

THE SECULAR CITIZEN

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A NATIONAL FAMILY WEEKLY

Tough Time Ahead In 2021

20-20 Tough Time

This year has been truly unlike any other. However, both the media and the freelancers like me have felt deeply privileged to bring you news, analysis, opinions and a real sense of community when you, our readers, have needed it most. While circumstances may have cast us apart, in a physical sense at least, these challenging last 12 months have seen us work more closely together than ever.

From Covid-19 and the state elections and the economic slowdown, I would like to thank media houses for their tireless efforts to bring out the best in the print form or online issues and encouraging writers in taking a look back at what we have achieved. The readers were made to look at online issues as a blessing in disguise during the pandemic. The older generation of the country is still fixated on tradition and culture, while the present-day youth is more interested in the fast-moving world of technology and social media.

The global print media market is expected to decline from \$315.7 billion in 2019 to \$289.9 billion in 2020 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of -8.2%. The decline is mainly due to economic slowdown across countries owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and the measures to contain it. So, print is neither dead nor is it making a comeback. It's just a little older, a little more creative, and a lot wiser.

Media is the "fourth estate" of democracy and it plays a pivotal role in ensuring justice and benefits of the government policies reach the interior sections of the society. They act as a chain between the government and the citizens of the country, people have faith in the media as it has an impact on the audience. Media has played a significant role in establishing democracy throughout the world. Since the 18th century, the me-

(Contd.. on p. 7)

HAPPY
NEW YEAR
2021

HAPPY
NEW
YEAR
2021

Will Goa See The Rise Of A New Front

It must be said that the enthusiasm over the ZP polls held in the state was in sharp contrast to the overall tone of insipidity that should have welcomed elections to bodies that seemingly lack powers and clear functions and fails to inspire confidence among the electorate as they have failed to contribute to the development of the state in any significant way

Be that as it may, but it was a virtual Saffron wave that swept the state!

Although not a precursor to the Assembly elections in 2022, the result of the elections to the two Zilla Panchayats in the state is a testimony of BJP's unwavering popularity in Goa.

If the massive mandate the Bharatiya Janata Party has managed to secure in these polls is anything to go by, it does appear that it will take some efforts to dislodge the BJP from the high pedestal that it occupies in the state's political scenario right now.



by Pachu Menon



But what has come as a big surprise is the number of 'Independents' who have managed to withstand the blitz of rivals fielded by various political parties in this 'party-based' election and emerge victorious!

Though a distant second to the BJP, the very fact that the total number of Independents declared elected almost equals the sum total of those elected from other parties put together is an indication that politics in the State is slowly rising above party considerations with the electorate showing a distinct penchant for favouring those candidates

with candid ideas for the development in the region.

While such a trend portends a significant swing in the perceptions of the electorate, it is yet a bit too early to say whether it will have a substantial impact on the politics in the State.

The CM may have been euphoric over his party's victory but his task was made that much easier by the split in secular votes that saw some of the BJP candidates romping home comfortably. A high percentage of those who did not cast their votes too contributed to the plight of the Opposition parties.

Besides, with many of the Congress turncoats still continuing to rule the roost in their respective constituencies, their dominance has helped the BJP make inroads into these 'bastions' as well.

For a state which has always been in the throes of the 'High Command' dilemma, the search for a strong regional party which could address issues at the local level is yet to bear fruit.

The long and popular stint the MGP enjoyed in power after Goa was liberated from Portuguese colonial rule is indicative of the fact that a state is well served when, colloquially speaking, it has the seat of power at home itself.

Bishop Barthol's Appreciation to Ladislaus L. D'Souza's article 'A Pandemic Christmas' in the Christmas Issue of The Secular Citizen

Dear Ladislaus,

THANK YOU for sending me the soft copy of the Christmas Issue of The Secular Citizen. At first glance, all the articles are based on the story of Christmas - God made man - Emmanuel - God with us.

Your article is so very real. Based on the situation of the ongoing pandemic, you have dwelt on the meaning and significance of Christmas. I liked the way you have developed the story of Christmas. Keep up the good work you are doing: you have a "gifted pen". God bless you abundantly.

Lovingly,
barthol



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(Contd.. from p. 2)

But the disintegration of the once robust local outfit is also suggestive of the more sinister machinations which allow regional parties to become 'defunct' no sooner 'they have served the purpose'!

The state has witnessed the 'genesis' of quite a few regional parties since then but hardly have any survived to make a pronounced effect on the political culture in the state.

Some of them are revived only during elections and serve as electoral platforms for those refused tickets by the more dominant parties.

Rather than serve as springboards for leaders of the outfit to launch themselves on an enterprising political career, a regional party is supposed to fulfill the aspirations of the local populace.

Moreover, the new corps of Goan politicians seems to have their sights fixed far beyond its borders. With 'bursting onto the scene' being the prime motto, aspirants to 'political stardom' are known to subscribe to their own sets of rules to attain it.

Hence given these conditions, expectations of logical solutions to local issues at the state-level would be a far-fetched prospect!

It is however the manner in which some of the campaigns in the state against government excesses in recent times has revved up every Goan without exception which has enabled activism to reach a new high.

The slew of protests which have marked public ire over many of the unpopular proposals of the ruling dispensation has brought to fore leaders who have been more than capable of swinging public opinion against the government's inconsiderate moves.

But how efficient would they be representing people in the high seats of power! Demonstrating against the powers that be and being a part of the establishment are diametrically opposite positions to be in. Hence we find many such leaders losing their mettle in the melee of incoherent voices that typifies politics today!

Although it is generally observed that activism and politics do not gel well with each other, it is said that politics usually begins where activism ends!

While one would have thought that the peoples' resentment over contentious projects in the state would have flooded the BJP in the ZP polls, the Saffron dominance was near complete.

Does this imply that the public perception over various issues have a political side to them which in the long run eclipses peoples' sentiments and sensitivity on those matters!

For a change there have been quite a few activists who have so very clearly exhibited a sense of commitment to a just cause and taken the government head on for its duplicity.

One cannot hence be oblivious to the thought of a new front in the making which will rise above politics in the State to dwell on matters that genuinely affect Goem, Goemkar and Goemkarponn.

With an eye on the assembly elections in 2022, would the State be witnessing a political baptism of these leaders to carry Goa forward with a true sense of purpose!

A Utopian fantasy I dare say, but one worth nurturing! ●

Jesus – the Centerpiece of Christmas.

Christmas is celebrated the world over to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is the Son of God, and the Saviour of all mankind. What is a centerpiece? Well, a centerpiece is an important item of a display or table setting. It creates a theme for decoration and is an important object in a collection of items. Since Christmas is our focus now, how do we put Jesus in the center of Christmas? Let's explore some of the ways to do it especially in Covid times.



Firstly, engage in the **Advent traditions** of preparations, like tidying the home and hearth to welcome Jesus. Get out your Art and Craft supplies to make Jesus centered Christmas cards. You can send them to all in your neighbourhood. It does not matter if they are not Christians, Christmas today is a universal celebration. Think of inviting to your Christmas dinner, guests who don't have family like an orphan, a disabled child or a lonely widow. Design your invitations with a picture of baby Jesus. Listen and enjoy Christmas songs and carols.

You can make a pretty cardboard **name plate** and write in a decorative hand, the name JESUS, and place it on your door. All your visitors during the season will be excited to think that they are visiting the home of Jesus. Children could make visiting cards with 'JESUS LOVES YOU', and these could be freely distributed to all their friends and neighbours who they meet during the season of Christmas. Create an **environment friendly crib** using newly sprouted greens, fresh flowers, toy animals, paper or cardboard cut outs and bring the story of Jesus' birth to life. Can you imagine a nativity scene without the figure of baby Jesus? Display your crib in a

prominent location of the house. Remember Jesus is your shining Star. Families of a Housing Society could make a joint outdoor crib where neighbours and passersby can view and see baby Jesus.

As a family, **adopt** a needy child or family at Christmas. Not only shop for their physical wants, but also give them spiritual helps ;such as models of baby Jesus, a Bible or a picture book with Christian themes. Pray for them throughout the season for their salvation, spiritual growth, and that they will look to God to meet their needs. A good idea would be that different families could volunteer to send to a 'Home for Children' or Orphanage nearby; cup cakes, cookies or sweet delights for evening tea on different days during the season.

joy what presents the family members have given Jesus for His birthday.

