Misericodia et misera
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We say that God is compassionate, but we ignore the poor. We say that God loves us and has mercy on us, but we hold grudges against our friends. Our actions need to authentically reflect God's mercy - This was the auto-reflection that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) took during the Jubilee Year of Mercy under the theme ‘Mercy in Motion.’

In *Misericordia et Misera*, the apostolic letter released on November 21 Pope Francis wrote, “The Catholic Church’s focus on God’s mercy must continue with individual acts of kindness, assistance to the poor and, particularly, encouraging Catholics to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation and making it easier for them to do so.” And he gave all priests permission to grant absolution to those who confess to having procured an abortion.

This universal grant of the faculty to absolve the sin of abortion has raised questions and debates at various levels. With this act, does abortion become a lesser sin or a minor crime?

A worried woman went to her gynecologist and said: “Doctor, I have a serious problem and desperately need your help! My baby is not even one year old and I’m pregnant again. I don’t want kids so close together. I want you to end my pregnancy, and I’m counting on your help with this.”

The doctor after a little thought and some silence said to the lady: “I think I have a better solution for your problem. It’s less dangerous for you too.”

She smiled, thinking that the doctor was going to accept her request.

Then he continued: “You see, in order for you not to have to take care of two babies at the same time, let’s kill the one in your arms. This way, you could rest some before the other one is born. If we’re going to kill one of them, it doesn’t matter which one it is. There would be no risk for your body if you chose the one in your arms.”

The lady was horrified and said: “No doctor! How terrible! It’s a crime to kill a child!” The doctor smiled, realizing that he had made his point. He convinced the lady that there is no difference in killing a child that’s already been born and one that’s still in the womb. The crime is the same!

The Pope too holds the same, “I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life.” But at the same time he stresses God’s endless mercy and forgiveness: “Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God’s mercy can be excluded from the embrace of his forgiveness. For this reason, none of us has the right to make forgiveness conditional.” And he added: “His love always precedes us, accompanies us and remains with us, despite our sin.”

God’s mercy continues forever. So should ours.

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08 | Relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia
A Brief commentary on Misericodia et misera, Apostolic Letter at the Close of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

18 | Demonetization
A critical evaluation on the impact of demonetization on the Indian Society

24 | Nonviolence is right
On Pope Francis’ message for the Fiftieth World Day of Peace

27 | Foot Prints
Dr. Felix Podimattom

faith matters

12 | Abortion
A Historical perspective on Catholic Church’s Position on abortion

16 | I made a huge mistake
A conversion story of a radical activist

28 | Yoga for Relaxation
On Sisuasana, Makarasana and Mat-syakridasana

32 | Consolation of Child Jesus
On the importance of finding consolation in God

regulars

03 | Editorial
34 | Film: Face of Mercy
35 | Website
36 | Logos
42 | Final Cut: Education 2030

news & views

23 | Top Five
30 | Top Ten
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Relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia:
The Two were Left Alone, the Wretched Woman and Mercy

At the closure of the Jubilee year of mercy, Pope Francis issued an apostolic letter, Misericordia et misera. Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and changes our lives.

Drawing inspiration from a poignant and provocative biblical image found in Chapter 8 of the Gospel of John, which narrates the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, and from the beautiful description of St. Augustine, in his Commentary on the Gospel of John (8:1-11) in the words: “relictisunt duo, misera et misericordia: the two were left alone, the wretched woman, and mercy,” Pope Francis published his Apostolic
Commentary on the Gospel of John (8:1-11), Lecture 33, 5)

According to the Roman Pontiff, the God of mercy, St. Augustine referred to, is the God of the Bible, whose abundance of mercy prophet Isaiah said he wanted to always remember (miserationum Domini recordabor) (Isaiah 63:7). It is the God who in Jesus Christ shows once more his tendency to be moved, to go beyond his own transcendence, as Adonai (Exodus 3:8), to enter the state of the humiliated, and of the most miserable man (Philippians 2:6-11). Hence, the Apostolic Letter highlights the “the mystery of God's love when it touches the sinner” (Mm1). It is a beautiful text which explores Divine mercy as revealed and extended in every time and into two words, “miser, miserable,” “miseria” which means misery, and “cor” or “cordia” which means heart. Thus, the word mercy denotes the human response “when someone else’s misery or sorrow touches and pierces your heart” or feeling the misery of another person in your own heart (St. Augustine, Sermon 358A).

In other words, as seen above, misera and mercy are already united at etymological level, since the first one, misery, is totally incorporated in the second, in mercy. Their etymology (misericordia/soreness of heart) ratifies and expresses a more radical involvement, which results in an existential attitude, namely: “someone else’s misery touches and pierces your heart” (St. Augustine, Sermon 358A).

The community of believers must always be vigilant and ready to identify new works of mercy and to practice them with generosity and enthusiasm.
“loving kindness” is used: “The loving kindness of the Lord fills the whole earth,” (Psalm 33:5) or in Latin “misericordia Domini plena est terra.” This helps to reinforce the sense that a merciful act is a compassionate or kind one, done with love for another.

Against the backdrop of the tendency of modernity to create new forms of spiritual and material poverty that assault human dignity, the Holy Father states explicitly that “mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father” (Mm1). The community of believers must always be vigilant and ready to identify new works of mercy and to practice them with generosity and enthusiasm by realizing that “now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace” (Mm18). The Apostolic Letter challenges each one to rethink the traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy against the backdrop of the prevalent “new forms of poverty” (Mm19) and invites every believer to give priority to the creativity of mercy by promoting “a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters” (Mm 20).

The entire Apostolic Letter rests as it were on two cardinal pillars, namely: mercy must be both celebrated and lived (Mm1 and 5). According to the Apostolic Letter, the first cardinal pillar is that: mercy must be a celebration in the lives of every individual believing Christian. The first innovation in this regard is that the Missionaries of Mercy are confirmed in their service, so that their mission may “continue until further notice as a concrete sign that the grace of the Jubilee remains alive and effective the world over” (Mm9). In effect, the action of the Missionaries was fruitful insofar as they heard confessions for entire days, and they travelled all over their respective countries to make tangible that mercy knows no boundaries. Along the same lines, Pope Francis writes: “given this need, lest any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God’s forgiveness, I hence forth, grant all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion” (Mm12). As it is known, this sin was reserved to bishops who, depending on the circumstances, sometimes granted to the priests of their respective Dioceses the faculty to absolve it. Now, “in virtue of their ministry,” that is, by the very fact that they are ministers of reconciliation, the sin of abortion may be forgiven by every priest, without a particular delegation. With the same spirit of going out to meet the needs of the faithful, the Holy Father “trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God’s help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church. 

God’s forgiveness, I hence forth, grant all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion” (Mm12). As it is known, this sin was reserved to bishops who, depending on the circumstances, sometimes granted to the priests of their respective Dioceses the faculty to absolve it. Now, “in virtue of their ministry,” that is, by the very fact that they are ministers of reconciliation, the sin of abortion may be forgiven by every priest, without a particular delegation. With the same spirit of going out to meet the needs of the faithful, the Holy Father “trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God’s help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church.
Church” (Mm12), establishes that those who frequent the Churches administered by the priests of the Fraternity of Saint Pius X can validly and licitly receive sacramental absolution (Mm12). Another moment of the celebration of mercy proposed by the Apostolic Letter is that it invites all the believers “to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people” (Mm7) by giving greater attention to the Word of God.

The second cardinal pillar of the Apostolic Letter rests on the living of mercy and its “social character” (Mm1 and19). The Holy Father indicates that the “temptation to theorize ‘about’ mercy” is always present, which “can be overcome to the extent that our daily life becomes one of participation and sharing” (Mm20). In this light, he proposes a World Day of the Poor as a denominator to eradicate poverty insofar as when any “Lazarus lies at the door of our homes (See Luke16:19-21), there can be no justice or social peace” (Mm21).

In and through the Gospel story of the wretched One and Mercy (John 8:1-11) or the day when Misery met Mercy, the misery of sin became clothed with the mercy of love. Its source is in the love with which God comes to meet each one of us, breaking through the walls of “inertia” and “indifference” (Mm20). God comes to gather us through his grace-filled responsible “participation” and “sharing” in his mercy (Mm20). Only divine forgiveness and divine love received with an open and sincere heart give us the strength to resist evil and “to sin no more,” to let ourselves be struck by God’s love so that it becomes our strength. Jesus’ attitude becomes a model to follow for every Christian, who is called to place love and forgiveness at the center of his/her life. The desire of a Christian for closeness to Christ requires of him to draw near to his brothers and sisters, for nothing is more pleasing to the Father than being a true sign of mercy in the midst of his community of brothers and sisters. By its very nature, mercy becomes visible and tangible in specific acts. Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and it changes our lives.

