will continue campaigning in cooperation with the Justice and Peace commission, and Commission for Catechetic to protect children from sexual abuse.

3 **Irregular unions**

**Rome**

Pope spoke to the parish priests, who were in Rome attending a course on marriage preparation and the new rules to reform the process for verifying the validity of a marriage, to reach out to the couples in cohabitation with “tenderness and compassion” and urged them that ministry to the least and the neediest “is an essential part of your work”. In an audience with the parish priest Pope Francis said, couples who have chosen to live together without getting married in the church “are, in spiritual and moral terms, among the poor and the least, toward whom the church, in the footsteps of her teacher and Lord, wants to be a mother who doesn’t abandon, but who draws near and cares for. Pope tirelessly reminds couples that marriage is a true sacrament that needs a long preparation and God is reflected in a Christian marriage “impressing his image and the indelible character of his love on them.”

4 **China-Vatican issue**

**Vatican**

The China Global Television Network, formerly CCTV International, broadcasted that China-Vatican negotiations expected to take place in next couple of weeks. One of the long time sticky issue on China – Vatican relations is the appointment of the bishops. Pope appoints bishops from his religious authority but Beijing wants to appoint his own bishops. The TV broadcasted this issue, however, Professor Wang Meixiu, senior researcher on Catholic studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, said that it was “a positive move” to bring up the topic of China-Vatican relations on a central television network. Religious topics getting into a mainstream media report or discussion is helpful to de-sensitize religious issues [in the atheist country],” Wang told ucanews.com. However, “it is a pity that the topic was too generalized and there was no in-depth discussion” on Catholic issues, and if the show was broadcasted in Chinese, it would have been much more meaningful and beneficial to the local people, she said.

5 **Samina Nawab**

**Pakistan**

Samina Nawab, a Pakistani Christian humanitarian and rights activist helped to rebuild a chapel for 100-plus Christian inmates in a major Karachi prison. She told that a Christian prisoner sought her assistance to build the chapel when she visited the facility to set up a free medical camp. Her trust sets up free medical camps to aid the most vulnerable sections of society. Although rights groups accuse Pakistan of subjecting religious minorities to severe discrimination, Nawab said she...
never experienced unfair treatment due to her Christian faith. One remarkable aspect of her charity is that there is no outside help from any international body, the trust is run on donations from close family and friends. In recognition of her services, she received the Official Nelson Mandela Award in 2016 from the Federal Minister for Human Rights Kamran Michael.

6 Priest stabbed Melbourne

A Catholic priest from Kerala was attacked by an Italian on Sunday when the priest was leading the Sunday mass in a Melbourne church. Father Tomy Kalathoor Mathew was stabbed in the neck with a kitchen knife by the Italian during the mass at a Catholic church in Melbourne suburbs, media reports said. While the Mass was going on the accused, aged in his 50s, came forward and shouted that since the priest was an Indian, he must be a Hindu or a Muslim and therefore can't be saying mass. Police arrested the attacker soon, according to Indian news service IANS.

7 Goa elections Goa

The Indian coastal state of Goa has elected the highest number of Catholic lawmakers since state polls were first held in 1963. When poll results were declared March 11, out of 40 elected representatives, 17 are Catholics, giving them a 43 percent representation in a state where Christians form only 22 percent of the population. Almost all Christians in Goa are Catholics. Social commentator Father Victor Ferrao, said “people in their wisdom have rejected the BJP but have stopped short of giving the Congress party the full majority to rule.” The BJP and pro-Hindu groups attached to it have often been accused of discrimination and violence against religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims. The BJP’s pro-industrial development policies upset large sections of Goa’s population because of harm done to the environment.

8 Married men Rome

Pope Francis said, in an interview with German newspaper Die Zeit that he would be considering married men to priesthood due to shortage of clergy, and indicated that he would be open to a change in the rules governing eligibility for the priesthood. “We need to consider if ‘viriprobati’ could be a possibility,” he said. Viriprobati is the Latin term for “tested men” or married men of outstanding faith and virtue.” The Catholic Church already allowed some married men to be ordained priests. Protestant married priests who convert to Catholicism can continue to be married and be a Roman Catholic priest. Eastern Catholic churches that are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church can also maintain their tradition of married priests. Pope Francis in his book, “On Heaven and Earth,” said that “For the time being, I am in favour of maintaining celibacy with the pros and cons that it has, because it has been ten centuries of good experiences more often than failure.”

9 Protection of minors Vatican

In a significant show of unity, officials from every Vatican department – including at least half a dozen cardinals who head various dicasteries – attended a recent Rome seminar on safeguarding minors. “I actually come from a dicastery that takes up the issue of human rights and justice,” said Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Every department of the Roman Curia was represented in some way at the March 23 seminar, an indication of its importance in the eyes of Vatican officials. It is rare for the cardinals who head dicasteries to attend events outside of those hosted by their own department – more often, they send representatives to attend. Joining Cardinal Turkson at the gathering was Cardinal Kevin Farrell, president of the Vatican’s mega-department for Laity, Family and Life.