Giving is better than receiving - it brings happiness to everyone's life. The slum children who sell cheap stuff on footpaths do not know true happiness due to their abject poverty. They know not what Christmas is, they only know of Santa who brings gifts- they don't know Jesus! Have a party, give them goodies, toys, or clothes. Dispel their darkness by telling them the beautiful story of the birth of Jesus. How about the SSC Community preparing and giving their maids and helpers a hamper of goodies? Don't forget to tell them about the reason, - Jesus' birthday! So, you see you can have fun and enjoy the season by making Jesus the centerpiece of Christmas.

In Covid times you have to think of out of the box ways to touch the lives of people who are under various restrictions. What about making a video of the crib and putting together carols sung by the community members, which tell of Jesus' birth, and of He being Saviour of the Universe. Send the video to a Home for disabled children or a Senior's Home or even to a prison to cheer the inmates. Jesus then surely will be the Centerpiece of this Christmas season.



by:
**Dr Jeanette
Pinto**

Give **birthday gifts** to Jesus. Birthday gifts are much sought after by children, so what would you gift baby Jesus? Wrap a box in colorful tissue and cut a slit in the lid. Fill a container with blank slips of paper and put it by the box. Family members could write what gift they would like to give Jesus, describe the gift, and put the slip in the box – perhaps without names. Open the box on Christmas day see and en-



Betrayal of trust by Malaika

This is with reference to the rejoinder 'Should have explained the situation' by Ivan Saldanha Shet to my earlier article 'Malaika Multi State Co-op society in the red' (Secular Citizen, Dec,1).

In the first place the writer (myself) happens to be A. F. Nazareth and not A.F. Noronha as stated by Saldanha.

Secondly, the article would not have been written by me, had it not been for the "deep distress" experienced by me along with several other depositors who have not received their monthly fixed deposit interests and their matured deposits since the time of the pandemic ---- Undoubtedly, a betrayal of trust reposed earlier by depositors in Malaika, to say the least.

Thirdly, it is true that the majority of depositors are Catholics from Mumbai, Mangalore and Goa who were lured and misled into believing that the owners Gilbert and Marceline are God-fearing and practising Catholics, dedicated to the service of the community without selfish interests. This false belief was further reinforced by the presence and blessings of a few priests from the community at every opening-ceremony of shops and other gatherings and also through advertisements in parish magazines and bulletins. However, it would be naïve to believe that these clergymen will involve themselves now with the depositors, to settle their grievances and demands with the owners, amicably, when their own house is in disorder.

Finally, in view of the prevailing scenario, it is unlikely that there will be an early settlement in the matter and hopes of depositors getting back their dues early, as the owners are presumably under detention and their shops and offices sealed. The ball is now in the depositors' court.

—A. F. Nazareth,
Alto Porvorim, Goa

The Farmers Agitation - Where are we heading?

It's now more than a fortnight since the farmers agitation against the Farm Laws began, with no end in sight.

The present agitation is known to be the largest such protest in a long time, with more than 35 unions mainly from Punjab & Haryana, coming together in a show of force. The government of India has had several talks with the farmers but there seems to be no resolution in sight. The farmers agreeing to nothing less than a repeal of the laws and the government on its part sticking its guns. And so, the stalemate continues.

Are the farmers legitimate in their demands or has the government passed these bills in the best interests of the farmers? The debate goes on but in the meanwhile, this agitation has evoked strong reaction not only from the rest of the country but from some western countries like U.K. & Canada as well.

In order to step up the pressure

on the government, the farmers organized a Bharat Bandh a couple of days ago. The newspapers reported the next day that the

farmers have kept their promise by keeping the bandh peaceful. Yes, the Bandh did pass off peacefully, by and large across the country. The point is not whether a bandh, on the present case or our any other issue, goes by peacefully or not. The point is, why are we bringing matters to such a stage when people are left with no option but to shut down the nation, a state, city, whatever for a day or two, sometimes indefinitely? So, where are we heading?

The government of the day ought take all sections of people into consideration before using its brute majority to push forward legislation which may not be good for the nation. Why not put such time, effort, energy to better use? Sometimes, somewhere we need to bend, make adjustments, eat humble pie in order to make life just a little better. We all have promises to keep, we need to do a rethink!

— Melville X. D'Souza
Orlem, Malad West

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Beyond the Last Will and Testament.....

Most Senior Citizens would already have made their Last Will and Testament bequeathing their assets to designated beneficiaries. If not, they are well advised to do so. This piece is not about what one has earned. It is about what an individual has learnt, imbibed, processed and assimilated over a lifetime, the complex mix of experiences, skills, insights, interests, knowledge and other attributes that made the person unique, that have been an integral part of his or her being, day to day, whether seen or unseen by others.

Many successful or prominent people write their biographies, memoirs or books that share their deep knowledge, experience and wisdom in the fields that they have excelled in. These are valuable for generations of readers to enhance their knowledge in these subjects, a rich contribution to society. But I am not talking about leaders, eminent persons, dignitaries or celebrities. My point is about simple folk like you and me.

We are well aware that being rich, famous or successful does not necessarily lead to happiness. We also see often, that people with little education or limited means being very happy, people who are popular, generous, lively, interesting, smart, witty and talented, leading what seem to be 'ordinary lives' but actually enjoying high levels of joy and contentment, wonderful family life and inner peace. All of us would have seen some simple homes bursting with energy, warmth, joy and hospitality that are overwhelming. They possess the 'secrets of living', uncommon skills, methods, ingenuity or improvisations by which they deal with challenging situations. These talents are mostly overshadowed by their daily struggles. This has been captured well by Thomas Gray in 'An Elegy Written in a Country Graveyard':

*"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear.
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."*

This syndrome is not restricted to the meek and poor but also to those in higher echelons, who do not make any significant mark through their journey on earth.....definitely including some of us.

I once came across a booklet titled 'A Small Still Voice', privately published by a Jesuit priest. It contained a selection of his homilies over the years. Among them was one beautiful homily at a wedding mass, from which I got tips for preparing many of the wedding toasts that I have proposed. I am sure that was not the intention of his publishing the booklet; nevertheless it benefited me. There are many such instances.

So I believe that each one of us can leave behind something of our journey that is a part of us that could someday, somewhere offer some light, assistance, knowledge or guidance to some person or just be of interest, unknown to us. We do not seek acknowledgement or appreciation but that is not the spirit of this act. We may not even realize the value or richness of what we have to share. Like physical beauty being in the eyes of the beholder, sometimes it takes another person to identify something that is brilliant or meaningful in someone.

So what is it that we could leave for posterity? The possibilities are limitless. A quick but incomplete list would include a collection of poems, skits or articles that one might have written (published or not), ideas and opinions on issues that one has but have not been expressed, essays and reflections on various matters related to life, society, family, politics, trends,

etc., those things languishing in our scrap books, original lyrics or musical compositions, recordings of your own singing or of playing an instrument, specific life experiences or learnings, diaries, short stories, prayers or spiritual commentaries and meditations, thoughts on religion or our liturgies, sketches, drawings, paintings, photographs on various themes, old family recipes, your childhood or growing up experiences, experiences at workplaces, places one has lived in or has been influenced by, travelogues, life in certain unusual settings, something that you may have studied in great depth but never had a chance to share, about people, relationships, and so on. To cite a simple example, I know a person with a flair for devising all kinds of quizzes. He could make a hundred or more quizzes and puzzles on various topics like history, geography, religion, literature, famous people, events, places and the like, suitable for different age groups, and present them in a booklet. Just a few copies could be printed off the computer and left behind. The single criteria would be that it is something that is truly your own, something that you are passionate about and want to share.

There is one thing common to all the following famous persons, most of whose names you would be familiar with: Galileo, Vincent Van Gogh, Henry David Thoreau, John Keats, Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, J S Bach, Monet, Anne Frank, Gregory Mendel, El Greco, Frank Kafka. Their works became famous after their death, in some cases, centuries later. Some of them were mocked, criticized, some artists were unable to sell their works for any decent price and died penniless. Perhaps some were ahead of their time; some were never understood, most were



(Contd.. from p. 6)

unaware of the worth of their works. One of them, in frustration, had asked his friend to destroy all his works but fortunately the friend did not. You can google to learn of their tragic lives It is not important whether our work is profound or plain simple. We do not bother whether anyone might find them useful or valuable. They will be like seeds in the wind or sea shells on the beach. Some seeds may land on good soil and bear fruit; some shells may get picked and be used in artifacts. Yet, if there has been a real genius lurking somewhere, he or she would surely one day get noticed and extolled.

Do we have to do this? Not at all. Yet, some may find it worth their while and fulfilling to do so, especially during the sunset years, when we have more time to reflect and tend to be more expansive and generous. It is an avenue to freely express ourselves, a final opportunity to say or do whatever we always wanted to, without any fear or hesitation.