The Apostolic Letter recalls to our minds that before the imitation of God by human beings, there was first the imitation of man by God. This justifies the fact that “in remembrance of his mercy” (Luke 1:50-55), the Mercy of God becomes flesh at Christmas. In this divine condescension or in becoming incarnate, God has reversed the path up that pyramid: He is at its base now. He has come down to meet every miserable one, fills him with mercy, picks him up and carries him/her on His shoulders. We can reach him now because he first comes to us. Therefore, along with St. Augustine who reveals that how difficult it was for him to reach the reversal achieved by the Incarnation: “I was not humble enough to cleave to him who is humble” (St. Augustine, Confessions, Book VII, 18), let us pray for the grace of being merciful in our Christian lives.
The History of Catholic Church’s Position on ABORTION
The Catholic Church considered abortion as a grave sin and condemned it right from the beginning. The Teaching of the Apostles (94 AD) condemned abortion: “...thou shalt not use magic; thou shalt not use drugs; thou shalt not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide” (Didache II, 2). One of the earliest Fathers of the Church Tertullian (c.160 – c.220 AD) opposed abortion and infanticide in clear terms, “murder is once for all forbidden; so it is not lawful for us to destroy even the child in the womb,” while stating that “a future human being is a human being too.” Later Jerome (c.347-420 AD), John Chrysostom (347–407) and Augustine (354-430) condemned all sorts of hindrance to the procreative act, and Caesarius of Arles (470-542) condemned abortion and called it a crime. During the patristic time, there was no unanimity concerning the moment of ensoulment, though Tertullian believed that the soul entered the new being at conception (Tertullian, De anima, pp. 242-346). Though they were clear that human life begins at conception, there prevailed an understanding of successive animation. Thus, they spoke of unformed and formed embryo. However, anything against conception and any harm to the unformed (unensouled) fruit of the womb was a punishable crime of contraception; and an injury to the formed (ensouled) embryo led to a punishable homicide. Contraception and abortion were grave sins and condemnable. Since the time of Augustine, the Aristotelian belief, that the foetus received the spiritual soul sometimes (about 40th day) after conception was prevalent among theologians. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1323 AD) held a position similar to the Aristotelian idea of ensoulment, i.e. for the male foetus after the 40th day and the female foetus after the 90th day. This was very much in practice from Augustine through the nineteenth century till 1869 (in official Church teaching), that the unformed embryo lacked a human soul and its destruction amounted to a sinful contraception rather than to a homicidal act.

However, Albertus Magnus (1200-1280 BC), the teacher of Thomas Aquinas, believed in simultaneous animation. In 1620, the Belgian physician Thomas Feynes assumed an animation on the third day, Jerome Florentius...
in 1658 counted on an animation immediately after conception, so also in 1660 Paolo Zacchia, who was person-in-charge of the health system in the Church council, stated of the infusion of the human spiritual soul at the moment of conception, and so the simultaneous animation permeated increasingly at this time especially in medical science, however, theologians represented for a long time widely the traditional theory of a delayed animation.

The change with an animation theory of probability at conception began to take place since the time of Francisco Emmanuele Cangiamila (1701-1763), Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) and Eusebius Amort (1692-1709). Though Alphonsus was non-decisive within his moral theology, he advocated the baptism of fetuses of miscarriages in his teaching of sacramental theology. Cangiamila conceded a vegetative soul to be sufficient scientific ground to grant the certainty of a simultaneous ensoulement theoretically and Eusebius held a position of simultaneous animation to a greater probability. Pierre J. C. Debreyne (1786-1867) seems to be the first one to have spoken of simultaneous animation with absolute certainty in his *Essai sur la théologie morale considérée dans ses rapports avec la physiologie et la médecine* (1845). Finally, Pius IX abolished the differentiation between ensouled and non-yet ensouled embryos in his Papal Bull *Apostolicae Sedis* (1869).

The Magisterium, the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church, says in many documents that human life begins at conception. The second Vatican Council (1965) says: “From the moment of its conception, life must be guarded with the greatest care while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.” The Pastoral Constitution “Gaudium et Spes” has consciously left the question of ensoulement and simply accepted the biological factor that human life begins at conception. The texts of the other Vatican document Declaration on Procured Abortion (1974) in paragraphs 12 and 13 explain clearly: From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother, it is rather the life of the new human being (= novi viventis humani) with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already… Even if a doubt existed concerning whether the fruit of conception is already a human person, it is objectively a grave sin to dare to risk murder. “The one who will be a man is already one.”

That the presence of the soul is probable (one can never prove the contrary) suffices not to take away the human life that has already come to existence. Further, the Church’s standpoints in biomedical matters dealing with human embryos are well expressed in Vatican documents of the Instruction (1987) “*Donum vitae*” by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of the Encyclical (1995) “*Evangelium vitae*” by Pope John Paul II. The Instruction “*Donum vitae*” no. 79. says: “Thus the fruit of human generation, from the first moment of its existence, that is to say, from the moment the zygote has formed, demands the unconditional respect that is morally due to the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality. The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of
“[F]rom the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather that life of a new human being with his [or her] own growth”

- John Paul II, Encyclical Evangelium Vitae, no. 60

conception; and, therefore, from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life.” The Congregation makes a philosophical conclusion in its Instruction (2008) Dignitas personae, no.1. with its opening statement: “The dignity of a person must be recognized in every human being from conception to natural death.” In fact, even a mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolute prohibition of any intervention that might kill the embryo.

A renowned Catholic moral theologian Bernard Häring asserted that “the child in the mother’s womb is alive and has almost the same qualities before being born as it has after birth,” while raising challenging questions such as these: “Could [it] be proved sufficiently that the embryo is not at all human life[,] if a totally deformed fetus that is even lacking the biological substrate for any expression of truly human life, still to be considered a person?” The answers are self-evident. Cardinal Lehmann says it succinctly: The embryo is human from the beginning. That human life commences at conception and killing an innocent human life at any stage is never acceptable – has been expressed and reasserted – by various bishop conferences and individual theologians.

Thus, the central convictions of the Catholic Church on the beginning of human life can be summarized as follows: (i) A human life begins at conception. (ii) A human life that begins at conception is a complete human being; (iii) this human being is sacred and created in image and likeness of God. (iv) this human being which is called embryo in the early stages is a human person; (v) being human persons, embryos have the same rights and dignity like any adult human being; (vi) thus it is morally wrong to take away the life of the embryo even for noble causes of humanity and abortion is a grave sin and a heinous crime.

The Catholic Church is however not rigid and unforgiving towards sinners of abortion. Thus, I end this article with compassion quoting from the Apostolic Letter Misericordia et misera of the Holy Father Francis who permits all priests to absolve the reserved sin of abortion during and beyond the Jubilee year of Mercy until further provisions are made: “I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God’s mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father. May every priest, therefore, be a guide, support and comfort to penitents on this journey of special reconciliation.”

The Catholic position on abortion remains a grave sinful act, while the attitude towards the sinners of procured abortion has changed. While Pope Francis wants more opportunities of reconciliation for sinners, he has not diluted the gravity of sin of abortion. The special provision of Pope Francis is a token of God’s love and mercy for those who underwent abortion unwillingly and a stern warning to those who procured it.
I made a huge mistake
Story of a feminist who changed her mind on abortion

Brazilian Sara Winter used to work to legalize abortion. She was one of the founders of a radical group that carries out topless protests at churches.

Now, she says people should learn from religious women who put their faith into action - and reject the powerful forces promoting abortion in her country.

What changed her mind? The birth of her child.

“I understand I made a huge mistake, and I ask forgiveness from the bottom of my heart. The way to achieve public policy changes for women has nothing to do with mocking people’s religions,” she said in a Facebook post late last year.

“What I was missing was love (which changed when I became a mother), love that came to me after having reflected a lot on today’s militant feminism,” she said.

Sara Winter is the pseudonym of Sara Fernanda Giromin. Three years ago she was one of the founders of the Brazilian branch of Femen, a radical feminist organization of sometimes violent, often offensive activists who protest topless in favor of abortion and LGBT rights.

Winter asked for forgiveness “from all those people, whether religious or not, that I offended during a protest last year involving a same-sex kiss in front of a church in Rio de Janeiro.”

Last month she denounced international funding to promote abortion in Brazil. She asked forgiveness for having been “part of that scheme to get abortion legalized.”

“But I never knew that all that talk about legalizing abortion in Brazil had been the work of organizations controlled by tycoons, rich men interested in reducing my country’s population.”

Sara confessed that she had always thought that an abortion was “something every woman should be able to get.”

“I’m not waving that flag any more. I don’t agree with women being jailed for having an abortion, I think they should always be treated with compassion, but I’m against the promotion of abortion being carried out by the feminist NGOs.”

The young woman also encouraged feminists “to learn from women who are religious.” While some people are “putting on ridiculous protests (I myself used to be one of them) which are embarrassing to women,
there are women of faith with homes protecting rape victims, and other women giving life by providing housing, taking in women in dangerous situations, and providing all kinds of assistance."

