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MATER POPULI FIDELIS
THE MOTHER OF THE FAITHFUL

MATER POPULI FIDELIS: CLARIFYING, NOT DIMINISHING, MARIAN DEVOTION

Revisiting Marian devotion through the lens of faith, Scripture, and tradition - where every true praise of Mary ends in the glory of Christ.



**Dr. Francis
Kodiyan MCBS**

Introduction

In its recent document *Mater Populi Fidelis* (“Mother of the Faithful”), the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith offers a timely reflection on Mary’s role in salvation history. By clarifying her titles and restoring Christ to the center of Marian devotion, the Church invites believers to rediscover Mary as the humble disciple who always leads us to her Son.

A Doctrinal Note for a Devout People

On November 4, 2025, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith released *Mater Populi Fidelis* - “Mother of the Faithful” - a document that revisits Marian titles and re-centers them on Christ. Approved by Pope Leo XIV, the note seeks not to restrict devotion but to refine it, so that the faithful may venerate Mary in a way that safeguards the truth of Christ’s unique mediation.

Roots in Scripture and the Fathers

Mariology, at its heart, springs from the Gospel. Mary’s “yes” at the Annunciation (Lk 1:38), her steadfastness beneath the Cross (Jn 19:25–27), and her prayer with the apostles (Acts 1:14) define her as the first disciple. The early Fathers drew deeply from this revelation. St. Irenaeus saw in her “the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race,” the obedient New Eve. St. Ephrem hailed her as “the new Eve who gave birth to Life Himself,” while St. Augustine wrote, “She conceived Christ in her heart before she conceived Him in her womb.” Their insight was clear: Mary’s greatness flows entirely from her faith and her union with Christ’s redemptive work.

A Needed Correction

Over time, language developed to express Mary’s cooperation in salvation - titles like *Coredemptrix* and *Mediatrix* of all graces. Though well-intentioned, such terms often require intricate clarification to avoid blurring the uniqueness of Christ’s redemptive act. *Mater Populi Fidelis* gently corrects this trend, proposing instead scripturally grounded titles such as “Mother of the Faithful” or “Spiritual Mother,” which affirm her maternal care without risking confusion. The note situates her mission firmly within the Trinitarian plan: chosen by the Father, overshadowed by the Spirit, and united with the Son in humble service.

Pastoral and Ecumenical Fruits

Far from cooling devotion, this clarification can deepen it. When the faithful see Mary as the perfect disciple rather than a rival redeemer, they rediscover her true beauty - the woman who listens, believes, and leads us to Christ. The document also offers an ecumenical bridge, easing the concerns of those for whom Marian excesses have obscured the Gospel’s centrality.

Conclusion: The Mother Who Leads Us to Christ

Mater Populi Fidelis is not a retreat but a renewal. It reminds the Church that purity of doctrine safeguards purity of love. By calling Mary the “Mother of the Faithful,” the Dicastery honors her true mission: to form Christ in the hearts of believers. In her humility, the Church sees her own reflection - and through her, she learns once more to say, with confidence and joy, “Be it done unto me according to thy word.” ■

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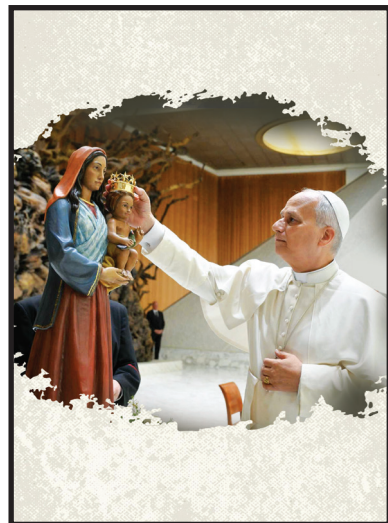
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Mater Populi Fidelis



Leader Moulds

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MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS AND ALL BELIEVERS, IS NOT CO-REDEEMER



Cindy Wooden

While praising devotion to Mary, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith firmly rejected moves to formally proclaim Mary as "co-redemptrix" or "co-mediatrix."