And any time is a good time to start, for we know not how much time we have. Hence the sooner we embark on this project the better, since it could take time to refresh our memory, collate material, work on its presentation and complete it to our satisfaction. Once a decision has been made there is no point in procrastinating.

—Elvin Colaco

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Prop. B. D'Souza

(Contd.. from p. 1)

dia has been instrumental in reaching the masses and equipping them with knowledge, especially during the American Independence movement and French Revolution. Media is considered a "Fourth Pillar" in democratic countries along with Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary, as without a free media democratic system cannot cease to exist.

For more than two centuries in this country, newspapers have been used in classroom instruction. Although innovative teachers probably enhanced instruction with newspapers since they were first printed, the earliest known reference to newspapers as tools for learning appeared in the Portland Eastern Herald of Maine on June 8, 1795. Since then newspapers are part and parcel of the curriculum and serve as an educational tool.



C.K. Subramaniam

During election time and newspapers play a pivotal role in bringing the political parties to the fore and peak at the right time. Photographs burst in the first page with catchy captions and rebuttal from the political leaders. News papers play a pivotal role in politics and more so in our regular life. It is indeed a time for news in early morning hours. Some people even skip their morning coffee but never forget to read the newspaper. Even though e-paper is available on the net for most of the newspapers, people prefer to buy newspapers and browse through at home and even take it to the office for a thorough study. newspapers are the backbone of the country and the fulcrum round which the universe is functioning.

We still remember that during our college days we found that the type-writing institute instructors instructed us to follow The Hindu newspaper script for dictation in shorthand and typing so that we can improve our English. Again, the sports lovers were engrossed to go through the pages

of The Hindu for gaining sports language for their early study of the subject. Thus the basic education and language building was done through newspaper reading. Even though the reading habit is dying down there are still a good number of local and national newspapers to browse through from the stalls in every nook and corner of the city.

Media became a source of information for the citizens of colonial India, as they became aware of the arbitrariness of the British colonial rule. Thus, it gave a new found force to India's Independence movement, as millions of Indians joined the leaders in their fight against the British imperialism. The role of media in Indian democracy has undergone massive changes, from the days of press censorship during Emergency in 1975 to being influential in the coming 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The older generation of the country is still fixated on tradition and culture, while the present-day youth is more interested in the fast-moving world of technology and social media. Thus, it becomes important for the media to ensure that the information that they are broadcasting should not be biased or tampered with in a way to boost the channel's TRP. There lies the real success of the news media and the newspapers are the backbone of this country.

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Finally

The Change!

Finally, the change: on Monday 14 December the Electoral College of the United States formally yet officially declared Joe Biden as the next President of the United States with Kamala Harris as the Vice-President! Earlier on Friday 11 December the US Supreme Court even refused to consider two Republican challenges to the elections. It was perhaps the ultimate humiliation for an outgoing President and his party to digest such a verdict from a Court with mainly conservative judges! But in spite of all this, they are still unrelenting! A sad commentary indeed on the world's oldest democracy!

Finally, the change: it was on 7 November when the outcome of the elections was a reality! CNN host and political commentator Anthony Kapel "Van" Jones was asked a direct question about what he felt about the election results; Van Jones is caught on camera, weeping live on air and watched perhaps by millions all over and in voice, cracking said, "It's easier to be a parent this morning, it's easier to be a dad, it's easier to tell your kids character matters. This is vindication for a lot of people who really have suffered. 'I can't breathe.' That was not just George Floyd. There were a lot of people who felt like they couldn't breathe. "This is a big deal," he continued, "for us to be able to get some peace, and have a chance for a reset. I want my sons to look at this. It's easy to do it the cheat way and get away with stuff, but it comes back around. This is a good day for this country. I am sorry for the people who lost, for them, it's not a good day, but for most, this is a good day." Moving words flowing directly and spontaneously from his heart. He could not have captured the

mood and enthusiasm of the nation on the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, in a more poignant and emotional manner. It was indeed a breath of fresh air!

Finally, the change: on all counts it was a historic election which was held on 3 November (postal ballots were sent in earlier). Joe Biden was pitched against the incumbent President Donald Trump who was seeking a second term. All were sure that it would be a close race; independent media and top political analysts were not willing to make any hazardous guesses. In the end it went down to the wire. After four days of anxious wait the US (and the world) finally had a result on 7 November. Joe Biden had won the key battleground state of Pennsylvania in a close finish and was declared the president-elect. A few hours later in a televised speech which was watched the world over, Biden said, "I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide but unify. Who doesn't see red states and blue states, only sees the United States. And work



BY FR. CEDRIC PRAKASH SJ

with all my heart with the confidence of the whole people, to win the confidence of all of you. And for that is what America I believe is about. It's about people. And that's what our administration will be all about". Both Biden and Harris have pledged to end an era of 'demonisation'. After four turbulent years of polarisation, divisiveness and hate, their positive forward-looking words are those of hope.

Finally, the change: Biden's running mate and now Vice President-elect California Senator Kamala Harris, has many 'firsts' to her credit; she is now the first woman, the first Black

woman and the first American woman of Indian origin; the first daughter of immigrants (her father was from Jamaica and mother from Chennai) who will serve as vice president. Kamala had close ties with her grandfather P.V. Gopalan, who was a Secretary of the Government of India under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In her acceptance speech, embracing the diversity which is America, Harris in her opening words said, "Congressman John Lewis before his passing wrote: 'Democracy is not a state. It is an act.' And what he meant was that America's democracy is not guaranteed. It is only as strong as our willingness to fight for it, to guard it and never take it for granted. And protecting our democracy takes struggle. It takes sacrifice. But there is joy in it, and there is progress. Because we the people have the power to build a better future. And in doing so she redefined the spirit of democracy- the ability to fight, to struggle, to progress and to change.

Finally, the change: both Biden and Harris are people of faith. Biden is known as a devout Catholic, who often prays the Rosary. An interview of him in 2015 with Jesuit Matt Malone the editor of the 'America' is going viral. In it Biden calls his faith a "gift," saying his parents inculcated in him Catholic values. In that interview he says, "Jesus Christ is the human embodiment of what God wanted us to do. Everything Jesus did was sort of consistent with what generically we were supposed to do: treat people with dignity." Biden also speaks about his meeting with Pope Francis in 2013. "He's the embodiment of Catholic social doctrine that I was raised with. The idea that everyone's entitled to dignity, that the poor should be given special preference, that you have an obligation to



reach out and be inclusive.”When the days dragged on for the final results, he constantly told his supporters “to keep the faith”. In his winning speech for good measure he said, “The Bible tells us, ‘to everything there is a season: a time to build, a time to reap, and a time to sow and a time to heal’ This is the time to heal in America. Now this campaign is over, what is the will of the people? What is our mandate?” Harris, on the other hand, is the daughter of a Hindu mother and a Christian father; now married to a Jewish man. In a way, she has been schooled in some of the world’s major religions. Today she regards herself as a Black Baptist. During the campaign she often referred to the parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ which she says helped shape her thoughts and actions on who one’s neighbour is. Last year at a meeting, she said, “Neighbour is not about having the same ZIP code. What we learn about in that parable is that neighbour is someone you are walking by on the street. ... Neighbour is about understanding and living in service of others — that we are all each other’s brothers and sisters.” Words similar to Pope Francis’ latest Encyclical ‘Fratelli Tutti’. In other speeches, Harris has invoked liberation theology, the strain of Christian thought that emphasizes social concern for the poor and political liberation for oppressed peoples. Transformative thoughts for meaningful action!

Finally, the change: Joe and Kamala are both steeped in family and the values that embody a family. They have consistently referred to their families throughout the campaign and particularly on election night, when Biden said, “Folks, in the last days of the campaign, I began thinking about a hymn that means a lot to me and my family, particularly my deceased son Beau. It captures the faith that sustains me and which I believe sustains America. And I hope, and I hope it can provide some comfort and solace to the 230 million -- thousand Americans who have lost a loved one through this terrible virus this year. My heart

goes out to each and every one of you. Hopefully this hymn gives you solace as well. It goes like this. ‘And he will raise you up on eagles’ wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, and make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of his hand.’ And now together on eagles’ wings, we embark on the work that God and history have called us to do with full hearts and steady hands, with faith in America and in each other, with love of country, a thirst for justice” Kamala remembered her own mother, “my mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris, who is always in our hearts. When she came here from India at the age of 19, she maybe didn’t quite imagine this moment. But she believed so deeply in an America where a moment like this is possible. And so, I’m thinking about her and about the generations of women — Black women, Asian, White, Latina, Native American women who throughout our nation’s history have paved the way for this moment tonight. Women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty and justice for all, including the Black women, who are often, too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy.”