10 Meeting of Families Ireland

Just a little more than a year away, the Archdiocese of Dublin released a video Wednesday inviting families from around the world to come together in Ireland for the World Meeting of Families in August 2018. The next World Meeting of Families will be held Aug. 22-26, 2018. Pope Francis’ visit to Dublin in 2018 will be a significant moment for Ireland, since it has been almost 40 years since their last visit from a Pope, Ireland’s ambassador to the Holy See, Emma Madigan, told EWTN News in January. The theme of the 9th World Meeting of Families is “The Gospel of family, joy for the world.” As the video says, “The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church. Our Catholic Church is a family of families.”

SMART COMPANION INDIA » APRIL 2017 27
Tadasana (palm tree posture) is helpful to strengthen the body and the mind. Palm tree is well known for its strength and capacity to survive inclement weather conditions. People with lack of body balance, neck pain or serious health problems should not practise this posture. Let there be no furniture close by where you practise tadasana so that even if you lose balance you will not hit any object. In the beginning, practise it on bare floor so that you may get better grip.

**Practise: Level I**

Stand straight, feet about twelve inches wide, neck and head straight. Fix your eyes on a spot on the wall a little above the eye level. Keep both the palms on your head downward, fingers interlocked. Slowly breathe in, as you breathe in lift up your heels from the floor and lift up your interlocked palms above your head turn it upside down. Keeping the balance and standing on your toes, stretch out your body to the maximum. Remain in this posture ten seconds in the beginning then slowly exhale and bring down your palms on your head and heels on the floor. This is one round; one may practise three rounds in the beginning after a month’s practise, the duration and number of rounds may be increased. After practising for some time, if the body balance is ensured, one may look up to the interlocked fingers instead of looking at the wall and continue the posture.

**Level II**

Stand straight, feet about sixteen inches wide, keep your hands on both sides. As you breathe in, lift up your hands on both sides above your head and lift up your heels. Interlock your fingers and turn your palms upside down. In the final stage you are standing on your toes, your body is stretched to the maximum, head turned upward looking towards the palms. Remain in this posture about fifteen seconds then slowly exhale, release your fingers, bring down your hands on both sides and bring down your heels on the floor. Repeat the posture three or five rounds. After one has mastered body balance one may keep the eyes closed but not in the beginning. Gradually the number of practise can be increased. Concentrate on the stretching of the muscles, nerves and joints.

**Benefits:**

Regular practise of tadasana will strengthen the body; will improve the mental concentration and body balance. Stretching the body will help to relax the nerves system and the muscles which will facilitate the energy supply through the peripheral nerves system. As a result of stretching, the central nerves and the back bone will be loosened and the congestion or blocks at the point where the peripheral nerves begin from the spinal cord will be released. As you lift up your body and stretch it the lower abdominal muscles, small and large intestines, stomach and chest muscles will be strengthened. Tadasana will be helpful for women to tone up stomach and chest muscles even during the early stages of pregnancy. Chest cavity will expand giving more space for the lungs to expand. As you lift your hands up and interlock your fingers, shoulder muscles and shoulder joints will be tightened and later when you come back to the normal position those muscles will get fresh blood supply. People with rigid shoulder and neck muscles will get relief.

**Tiryakatadasana** (swaying palm tree pose) will stretch the side muscles and strengthen them. Feet are placed about three feet wide, as you breathe lift up the hands, interlock the fingers and turn them upward. Slowly exhale and bend to the left, make sure that you do not twist your torso or bend forward or backward. If your bending is proper you will feel stretching on your right side of the body and you will not be able to bend too much in the beginning. As you come back to the straight posture breathe in, then breathe out and do it to the right side. When you bend
to the left; become aware of the contraction of muscles in the left side and stretching of the muscles and hip joint on the right side. One may practise this asana three to five times in the beginning and increase the number later. Like tadasana, this asana also will strengthen the muscles and joints. Flexibility of the body, back bone and side muscles will be increased.

**Katichakrasana** is waist rotating posture. Keep the body relaxed, legs about three feet wide, hands on both side of the body. Legs and feet are firmly placed on the floor, body above pelvic joint rotates. Slowly inhale and lift your arms, keep your right palm over your left shoulder joint and the left hand goes behind to your right side. As you breathe out twist your left shoulder and torso to your left back. Turn your head and neck to the left and look above the left shoulder. While you twist your body don’t move your feet, keep it firmly placed on the floor. Breathe in as you turn back to the straight posture and put down your hands on both side. Repeat the same to the right side and one round is completed. May do three to five rounds in the beginning and later increase the number.