“There are a lot of NGOs and institutions that need a helping hand and volunteers to care for the victims of violence, so let’s get going, help them, do your part. Take care of, assist and love other women,” she encouraged her readers.

Sara first began to speak about this complete turnabout in her life in October 2015.

“I regret having an abortion and today I’m asking for forgiveness,” she wrote on Facebook at that point, almost one month after the birth of her second child. Since her baby was born, she said, “my life has taken on new meaning.”

“I don’t want you to go through the same thing I did,” she told her readers.

Years before, she underwent an abortion using a drug provided by someone she refers to as a feminist.

“I almost bled to death and had very serious complications,” she recalled, adding that the person who came to her aid in those circumstances was a man who had “no connection to radical feminism.” On abortion, she urged, “feminism should be focusing more on taking care of women instead of putting their lives at risk.” She said her prior abortion had caused difficulties early into her second pregnancy.

Sara has also become a critic of transgender ideology. She explained that she has no animus against people who say they are transgender, but she added, “I don’t think that changing your clothes, getting silicone breast implants and making the transition with hormones and surgery can change anybody’s sex.”

By mid-November, Sara was urging Brazilian feminists to “respect women who are religious believers.” Although she has no religious affiliation, she said that “one of the things I regret in my life is pulling away from God and devoting all my time to militant feminism.”

“Having faith is not a retrogression and other people’s religion needs to be respected,” she urged.

Sara said that she has faced a hostile reaction from the feminist faction she has abandoned.

“You have no idea of the reprisals I’ve been a victim of coming from the feminists,” she wrote. “I’m afraid of even stepping out on to the street with my baby, but I have faith that all this is going to go away.”

In early December last year, Sara published a short digital book about “seven times I was betrayed by the feminist movement.” The book is a compilation of the bizarre experiences she says she had as part of the Brazilian feminist movement, involving orgies, alcohol, drugs and misuse of funds.

For every book sold, she has offered to donate a Brazilian Real (about 25 cents) to “initiatives helping women in violent situations and against abortion.”

She said the main reason Brazilian people do not like the feminists is because many of them act hysterically and use social media “to mock and humiliate religious people, preach hatred against men, besides being extremists and disrespectful of other people’s religious heritage.”

“I’m just as guilty. I used to be like that too, but thanks be to God I’ve been healed,” she said.

- Courtesy: Cruxnow
India has done this before. But this time hundreds of millions of people were left without the means to engage economically, to buy the things they wanted and needed...
Demonetization

The ill-fated 9/11 Indian style, saw people were on the street, fretting and fuming about the delay in exchanging their old notes with new ones and over malfunctioning of or non-availability of cash in ATMs. Even after three days, several ATMs were closed or non-functional, while others had not seen the cash delivery van since the demonetisation demon was unleashed. The cash crunch led to sporadic violence, and ration shops in some places were looted. While there were some cases of dire distress, there were others of philanthropic humanitarianism, where shopkeepers extended credit facility to their customers.

Who is this so-called Demon?

Demonetization implies the stoppage of use of current legal currency tenders and replacing them with new currency units.

Government sources promote the demonetization act of Modi, which happened on November 8, this year by promulgating some advantages. According to them, the biggest advantage of demonetization is the tracking of illegal currency notes which have been horded by some in different parts of the country. This unaccounted for cash on which no tax is paid, becomes of no value unless submitted to banks or submitted to sources appointed by the Government.

People have two options, one is to deposit the money in bank accounts and pay taxes on such amount and second option is to let the value of that cash be reduced to zero. Another advantage is that, it will curb terrorism funding which is related to production of fake currency which is used. In real estate, everyone knows that no one pays the money legally. There is always some portion, rather the major portion to be paid illegally. This is done only in cash. And that is why builders and their aides usually have stacked cash in different places.

Entertainment involving hard cash like gambling, prostitution, and related activities will get a setback, as these happen mostly in cash transactions. Due to demonetization, all such activities will get reduced. It helps in putting an end to this circle of people doing illegal activities to earn black money and using that black money to do more illegal activities.

Another benefit is that due to people submitting their cash and thus disclosing their income by depositing money in their bank accounts, government gets a good amount of tax revenue which can be used by the government towards the betterment of the society by providing good infrastructure, hospitals, educational institutions, roads and many facilities for the poor and needy sections of society, provided the corruption in these sectors too is curbed.

However, it is clear that only those who are the educated and influential are gaining. One can see that this will help E-Wallet companies are minting money and increasing their registrations by the minute. Some of their mobile apps have more than 50 million downloads, and e-wallet apps which were not known are advertising with full page newspaper advertisements to promote themselves. The preference for plastic money, credit card and debit card payments is gaining momentum. Use of these means will definitely lead India towards a more techno-savvy population, but only those who already have some education, and have a good phone and internet network. It is not that these means work on fresh air and well water, which is the only common commodity in rural India.

Besides, these payments will auto generate commissions for the government, through every transaction. It is clear, then, why the government would prefer a wired cashless payment, rather than one done through the common paper legal tender.

Agricultural scene:

In various parts of the country where agriculture is the main source of income, cash is the primary mode of transaction in the sector, which provides
employment and sustenance to most of the workforce. Some news channels reported the difficulties farmers are facing while buying fertilizer and seeds from the market. The time being of the kharif harvest and rabi sowing, it is indeed a busy season for the farmers, and the Prime Minister who promised them support, doesn’t seem to resonate with their way of life and work. Cooperative banks which were not exchanging notes in the rural areas, made it even more difficult during the demonetization drive. What adds to their woes is that there are no banking facilities in over most of the panchayats in many of the states.

NABARD (Government hand from the Agricultural sector) is yet to provide the crores of rupees promised to the Cooperative banks for rabi operations. The delay will definitely affect the production of crops as seeds will not be planted in time, thus laying waste the land for the coming season. This would definitely affect the production of grains and pulses for the next year, as adequate soil moisture required for good crop, varies from season to season.

Most farmers depend on private outlets for their seeds as according to them, the government-run centres are few and stock poor quality seeds, and so, even though farmers have been allowed to purchase seeds with the demonetised notes from outlets belonging to the central or state governments they don’t.

Church and activity:
The cash crunch caused by the demonetization adversely affected the donations and weekly contributions of the people to the collection boxes. Some churches showed a dip of up to 40 percent in Sunday Collections. In the urban churches since the higher denomination notes were no more valid, people were saving all their other notes for survival.

However in some churches, boxes were kept to put in the old notes and take back the change in legal smaller denomination notes.

When it comes to Indian shrines, Sabarimala, situated more than 900 meters above sea-level, in the Western Ghats in Kerala, did the clever job of introducing card-swiping machines.

Politically:
Some of the Rajya Sabha members disapproved of Modi’s private announcement to the media, without any consultation with the Parliament, even though both the Houses were in session. The notice has been filed under Rule 187 and 188 of Rules of Procedure and privilege of the House. It shows his dictatorial attitude and non-egalitarian kind of demeanor.

The ex-Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, criticized this move as it has brought on extreme hardship, especially to those in small businesses and farming. More than 70 people have also lost their lives either while literally standing in the queue, or from shock or
committing suicide.

His proposition of a two percent decline in GDP annually because of this event, is definitely something worth pondering about. It will not be taken calmly by the people of the country. They will have to deal with this "monumental" mismanagement in implementation by struggling economically for the rest of their lives, with a weakened confidence in the currency and banking money is stashed away in foreign banks.

But the poor have no choice. They live a hand-to-mouth existence, believing in the promises of wealthy but selfish politicians, who promise them ‘good days’ if they come into power, and often lace their palms with some cash, in order to ‘give them a taste of what is to come’.

Modi’s defense:

According to the Prime Minister, the people are suffering, since they are fighting a war against corruption and black money, and he thinks that there ought to be some inconvenience, just like soldiers go through when fighting the enemy. He has managed to convince the people, not accounted for in an official manner, it has put the middle and poorer classes into an economic dilemma. Modi’s surprise move must be seen as an attempt to fulfill his election promise to crack down on tax evasion and recover illegal funds stashed overseas. But people have been saving cash for years to fund important occasions in their family like weddings, education etc. Suddenly they have been slapped with this disastrous decision of the government who has made their money useless.

Would it not be courteous to give at least a day or two of information to faithful taxpayers? Modi’s strategy seems to fall in line with the anecdote of the crocodile and small fish in the

system and then ultimately the government.

The weaker sections of the society seem to be the most affected and victimized by this bitter pill. It seems like they were the owners of the illegal money, when everyone knows that it is only their savings of the past years. They know that those who really horde black and illegal tender, are in the least affected, since their

that the constitutions were being misused by the forgone leaders for their own benefits, and that only after his government came into power, has the following of the constitutions become more serious. According to him, terrorists are funding their works with the use of fake notes and pumping them into the country. Gullible people who are looking for easy cash often get trapped in these snares set by the terrorists and their aides.