Finally, the change: The Joe Biden administration will be committed to the environment and to address climate change. He has promised to enter the Paris Agreement on day one of his office. He was there in Paris on 12 December 2015 when President Obama signed the historic agreement on behalf of the United States; the US recently withdrew from that agreement. The manifesto on his website for the campaign included the following points:

- i. Ensure the U.S. achieves a 100% clean energy economy and reaches net-zero emissions no later than 2050'
- ii. Build a stronger, more resilient nation
- iii. Rally the rest of the world to meet the threat of climate change
- iv. Stand up to the abuse of power by polluters who disproportionately harm communities of colour and

low-income communities
v. Fulfil our obligation to workers and communities who powered our industrial revolution and subsequent decades of economic growth' Biden says his policies would protect workers affected by the transition to cleaner energy sources, such as coal miners and power plant workers, as well as invest in their communities. On the night of his election, he emphatically reiterated his pledge on “the battle to save our planet by getting climate under control”.

Finally, the change: Both Joe Biden and Kamala Harris have ‘justice’ and ‘human rights’ in their DNA. Given her track record Harris is very forthright on justice issues. A year ago, in Iowa she said, *I have spent my career as a prosecutor. I’ve only had one client in my entire life, and that has been the people. Unlike other people, unlike others, I have never represented a corporation. I have never represented a special interest. I started my career fighting for the people. Infact, the first time I walked into a courtroom, I spoke five words. ‘Kamala Harris, For the People. ‘And those words, ‘For the People,’ capture our system of justice. Because there are two points when we say for the people. One, in our system of justice, we have rightly said that a harm against anyone is a harm against everyone — that no one should ever be made to fight alone. And for the people, when I stood there, and when I stand here today, also means all the people. Regardless of race, regardless of gender, regardless of sexual orientation, regardless of the party with which they are registered to vote, regardless of the language your grandmother speaks. It means all the people. And it was for the people that a large part of my early career was about fighting against those who molested children and raped women — because it was about saying that those survivors deserved justice and a voice that gave them safety without judgment. For the People”.* Biden resonates in a similar way; for both of them justice was on the ballot- a determined way to ensure change!!

(Contd.. from p. 9)

Finally, the change: The Joe Biden-Kamala Harris administration will great for the people of India – but not for the ruling regime! Both of them love India – have close connections and know exactly what is happening in the country. In a recent policy paper, among other things, Biden plans to increase the number of high-skilled visas, including the H-1B, and eliminate the limit on employment-based visas by country, both of which are expected to benefit tens of thousands of Indian professionals impacted by some immigration policies of the outgoing Trump administration. Both have expressed concern on the human rights situation in India- particularly on freedom of speech and expression and freedom of religion. Both leaders have on record, taken positions that make it clear they back a liberal India, and care about it. One can be sure that Biden-Harris will not give this regime the free pass that Trump did. Biden has expressed disapproval of the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), and Harris' words on the abrogation of Article 370 should alarm New Delhi, "We have to remind the Kashmiris that they are not alone in the world. We are keeping a track on the situation. There is a need to intervene if the situation demands." Currently there is wide concern all over the US on the farmer's protest in India. So, there is bound to be a paradigm shift in the US-India relations: deeper on one level and challenging at the other. No one can now daresay that there is 'interference' by the US in

India's internal affairs; after all, there is the recent precedence of the 'Howdy Modi' bash in Texas and the 'Namaste Trump' tamasha in Ahmedabad, to go by! For many the phrase 'abki baar, Trump sarkar'. by a foreign head of State still rankles something which protocol-wise is non-acceptable!

Finally, the change: on 7 November night, speaking to millions all over the world, President-elect Joe Biden also said, "I sought this office to restore the soul of America, to rebuild the backbone of this nation, the middle class, and to make America respected around the world again. And to unite us here at home. It's the honor of my lifetime that so many millions of Americans have voted for that vision. And now, the work of making that vision is real, it's a task -- the task of our time". Yes, America and the whole world certainly needs the restoration of her soul: a 'climate' for change based on unity, hope, faith, compassion, justice, family values, a healthier environment; but above all, as Van Jones puts it so succinctly "to tell your kids character matters", that one can now breathe more easily... As the world rejoiced, after a very long time, one had to thank God on what is taking place, to pray and act that the vision becomes a reality; that pledges are turned into action; that swords are turned into ploughshares- and for all to graciously say, "Finally, the change"!

(*Fr Cedric Prakash is a human rights and peace activist- writer.

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New Year Gifting Tradition

The tradition of giving and receiving gifts is an integral part of every festival. And so it is with New Year's Day. New Year's Day is an occasion when we give gifts to our family members, friends and relatives and make their New Year begin on a sweet note.

But do you know how the tradition of gift-giving became associated with the New Year celebrations? The tradition

has its roots from earlier times. Today, every country has adopted this tradition of gifting. The day when every gift shop dreams of making it big on the sales chart is the first of January. It is believed that this tradition is the best way to heal up our sour relationships with people and develop a feeling of togetherness and love for people whom we care. That is why we say it with flowers and presents. So, people across the world love to follow this tradition.

The Magi were wise men and their gifts were emblematic of tribute, worship and death -- of Christ considered as king, God and the sacrificial victim. The Magi were regarded as the pioneer in gift-giving tradition following the birth of Jesus. But in Europe it is sometimes said to have been prevalent even before Jesus was born. In France, Switzerland, Russia and Greece, bartering of presents was in vogue even before Jesus' birth. However, it can certainly be said that the tradition got a new significance and that too a religious one with the Magi who presented their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child at his stable in Bethlehem 2021 years ago.



by Jubel D'Cruz

A New Year Gift With Heartstrings

Short story

This was the worst spell of winter, as though nature was disturbed at the cruel ways of humans in a rage to destroy the earth with all its wonders.

The bitter cold night air was almost unbearable. The sharp winds lashed out at everyone walking the street, with the exception of Derek Parker, the homeless man.

Derek lay huddled under the broad overhead pillars and beams of the giant Parama Island flyover which passed the Calcutta Race Course and swept into the Park Circus seven point crossing. Calcutta wore a dark angry face, as the invisible Corona virus searched for another victim. The silence of fear crept all over the city, wiping away the cheer of the festival only a few hours away. It was the evening of the New Year.

People were busy with their last minute shopping and others doing extra hours of work to earn a few rupees more.

Derek's life had been a one-way ticket of misfortunes. He lost his job at the bookshop because of the Corona, gave up his rented apartment because he could not pay the high rent, and what little he saved went towards the food expenses. It was the last straw.

The hour was 10.40 p.m. Shoppers were moving fast to get back to their homes. Pockets of emptiness slowly spread along the pathways. Derek could feel his teeth chattering and his stomach growling.

Suddenly, the air split with a loud scream. It was the voice of a woman, and Derek leaped up running towards the sound of the voice. He raced

across the pavement with the strong wind lashing his back. He saw a young woman clinging on to her black leather handbag as the man tried to wrench it from her grip.

Like a superhero from a comic book, Derek threw himself on top of the man and threw him down on the paved street. A fight followed and in the snap of a second the thief whipped out a broad blade knife and slashed Derek's right arm as blood squirted like a pea-shooter. The villain dashed away as the homeless man tried to give chase.

"Wait," the woman shouted as she gripped his bleeding arm. "You need to attend to the wound. You are in a bad way."



BY MELVYN BROWN

He relented to her suggestion. "I'll be all right. Pick up your handbag and go. Go!"

"Please, let me clean the wound, it will need stitches. Don't worry, I am a certified nurse. Come with me, my home is a few blocks away."

Her apartment was large with a beautiful living room, pantry and toilet. She made him sit on the leather sofa as she rushed around, getting things ready, putting up the hot water, brought a bottle of Dettol, needle and thread, and a roll of cotton and plaster.

It was all over in almost thirty-five minutes. Derek stood up to leave after thanking her.

"Wait. I've put up water for coffee."

Somehow he felt relaxed in this woman's presence. They spoke for a long time bringing up happy moments and sharing each other's past.

"Can you believe it I also stayed on Ri-

pon Street, in Amolia mansion on the second floor." She smiled.

"And I stayed on the ground floor with my parents. How the years have flown. Did you get married?"