**Benefits:** This posture will help to ease stiffness of the muscles in the lumbar, thoracic regions and on both side of the back bone. Vertebrae and the discs in the back bone will be twisted to give them fresh blood supply. Pelvic joints will be made flexible, stomach muscles will be strengthened. Through the expansion and contraction, the chest/breast muscles will get fresh blood and energy supply; internal vital organs heart, lungs, pancreases, kidneys, uterus and the peripheral nerves system will benefit a lot through the practice of this asana. This asana will help to release the physical and mental stress.
One of the clarion calls of POPE FRANCIS has been to respect the dignity of each individual. He has been stressing this point repeatedly.

On Thursday, January 26, 2017 speaking to the members of the Italian Committee for Bioethics, he underlined how the Church supports the efforts of civil society to promote, “the search for truth and goodness on complex human and ethical issues”. He noted the fact that the Committee “had repeatedly dealt with the respect for the integrity of the human being and the protection of health from conception to natural death, considering the person in his singularity, always as an end and never simply as a means.”

Again on Oct 22, 2017 he told a Council of Journalists that “truth, professionalism and respect for human dignity were essential elements” in their work. On the subject of human dignity, the Pope stressed the importance of responsible journalism and he reiterated earlier comments he made about rumours being a form of “terrorism”, and how you can kill a person with language. The Holy Father went on to say
that “journalism cannot become a ‘weapon of destruction’ of people and even nations.” Criticism, is legitimate, he added, “as well as the denunciation of evil, but this must always be done respecting the other, his life, his affections.”

He points out that every individual must be treated with the dignity and respect due to him or her as a person. Therefore he urged emphatically that immunity must be treated with the respect. That dignity and respect due to him, the denunciation of evil, but this must always be done respecting the other, his life, his affections.

The Culture of Waste

In this context of the unique dignity assigned to each person, we can understand Pope Francis challenge of tackling what he called “the culture of waste.” Such a culture, he underlines, has many forms, such as treating human embryos and even the sick and elderly who are approaching death as disposable materials.

In his speech to diplomats on January 13, 2014 he spoke against such a culture of waste, exemplified in the throw away culture: “Unfortunately, what is thrown away is not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves, who are discarded as ‘unnecessary.’ For example, it is frightful even to think there are children, victims of abortion, who will never see the light of day; children being used as soldiers, abused and killed in armed conflicts; and children being bought and sold in that terrible form of modern slavery which is human trafficking, which is a crime against humanity.”

Degradation of Our Dignity

Such culture of waste shows that we “degrade” our dignity. This is what happens when we embrace idolatry and allow material things, such as wealth, to take the place of God in our hearts. Francis further adds that in a society, tending towards competition, and focussing only “acceleration of progress” and commodification of persons, degradation of human dignity - both of the victims and culprits is normal.

Our Common Pursuit

Therefore, in the Joint Session of Congress, United States on Sept 25, 2015, he urged: “All political activity must serve and promote the good of the human person and be based on respect for his or her dignity.” He reaffirmed from the Declaration of American Independence, issued on 4 July 1776: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

This calls for a collective conversion of mind and heart: “Essential to the attainment of these national goals is the moral imperative of ensuring social justice and respect for human dignity. The great biblical tradition enjoins on all peoples the duty to hear the voice of the poor. It bids us to break the bonds of injustice and oppression which give rise to glaring, and indeed, scandalous social inequalities. Reforming the social structures which perpetuate poverty and the exclusion of the poor first requires a conversion of mind and heart.”

So, the existential question the Pope asks each one of us is: “How can I share this dignity, so that it develops in a positive reciprocity? How can I make the other feel worthy?” He further asks: How do I accept my own dignity? How am I helping others to grow in their dignity?
Indian bishops support Tribals

Jharkhand

Tribal people of the eastern Indian Jharkhand State have been campaigning against the land law amendments made in November that allow Jharkhand State to take tribal lands for welfare and industrial projects. The amendments are now awaiting State governor Droupadi Murmu's assent to become law. Some 3,000 tribal people marched through the streets of New Delhi and converged near parliament. Nabore Ekka, president of Jharkhand Adivasi Sangharsh Morcha Delhi region, along with Jharkhand’s opposition political parties, organised the demonstration to attract national attention against their State government’s anti-tribal policies. The bishops decided to support the struggle for land and suggested systems to monitor any policy decisions that might affect tribal people.

Salesian in Youth Work

Arunachal Pradesh

Father Cyriac Pulinthanathumalayil of Salesian Province of Dimapur in Arunachal Pradesh has received a state award for excellence in Youth work. He is the founder & director of Don Bosco Youth Centre in the State capital of Itanagar. The Award was given by the Home Minister of India, Rajnath Singh in Itanagar at a function to celebrate the Statehood day of Arunachal Pradesh. The Don Bosco Youth centre has helped hundreds of young people from the state to find jobs in various parts of the country. It also imparts skills in computer, hospitality, spa and beauty, retail and tourism, spoken English and other soft skills.