With the approval of Pope Leo XIV, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published a document on the titles of love and respect Catholics have for Mary and her motherly assistance to believers, but it also explained the problems with referring to Mary as "co-redemptrix" or "co-mediatrix" with Christ.

While praising devotion to Mary, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith firmly rejected moves to formally proclaim Mary as "co-redemptrix" or "co-mediatrix." In a lengthy doctrinal note titled "Mater Populi Fidelis" ("Mother of the Faithful People of God"), the dicastery said the title co-redemptrix or co-redeemer "carries the risk of eclipsing the exclusive role of Jesus Christ" in salvation. And, regarding the title co-mediatrix or co-mediator, it said that Mary, "the first redeemed, could not have been the mediatrix of the grace that she herself received." However, it said, the title may be used when it does not cast doubt on "the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man."

Pope Leo XIV approved the text Oct. 7 and ordered its publication, said the note, which was released Nov. 4. Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the doctrinal dicastery, presented the document during a conference at the Jesuit headquarters in Rome and said its teaching becomes part of the church's "ordinary magisterium" and must be considered authoritative.

For more than 30 years, some Catholics, including some bishops, have asked for formal dogmatic declarations of Mary as co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix, the document's introduction said. But Msgr. Armando Matteo, secretary of the dicastery's doctrinal section, told the conference that the Vatican's first study of the doctrinal implications of the titles goes all the way back to 1926.

Cardinal Fernández said that one time, when St. Peter's Basilica was closed, he spent a long time in front of Michelangelo's Pietà. The sorrow on Mary's face because of the death of her son and, at the same time, her obvious strength, he said, "was so beautiful it was understandable why people would want to say everything and more about Mary."

The new document said that titles used for Mary should speak of her motherly care for all people and her place as the first and perfect disciple of Jesus but must not create any doubt that Catholics believe Jesus is the redeemer of the world and the bestower of grace.



"Any gaze directed at her that distracts us from Christ or that places her on the same level as the Son of God would fall outside the dynamic proper to an authentically Marian faith," it said, because Mary always points to her son.

The titles co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix have been used in reference to Mary by theologians and even popes in the past millennium, the doctrinal dicastery said, but without elaborating on the precise meaning and the extent to which those titles could describe Mary's role in salvation history.

St. John Paul II "referred to Mary as 'Co-redemptrix' on at least seven occasions," the note said, but after consultation with the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and its prefect, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in 1996, he did not issue a dogmatic declaration and stopped using the title. Citing Scripture and tradition, the future Pope Benedict XVI said, "The precise meaning of these titles (co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix) is not clear, and the doctrine contained in them is not mature." "Everything comes from Him

-- Christ -- as the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Colossians, in particular, tell us; Mary, too, is everything that she is through Him. The word 'Co-redemptrix' would obscure this origin," Pope Benedict said.

Pope Francis, at a general audience in 2020, said that Jesus entrusted Mary to humanity as a mother, "not as a goddess, not as co-redemptrix," adding that love motivated some people to call her co-redemptrix, but love often leads people to "exaggerate." "Given the necessity of explaining Mary's subordinate role to Christ in the work of Redemption, it would not be appropriate to use the title 'Co-redemptrix' to define Mary's cooperation," the doctrinal note said. The title, it said, "risks obscuring Christ's unique salvific mediation and can therefore create confusion and an imbalance in the harmony of the truths of the Christian faith, for 'there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'" "When an expression requires many repeated explanations to prevent it from straying from

a correct meaning, it does not serve the faith of the People of God and becomes unhelpful," the dicastery concluded.