Though the aim is to curb illegal money, i.e. money which is

same pond. While the water is dried up to catch the crocodile, they survive anyway but the small fish all die.

Many agree that this implementation was poorly planned, though Modi’s idea was to shock those black money holders. Time is proving helpful, in showing that the ‘crocodile’ are in the least affected as they were well informed of this event and have got rid of their 500 and 1000 notes long before the date of announcement. It neither addresses major sources of illegal

The decision was variously described as ‘Tuglaqi farman’, an anti-poor measure and an undeclared financial emergency.
funds coming from abroad nor those invested in property or gold.

Christian concerns:
Reading the above, a human being true to his salt, would immediately become sensitive to the treatment of the common Indian citizen by the personnel in the government. In the way the citizens specially those who are economically not very well to do, are not shown the respect they deserve as dignified human beings, citizens of a secular and socialist democratic republic. The sudden change of policy in something which affects the livelihood of the person, is unnerving in cases where people are totally dependent on cash for their transactions concerning food and medicine. The unorganized way of going about, caused the death of more than 70 citizens, some due to shock, others due to no proper arrangements in banks for the queue system and still others who were emotionally disturbed and committed suicide. The priority of the government for a transparent system is a good one, but the means to attain it does not seem to respect the persons for whom it is doing it. One, therefore, begins to wonder, if at all this scheme is for the people or there are some ulterior motives. A don’t care attitude is rampant in the management and also the trouble that the lower economic level are facing, implies the preferential option by the government for the rich.

As Christians what is a fitting attitude to this entire scheme? As human beings with a healthy reasoning mind, might each one look at it critically? Yes, definitely.

Giving Prime Minister Modi, the benefit of the doubt, one ought to laud him for the attempt towards curbing the growth of black money in India and fighting the infiltration of counterfeit currency into the nation, which according to him and his cabinet is mostly through the terrorist activities. If at heart his intention and motivation are clear, transparent and the welfare of the people of India, whom he has pledged to serve and who have voted him to power, then we can be sure that the consequences of this act will bear similar fruits and it will be clear to the citizens of India. Otherwise, sooner or later, the cat will be out of the bag, and his treachery and selfishness will be clear to the people of India, jeopardizing his place at the Prime Minister’s post and head of the ruling Party.

If Modi had to emulate true compassion for the people of his country, the virtues of Jesus Christ would have been visible in his demeanour and attitude, specially sharing in the suffering of the people, being with them during the time of the ordeal, helping them heal. But Modi, was travelling abroad the day after he made the announcement, and looking at the queues in the country through the media, leaving his people alone to suffer the consequences of an unprepared-for leashing out of the demonetization demon.

The decision was variously described as ‘Tuglaqi farman’, an anti-poor measure and an undeclared financial emergency. It was alleged that having made arrangement for itself, the ruling party had attempted to stymie the Opposition in the coming elections. This very much goes against the Christian values of caring and sharing, but highlights the attitude of selfishness in the face of tight competition.

However, one cannot end on a depressing note, as for Christians the virtue of hope is one which increases our faith and helps us live in love. These three theological virtues, invite us to look with hope at the attempt being made by the government towards a better style of life for the Indian citizens. Faith in the fact that we are children of a loving God, who cares for us and who will deliver us from the hands of our enemies and from tribulation, we trust that God will do for us what he did for the Israelites through the leadership of Moses and Joshua. If God sent his only Son Jesus to deliver us from the clutches of the Evil one, and redeem us, surely he will see us through this.

Definitely, this is the time of disciplining our lives, and giving up unnecessary luxuries and falling in line in a simple and economically viable way of life. It is an extended Lenten season, one would say, which is preparing us for the coming of the true life in God. Through this disciplining of our lives, God will save us.

Curbing of black money in India, would definitely do good for all of us, and tax evasion will stop. People will be able to live simpler and honest lives so that all can have at least a meal a day, and the rich don’t get richer, while the poor starve to death. Facilitates will become available to all, and people will be able to have a better account and utility of their money as it will be saved in banks and not just available to use unnecessarily. As a whole Indians might begin to live a more secure and mature economic life.
The Vatican on December 20 announced the appointment of two new auxiliary bishops, Fr. Allwyn D'Silva and Fr. Barthol Barretto, for the archdiocese of Bombay. The Archdiocese of Bombay will now have four Auxiliary Bishops, the previous appointments being of Bishop Dominic Savio Fernandes and Bishop John Rodrigues who were appointed in May 15th 2013. The episcopal ordination ceremony will most likely be held in January 2017. Fr. Allwyn D'Silva, born 20th April, is presently serving as Parish Priest, St. John the Baptist Church, Thane (West). Ordained to priesthood on April 19, 1975, he serves as Episcopal Vicar of the Navi Mumbai and Thane Deaneries. Fr. Barthol Barretto, who was born on September 16, 1961 and ordained on April 8, 1989 is currently serving as Parish Priest, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (IC) Church, Borivli (West).

A group of Catholics holding Carol services in private homes have been savagely beaten up by a mob of 30 in the village of Tikriya, near the city of Banswara, in Rajasthan. The attacked belong to the Church of St. Peter and Paul in the diocese of Udaipur. The parish priest, Fr. Stephen Rawat, was also among them. "I have no enemies, I was beaten up because of my Christian faith," said Fr. Rawat. He added that there is a hostel of the RSS near the scene of the attack "where the ideology [Hindutva] is imparted to young people. It is not improbable that they were behind this attack against Christians." Like every year the Tikriya parish had organized the Christmas carol service in Catholic homes. This year the group consisted of 20 worshipers, which included three nuns, women and children.

Pope Francis visits India

Kerala

Pope Francis, head of the Roman Catholic Church, is likely to visit India next year. Archbishop-designate Joseph Kalathiparambil is reported to be said the following: “What I understood is that the Pope wishes to visit India next year. An indication in this regard was given to me when I visited him at his residence at Santa Marta in Vatican.” Kalathiparambil said he requested the Pope to visit Kerala and Verapoly Archdiocese, and his response was positive. Prior to his appointment as the archbishop, Kalathiparambil was serving as the Secretary of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People after being called for the assignment by Pope Benedict XVI in February 2011. The 64-year-old bishop replaces Archbishop Francis Kallarakal, who has retired. Pope John Paul II is the only Pope to have visited Kerala.

Venerable Father Agnelo D’Souza, Society of the Missionaries of St. Francis Xavier, is inching toward beatification now as the Vatican has started to look for a potential miracle cure attributed to his intercession. Beatification is one of the steps on the path to sainthood. According to Father Hillary Fernandes, Venerable Agnelo, who died in 1927, helped a 35-year-old woman with a "near-impossible" birth. The woman, who had miscarriages three times, delivered a premature baby during the sixth month of her pregnancy. Both mother and child are safe. The family attributed the health of the mother and child to the intercession of Venerable Agnelo. Now his followers hope that this will be the mandatory miracle needed for Venerable Agnelo to be beatified.

The Catholic bishops’ office in India has mourned the death of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa. She was hospitalized since September, and her health condition kept secret until her death was announced following a cardiac arrest on December 5, 2016 at the age of 68. "It is imperative the people of the state remain calm and avoid violence during this troubled time," said Archbishop Anthony Pappusamy, president of the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council. During her administration in 2001-2016, she made attempts for a rapprochement with Christians, and celebrated Christmas publicly with church leaders.
Our world seems to be becoming more and more violent. Violence, expressed in many different ways, is regarded as the prerogative of the strong! In recent weeks, violence continued to throttle several parts of the world: bombings in Istanbul, Turkey and in the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo, Egypt; the escalation of violence in Aleppo Syria are just some of the violent acts which have resulted in several deaths and many more injuries. In India, some kill another because of what they eat or because they dare stand up for justice and truth. Violence, for many, thus becomes a way of life and highly institutionalised; little children grow up on stories of war, of how the ‘enemy’ needs to be dealt with. For several across the globe there seems to be nothing to hope for: one act of violence spawns another, for retaliation and revenge. Most are oblivious of the truth that ‘eye for an eye’ makes the whole world blind.

Pope Francis has done it again! In a Nonviolence is a common right. Pope Francis in his message on the world day of peace insisted that building a new politics of nonviolence starts in the human heart and the home.
style which is characteristic of his papacy, he has once again sent out a powerful message to the world. It is a message for the Fiftieth World Day of Peace which will be celebrated on January 1st 2017; entitled ‘Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace’, he emphatically states in this message that, “violence is not the cure for our broken world.” He calls for a new style of politics built on peace and nonviolence, and at the same time for disarmament, the eradication of nuclear weapons and an end to domestic violence and abuse against women and children.