"No. I had a good friend, we were very young. When we decided to move to Park Circus, he told me, one day he would return and marry me."

"Can you show me his photograph?"

"Certainly, in those days we only had black and white photos."

She opened a wooden Chester draw and took out a snap. "Here it is, a bit faded, you don't mind?"

"Wait! Wait!" Derek took out his worn-away wallet. "It's the same snap of you and I, see!"

"O my Lord! You are Derek?"

"Yes. And you are Rachel."

The old grandfather's wall clock chimed the hour, twelve times. It was New Year's Day. Crackers and fireworks lit up the dark night and merry voices broke the silence of midnight. You could hear the loud voices of the choir from the nearby parish church. For both of them it turned out to be the happiest New Year of their lives.

"When will we get married?" Rachel laughed out loud.

"We can't till I find a job."

"I have a good job, while you search for a job. Is that all right?" Rachel asked.

"Yes. How about a New Year Wedding on the Fifth of January?" Derek suggested.

"That will be wonderful!" She said, as he wrapped her in his arms.

TRULY, A NEW YEAR GIFT WITH HEARTSTRINGS

'Rahul Bhatia, Chief Executive of Indigo Airlines' the so called cheap airline in India, After arriving in a hotel in Mumbai, went to the bar and asked for a pint of Guinness.

The barman nodded and said, "That will be Rs. 50 please, Mr. Bhatia."

Somewhat taken aback, Rahul replied, "That's very cheap," and handed over his money.

"Well, we do try to stay ahead of the competition", said the barman. "And we are serving free pints every Wednesday from 6 pm until 8 pm. We have the cheapest beer in Mumbai".

"That is remarkable value", Rahul comments.

"I see you don't seem to have a glass, so you'll probably need one of ours. That will be Rs. 150 please."

Rahul scowled, but paid up.

He took his drink and walked towards a seat. "Ah, you want to sit down?" said the barman. "That'll be an extra Rs. 150. You could have pre-booked the seat, and it would have only cost you Rs. 100."

"I think you may be too big for the seat sir, can I ask you to sit in this frame please".

Rahul attempts to sit down but the frame is too small and when he can't squeeze in he complains "Nobody would fit in that little frame".

"I'm afraid if you can't fit in the frame you'll have to pay an extra surcharge of Rs. 250 for your seat sir".

Rahul swore to himself, but paid up.

"I see that you have brought your laptop with you" added the barman. "And since that wasn't pre-booked either, that will be another Rs. 300."

Rahul was so incensed that he walked back to the bar, slammed his drink on the counter, and yelled, "This is ridiculous, I want to speak to the manager".

"I see you want to use the counter," says the barman, "that will be Rs. 200



please."

Rahul's face was red with rage. "Do you know who I am?"

"Of course I do Mr. Bhatia."

"I've had enough! What sort of Hotel is this? I come in for a quiet drink and you treat me like this. I insist on speaking to a manager!"

"Here is his E-mail address, or if you wish, you can contact him between 9.00am and 9.01am every morning, Monday to Tuesday at this free phone number. Calls are free, until they are answered, then there is a talking charge of only Rs. 10 per second, or part thereof".

"I will never use this bar again".

"OK sir, but remember, we are the only star hotel in Mumbai selling pints for Rs. 50.

And that my friends is how Indigo works in India !

Courtesy- Ajay Pillay!

Three men die in a car accident on Christmas Eve. They all find themselves at the Pearly Gates waiting to enter heaven. On entering they must present something relating to or associated with Christmas. The first man searches his pocket, and finds some mistletoe, so he is allowed in. The second man presents a cracker, so he is also allowed in. The third man pulls out a pair of stockings. Confused at this last gesture, St Peter asks, 'How do these represent Christmas?' Answer: 'They're Carol's.'

A guy bought his wife a beautiful diamond ring for Christmas.

After hearing about this extravagant gift, a friend of his said, "I thought she wanted one of those sporty four-wheel-drive vehicles."

"She did," he replied. "But where was I going to find a fake Jeep?"

Q: How did elves climbed up to the top of Santa's Castle?

A: Using an "Elf"-evator.

Q: How to cats greet each other at Christmas?

A: "A furry merry Christmas & Happy mew year!"

Lecture Tour with A Difference

On New Year's Eve, Daniel was in no shape to drive, so he sensibly left his van in the car park and walked home. As he was wobbling along, he was stopped by a policeman. 'What are you doing out here at four o'clock in the morning?' asked the police officer. 'I'm on my way to a lecture,' answered Roger. 'And who on earth, in their right mind, is going to give a lecture at this time on New Year's Eve?' enquired the constable sarcastically. 'My wife,' slurred Daniel grimly.

How to Quit Smoking

Peter, at a New Year's party, turns to his friend, Ken, and asks for a cigarette. 'I thought you made a New Year's resolution to quit smoking,' Ken responds. 'I'm in the process of quitting,' replies Peter with a grin. 'Right now, I am in the middle of phase one.' 'Phase one?' wonders Ken. 'Yeah,' laughs Peter, 'I've quit buying.'

Classic New Year Poem

Ring out the old, ring in the new
Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

What's every parent's favorite Christmas Carol?

Silent Night

Where does mistletoe go to get famous?

Holly-wood!

Sharing Is Caring And Growing

On 3rd December 2020 the London based Varkey Foundation and UNESCO awarded 32-year-old Ranjitsinh Disale from Paritewadi village, Sholapur, in Maharashtra, India; the annual Global Teacher Prize 2020. Ranjitsinh a Government Zilla Parishad Primary school educator is the first Indian to win this prestigious prize of \$ 1 million, from among 12,000 nominations and from over 140 countries around the world. I felt proud that an Indian got this award. What touched a deep chord in my heart was the attitude of this extraordinary, simple and humble village teacher. His prompt and spontaneous response to the prize was to share 50% of the prize money equally among the top other nine finalists from different countries; totally unknown to him! He wanted to scale up and support their incredible work. Not an iota of pride or selfishness, only largesse of heart and generosity in sharing. He considered himself the first among equals and said, **God gives us and so we have to share. Sharing is growing i.e. many more will benefit.**

I pondered these words. God gave us His son Jesus, **Emmanuel-God with us.** Christmastide, the nativity tableau, the incarnation story; all remind and challenge us to live to the full, sharing and growing from what we have received freely and unconditionally. Christmas is certainly a work of salvation and we all need to collaborate with God, by harnessing the creative powers and energies within us. This invites us to witness in and through our lives, to the saving mission of Christ, which in tangible terms means unconditional love and acceptance of any and every situation.

At present, India has the ambience of indigence. With democracy shattered, migrants and the poor are left helpless and pushed to the peripheries to be exploited further. Selfishness spawns in our midst while individualism and a utilitarian mentality are taking over

from concern for the other and for creation. Corruption, injustice, intolerance, communal disharmony, racial and caste discrimination continue to rule the roost. Survivors of human trafficking are oppressed by a culture of silence. Psychopaths walk our streets, often in obscurity, while women are raped, abandoned, humiliated and even killed. In this harsh and demanding world, human greed together with a tepid spirituality has only helped to deaden our human instincts to share, care and grow. Wanton destruction and rapacious forays are made on Mother Earth, with cataclysmic climate changes and a deep sense of uncertainty! Let us not jeopardize the life of future generations.

This Christmas is a **Goldilocks Christmas** as Professor David Christian would perhaps say. Covid 19 and the pandemic is a huge blessing in disguise. Every obstacle presents an opportunity to improve our condition. We are living at a time when the **Planet is evolving and healing.** We are living in **NOW THE PRESENT MOMENT**-the height of spirituality (Eco-Spirituality); **with total dependence on God or the Divine.** Christmas augurs in the certainty of Peace and of a new awakening. This Christmas invites us to witness to God who is with us and within us (Aham Brahmasmi as the Indians would say), to life in abundance, full and free, to repent and reject fake news that divides. We all need to find our voices to raise protests and to stand for living heroes like Fr Stan S.J. and the many others, languishing in jails; who represent strength to witness to faith in the face of decapitation and torture; or the farmers struggling to survive! May this Christmas be a journey to our centre, resulting in **kenosis**, calming the storms of life and unraveling God's plan; ushering in new hope to battle against all odds in humanitarian outreaches, so that sharing the gift of self and caring for one another and for creation, we may all grow, **SOWING SEEDS OF HOPE FOR THE FLOWERING AND BLOS-**

SOMING OF ENDURING PEACE IN THE NEW YEAR 2021. WISHING YOU A BLESSED CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR 2021.