The use of the title "co-mediatrix" is more complicated, the doctrinal note said, because the word "mediation" often is "understood simply as cooperation, assistance or intercession" and easily could apply to Mary without calling into question "the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man." Mary's role in salvation history is unique, the document said. She willingly accepted to become the mother of Jesus the savior, she raised him, travelled with him and stood at the foot of his cross. While Christ, fully human and fully divine, is the one mediator between God and humanity, it said, "he enables various forms of participation in his salvific plan because, in communion with him, we can all become, in some way, cooperators with God and 'mediators' for one another." "If this holds true for every believer -- whose cooperation with Christ becomes increasingly fruitful to the extent that one allows oneself to be transformed by grace -- how much more must it be affirmed of Mary in a unique and supreme way," the doctrinal note said.

The church believes that those in heaven can pray and intercede for people still on earth and, "among those chosen and glorified with Christ, first and foremost is his Mother," the note said. "Therefore, we can affirm that Mary has a unique collaboration in the saving work that Christ carries out in his Church. With this intercession, Mary can become for us a motherly sign of the Lord's mercy."

Courtesy: Vatican News.

HOLINESS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH



**Fr Royston
Pinto SJ, LCL**

Holiness lies at the very core of the Church's identity and mission. Rooted in the holiness of God revealed in Christ, nurtured through the Spirit's sanctifying power, and manifested in the lives of believers, it is the vocation of all the baptised.

Introduction

In his encyclical *Divinum Illud Munus*, Pope Leo XIII opined, “The Holy Spirit is the principle of holiness and the bond of charity in the Church; from Him comes the sanctity of souls, their love of virtue, and their participation in the divine life” (§3). Hence, holiness stands at the heart of the Christian vocation and defines the very essence of the Church. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is called to reflect the holiness of her divine Head and to manifest God’s sanctifying love to the world. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the Church as “holy because Christ, her Head, is holy” (CCC, §823). Yet, this holiness is not merely institutional; it is deeply personal and communal, expressed through the lives of believers who, united to Christ, strive for sanctity. Throughout history, Scripture, the Early Church Fathers, papal teachings, and the saints have consistently emphasised that holiness is both a divine gift and a human task, rooted in grace but requiring cooperation and continual conversion. Hence, the nature of holiness within the life of the Church is understood through four dimensions: (1) biblical foundations, (2) Patristic understanding, (3) magisterial teaching, and (4) the witness of the saints. It will argue that holiness is both the identity and mission of the Church, representing humanity’s participation in the divine life, expressed through love, unity, and the imitation of Christ.

Biblical Foundations of Holiness

The concept of holiness (Hebrew *qadosh*; Greek *hagios*) in Scripture signifies being “set apart” for God’s purposes. From the Old Testament onward, holiness is primarily an attribute of God: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). Humanity, made in God’s image, is called to share in this holiness through covenantal fidelity. God commands Israel, “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Thus, holiness is not merely moral rectitude but participation in God’s own sanctity. In the New Testament, holiness takes on a Christological dimension. Jesus Christ, the “Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24), embodies divine holiness in human form. Through his Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection, Christ sanctifies humanity and establishes the Church as the new people of God. St Paul reminds believers, “You are God’s temple, and God’s Spirit dwells



in you... for God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, is thus holy because of her union with Him. Furthermore, holiness is inseparable from love and moral transformation. St Peter exhorts, "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) describe the attitudes of the holy, poverty of spirit, mercy, purity of heart, and peace-making. The ultimate expression of holiness is conformity to Christ's sacrificial love, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