His message is addressed to the world’s peoples and nations, to heads of state and government, and to religious, civic and community leaders; in wishing all peace, Pope Francis says, “I pray that the image and likeness of God in each person will enable us to acknowledge one another as sacred gifts endowed with immense dignity. Especially in situations of conflict, let us respect this, our deepest dignity and make active nonviolence our way of life”. Though Catholic in expression, the message clearly transcends the narrow confines of any religion as he proposes an agenda “to banish violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to build nonviolent communities that care for our common home.” The emphasis is clearly on the fact that only the truly brave are non-violent.

Pope Francis insists that build-
May we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people.

In a new politics of nonviolence starts in the human heart and the home. “The family”, he says, “is the indispensable crucible in which spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness.” Certainly a moot point for reflection as Christmas approaches; do we reflect that the most sought after and given Christmas gifts to little children, are the ‘violent’ ones: ranging from toy guns to play-stations?

The message refers to icons of nonviolence and peace like Mahatma Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Martin Luther King Jr. Mahatma Gandhi is regarded as the ‘Apostle of Non-Violence’ today; his birth anniversary on October 2nd is observed as the ‘International Day of Non-Violence’. The World Day of Peace, is celebrated by the Church in India on January 30th, the anniversary of Gandhi’s assassination. Pope Francis also says, “women in particular are often leaders of nonviolence, as for example, was Leymah Gbowee and the thousands of Liberian women, who organized pray-ins and nonviolent protest that resulted in high-level peace talks to end the second civil war Liberia”.

In our broken world, for Pope Francis, “Mother Teresa is a symbol, an icon of our times... She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crimes – the crimes! – of poverty they created”.

Pope Francis has been consistent in his references to those who are responsible for the wars and conflicts in the world today- and specially the military-industrial establishment, “because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world”. He goes on further to say, “I plead for disarmament and for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons: nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutual assured destruction are incapable of grounding such an ethics.”

The Beatitudes of Jesus is a ‘manual’ for peace and nonviolence; “applying the Beatitudes, which outlines how to be blessed, good and authentic, is also a program and a challenge for political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives.”

In the concluding paragraph of his message Pope Francis exhorts, “All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers. In 2017, may we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home. Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace.”

Nonviolence is indeed a right for all; something which we should begin putting into practice both individually and collectively from today!
Dr. Felix Podimattom
(1934 - 2016)

Dr. Felix Podimattom was born in 1934 at Muttom, near Thodupuzha in the Diocese of Palai, Kerala. He joined the Order of Friars Minor Capuchins and was ordained a priest at the age of 26, and was a member of St. Joseph Province.

He holds a Master’s degree in Political Science from the University of Mysore, a Licentiate degree in Theology from Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome and a Doctoral degree in Moral Theology from the Alphonsian Academy, Rome.

Podimattam created history when Limca Book of Records accepted him in 2013 as the person who has authored most number of books on moral theology in the world. Podimattam has written 135 books in his four-decade long teaching and theologizing career on varying moral subjects such as celibacy to sex and artificial insemination to euthanasia.

He holds a Master’s degree in Political Science from the University of Mysore, a Licentiate degree in Theology from Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome and a Doctoral degree in Moral Theology from the Alphonsian Academy, Rome. His doctoral thesis ‘The Relativity of Natural Law’ is acclaimed as exceptionally excellent. The thesis was guided by the eminent Moral Theologian, Bernard Haering, who influenced the renewal of Moral teachings of the Church during and after the Vatican II. Dr. Podimattam was resident professor at St. Francis Theological College, Kottayam and has been the founding member and first president of the Indian Moral Theologians Association. Most of his books are published by Media House, Delhi.

Bishop Raphael Thattil, the Apostolic Visitor to the Syro-Malabar Church, and Auxiliary Bishop of Trissur once described him a towering scholar and the last word in Moral Theology in India. His works are unparalleled, and each of his books unique and scientific.
Relaxation is one of the five basic principles for happy and peaceful living. The other four are proper breathing, proper food, positive thinking and meditation. People, because of stressful life, accumulate tension and negative energy in the mind which will pass on to the body. So both body and mind will become stressful. When the body is tensed the nerves system will get blocked and energy supply to the vital organs and to the different parts of the body will be badly affected. Toxic materials accumulated in the body and nerves system will aggravate the problem. In course of time stress and negative energy will weaken any one or more of the vital organs leading to serious health problems. Regular relaxation will help a person to reduce the stress and negative energy in the body and mind. Shavasana, sisuasana, makarasana and matsyakridasana are some of the important relaxation yogic postures. Shavasana was already discussed in the December issue of Companion.

Sisuasana
“Sisuasana” also known as child posture is a very good relaxation yogic posture. Children prefer this posture for sleep. Child posture can be practised at any time except soon after a meal. Stand on your knees and palms on a mat on the floor. Keep the big toe close to each other so that heels will be apart. Slowly sit on the inverted part of the feet. Body weight should not be on the heels so that the ankle will not get strain. Breathe out slowly and bend forward. Place the forehead on the mat, hands are stretched out palms on the floor downward and chest rests on the thigh. In another variation hands are placed backward...
closer to the feet, palms are open. Breathe normally; gradually the breathing will slow down. Body and mind will relax. After a minute, the beginners come back to sitting posture and then repeat the ‘asana.’

Pregnant women, people with diarrhoea, weak cornea, lower back pain, pelvic problem, knee problem, neck problem, heart problem, and high and low blood pressure should not practice this posture without proper guidance by a yoga teacher.

In the final position the head is placed slightly lower than the heart. This will ensure slow flow of fresh blood to the brain cells and the organs on the head and face. Kidneys and the other vital organs will get rest; discs in the back bone will be relieved of pressure. Neck, Chest muscles, lower back muscles and the muscles on both sides of the back bone will get stretching and fresh blood supply. After a few days of practice, one can remain in this posture for a longer time. Regular practice of “sisuasana” will bring in peace of mind and relaxation to body.

**Makarasana**

“Makara” means crocodile. One who is in this posture resembles a crocodile resting on its belly on the floor. Lie down on the floor on a mat on the stomach. Hands are starched out in front of the head; keep the palms downward and the forehead or the chin on the floor. Another variation is, to keep the palms one above the other down ward and keep the cheeks or the forehead on the palm. Legs are kept apart and the toe pointing to each other. A third variation

of the posture, keep the head and chest up, chin supported by the palms, elbow is placed on the floor. Choose one of these as a comfortable posture in which one can remain for a longer time. Breathe slow and deep in the beginning and later normal.

**Matsyakridasana**

This posture looks like a flapping fish in the water. Lie down on the back, breath slowly prepare the mind to do the posture. Turn to the right side, right hand stretched on the floor, bend the left knee and bring it closer to the chest, bend the left and right palms down ward one above the other and make a pillow. Keep the right cheek above the palms. Left knee touches the left elbow, left foot is kept above the right knee and the right leg is straight. Left shoulder is on the floor, close the eyes and breathe in a relaxed way. After a few minutes, repeat the posture on the left side. This is a comfortable and relaxing posture for the entire body. The vertebrae and the internal organs will get a twist and fresh blood supply. As the breathing slows down, the mind becomes serene.

A variation of this posture: Lie down on the back, fold the left knee, twist the pelvic joint to the right and bring down the left knee on the right side of the body, gently press the knee down with the right palm. Right leg is kept straight. Left upper torso, shoulder and left hand are twisted to the left, turn the head towards the left. This posture has to be repeated with the other side. In this

Regular relaxation will help a person to reduce the stress and negative energy in the body and mind.
1 **Stephen Hawking**

**Rome**

Stephen Hawking, the brilliant astrophysicist and self-proclaimed atheist, visited Vatican on Dec 2, 2016 for the Pontifical Academy annual meeting. The Academy was founded back in 1603 by Prince Federico Cesi with Pope Clement VII's blessing, and its first leader was Galileo Galilei. The Pontifical Academy is conceived as a place where science and faith can meet and can have an open discussion and examine future scientific developments. This year’s conference was focused on “Science and Sustainability.” Hawking himself gave a talk on “The Origin of the Universe,” the topic that has earned him world renown. Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Mueller, prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, concluded the event which held at the Academy of Belgium in Italy.

2 **Tightened security**

**Philippines**

Philippines bishop conference announced that the liturgical activities may be suspended due to terrorist attack. Fr. Jerome said that safety of the people is important. "The church, for practical purposes, will be more than willing to suspend any liturgical activity if there are threats to the safety of churchgoers," said Father Jerome Secillano of the bishop conference’s public affairs committee. There was a bomb explosion near the Catholic Church in the southern city of Esperanza, injuring two of the churchgoers, on the first Sunday of Advent. Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, OMI, Archbishop of Cotabato, condemned Sunday's church bombing, telling Minda News that it was "pure terrorism, made worse because of the sacredness of the place, the sacredness of the day, and the sacredness of the event that had just taken place."