Dr (Sr) Mudita Menona Sodder
RSCJ, Sophia College Campus,
Mumbai.

Egg Pulao



Ingredients:

5 egg
1 cup boiled basmati rice
1 tsp crushed to paste green chillies
1 tsp ginger-garlic paste
1 chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped coriander leaves
1 tbsp ghee
1 tsp refined oil
1/2 tablespoon salt

Method:

To make this easy Egg Pulao recipe, take a pan and add ghee in it. Heat it over moderate flame. Once the ghee is sufficiently hot, add the green chili paste and fry it for 30 seconds. Then add in the ginger-garlic paste to the green chilli paste and stir-fry for 1 minute on moderate flame.

Then add the chopped onions and salt to the mixture. Saute the onions till they turn slightly pinkish in hue. Once this is done, break the eggs into the same pan and mix well. Meanwhile, reduce the flame to low-medium.

Add the cooked rice in the pan and mix well until all the ingredients are well combined. Cover the pan with a lid and cook for 5 minutes. Once the pulao is properly cooked, transfer it to a serving bowl and garnish it with coriander leaves and serve hot with green chutney or yoghurt. You can also pair it with Mirchi ka Saalan. Enjoy this Egg Pulao recipe with family and friends.



Sweta D'Cruz

Denominations Are Abominations

Find the word “denominations” abominable. In an era of competition between different churches, the term was used to distinguish between them. In today’s ecumenical era, the term becomes redundant. I would rather call them “Sister Churches”. Did not St Paul write to the churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus etc? Does not the Book of Revelation talk of the Spirit speaking to the churches (in plural) not in the singular. So shouldn’t we too be comfortable with the plurality of churches, rather than insisting on the singularity or superiority of one’s own particular church?

History is replete with instances of churches being critical, hostile to and in open competition with each other.

If in 1302 the 189th pope, Boniface VIII, summarily declared that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church; there are even today, several churches, mostly from the Evangelical stream, that are merrily sending all unbaptised “pagans” to hell. I do not believe in a God that is hell-bent on packing “sinners” off to hell.

As a Catholic myself, I will restrict myself to the current teachings of the Catholic Church, especially in the post-Vatican II era. It was a watershed moment in the life of the Church. With its changed self-understanding, it also brought about a tectonic change in its relationship with other churches, religions, the natural and behavioural sciences and the world at large.

This change is most evident in the events of 1054 and 1965. The first was the “Great Schism of the East”, when the western churches based in Rome and the eastern ones based in Constantinople (Istanbul today) ex-communicated each other. It took 911 long years for those ex-communications to be lifted by Pope Paul VI

and Patriarch Athenagorus, when they met, warmly embraced and lifted the sanctions in 1965.

The Catholic Church, in the post Vatican II era has come a long way from the sad events of 1054 and 1302. Before that the Catholic Church was like the cat’s whiskers, steeped in its own pride and exclusivity, a head and shoulders above other “lesser” mortals. Now it very humbly calls itself “an initial budding forth of God’s kingdom” (LG No 5), not a full bloom basking in the sun. She “embraces sinners in her bosom” (LG No 8), not a rarefied puritan, and admits that it is still “a pilgrim”, not one that has arrived at its destination. From absolutism it has moved to relativity. This is a crucial change reflected in its attitude to others, including the Sister Churches. Of them it says, “The church recognizes that in many ways she is linked to those who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian” (LG No 15). This is the official dogmatic teaching of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, there is a yawning gap between precept and practice.



by chhotebhai *

There are many Catholic priests and bishops in India who are uncomfortable with the relativism and inclusiveness of Vatican II ecclesiology. They are more at ease with the fundamentalist, absolute, binary pre-Vatican ecclesiology of Me or You; not Us. That black or white binary refuses to recognize the various shades of grey.

Jesus’ last prayer included an impassioned one for unity. “May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me” (Jn 17:21). Jesus is linking unity with witness value. Conversely, Christian disunity or division is the greatest stumbling block to Christian witness and evangelization.

This is evident in colonial India, where each western church came with its own theological baggage, confusing those who had never heard of Jesus. In contrast, the apostle Thomas in Kerala and St Francis Xavier in Goa were successful, partly because of a unified message. There was no counter witness. We will revert to the Indian church later.

For now let us return to apostolic times. Those who oppose organized religion, derogatorily referred to as churchianity, point to the early Christian community. “The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32). This was too good to last. Shortly after, there was a division among Hebrew speaking Christians and the Greek speaking ones (cf Acts 6:1). The second dispute arose between circumcised Jews and proselytes (circumcised Gentile converts to Judaism) and non-circumcised converts on the other. St Peter had to step in to breach the divide (cf Acts 11:1-18). There are several other instances of both Sts Peter and Paul admonishing the neo-converts for their ethnic divisions and personal loyalties.

If in the first flush of apostolic times, when the Holy Spirit was powerfully manifest, unity was at a premium, then how much more difficult is it for us today; bombarded as we are by multiple messages and factors in both history and the present all-pervasive media? It requires both prayer and humility.

The history of Christianity in India is different from that of the west that suffered persecution for 300 years till Emperor Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 312 CE, effectively making it a State religion. It was also spared the ignominy of being subjected to Roman, Byzantine, French, German and

(Contd.. on p. 15)

Spanish emperors, as also the scars of the Crusades. The infamous Inquisition was limited to a section of Goa.

However, with colonisation came missionary expansion and various white missionaries toeing the line of the churches of their native lands. It was this conflict that greatly contributed to the failure of Christianity to make its presence felt in India. When I was in Jyotiniketan Ashram, Bareilly, we had an ecumenical meeting. I recall the words of Rev Kenneth Sharp of the Brotherhood of the Ascended Christ, an Anglican order. He said that we may be divided in thought or belief, but we can always be united in service where there is no room for dispute. Some years later when I had organized an ecumenical meeting under the aegis of the Kanpur Catholic Association, the main speaker, Dr A.B.K. Sebastian of Christ Church College said that in India there was no need to perpetuate the divisions of European Christianity. Words of wisdom.

It is for this reason that Pope Francis refuses to get sucked into theological hair splitting. He prefers to directly reach out to people, saying that we should leave the debates to the theologians. In a joint gathering of Catholics and Lutherans somebody asked him a tricky question – “Whom do you prefer – Catholics or Lutherans?” Pat came the reply, “I equally dislike lukewarm Catholics and Lutherans”. It reminds one of how the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking him if it was proper to pay taxes to Caesar? (cf Mat 22:21).

Pope Francis has repeatedly adopted a pastoral, rather than a dogmatic approach to complex issues. He gave the telling example of the field hospital in battle. You don't stop to check the injured soldier's cholesterol or sugar levels. You first bandage his wounds. In his latest encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” he talks at length about the Good Samaritan, a detested “other”. Jesus upholds him as a paragon of virtue (cf Lk 10:25 ff).

This doesn't mean that Christian churches may do as they please, often pulling in opposite directions. St Paul gave us two beautiful analogies of the church as a body and as a bride (cf I Cor 12:12-30, Eph 5:23). Both indicate some kind of organic unity and bonding, if not exactly organizational. Interestingly, Jesus himself never used the word “church”; though some English translations use it (cf Mat 16:18 & 18:17). The actual Hebrew word used by Jesus was “qahal” that meant a community or assembly of believers. The Greek word “ekklesia” from which the English word “church” is derived, also has the same meaning.

However, there is an evolution discernible in the New Testament itself. In the Acts of the Apostles the word “church” is used 23 times, and in the Pauline letters 65 times! So obviously, as the community grew, it needed to be better identified. For those critics of churchianity that say that Jesus never founded a church and personal discipleship would suffice, I give the example of a human embryo. It is just a few cells, with no head, hands or feet. Yet it bears all the intrinsic qualities of a baby and later an adult. So too with the church. It grows and evolves and sometimes mutates because of external influences. This should not detract from the reality that Jesus wanted his disciples to have some form of spiritual, organic and organizational unity.

This can never be fully achieved. If the apostles failed with small numbers and no excess baggage, then we have a slim chance of getting there. This should not deter us from moving forward as pilgrims seeking to convert the bud into a full bloom, while embracing sinners in its bosom.

Management gurus teach us about areas of concern and areas of control. I may be concerned about the world economy, over which I have little control. But I do have control over my own domestic budget. Instead of bemoaning my inability to transform the world, let me first address what is within my control. Many Christians may feel that they are facing insurmountable odds in

climbing the treacherous mountain of Christian unity. They then despair. Let alone the Evil One, even sociologists, psychologists and political pundits tell us that despair is the easiest way to accept the inevitable (like a Trump or Modi) and be resigned to one's fate. However, the Holy Spirit spurs us to action. That is why I reiterate that humility and prayer are pre-requisites for Christian unity.