The Early Church Fathers on Holiness

The Early Church Fathers viewed holiness as humanity's participation in the divine nature through Christ and the Holy Spirit. St Athanasius expressed this mystery succinctly, "The Son of God became man so that we might become God" (De Incarnatione, 54). This doctrine of theosis (divinization) reveals that holiness is not merely moral improvement, but rather transformation into the likeness of God. The Church, through the sacraments, serves as the channel of this sanctifying grace. St Irenaeus of Lyons emphasized the communal

dimension of holiness, identifying the Church as the locus of divine life, "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace" (Adversus Haereses, III, 24:1). For Irenaeus, holiness was not confined to ascetics or clerics but extended to all who live by the Spirit. On the other hand, St Augustine of Hippo viewed holiness as the fruit of charity, the love of God poured into the human heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). In *City of God*, Augustine contrasts the "City of God," composed of those who love God to the contempt of self, with the "earthly city," where self-love leads to contempt of God. Thus, holiness is the ordering of love toward God and neighbour. Augustine writes, "Love, and do what you will... let the root of love be within; of this root can nothing spring but what is good" (In Epistulam Ioannis ad Parthos Tractatus, VII, 8). Hence, St Gregory of Nyssa further developed the dynamic character of holiness as an unending ascent toward God, "The one limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit" (Life of Moses, II, 225). Holiness, for Gregory, is not a static perfection but a continual growth in divine likeness, a journey of transformation that continues throughout eternity.

Magisterial Teaching on the Holiness of the Church

The magisterium of the Catholic Church has consistently affirmed holiness as one of the four essential marks of the Church, "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) of the Second Vatican Council, provides the most comprehensive magisterial treatment of this doctrine in modern times. Paragraph 39 declares, "The Church... is believed to be indefectibly holy. For Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy,' loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her" (LG 39). Holiness, therefore, is intrinsic to the Church's identity because it derives from Christ's self-giving love. However, Vatican II also recognised the paradox of holiness coexisting with human sinfulness within the Church. *Lumen Gentium* §8 acknowledges that "the Church, clasping sinners to her bosom, is at once holy and always in need of purification." This tension reflects the Church's pilgrim status; she is holy by divine gift but continually called to conversion. Papal teaching has consistently reaffirmed the universal call to holiness. St Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Novo Millen-*

nio Ineunte (2001) insists that holiness is the “high standard of ordinary Christian living” (§31). He states, “To ask catechumens, ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask, ‘Do you wish to become holy?’” Similarly, Pope Francis in *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018) emphasises the contemporary relevance of holiness, “To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs... This is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do” (§14). These teachings situate holiness not as an esoteric ideal but as the lived reality of every believer. Through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, the Church continually renews her holiness, allowing Christ’s sanctifying grace to transform her members.

The Witness of the Saints

On November 1, we celebrated the Solemnity of All Saints Day. The saints are the living embodiment of the Church’s holiness. They demonstrate that sanctity is attainable in every age, vocation, and circumstance. As St Thérèse of Lisieux wrote, “Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be” (*Story of a Soul*, Ch. IX). Her “Little Way” reveals that holiness is rooted in love expressed through small acts of faithfulness. St Francis of Assisi exemplified evangelical poverty as a path to holiness. His radical imitation of Christ, characterised by simplicity, peace, and a care for creation, demonstrated the transformative power of divine grace. His life became a living icon of Christ crucified, embodying the words of St Paul, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (*Galatians 6:17*). Similarly,

Sts Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross deepened the Church’s understanding of holiness as interior union with God through prayer and purification. Teresa declared, “Holiness consists not in doing extraordinary things, but in accepting, with a smile, whatever God sends us” (*The Way of Perfection*). John’s *Dark Night of the Soul* describes holiness as a journey through suffering toward divine love, a purification that unites the soul perfectly to God. In modern times, Sts Teresa of Calcutta and Pope John Paul II demonstrated holiness through service and joyful witness. Mother Teresa’s holiness was expressed in radical charity toward “the poorest of the poor,” proclaiming through her deeds that “holiness is not the luxury of the few; it is a simple duty for each one of us.” St Pope John Paul II, through his profound spirituality and endurance in suffering, demonstrated that holiness is a total self-offering rooted in love for Christ and humanity. The saints’ diversity reveals that holiness is not uniform but multifaceted, reflecting the manifold grace of the Spirit (1 Peter 4:10). Each saint mirrors a different aspect of Christ’s holiness, contributing to the Church’s sanctity as a whole.