3 **Christians Attacked**

**Egypt**

Coptic Christians were attacked on 25, November 2016 injuring four believers, damaging four Christian owned shops, destroying Christian guesthouse and 9 Christian homes. A Christian charity and watchdog group reported that Coptic Christians have become the latest victims of radical Islamists in Egypt. According to International Christian Concern (ICC), the village of Manshiet El-Naghambah was attacked by Islamists who were enraged at the news of a new Christian church being built. The nearest Christian church is three miles away from El-Naghambah and Christians have asked permission to build a church in the village but the Egyptian government has yet to approve. The village is a home to majority of Muslims while only 2,000 residents are Coptic Christians.

4 **Forced Organ**

**China**

The forced organ harvesting performed on religious minorities, who are in Chinese prisons, majority of them are Christians. There have been 60,000 to 100,000 organ transplants in China per year. Following years of several human rights groups speaking out, the European Parliament called for an investigation into the "persistent, credible reports on systematic state-sanctioned organ harvesting from non-consenting prisoners of conscience," but the China government kept secret its actions and statistics till now, making its horrendous actions difficult to prove and continues to deny any allegations to it. Even though "organ pillaging" is a crime in China, it continues doing organ transplant industry for many years.

5 **Fr. Stanley Rother**

**USA**

The Servant of God Fr. Stanley Rother has been approved for beatification. Father Stanley Rother, a priest of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, was a missionary in Guatemala. He is the first US born martyr and priest to receive this official recognition from the Vatican. Fr. Rother joined the Seminary at his young age. A few years later after his ordination, Fr. Stanley accepted the invitation to join the mission team and spent 13 years of his life in Guatemala. He was known among the villagers padre Francisco, after
his baptismal name of Francis. Oklahoma City’s Archbishop Paul Coakley states ‘We need the witness of holy men and women who remind us that we are all called to holiness – and that holy men and women e’

**Fatima anniversary**

**Portugal**

Pope Francis declared as Jubilee Year from November 27, 2016 to November 27, 2017 and granted a plenary indulgence opportunity in occasion of the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal. There are three ways of obtaining the indulgences said the Rector of the Fatima Shrine in addition to the ordinary conditions: 1) Make pilgrimage to the Fatima Shrine in Portugal and participate in a celebration or prayer dedicated to the Virgin 2) Pray before any statue of Our Lady of Fatima in any Church or oratory on 13th of each month from May to October. 3) The elderly and infirm: they can pray in front of a statue of Our Lady of Fatima and spiritually unite themselves to the jubilee celebrations on the days of the apparitions, the 13th of each month, between May and October 2017.

**Church’s work**

**Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena invited Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conference (FABC) to hold their meeting on family in his country. FABC delegates appreciated the warm welcome and the hospitality they received from the country, and they enjoyed the beauty and the tranquility of the nation. Sri Lanka is a multicultural and multireligious country. The president appreciated the Catholic Church for its work among the poor in the island nation: “I very much appreciate the work accomplished by the Catholic Church on behalf of the poor in Sri Lanka. It was the first time in the FABC history that the head of a nation hosting its plenary members.

**Footballer priest**

**UK**

Phil Mulryne, a Manchester United footballer who’s shared the field with David Beckham and brought fame to Ireland with 27 caps is setting aside his jersey to pursue the vocation of a Catholic Dominican priest. Mulryne, a 38-year old Irishman, began his career in football as a kid in 1994 when he attended the Manchester United youth academy, and eventually joined the Norwich league in 1999. After a series of major injuries at the end of his career in 2008, Mulryne was faced with the future. Bishop Noel Treanor of Down and Connor said to be an influential figure during Mulryne’s conversion, eventually inviting him to enter the seminary. In 2009, the Irish native entered the Irish Pontifical College in Rome, where he has been pursuing the priesthood through studies in philosophy and theology and is set for priestly ordination in 2017.

**Visas Refused**

**UK**

UK refused visas to Archbishops from Mosul, Northern Iraq and Syria to attend the Consecration of the first Syriac Orthodox Cathedral in London. These archdioceses were taken by Islamic State (IS), and Mosul converted to mosque now. The Christians were executed, enslaved to accept ‘dhimmitude’ and pay fines. Hundreds of public buildings were illuminated in red light in London as an act of solidarity with those who are suffering persecution for their Christian faith around the world. Aid to the Church in Need released report on Religious Freedom in the World and was presented to HRH Prince Charles, who went on to attend the consecration of the new St. Thomas Cathedral Syriac Orthodox Church in west London.

**Global business**

**Rome**

Pope Francis addressed participants of the Fortune-Time Global Forum, who were discussing on technology and jobs, global health, food and water, commitment to communities, energy and the environment, and financial inclusion–each representing critical elements related to poverty alleviation. Pope Francis challenged the business leaders to work for justice by promoting local and personal sense of responsibility so that everyone would be part of the society. The Holy Father thanked the leaders for their work in promoting the dignity of the human person within their institutions and economic models and in alleviating poverty. The Holy Father said - "The renewal, purification and strengthening of solid economic models depends on our own personal conversion and generosity to those in need."
On October 24, 2016, Pope Francis addressed 220 members of the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, encouraging them to ‘to ask insistently for consolation.’ In the question and answer session that followed he said that the best anti-depressant he has found is this consolation that comes from God.

He shared with them that when he does his daily examination of conscience at night, Pope Francis says he feels consolation in seeing how God has been leading him. He acknowledged that sometimes he asks forgiveness for the times he’s been an obstacle to the Spirit’s bidding.

Earlier on October 1, 2016 in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, Pope Francis offered words of consolation to the nation’s small Catholic community and invited the faithful to be like little children who are so lovingly embraced by God.

God, he said, is always ready to offer us consolation in times of need, “amid the turmoil we experience in life.” It “liberates us from evil, brings peace and increases our joy.”

But, he suggested that we must leave the “doors of consolation” open to Jesus, through daily reading of the Gospel, silent prayers in adoration, confession and receiving the Eucharist. When the door of our heart is closed, he said, we “get accustomed to pessimism” and “end up absorbed in our own sadness, in the depths of anguish, isolated.”

God best consoles us, he noted, “When we are united, in communion” and the Church is
Consolation is a support both an emotional and practical which very one needs in life. It is important that where we find it. Do we find consolation in Christ in times of need?

Sharing consolationas Church’s urgent mission

Receiving and bringing God's consolation, especially to those who suffer intensely, he stressed, is the Church’s “urgent” mission. And in order to do this, he said, we must become, as Jesus tells us, like a little child. “For God is not known through grand ideas and extensive study,” he noted, “but rather through the littleness of a humble and trusting heart.” Likewise, prestige and earthly success mean little to God who wishes us to empty ourselves of such things.

Children as Consolation

“A child has nothing to give and everything to receive,” the Pope added: “the one who becomes like a little child is poor in self but rich in God.”

Children reminds us that we are not the masters of our lives. They invite us live in simplicity, spontaneity and freedom. Children have much to teach us, he observed: they show us that God “accomplishes great things in those who put up no resistance to him, who are simple and sincere, without duplicity.”

The Pope reminded the faithful that we are all children of the Father: “not masters of our lives” or “autonomous and self-sufficient adults,” but children “who need love and forgiveness.”

In the same way, Christian communities who live the Gospel with this simplicity may be “poor in means” but “rich in God.” And blessed are those “Shepherds,” the Pope said, “who do not ride the logic of worldly success, but follow the law of love: welcoming, listening, serving.” Blessed too, he observed, is the Church “who does not entrust herself to the criteria of functionalism and organizational efficiency, nor worries about her image.”

Quoting St. Theresa of Child Jesus, Pope Francis concluded his Homily by inviting the faithful to “bear with the faults of others” and delight in the “smallest acts of virtue we see them practice.” Charity, he said, “cannot remain hidden in the depths of our hearts.”

Connecting consolation to the life of the children, urges us to reflect on the coming Christmas, when the Child Jesus has united the world with God. May the joy of his birth bring us genuine consolation, which we can share with the rest of the Church and the world, especially through the little experiences of life and encounters of love. That is the way we can live the Gospel of Joy, share of Love of God and bring hope to ourselves.

“The house of consolation” to which we should turn. Further, in a spirit of mutual sharing, Pope Francis urged the faithful to offer to others the same consolation that they receive. “Even when enduring affliction and rejection,” he said, “a Christian is always called to bring hope to the hearts of those who have given up, to encourage the downhearted, to bring the light of Jesus…and his forgiveness” (Vatican Radio)

“Countless people suffer trials and injustice and live in anxiety,” he continued. And though God’s consolation cannot take away our problems, he said, it “gives us the power to love, to peacefully bear pain.”