Heroic nun

Bhopal

The 53 year old, Sister Clara Animuttil, works in the railway station platform teaching abandoned children. She is faced with many kinds of oppositions: sex abusers, gang leaders and even from some of the railway officials. She cares for runaways since 1998 in Itarsi, a major railway junction, and set up a center for them in 1999. She keeps visiting the railway platform to contact destitute children begging and doing menial jobs. She takes them to her center, Jeevodaya (dawn of hope) center, just outside the railway station to provide them with accommodation, food, clothes and education. Her work has helped more than 21,000 children who often use drugs or suffer sexual exploitation. Archbishop Leo Cornelio of Bhopal, in the capital of Madhya Pradesh, considers the nun a “rare person who put her own life at risk for others. [She is] a great example of both the struggles of women and what women can do with conviction and faith,” he said.

Rani Maria to be beatified

Kochi

The Vatican has cleared the name of Keralite nun Rani Maria, who died after being stabbed in Indore 22 years ago, for beatification. Rani Maria’s cause of canonization began in 2003 and she was declared a Servant of God four years later. The 41-year-old nun was stabbed by Samandar Singh inside a bus at Udainagar allegedly at the behest of money lenders affected by the nun’s social work among village women while she was travelling to Indore, enroute to her native place in Kerala. The nun was born on January 29, 1954 at Pulluvazhy, a small village near Kochi.

“Sneha Bali”

Alapuzha

A Hindi theatre group from Hindu holy city of Varanasi is on a 15-day Lenten mission performing a play on the passion of Christ in 14 churches in Kerala. The Passion play in Malayalam is performed by Christian, Hindu and Muslim artiste of Varanasi Prerana Kala Manch art forum for inspiration), a unit of Vishwa Jyoti Communications managed by the Indian Missionary Society (IMS). The play entitled “Sneha Bali” (Love Sacrifice) is two hours of light and sound show. The community was founded by Fr. Dheeraj Sabu, Father Anand’s conferee. The troupe is staging play in various church premises in Alapuzha, Ernakulam, Kollam, Kottayam and Trichur districts.
REbuilding Your MESSAGE: Practical Tools to Strengthen Your Preaching and Teaching

Ideas are the currency of the twenty-first century. In order to succeed, you need to be able to sell your ideas persuasively. Michael White and Tom Corcoran in Rebuilding Your Message, share their carefully honed communication practices to help anyone who wants to be more a successful communicator. They also share dozens of strategies to help Catholic parishes establish and sustain excellent communications. This book clearly gives a certain guidelines how to prepare what you are to say and how you have to say. We communicate to be understood and to understand others. It is a perfect book for communicators.

Pages: 267 Price: ₹ 250.00
ISBN: 978-81-7176-884-4

More Than You Could Ever IMAGINE: On Our Becoming Divine

In More Than You Could Ever IMAGINE, Bernie Owens, the author of the book, offers a glimpse of what we shall become, both individually and as a human race, transformed in Christ. This book is ideal reading for pastors, spiritual directors, instructors and students of formation programs and college courses of theology and religious studies; so too for anyone, Christian or non-Christian, wanting to grow in their knowledge of our journey to God. It will also be of much interest to clients of psychologists who are open to the spiritual journey. With the help of St. Paul, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and Teilhard de Chardin, the author provides an engaging sketch of our spiritual journey.

Pages: 200 Price: ₹ 200.00
ISBN: 978-81-7176-886-8

The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within

The renowned author of eight books and abbes of the online retreat center Abbey of the Arts, Christine Valters Paintner takes readers on a new kind of pilgrimage: an inner journey to discover the heart of God. In The Soul of a Pilgrim, Paintner identifies eight stages of the pilgrim’s way and shows how to follow these steps to make an intentional, transformative journey to the reader’s inner “wild edges.” Each phase of the exploration requires a distinct practice such as packing lightly, being uncomfortable, or embracing the unknown. The Soul of a Pilgrim is the perfect companion to have in our pocket along the way.

Pages: 200 Price: ₹ 200.00
ISBN: 978-81-7176-885-1
Director: Martin Scorsese
Stars: Andrew Garfield, Liam Neeson, Adam Driver, Shinya Tsukamoto, Issei Ogata, Tadanobu Asano

Chris Valentino sdb
Mumbai
With so many films made, remade and exclusively made for online viewing, the import of a riveting film made for the large canvas to reach a larger audience is always welcome. Martin Scorsese’s decades long infatuation and grappling with Shusaku Endo’s 1966 novel Chinmoku, translated into English by William Johnston reaches its acme point with the stunning and thought-provoking Silence.

In 17th century Japan, Christianity is outlawed and the famed Jesuit order of Catholic priests endures suffering, humiliation and pain to transmit their faith, a faith based on truth, justice and love. Breaking of bones, crashing of waves, screams of agony, painful moans and flesh torn asunder torturously feels like ‘hell’. Scorsese manages to demonstrate his mastery over the cinematic craft with intensity, getting into the skin of the characters and stimulating the audience to think, to ponder, to observe and be unsettled.