Holiness as Mission: The Church’s Sanctifying Role

The Church’s holiness is not an end in itself but a means of sanctifying the world. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her threefold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity” (§25). Through these, she continues Christ’s mission of sanctification. The liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, is the source and summit of holiness. In the Eucharistic

sacrifice, the Church offers herself with Christ to the Father, and believers are united in the communion of love. The sacraments make holiness tangible, baptism initiates it, confirmation strengthens it, and reconciliation restores it. The Church’s moral and social teachings likewise extend holiness into the public sphere, calling the faithful to transform society through justice, mercy, and peace. Holiness also has an eschatological dimension. The Church, as the Bride of Christ, journeys toward her consummation in heavenly glory. The Book of Revelation depicts the Church’s final sanctification, “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready” (*Revelation 19:7*). Thus, the Church’s holiness, though real, anticipates its perfect fulfilment in eternity.

Conclusion

Holiness lies at the very core of the Church’s identity and mission. Rooted in the holiness of God revealed in Christ, nurtured through the Spirit’s sanctifying power, and manifested in the lives of believers, it is the vocation of all the baptised. From Scripture to the Fathers, from papal teaching to the example of the saints, the consistent message resounds, holiness is not an abstract ideal but a concrete way of life, a participation in divine love that transforms both individuals and communities. As the Church continues her pilgrimage through history, she is called to renew her holiness through repentance, sacramental life, and charity. The witness of the saints assures us that holiness is possible, attainable, and necessary for the world’s salvation. In the words of St Pope John Paul II, “Do not be afraid to be saints!”, for in the holiness of her members, the Church reveals most clearly the face of Christ, the Holy One of God.

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LIMITLESS LOVE OF GOD FOR THE POOR THROUGH THE CHRISTIANS SELECTED INSIGHTS FROM DILEXI TE



**Dr Edwin
Rodrigues SJ**

A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today.

“By its very nature, Christian love is prophetic: it works miracles and knows no limits. It makes what was apparently impossible happen... A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today” (Dilexi te, no. 120). The Catholic media started buzzing after the release of the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Leo XIV, Dilexi te (DT), on October 9, 2025. Pope Leo has struck all the right chords with this document, dispelling the doubts and reassuring and reenergizing the faithful that the reforms carried out by Pope Francis will not be abandoned, but carried out with renewed vigour and zeal. Pope Leo XIV through this Apostolic Exhortation with strong and urgent call for the “preferential option for the poor” has firmly placed himself in the tradition of the Catholic Social Teaching, inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII – whose name he has accepted – who promulgated *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the foundational text of CST.

Two Popes and One Document: Unbroken Apostolic Tradition

The great love and appreciation Pope Leo harbours in his heart for Pope Francis was visible in his opening speech from the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica on May 8, 2025. Pope Leo acknowledges in the introduction (DT 3): “I am happy to make this document my own - adding some reflections” sharing the desire of his “beloved predecessor” that “all Christians come to appreciate the close connection between Christ’s love and his summons to care for the poor.” This reminds us of *Lumen Fidei* (2013), which was the legacy of Pope Benedict XVI accepted by Pope Francis, by stating: “as his brother in Christ I have taken up his fine work and added a few contributions of my own” (LF 7). The style of Pope Francis is evident in the Exhortation just as Pope Benedict’s was evident in the Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*. Although it would be interesting to know which reflections have come from the pen of Pope Leo, we will refrain from such exercise and in good faith consider the entire document as his because he has made it his own and given it to us in his name.