Like Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagorus let us begin by warmly embracing each other and stop seeing each other as antagonists. There are two steps that we can adopt immediately. The first is to stop criticising each other. The second is stop “sheep stealing”, grabbing disgruntled or dissatisfied members from sister churches, especially from what are described as the “mainline” churches like Catholics, CNI/CSI and Methodist. They are soft targets for preying evangelical churches. Not that they are the only culprits. Catholics do the same with their superior organisation and financial resources. This has been widespread in the Punjab, Uttarakhand and North East regions. It must stop. If at all some of us are determined to increase the number of Christians through conversions, then let them go out and share the message with those who have not heard it, rather than sheep stealing.

I became starkly aware of the divisions among Christians when I visited the Holy Land in 1980. Not only were there divisions among Christians, Jews and Muslims; there were scores of them among Christians themselves. The worst example of this was the Holy Sepulchre. The six feet slab has three altars; one belonging to the Catholics and the other two to different Orthodox churches, possibly Greek and Armenian. When celebrating the Holy Eucharist at these altars the respective priests must ensure that their hands do not extend beyond their allotted two feet. It is scandalous.

Nevertheless I would like to end on a positive note, again from Jerusalem. I

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7097. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in October 1991), Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 97 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working as Sr. Account Recievable in private company. Contact email : dsouzadonald11@gmail.com

7185. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in October 1984) Ht. 5' 10", Wt. 72 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working for Bank. Contact email : spydee321@gmail.com

7088. MYSORE : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in March 1983), Ht. 5' 9", Wt. 70 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. MBA. Marketing. well employed. Contact email : vishwasturners@yahoo.com

7184. U.K. : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in April 1990) Ht. 5' 7", Wt. 65 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working as a Credit Control in Private company in U.K. Contact email : troyt007@gmail.com

7079. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in December 1962), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 67 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., Inter MBA, working as a Manager. Contact email : archielewis.al@gmail.com

7183. MUMBAI : East Indian Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in February 1991) Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 86 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. PGDM and BMS., working as a Relationship Manager. Contact email : ritadhawan10@gmail.com

7077. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in March 1987), Ht. 5' 10", Wt. 80 kgs,

Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working as a Manager. Contact email : leroy2266@gmail.com OR Mob: 9503282306

7113. POONA : Tamilian Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in December 1982), Ht. 5' 6", Wt. 65 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working in Logistic Co. in **DUBAI**. Contact email : shantasam1955@gmail.com

7068. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in June 1983), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 58 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. HSC, working as a Customer Service. Contact email : cynthiadalmeida83@gmail.com

7047. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachaelor, (Born in November 1982), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 65 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., C.S. in Process, having family business. Contact email : mail.soj@gmail.com

7052. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in June 1977), Ht. 5' 6", Wt. 72 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.A., Retail Management, working as a General Manager. Contact email : albert.pinto2006@gmail.com

7049. CANADA : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in June 1986), Ht. 5' 11", Wt. 85 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. BE (Computer), working in CANADA in a Non IT Field Seeks a working girl in Canada and holding a PR Visa. Contact email : anniedrz@gmail.com

7045. CANADA : Mangaloren Roman Catholic Divorcee, (Born in September 1985), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 68 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Sc., Hotel Man-

agement, having permanent Resident. Contact email : bmathias88@gmail.com

7041. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in July 1985), Ht. 5' 7", Wt. 65 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. 10th Std., working as a Plant Operater. Contact email : ronnydsouza075@gmail.com

7025. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in May 1992), Ht. 5' 8", Wt. 56 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.E. (IT), working as a Software Developer. Contact email : kevin92ster@gmail.com

7040. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in October 1991), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 65 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.C.A., MBA Pursuing, working as a GIS Analyst in MNC. Contact email : ronaldpereira1210@gmail.com

7050. LONAVLA : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in November 1985), Ht. 5' 9", Wt. 75 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. MBA., working. Contact email : dsouza_adrian@yahoo.co.in

7039. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Bachelor, Handicap - slight Scoliosis - taking treatment, spine slightly curved. (Born in September 1976), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 45 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.A. Computer Prog. / Hair Designer, Having own business. Contact email : reginarodrigues634@gmail.com

7032. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Bachelor, (Born in November 1977), Ht. 5' 6", Wt. 72 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. Degree in Electronics and Telecommunications, working as Telecom Engineer. Contact email : franky54@rediffmail.com

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7143. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in April 1987), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 75 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. M.A. (Literature) working as a Sales & Marketing Manager. Contact email : irisedsouza@gmail.com

7156 MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in November 1993), Ht. 5' 1", Wt. 65 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. MBA., working in an IT Company as an Executive Assistant. Contact email : mumbai.lavi@gmail.com

7142. MUMBAI : Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in December 1981), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 62 kgs, Very Fair Complexion, Edn. MBA (HR) working as a HR Associate. Contact email : sunrays1227@gmail.com

7160. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in September 1988), Ht. 5' 7", Fair Complexion, Edn. BMS, working as a Senior Merchandiser in a Global Retail Company in Dubai. Contact email : prislobo10@gmail.com

7141. MUMBAI : Affluent business family Protestant Spinster, (Born in November 1995), Ht. 5', Wt. 55 kgs., Fair complexion, good looking, Edn., M. Pharma, Student. Contact email : saloni.1995naik@gmail.com

6741. MANGALORE : Mangalorean RC spinster, 26 years, 5' 3", Doctor, Qualification : MD. Very fair and beautiful. Belongings to an affluent business family. Email : sona68500@gmail.com

7139. MUMBAI : Maharashtrian Protestant Spinster, (Born in May 1993), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 47 kgs, Fair Complexion, good looking, Edn. B.Com., working as a Sr. Advisor in MNC.

Contact email : shirley.jadhav@gmail.com

7126. U.S.A. : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in January 1992) from Mumbai, Ht. 5' 7", Wt. 60 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.E. (Computers) from Mumbai, M.S. (Information Systems) from US. Possesses H1B visa and is working as a Technical Analyst with an MNC in USA. Contact email : wilfyjoy1315@gmail.com or call +91 98603 02527 / + 91 9970172527

7137. MUMBAI : Karnataka Protestant Spinster, (Born in January 1996), Ht. 5' 5", Wt. 54 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working as an Accountant. Contact email : sujatareddy209@gmail.com

7066. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in June 1987), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 78 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.E., (EXTC) M.S. (International Business Management), working as a Consulting Manager. Contact email : l2018anselm@yahoo.com

7128. MUMBAI : Affluent business family R.C. East Indian Spinster, (Born in 12-04-1988), Ht. 5' 2", very beautiful and pretty. Edn. MS General Surgeon, Doctor by profession. Contact email : drvd2019@gmail.com

7140. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in November 1991), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 63 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Graduation (BBI), working for a Private Bank as a Deputy Manager. Contact email : glendamisquith9@gmail.com

7127. MUMBAI : Goan R.C. Spinster, (Born in December 1992), Ht. 5' 5", Edn. Ph.D., Student. Contact email : exmi2019@gmail.com

7153 MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Divorcee, (Born in May 1987), Ht. 5' 2", Wt. 60 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Sc., IATA, Pursuing B.Ed., working as a Travael Consultant. Contact email : greshma.

saldanha@gmail.com

6642. MUMBAI : Goan Roman Catholic Divorcee, (Born in September 1979), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 65 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Com., working as a Customer Service professional. Contact email : sav_mon@yahoo.com Tel.No. 8291001606

7069. MUMBAI : Tamilian Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in April 1992), Ht. 5' 3", Wt. 50 kgs, Fair Complexion, Edn. B.Sc., Nursing, Staff Nurse. Contact email : mpchandran68@gmail.com Mobile : 9820041633

7138. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in December 1984), Ht. 4' 11", Wt. 56 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.A., working as an Executive Assistant (Secretary). Contact email : labina-jena@gmail.com

7098. MIRAJ : Protestant Spinster, (Born in November 1983), Ht. 5' 4", Wt. 52 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. Masters in Dental Science, Doctor by profession. Contact email : dprebentisch@yahoo.com

7123. MUMBAI : Mangalorean Roman Catholic Spinster, (Born in December 1987), Ht. 5' 2", Wt. 58 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. B.Com., CS., M.Sc., working as a Sr. Manager Programmer. Contact email : r.douza.co@gmail.com