Starting with a lengthy silence, the film narrates the embarking of two Portuguese priests setting out in search of another missionary priest who is missing, and who is believed to be an apostate for having stepped on an image of Jesus under Japanese torture. Beginning with the mass torture and being coerced to commit apostasy, the film starts with the third priest and leaps forward to the setting sail of the other two missionaries, with a Japanese Christian guide through Macau. It would appear as though the film is a bit insensitive to Japanese sensibilities, yet this is not the case scenario in Scorsese’s depiction. His perception of the self-preservation of the natives and the authorities is wonderfully played out by the official who thinks that Christianity will not take root in this swamp land.

The visuals are gripping, almost forcing one to cringe with a soundtrack that plays unsettling sounds that make up for a missing background musical score. The second half is more forceful and pondersome, with the doubts, questions and uneasiness assailing the captured priest confined in a wooden cage compelled to watch the horrendous torment his people have to endure for their faith. Emotionally charged and heart-wrenching in its cinematographic interpretation, Silence is a tad reminiscent of The Mission but vastly differs in its narrative, instead keeping the spotlight on a clash of cultures, beliefs and traditions. Silence is a masterclass in the cinematic rendition of a text, for it brings to life the mood, the ambient, the conflict and the torment embedded within the Endo’s novel, even while forcing queries and existential questions about death to crop within the viewer’s being.

Scorsese’s Silence is grim, convincing and peculiarly serene despite its horrific conjuring of atrocities that magnify the ‘silence of God’ in moments of despair and desolation!
Rays of Hope!

JOHN 20: 1-9
APRIL 16, 2017
1ST SUNDAY OF EASTERN

Context and Theme
John chapter 20 recounts the most amazing, spectacular event in all of human history—the empty tomb of Jesus! The resurrection of Jesus is the hinge point of the Gospel. The resurrection is the authentic foundation for Christianity, for the church, and for the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. Without the resurrection Christianity would be an empty shell (cf. 1 Cor 15:14-19). The empty tomb can only mean that Jesus is truly alive—raised up and transformed by the Father. John is clearly selective over the resurrection incidents he relates. He intends to illustrate some of the spiritual lessons to be learnt from the event. John’s gospel emphasized the empty tomb as a cause for faith, not the appearance of Jesus. Later, the vision of the risen Lord would cause others to believe (Mary Magdalene in John 20:14-18 and Thomas in 20:26-28).

Message
1. The Tomb is Empty! The empty tomb shows Jesus’ divine authority in overcoming the power of death. The resurrection of Jesus’ body gives evidence of more than mere immortality. The empty tomb is a sign of new life. The tough times of life can bring us close to God, or distance us; suffering can make us better people, or make us bitter and isolated. The empty tomb is the message that nothing is final in this life, not even death. God’s love is stronger than any human power, violence or cruelty. Love conquers all.

2. Definite defeat of Satan and assured victory over sin: The Johannine story focuses on Mary Magdalene. Mary may have been the woman who had been forgiven much and loved much (Luke 7). Jesus, by His Passion, death and resurrection has accomplished the salvation of the world from sin and separation from God. Pope Francis speaks of Easter: “Brothers and sisters, let’s not close ourselves to the newness that God wants to bring to our lives! Often we are tired, disheartened, sad; We feel the weight of our sins and think we’re not going to make it. Let’s not get locked up in ourselves. Let’s not lose our confidence. Let us never give up. There are no situations that God cannot change.”

3. Burial clothes: John specially notes the precise position of the burial clothes in the tomb. The isolated burial cloth used for the head suggests that Jesus is truly risen. It was obvious that no grave robbers had been in this tomb. The robbing of tombs was sufficiently common in those days. The orderly scene evidenced God’s hand in delivering his Son from death.

4. Seeing and Believing: To the beloved disciple the mystery was of a different dimension. On entering the tomb “he saw, and believed”; he saw not only the wrappings, but also their significance: he “believed”! The seeing and believing in the empty tomb is akin to the seeing and believing the “signs” of Jesus, and this was a sign from the Lord.

5. Peter is the primary witness: Peter’s role in early Christian tradition was firmly established as a primary witness to the resurrection

6. Resurrection is an explosion of love: The resurrection was a cosmic event linking heaven and earth. But above all, it was an explosion of love. It ushered in a new dimension of life, through which a new world emerges. It is a leap in the history of evolution and of life in general towards a new future life, towards a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this
world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself. The resurrection unites us with God and others. If we live in this way, we will transform the world. **(Pope Benedict XVI).**

7. "We proclaim the resurrection of Christ when his light illuminates the dark moments of our existence, and we are able share it with others; when we know when to smile with those who smile, and weep with those who weep; when we accompany those who are sad and at risk of losing hope; when we recount our experience of Faith to those who are searching for meaning and happiness...and there - with our attitude, with our witness, with our life - we say ‘Jesus is Risen,’ with our soul.” **(Pope Francis).**

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**Context and Theme**

In this section there is a rapid switch of emotion from fear (v. 19) to joy (v. 20). The reason was the declaration of peace from the Risen Lord. The disciples were still gripped with fear. They were still terrified that Roman soldiers would find them. Now they are locked in a room. The disciples’ reaction when they realized that Jesus was alive was obviously one of great rejoicing. The evangelist added the editorial note that their rejoicing was because “they saw the Lord.”