General Information and Outline of Dilexi Te

This Apostolic Exhortation is a response or a follow up of Pope

Francis' fourth and last encyclical: *Dilexiti nos* (2024) as is amply clear from their titles speaking about love, derived from the Latin verb *diligere*. *Dilexiti nos* ("He loved us," cf. Rom 8:37) was about the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ. In this Exhortation, the focus is shifted on the Christians. We are reminded of the words of the Risen Lord: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). The same mission of Jesus is entrusted to the disciples. This aspect is brought out in the first and the last paragraph of the Exhortation through the inclusion of "I have loved you" (Rev 3:9) in the beginning and at the end, but keeping different agents in mind. In the first paragraph, it refers to Lord Jesus Christ loving the poor, whereas in the last paragraph, it is Jesus through the work and efforts of the Christians loving the poor by bringing about transformation in unjust social structures and within themselves.

Salient Features of *Dilexiti Te* The Concentric Structure: Third Chapter in the Centre

This Exhortation is masterfully organized, which is obvious from the inclusion of Rev 3:9 mentioned above. A careful reader discovers that the first chapter corresponds with the last chapter, both of which focus on our understanding and attitude towards the poor. The second chapter corresponds with the fourth chapter, which concentrate on the biblical and ecclesial foundations for the love of the poor. The third chapter, which is the longest and most extensive, deals with the shining examples and burning insights from the history of the Church in the last two thousand years, challenging us to take a concrete stand on behalf of the poor. These witnesses draw strength from the Scripture (chap. 2) and shape the tradition of the Church (chap. 4) as well as imbibe the principles laid out in the first chapter and provide power and

punch to the exhortative section in the final chapter.

Placing the Poor in the Centre

"I have chosen to recall the age-old history of the Church's care for the poor and with the poor in order to make clear that it has always been a central part of her life" (DT 103). The poor are not an "appendage," but core of Christ's living body (DT 39). The poor are at the heart of the Church (DT 111). This message is repeated again and again in DT. The logic of the Pope is simple. The Scripture and traditions of the Church bear a strong testimony to the fact that God has "a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed" (DT 16) and the poor are identified with the Lord because in the suffering of the poor, it is Christ himself is suffering (DT 9). Hence, the mystery of Christ is the mystery of Christ in the poor, as Cardinal Lercaro put it during Vatican II (DT 84) and "Love for



the Lord... is one with love for the poor” (DT 5).

Change of Attitude towards the Poor

Pope Leo desires that the Christians undergo cognitive, behavioural, and attitudinal transformation in their understanding and action towards the poor. Hence, he states, “A concrete commitment to the poor must also be accompanied by a change in mentality that can have an impact at the cultural level” (DT 11). He appeals to the Christians to develop intimate relationship with the poor and consider them not as a problem, but part of their family (DT 104). Drawing from the Aparecida document, the Pope invites us to consider “marginalized communities as subjects capable of creating their own culture, rather than as objects of charity on the part of others” and listen to their wisdom (DT 100). He strongly emphasizes: “serving the poor is not a gesture to be made ‘from above,’ but an encounter between equals” (DT 79). In the same vein, “the education of the poor is not a favor but a duty” (DT 72) and the caring for the poor is “concrete proof of the sincerity of faith” (DT 45).

Getting Inspired by the Great Cloud of Witnesses

In the third chapter, the Pope speaks about “numerous witnesses from disciples of Christ spanning almost two millennia” (DT 36). In the footnote, he mentions that the list is not exhaustive. The example of these witnesses constantly inspires, appeals, and challenges. The galaxy of the Saints and Holy men and women starts from the Apostle Paul and ends with popular leaders who have made radical intervention on behalf of the poor. The Pope calls the Fathers of the Church, the Fathers of the poor. In this section, five paragraphs are dedicated to St.

Augustine, “the Doctor of Grace,” (DT 43 47). Here the Augustinian Pope must have surely added a few reflections. He appeals to the readers to study Augustine’s works and to “live radically his call to conversion, which necessarily includes the service of charity” (DT 47). The long list of luminaries includes those who took care of the sick, those who care for the poor in monastic life, those who freed prisoners, witnesses of evangelical poverty, educators of the poor, those who accompanied migrants, and were at the side of the least like Mother Teresa, etc. The contribution of the consecrated women is particularly highlighted. The contribution of the lay people, especially that of popular movements and popular leaders is duly recognized (DT 80 81). There is both appreciation for and critique of the secular efforts to alleviate poverty (DT 13, 15).