7082. MUMBAI : Tamilian Roman catholic Spinster, (Born in September 1985), Ht. 5', Wt. 50 kgs, Wheatish Complexion, Edn. 12th std., working as a sales girl in Big Store. Contact email : susanmoses1385@gmail.com

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A Loving God In Difficult Times

By Father John Alexander SDB,
PhD

REVIEWED by

Ladislaus Louis D'Souza

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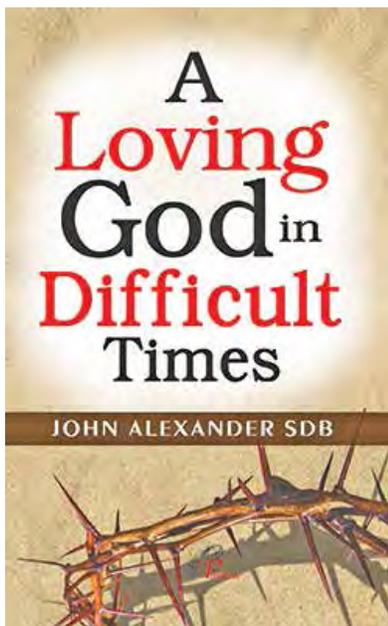
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The tiny, invisible Corona virus has been on the rampage across the world for nearly a year now or perhaps longer, our country itself facing the brunt of its effects for several months, with a lockdown imposing a stay-indoors phenomenon that has ensured a complete change in every facet of life. Travel grinding to a standstill, education took a backseat, religion going for a royal toss, leaving the high and mighty, the poor and the lowly, not excluding pope, premier and pauper wondering as to

what to make of the agony and death surrounding us, in the process bringing the very existence of God and the effectiveness of His presence in our lives into question. What the heck is God doing in the mighty tough times that we are roughing through? What type of God have we, indeed! Better still, what kind of a God do I believe in at all—a magical God who promptly wipes away human suffering and, drying our tears, leads us all into a comfort zone? Or a God who challenges me by suffering with me, giving me hope that leads me to experience an urge for immense love and mercy for my fellow humans? Seen in this light, A LOVING GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES, a product of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, is a book that

comes to soothe frayed nerves with words both human and divine.

Aby drawing our attention to how people down the ages have overcome struggles and difficulties trusting in God's power and mercy, in the process assuring us that we too shall likewise overcome the present traumatizing situation, the contents of this inspiring little book can be read in one single sitting or piecemeal, i.e. chapter by chapter. Interestingly, the life-changing comments and reflections



by Fathers Stanislaus Swamikannu SDB, Jerry Rosario SJ, Daniel Ambrose SDB, Edwin George SDB, Alphonse Philip SDB, Bosco Francis SDB, Sisters Metri Amirtham SCC and Javaceli FMA, make A LOVING GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES a book of solace and comfort that brings to light God's loving nature that feels profoundly for suffering humanity. This to the extent that Father [Dr] Edwin George could confidently say, "Realistically speak-

ing, thanks to COVID-19 for creating a 'miracle' moment in the history of humanity at this time of our existence in the third millennium, everyone stayed home probably for the first time both qualitatively and quantitatively" (p 111).

The pocket-sized book can either be read in a single sitting or by reflecting over every chapter piecemeal. Graphically, the crown of thorns on the cover of A LOVING GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES very aptly has the last word so to say, serving as it does as a link between the suffering of humanity and the suffering of God, clearing all misconception concerning God's care for His human creation and the totality of our trust in God!

(Contd.. from p. 15)

had been invited there by the Anglican archbishop, at the behest of Rev Murray Rogers, the founder of our ashram in Bareilly, who had since relocated to Jerusalem. It was during Holy Week itself. On Holy Thursday we attended a Catholic service. It was presided over by a bishop of the Melchite (Greek) Rite. The choir was led by French speaking Vietnamese nuns. Rev Rogers was an Englishman, a pastor of the Anglican Church, who wore ochre robes and lived like an Indian. He was vegetarian and regularly used Hindu texts in his own liturgy. And there I was, an English speaking Indian of the Latin Rite! Could that congregation have been more catholic (universal)?

For the Easter vigil we again attended a Catholic service presided over by an African cardinal. Later during coffee there was a blackboard on which people from different countries wrote Easter greetings in their native languages, mostly in the Roman script. I wrote in Devanagari script in Hindi at the top of the board "Jai Sri Yesu". It caught the eye of the cardinal. He immediately asked me where I was from and was thrilled to know that I was Indian.

After coffee we proceeded to the Russian Orthodox Church presided over by the Patriarch himself. At that time Christianity was still banned in the communist Soviet Union. A ninety-year-old retired army general was playing the organ. It was about 3.00 a.m. but the service was still warming up for the few elderly people there. I could not but wonder at some churches' inability to adapt to the times. Many of us fossilised Christians are in urgent need of perestroika, glasnost and aggiornamento (opening up and updating to change).

In this season of Advent let us prayerfully and humbly listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Rev 3:22), for denominations are an abomination for the disciples of Christ today.

•Much of this information is contained in the writer's forthcoming book "The Jerusalem Code".

It Was A Friendship, Mom, A Pure Emotion.

A CHRISTMAS STORY

The State Transport bus took a sharp turn and entered the village Gopur; and a series of memories of his home town gushed into Vilas' mind. He looked at his wife sitting on the next seat. She too looked lost in the thick jungle of the bygone days. Their son, Naveen at the window, was just drinking in the village scenes for the first time. Gopur was getting ready for the Christmas midnight celebration.

Vilas had deserted his home town ten years ago and had never once returned to it. His father died when he was only five, and his elder brother, Prashant, was seven. His mother Sonia with her job as a peon in the school bravely brought them up. Of course, her cousin Madhav was a great support -in every sense. He was a rich man. But besides the financial support, he used to visit the family every week and sometimes spend a day just being with the family. On special occasions he would even spend a night there.

Years passed by. Prashant declared he won't get married. Vilas married Meena, from a neighbouring village. Being new in the village, Meena heard gossip in the village. People had begun to talk about Sonia's relationship with Madhav. One day she opened her mind to Vilas.

"Have you never heard people gossiping about Uncle and Mummy?"

"Yes. You too do not give much importance to it."

"Who is he?"

"Mummy's cousin."

"They say, Mummy was engaged to him once. It broke."

"That's news for me!"

"I have to listen to such 'serials'! Vilas, better stop that uncle's visits here. I cannot bear anymore that biz-zare talk!"

Vilas reported to Bada bhai, Prashant.

But self-made philosopher Prashant simply brushed it aside as cheap Gao-gappaa. Being a mature person, he even gave Vilas a sermon with the example of St. Joseph who suspected Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Finally the Angel had to appear to clarify his doubts. Vilas, The darkness of a night is nothing. Just a little candle can drive it away! But the darkness of the human mind? ...in our hearts? Despair, hatred, jealousy, passions, prejudice... They blind us more seriously. That's like a 'yoke', a 'rod', and 'invading army', in the language of Prophet Isaiah. ...

But Meena could no longer bear the bad repute of the family. She threatened to leave the house if no steps were taken against nonsense. One day Meena announced, "Vilas, uncle was here last night."

"Yes, we were all chatting together with him till midnight. You could have joined us."

"You all want his money. You don't care a bit for the shit the people talk about us!"

"Look Meena, you are listening to our neighbor too intently. When Prashant started earning, Mummy stopped taking any help from Uncle. And I swear I have never noticed any nonsense in his behavior."

"They are lovers!"

"Meena! That's enough!"

Meena was not to be cowed down. She roared, "It's I who now says, 'That's enough!' My Mom too heard villagers are calling this house a brothel!"

"I have complained to Dada, several times, Meena."

"What did the maharaj say?"

"As usual: Keep watch in the night if you want; but do not hurt Mummy by false allegations."

"And you believed him?"

"I won't believe unless I see nonsense for myself."

"O. K. You wait for a proof. I am leaving the house!"

The very next day Meena left for her mummy's house in the next village. Vilas was caught between mummy and Meena. The day came soon to see a proof. That was a 24th of December. Meena suspected. She sent Vilas home to see a proof for himself! He was just following Maadhav as he approached the house. He heard the conversation-

"Prashant, ... Prashant,"

"Prashant is gone to the office, Maadhav."

"I know that. Prashant is another name for you, Sonia."

"I was eagerly waiting for you today. Happy Christmas!"

"Already? It's only 10 in the morning."

"My Christmas begins with your darshan. Why so late?"



Fr. Michael G. Vasai

(To be contd...)

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