The words “Peace be with you” are in the form of an ordinary greeting, but on the lips of Jesus they convey the bestowal of his own peace to his disciples as previously promised (cf. 14:27; 16:33). The showing of the hands and side to the disciples was to assure the disciples of the identity of Jesus. Even his risen body carried such proofs.

The risen Lord showed sympathy with Thomas’ lack of faith, but there is no indication that Thomas actually touched the wounds. The confession My Lord and my God (v. 28) is remarkable for its theological meaning and is rightly regarded as the culmination of the revelation of God in Christ recorded in the Fourth Gospel. It also serves as a fitting conclusion to John's record of the path of faith. Nevertheless, the weakness of Thomas’s faith was that it depended on his insistence to see the Lord.

**Message**

1. **Starve your doubts. Feed your Faith:** Jesus’ tomb is open and empty but the disciples’ house is closed and the doors locked tight. The house has become their tomb. The disciples are bound in fear. The disciples were not able to believe fully in the resurrection of Jesus and, therefore, they have separated themselves from the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Their doors of faith have been closed. They could not fully comprehend that life is now different.

2. **Remove the stone of the tomb:** Inside the locked room they were afraid and there was no sign of faith and hope. The stone was removed from the tomb, but they entered their own tombs of fear, doubt, and blindness and the locked doors have become the great stone sealing their tomb. They have locked themselves in. The doors of our tombs are always locked from the inside, not from outside!

3. **Open the door to a new life:** Jesus is always
entering the locked places of our lives. He comes to comfort and strengthen us. Unexpected and uninvited He steps into our closed lives, hearts, and minds. Standing among us He offers peace and breathes new life into us. He doesn’t open the door for us but he gives us all we need so that we might open our doors to a new life, a new creation, a new way of being. We are free to unlock the doors of our lives and step outside into a new life that He can only offer.

4. Circumstances cannot block your growing into a new life: Life and peace are realities of resurrection. Regardless of the circumstances Jesus shows up bringing peace; regardless of the circumstances Jesus shows up bringing life. It is not necessary that we change the circumstances of our life. The life and peace of Jesus’ resurrection enable us to live through those circumstances. There is no point in blaming our situations. Invite the Risen Lord and everything will be set.

5. Experience the revelation of God: The resurrection appearances in the gospels were not caused by human weakness; but, rather, they were revelations of God’s action in Christ for eternal salvation. These revelations compel us to be free from the shackles of sin and begin a new life in His fellowship.

6. Acknowledge Jesus as your Master: Thomas said to Him, “My Lord and my God”. It was a clear confession, on the part of Thomas, of our Lord’s humanity, and of His divinity. In these words, Thomas acknowledges our Lord to be Man and God, and, that not only did He rise again, but raised Himself up by His own power.

7. Respond to the proclamation of the Gospel: The giving of the Spirit in v. 23 was linked with the forgiving of sins. The promise is given to the whole group of disciples (the verb is plural). Although it is not in human power to forgive sins, the preaching of the gospel proclaims such forgiveness. The verbs are in the passive which suggests that it is God who is acting. Those who do not respond to the preaching of the gospel are left in their sins.

Message

1. Empty space can only be filled by Jesus: The two disciples spend the time telling him of their tragic experience in Jerusalem. They are trying to fill the empty space with their own voices; they are stricken with grief, loss, and incomprehension. For them the empty tomb doesn’t fit within their human reason and comprehension. We are all “on the road to Emmaus”, preoccupied with our own woes in our lives. There it is important recognize the voice of God.

2. Jesus will meet you in the peripheries of your life. Jesus went to them; he did not await their visit. He is with us in prayer, especially what Pope Francis calls ‘the peripheries of life’. Most of us spend some time there, and appreciate the help of love and faith.

3. Faith grows in sharing it. If we are honest and open with each other in faith, the faith of everyone grows. We want the shortcuts to faith, and we want shortcuts to certainty that fit within our own limited human understanding of the world.

4. We need to stop talking and start listening: If we want to experience salvation, invite God to speak to us. We need to stop talking and start listening.

5. Jesus is the only companion: Jesus is a companion who comes to help the friends and to remind them what they had forgotten. The force of death, the cross, had killed the hope of the disciples. This was the situation of many people at the time of Luke, and is also the situation of many persons today. Jesus gets close to them and walks by their side; He listens to their conversation and enkindle in them the true faith and hope.

6. Only Jesus can transform failure into victory: The story of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples of Emmaus tries to give a response to all these anguishing questions that we encounter in our daily life. Jesus has transformed the cross, a sign of death, into a sign of life and of hope. Only
He can transform our life, re-create everything that is shattered by unexpected tragedies of life.