Kuruvilla Pandikatt SJ
Professor of Science, Religion and Philosophy Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune
The just concluded Year of Mercy has been a year of renewal, reconciliation and return. Catholics all over the world have contemplated the ‘Merciful Father’, trying to imitate the Face of Mercy in their workplaces, families, churches and neighbourhoods. Each of us were invited to ‘be moved with pity’, risking our lives, our resources and feeling one with the other in his/her pain and suffering, taking our cue from MisericordiaeVultus, in which the Holy Father Pope Francis writes “Mercy is a force that overcomes everything, filling our hearts with love and bringing consolation through pardon.”

The Face of Mercy is a film that reiterates mercy as an antidote to the evil of our times, in a stunningly seamless weave of testimony, theology and history. A docufilm with a running time of sixty minutes, this is a film that reminds us that ‘mercy’ is much more than just a devotional or theological concept. It showcases the importance of mercy in our lives, in difficult and excruciating circumstances in a myriad ways. Mercy is indeed a transformational force for good, that is alive and present in our daily life circumstances.

The film produced by the Knights of Columbus “highlights the sort of transformations that are possible in individual lives that embrace the way of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation,” according to Knights CEO Carl Anderson. Exploring the relevance and history of Divine Mercy, The Face of Mercy through exquisite juxtapositioning of visual effects and human tapestry creates a vibrant and delightful canvas of ‘mercy’ working in our troubled and violent times. Focussing on evocative personal testimonies of a Rwandan genocide survivor, a NYPD officer, a young widow who forgave the killer of her husband, a baseball player who became a Norbertine monk, an addicted high-school dropout who became a Marist priest, and a former Cleveland Browns linebacker who became a Carmelite and then a missionary of Divine Mercy, this film takes us on an introspective trip into our own innermost recesses.

Jim Caviezel (who essayed Jesus in Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ) narrates the story of The Face of Mercy, commencing from the powerful visions of the Divine Mercy to that unpretentious Polish Nun – St, Faustina Kowalska, proceeding with St. John Paul the Great who ensured that this message reached the corners of the world and culminating with the just-concluded ‘year of mercy’ granted the Church by Pope Francis.

This film available at amazon.com and the Ignatius Press website, is a continuation of the year of jubilee, for personal and communitarian renewal, inviting all of us to a metanoia – a transformation of mind and heart, with the same love and compassion that God in His mercy chooses to embrace us! The Face of Mercy is an invitation to, in all difficult moments neither despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to His holy will, which is love and mercy itself!
The Vatican has launched a new website detailing its efforts to protect children from sexual abuse. This is launched by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, created by Pope Francis and led by Cardinal Sean O’Malley of Boston.

It's the first time the Vatican is publishing the documents and resources in one place, including an email and phone number to contact its commission for the protection of minors.

The site includes a template for anti-abuse guidelines each local church was asked to produce back in 2011, under emeritus Pope Benedict XVI.

The site, conceived as a way to share the knowledge and resources the commission has on safeguarding children and caring for survivors, is currently only available in English, but with other major languages following soon.
Promised Sign

**Context and Theme**

With eager haste the shepherds hurry to Bethlehem and find Mary, Joseph, and the baby in the manger. Having seen the promised sign, they make known to all in the house what had been made known to them by the angelic revelation. Mary is also part of the “they” who were amazed. She seeks to understand fully what was being made known in these acts of revelation. She treasured all this, and retained it in her heart. The episode is concluded with the departure of the shepherds, full of praise for God.

The feast of the Holy Mother of God is one of the most important and oldest of the major feasts of Mary. The church commemorates and celebrates today the unique privilege of Mary and her singular relationship with God.

**Message**

1. To be called the Mother of God is a great honour for Mary. Her “fiat” to God’s invitation to be the mother of his Son was an act of faith and an act of obedience to the will of God. While saying yes to God’s will she did not expect any special honours and privileges to come her way. People usually think that by holding top posts and receiving honours from others they become privileged. But it was not Mary’s concern when she responded to God’s call.

2. Mary is usually depicted as carrying Jesus in her hands. Jesus is Mary’s gift to the world. She invites us to accept Jesus as our Lord and master as Mary accepted him. St. Alphonse de Ligori said: “Whoever desires the fruit must go to the tree; whoever desires Jesus must go to Mary; and whoever finds Mary will most certainly find Jesus”.

3. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on 1st January 2008, while giving the homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God said: “The Apostle Paul refers to the mystery of the divine motherhood of Mary, the Theotokos, in his Letter to the Galatians. ‘When the time had fully come’, he writes, ‘God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law’ (4:4). We find the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word and the Divine Motherhood of Mary summed up in a few words: the Virgin’s great privilege is precisely to be Mother of the Son who is God... Let us today contemplate Mary, ever-virgin Mother of the Only-Begotten Son of the Father; let us learn from her to welcome the Child who was born for us in Bethlehem. If we recognize in the Child born of her the Eternal Son of God and accept him as our one Saviour, we can be called and we really are children of God: sons in the Son.”

4. Mary becomes the measure of who we are and who we are to be. In Luke, Mary represents...
the ideal believer, for she hears the good news and ponders it in her heart, and fully responds to it. Her heart becomes the place of discovering Jesus. Our hearts must become that place of Jesus’ dwelling.

5. One of the most amazing qualities of Mary is her capacity to ponder over what is happening to her. She ponders them and stores them in the silence of her heart. If we want to imitate her, we need to ponder in our hearts what Jesus says to us and what he does in us. In other words, it is to keep Jesus as the centre of our life, as the Lord of our life.

6. “Pondering” calls for response. Mary’s response to the call of God was not simply a choice between right and wrong, good or bad, some sort of ethical or moral decision. It was the choice to obey and follow God.

Context and Theme

The narration is not about Jesus’ birth but about the Magi who recognize and worship the child as the Son of God. Herod rejects the newborn king and plots to destroy him. Matthew clearly sees this as an acceptable Gentile response to the birth of the Messiah. Their visit and worship foreshadow the future welcome of Gentile believers into the true people of God. Adoration of the Magi consolidates the event of incarnation of Jesus as Son of God.

Message

1. Three wise men bent their knees in front of a silly babe born in a manger! They see baby Jesus and fall on their knees to worship Him. They offer him homage and give him presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh; gold because Jesus is king, frankincense since Jesus is divine and myrrh prefiguring his Passion. We need to recognize the Lord who comes to us everyday into our life and we have to search Him with a sincere and humble heart as the three wise men did.

2. The three wise men were led by the star and were ready to obey the directives of the Lord. When they followed their own reasoning, they were led astray. Only the Lord can lead us to happiness and bliss. In the darkness of this world we have all been given help on our journey to God: the beauty of nature, the Word of God, Spirit-filled witnessing and preaching, the faith of others and our own faith.

3. Herod was certainly interested in the Child of which the Magi spoke; not in order to worship him, as he wished to make them believe by lying, but rather to kill him. Herod saw others solely as rivals to combat. “God also seemed a rival to him, a particularly dangerous rival who would like to deprive men of their vital space, their autonomy, their power; a rival who points out the way to take in life and thus prevents one from doing what one likes” (Benedict XVI). 4. After their visit to Bethlehem the wise men set out not via Jerusalem since they are asked to avoid Herod. There are many “Herods” that we have to avoid on our journey to heaven. “Herods” are persons that lead you away from the Lord or the way of living that will bring disaster to you and your family. Are you ready to avoid them? “Might we too sometimes see God as a sort of rival? Might we too be blind to his signs and deaf to his words because we think he is setting limits on our life and does not allow us to dispose of our existence as we please?” (Benedict XVI).

5. After their departure from Baby Jesus, they did not have gold, frankincense and myrrh. They returned empty-handed! But their hearts were brimming with joy. They became witnesses to the Epiphany. We need epiphanies! We need epiphanies so that peace, love and hope abound in this new year. Let us open our eyes and ears, and all the more our hearts, to witness and become part of that epiphany.
6. Sometimes we see only darkness around us. But Jesus is there—He is the star and the light. We need to believe that eternal life awaits us even if sometimes in this world there is no star for us. He, in our moments of darkness without a star, will help us not to give up but to keep searching, hoping and praying because that would be the best way forward.

**Jan 15, 2017 - 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**Context and Theme**

While John 1:19-28 speaks about the Baptist’s witness to the Jewish Leaders, the next session (John 1:29-34) details his witness to the People. The evangelist chooses to give a designation to Jesus that is not used in any of the other Gospels, namely, the Lamb of God. The testimony of John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, whose task is to bring about the judgment of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous. Jesus, the Lamb of God, brings deliverance through submission to death as the Passover Lamb and his rising to life with the Father in heaven. The theme of Passover functions as the theological foundation stone for the entire Gospel of John.

**Message**

1. Jesus is the heart and core of the gospel. Christianity is not a simply way of life; the focus of Christianity is a person who is the core of everything Christians believe. John calls Jesus the Lamb of God and Jesus’ mission is to redeem us from our sins. The blood of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12) delivered the Israelites in Egypt from death. The blood of Jesus, the true Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7), delivers us from everlasting death and destruction. In Jesus he saw the true and only sacrifice which can deliver us from sin.