7. Go back to Jerusalem: To live the life of resurrection means to go back to Jerusalem. The two of them got back on the road to go to Jerusalem, where the same forces of death, which had killed Jesus and had killed their hope, continue to be active. But, now everything has changed. Jesus is alive! Therefore, there is in him and with him they experience a stronger power than that which killed him. There is faith and not unbelief! There is hope and not despair! There is life and not death! The bad news of the death of Jesus changes into the Good News of his Resurrection!

Context and Theme

In our world settings, where the shepherding of flocks is normally done differently, we may find it hard to envisage the intimacy of the biblical shepherd passages. In John 10 the shepherd is pictured as having a personal attachment to the sheep, and the sheep are portrayed as recognizing the shepherd’s voice and responding accordingly. The main point of this section is the means by which true and false shepherds are to be distinguished. There are two ways to enter a sheepfold, depending on whether one wishes to shepherd or to harm the sheep. The parable depicts a shepherd as one having authorized access to his flock, in contrast to a thief, who comes to steal. In Jesus we have the model of the true shepherd. In him is fulfilled the expectation of the Good Shepherd promised by God.

The imagery of the shepherd is a familiar one in the OT (cf. Jer 23; Ezek 34; Zach 9). In this section the thought is most strongly influenced by Ezek 34, where the shepherds of Israel are criticized.
Message

1. Follow Jesus as sheep follow their shepherd: John chapter 10 is all about salvation through a relationship with Jesus. Jesus explained that his disciples must follow him as sheep follow their shepherd.

2. God knows me well: The parable of the good shepherd and his sheep is a reference to God's intimate knowledge of all of us. He knows each and every one of us by our names, just like a shepherd knows each and every one of the sheep in his flock. The good shepherd, unlike the thief, has a personal and exclusive relationship with the sheep: he knows them, and they recognize him, and so they follow him as he leads them out to pasture, whereas they run away from a stranger. A personal and intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep is highlighted. It is our responsibility to be careful not to allow others to take the place of an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

3. Sheep need a leader because they know they can’t go alone: Sheep are not the brightest animals in the world. They blindly follow the lead of the shepherd. When several flocks are grazing together in a field, they are still able to distinguish the voice of their own shepherd and follow his voice. Sheep need a leader not because they are dumb, but because they know they can’t go alone. They need someone to lead and to guide them. The French scientist Blaise Pascale once remarked: “There is a God-shaped hole in every human heart that can be filled by God and God alone.” Sometimes people try to fill that void with money, sex, power, material goods, relationships, alcohol or drugs with unsatisfactory results. Even filling that void with good things can’t take the place of an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

4. Jesus identifies Himself both as the door or gate to the sheepfold. Jesus is our gateway to possession of the full revelation of God and the blessings promised in the messianic age. The doorkeeper is God, who alone draws all believers to Jesus as a gift for Him to look after (John 6:39; 17:6). In the Old Testament God was the true shepherd of Israel, and here Jesus claims to be the true shepherd Himself.

5. Jesus is the giver of life: The truth is that life is not found in pleasure, performance, possessions, position, or pursuits; it is found in the person of Jesus Christ (v.10). Jesus is the giver of life, the author of life.

6. To be successful in life we are advised to do as the sheep do. Three simple applications are given on how to follow Jesus in order to enjoy eternal life:

a. Listen to Jesus: “the sheep listen to his voice” (v. 3). Because He knows everything about you.

b. Stay together: When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. (v. 4). We are to stay together. Lone sheep don’t survive in the wild. Lost sheep are dead sheep. They can’t survive alone.

c. Run from strangers: “They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” (v. 5).

Context and Theme

In John 14 Jesus offered the personal touch of heaven, prepared by Him and containing enough room for all who follow Him. Heaven is the place where the Father lives. Jesus starts by exhorting his disciples to have faith in Him. He consoles the Apostles, who were saddened at the knowledge of His near departure, by pointing to the “place” He was about preparing for them. He informs them that He himself is the way, by which they were to reach the Father. He asserts His identity with His Father. The discourse of Jesus unfolds in three subsections:

1. Jesus is the way leading to the Father (vv. 1-6).

2. Jesus is the revelation of the Father (vv. 7-11).

3. To do the works of the Father (vv. 12-14).

Message

1. God offers only one way leading to heaven – only through Jesus Christ. We are all travelers on a road called life to our sole destination, heaven. There are many detours and we don’t need to be
confused. All we need to do is follow Jesus who will show us the way; in fact He is the way. He will lead us and He will guide us.

2. **The church invites us more than ever to have faith in Jesus, to trust in Jesus, to make Jesus our way, our truth, and our life.** We have to renew our commitment to Jesus and to see our life as a journey with Jesus, our saviour and friend.

3. **Jesus asks the disciples to trust (or believe) that he and the Father are one.** Trust reduces worry and alleviates the pains. Even in the midst of the storm and even in the valley of the shadow of death there can be a peace that surpasses all our hopes and understanding if we believe that God is with us. The 23rd Psalm sings of the same trust and faith: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— comfort me” (v. 4). He is with you always. Trust in Him and God will grant you his perfect peace.

4. **The anxiety about being left alone is bothering the hearts of the apostles.** To avert such loss of certainty in his disciples, Jesus turned their minds toward the Father. The heavenly Father will wrap his loving arms around us during our darkest times when we find everything has slipped ways from our hands.

5. **No one in this world can love you as your God loves you.** We sometimes believe that if we do more for God, he will love us more. There is nothing you can do to make God love you more and there is nothing you can do to make him love you less. The Love of God is unconditional.

6. **The analogy of rooms in the Father's house (v. 2) does not refer to space, but to relationship.** The Father’s “house” is where we all live as God's children. Jesus invites everyone to a love relationship with the Father and to a sharing in God's very life. In the phrase “I am the way, the truth, and the life” Jesus declared he was the only means to the Father and he was the very presence of God on earth.

7. **Judaism built its spirituality upon the notion of the unseen God; no picture or statue could capture the essence of Yahweh.** Now the time had come to see God. They saw the face of a loving Father in the self-giving of his Son. Jesus lived and died for one reason: to show everyone the face of the Father.

8. **Some questions:** Has your life been a journey with Jesus and have you walked with Jesus? Have you had faith in Jesus and trusted in Jesus during moments of trouble and worries? Have you made Jesus the way, the truth and the life, the center of your life?
Yogi Adityanath, born Ajit Singh Bisht into a Rajput family of Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand in 1972, is not the first Hindu ascetic or abbot to be sworn in a chief minister of a major state. Sadhvi Uma Bharati, a backward community nun, was Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh earlier. But she had to leave office under a cloud, and for a while was marginalized in the Hindu brigade after a violent fallout with former Deputy Prime Minister and Bharatiya Janata party president who is widely held to be the mastermind of the phenomenal rise of political Hinduism in independent India. Ms. Bharati was eventually rehabilitated, shifted to Uttar Pradesh to consolidate the backward community votes, and is now ensconced in the Union Cabinet of Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi as minister in charge of the River Ganges.

But the Yogi’s ascension to high marks a hiccup in the powerful march of Mr. Modi to a status even higher than of the former Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, till now the most respected leader in the party since founder Dr. Mukherjee and ideologue Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. And it marks a return of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh as once again the final arbiter of careers, and the helming force in Hindutva politics in the subcontinent after a seeming eclipse, at least in the media, in the blinding strobe of the Modi meteor.

The RSS, in fact, holds the balance between the Congress, the BJP and newer political groups of the backward community. Lohiaite socialist parties of UP and Bihar, such as the Samajwadi, the Janata Dal United and their several fragments. This political mass, barring the BJP, is rather inclusive as far as Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims are concerned. The vote percentage of these three groups, when added, has remained almost constant. Many observers have in the past felt that despite their secular rhetoric, all these groups have a mild Hindu religious bias, and are loath to antagonize the pious and the faithful.

The RSS had first shown it strength in the aftermath of the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards in October 1984. In the general elections that followed, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi bagged an unbelievable 416 seats with a 50.7 per cent vote share. Getting an absolute majority in votes was unheard till then, as were the number of seats. The past record of the Congress, glorious as it was, had never touched such dizzy heights. It was later revealed that the RSS, which saw Mrs. Indira Gandhi as a martyr defending Hindu India against Sikh separatism of the Khalistani movement, had swung “its cadres to campaign and mobilize votes for Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. The BJP, expected, got a mere two seats, the lowest yet of a national party.

Every single BJP leader acknowledged the power and heft of the RSS, even the towering L K Advani who had led the RathYatra that eventually ended with the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

Mr. Modi, a senior cadre of the RSS, also arose from the Babri movement, was placed by the RSS as the chief minister of the politically and financially important Gujarat state, and then projected as the prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 elections. He won, and almost eclipsed his parent force. After his whirlwind campaign in Uttar Pradesh where he helped the party win an absolute majority, Mr. Modi loomed as the most massive figure in national polity, his presiding over the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat 2002 now a distant and fading memory, and his talk of development getting him reach as far as the White House in Washington and the capitals of Europe.

Yogi Adityanath, with a poisonous record as a Muslim and Christian baiter – he has in the past advised Muslims to go to Pakistan and called Mother Teresa part of an international Christian conspiracy to proselytize India – would have tarnished the development and inclusive image that Mr. Modi now wants to project. He wanted two leaders of the Brahmin and backward castes as his candidates for the chief machership. Two days of bargaining later, Mr. Modi capitulated. The Yogi’s swearing in ceremony found a less glowing Mr. Modi giving his blessings to the young celibate clad in his ochre robes. The hush that has descended on the landscape smells of fear and apprehension as minority communities watch Mr. Modi and the Yogi, now a commissar in his own right, for every slight twitch.
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