2. The Lamb is one that “takes away the sin of the world”. The theme of taking away sin involves “wiping away” or “getting rid of sin” which is actualized through God’s “pardoning” of humanity.

3. The purpose of the baptism of Jesus (vv. 32-34) was to demonstrate his consecration to the heavenly Father and approval by him. The Father’s voice declares him to be not simply a man of the Spirit, but the Baptizer with the Spirit.

4. The witness of John to Jesus comes to its climax in the confession: “This man is the Son of God.” When John says he did not know Jesus he was referring to the hidden reality of Jesus divinity.” It was the Holy Spirit who revealed to John Jesus’ true nature and he bore witness that this is the Son of God. We can only know who Jesus truly is through the Holy Spirit who reveals him to us.

5. It is important for us to remember that people come to Christ through us. Witnessing sometimes seems so difficult. Yet we must learn to start at home and direct people to Jesus. Like John the Baptist, we must say to our modern world, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

6. This passage provides us with the following theological confessions concerning Jesus, which forms a striking summary of Johannine Christology: (1) he is the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; (2) he is able to accomplish this divine task because he is the Son of God; and (3) he brings salvation by his baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

**Jan 22, 2017 - 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**Context and Theme**

Matthew 4:12-17 serves as a transition and introduction to the narrative of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. A brief notice about the arrest of John concludes the account of the time of preparation and Jesus’ own work, which now begins, is prefaced by an OT quotation (vv. 15-16). Verses 4:18-22 narrates the call of first disciples. Simon, James and John formed a core of the disciple group. Their call and ready response may be taken as typical of the group as a whole. Preaching and healing sum up Matthew’s distinctive epitome of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples (v. 23). The focus on Christology and discipleship indicates a substantial portion of what appears in Mt 4:16-16:20.

**Message**

1. “Light” versus “darkness”; “Light” refers to the knowledge of God and the obedience to Him while “darkness” stands for the ignorance of or disobedience to his revelation. Jesus brings liberation from oppression (Isa 9:4). In John 8:12 he calls himself “the light of the world.” Matthew has shown Jesus as the royal Messiah who fulfilled Scripture.

2. 4:17 - Jesus’ words echo John’s message recorded in 3:2. The core of their message was identical. The essential content of their kerygma is “repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has come
near”. The drawing near of the kingdom is the reason of the call to repentance and the arrival of the kingdom is more important than the call to repentance. This is a period of grace where all are called to repent and enter into the kingdom of God. The Day of Judgment, that the Messiah brings, is still coming. But by God’s grace, they did not come at the same time. Now is the time to repent.

3. The disciples’ immediate response is significant because it is the true pattern of genuine discipleship. Genuine discipleship involves two things: (a) the leaving behind of past preoccupations and (b) the unhesitating and unconditional response of following. The call to discipleship is a sovereign act of God; the response of those who are called is to be immediate and unconditional, involving a complete break with old loyalties.

4. As the first disciples were called and responded, so are we called to respond. Such response is of primary importance if we are to participate in the new reality of the kingdom of God. We also share the task of bringing others into the kingdom—a task for which Jesus prepares those whom he calls (cf. 28:18-20).

5. Disciples are agents of change: To be a disciple means to go all with message of Jesus. They are to be agents of change; they are to be a people of faith, bringing God’s love into the lives of those in need.

Context and Theme

Chapters 5-7 of Matthew’s gospel is known as the Sermon on the Mount, which is the first and lengthiest of the five Matthean discourses. These chapters present the ethical teaching of Jesus. The righteousness of the kingdom of God (6:33) is the main theme of the Sermon of the Mount. The content of the sermon would have had special relevance for the Jewish-Christian readers of the Gospel. The “sermon” is clearly a compilation of the sayings of Jesus by the evangelist, rather than something spoken by Jesus on a single occasion. The contents of the sermon are fundamentally Jewish, while at some points they go beyond what is typically Jewish teaching and reflect the originality of Jesus (see 5:39-42, 44; 7:12). Those original teachings of Jesus put in positive form what Judaism expressed negatively.

Message

1. The Beatitudes (5:3-12) are a common biblical form in both Testaments (e.g., Ps 1:1;
Prov 3:13; Dan 12:12; Matt 11:6; Acts 20:35; Rev 1:3) and the word “blessed” refers to those who are or will be happy or fortunate, because of God’s response to their behaviour. Matthew records eight blessings followed by a generalizing summary, whereas Luke presents four blessings and four parallel woes.

2. The sermon described the kind of righteousness Jesus expected of his followers. This righteousness surpasses the legalistic mentality of the Pharisees and must be lived by every follower of Jesus. Mt 5:3-5 and 5:13-20 deal with our personal life; Mt 5:6 and cha. 6 deal with our genuine relationship with the Lord; and, Mt 5:7-12 and cha. 7 deal with our relationships with others.

3. The core of Jesus’ teaching is that a radical change of heart is a necessary for being his disciple. Matthew is telling his readers that Israel (and all mankind) needs to change its heart and attitude toward self, others and God. The righteousness of the disciple must surpass mere “religiosity”.

4. The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness that God has placed in every heart. Our idea of “happiness” is dependent on circumstances. Instead, God’s happiness or joy is dependent on the assurance of God’s blessing, not on present situations.

5. The beatitudes are a sign of contradiction to the world’s understanding of happiness and joy. How can one find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? Poverty of spirit finds joy in possessing God as the greatest treasure possible. Hunger of the spirit seeks nourishment and strength in God’s word and Spirit. God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world.

6. The beatitudes confront us with decisive choices concerning the life we pursue here on earth; they also teach us how should we make use of the goods God puts at our disposal. The blessing or happiness belongs to such a person, who participates in God’s kingdom by acknowledging his need for a source of salvation outside himself. The kingdom is declared as a reality apart from any human achievement. Thus the beatitudes are predicated upon the experience of the grace of God. God alone can satisfy us.
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It did not surprise anyone that the government notices to the managements of educational institutions in the wake of the controversial demonetization of high denomination currency notes generated more excitement and fear than the proposals of a new education policy that the Ministry of Human Resource development posted on its website earlier this year.

With quality education, so much in demand not just by the aspirational middle classes of upper castes, but even by parents from lower income strata and marginalized caste and ethnic groups, and the central, state or municipal agencies not able to guarantee either quality or numbers, there is always a rush for presumably better, English-medium schools in the private sector. The skewed demand-and-supply chain introduces its own element of corruption. The corruption chain reaching all the way up to the political leadership ensured that school managements had their way.

But corruption aside, the institutions did to a large measure meet the expectations of parents, giving a wholesome education with trained or semi trained staff, in buildings equipped with reasonable teaching aids, including the most important blackboards, chairs, tables, toilets, and sometimes even good playgrounds. The Nehruvian model ensured that children learnt English, as also their mother tongue, and if possible a third language including Sanskrit, Urdu and perhaps French or some European tongue.

This made for a wholesome, well rounded young adult after eleven or twelve years of schooling. The batches that passed out of school and college fifteen to twenty years after independence were the ones who worked on the rockets and satellites, computer codes and bioengineering which had made India the best of the developing societies. In later years, the National Council of Educational Research and Training, the University Grants Commission, the Science Talent Search and the CABE ensured continuing emphasis on excellence despite still limited resources and political interference. The DS Kothari and other reports promised improvements that would bring education up to the best the west could offer, even if it took time.

All this came under challenge in the new education policy. The Unique Selling Point, or USP, of the new policy was religious nationalism, a harking back to some mythical past where India had spaceships, and had invented plastic surgery and genetic engineering. Investigations by concerned groups, of which this writer was a part, revealed the hot house in which this policy was spawned. It is not that the policy was anti science, but it as in Vedic times sought to reserve “real” education, science and engineering and biology, to only a select few – a sort of eugenics that would breed and train only a small select breed of citizens to be the managers of the future. The rest were destined to be sloughed off at various stages into professional work in support services, the contemporary equivalents of potter, tanner, carpenter, tinsmith.

The cultural vehicle was to be Sanskrit, and it would have a field free of competition with any trace of connections to the Muslim and Christian initiatives in education over 500 years, airbrushed out of the country’s history.

Inevitably, with no sign of increased government spending, this new communalized education would be owned by make-in-India corporations, working under the benign patronage of the Central government, with little if any place for state governments, municipal bodies and other self-government agencies. Crony education in a twenty-first century Varna system.

There is need to formulate an alternate to this policy. This new policy must find its roots in the nurturing soil of the era that brought about the Indian renaissance, that ended things like Suttee and untouchability, and the finest of whose sons and daughters led the struggle for Independence. This does not mean a total abnegation of India’s rich culture, its diversity and its history. Similar old cultures such as China and Japan show that a twenty-first century cutting edge education is not in conflict with the essence of culture and tradition of a nation and a people. Regression will betray the promise of free India.
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