Urgent Commitment towards the Poor

One can decipher a great sense of immediacy and urgency in the Exhortation. The prophetic utterances prick our conscience and wake us up from our dogmatic slumber. The Pope writes, “the dignity of every human person must be respected today, not tomorrow, and the extreme poverty of all those to whom this dignity is denied should constantly weigh upon our consciences” (DT 92). Charity is not considered as optional but “a requirement of true worship” (DT 42). Six times the word “denounce” is used. We are called to denounce unjust structures victimizing the poor. There is an appeal to make “small gestures of affections” towards the suffering (DT 4; cf. EG 188: “Small daily acts of solidarity”; EG 265: “simple daily acts of generosity”). Seven times the word “commitment” is used. The Pope insists: “We need to be increas-

ingly committed to resolving the structural causes of poverty. This is a pressing need that ‘cannot be delayed’” (DT 94). “We must not let our guard down when it comes to poverty” (DT 12) because not listening to their cry will make us guilty (DT 8). The Exhortation comes with strong warnings. While referring to the Parable of the Last Judgment in Mt 25, the Pope states: “The clear and forceful words of the Gospel must be put into practice without any ‘ifs or buts’ that could lessen their force” (DT 28). We cannot afford to relativize the radical message of God’s word (DT 31).

Conclusion

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). Through the committed lives of luminaries and striking teaching from the Scripture and traditions, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* pounds our stony hearts, breaks them, and makes them more responsive to God suffering in the poor. DT has a good blend of exposition and exhortation. It exposes what God in Jesus Christ and saints have been and done for the poor and exhorts us what we should do in our time. Concerns of the global south such as migration, striving for democracy are brought forward. There is an incessant and urgent call to all to reach out to the “flesh” of Christ and make faith active through works of charity. The aim of the document is to embody the love of Jesus for the poor. Through this spirit-filled document, “God 7 ... asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favor of the weakest” (DT 16). Are we going to pay heed to this urgent call and act accordingly?

COMP

NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH



**Sr Santan
Nago, FS**

I am constantly thinking of that final hour of my life, which is approaching each day. I prepare myself for it with a prayerful thought: Lord, when You will, as You will, how You will.

Introduction

November is the month when the Church pauses to remember those who have gone before us. The feasts of All Saints and All Souls remind us that life on earth is a pilgrimage toward eternity. We are pilgrims passing through, and our final destination lies in the loving presence of God. The Psalmist prays, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain wisdom of heart.” (Psalm 90:12). Wisdom begins when we recognize that our time is a gift, and that each moment prepares us for our final encounter with God.

The Mystery of Death and Christian Hope

There are two pivotal moments in everyone’s life: Birth and death. The earthly life we begin and the life we complete by crossing the threshold of time toward eternity. This final moment is always accompanied by strong and particularly intense human sentiments. Francis Cardinal Van Thuan, quoting a Vietnamese proverb said, “Birth is a pilgrimage; Death a return home”. Death is the most serious matter in life. Among all of life’s trials, it is the greatest. It is definitive. Death is the culmination of our life, the last offering that we can give to God here on earth. But we can be sure that in that hour we can be assisted, like Joseph, by Jesus and Mary. The Christian vision of death’s hour is well expressed in one of the Prefaces of the Mass for the dead. “For your faithful, life is changed, not ended; and while our earthly dwelling is destroyed, an eternal home is made in heaven”. For Christians, death is not an end but a passage - a doorway through which we enter the fullness of life. Jesus transformed death by passing through it himself. On the cross, he sanctified our dying, turning it from defeat into victory. Through his resurrection, he assures us that death no longer has the final word.

Pope John XXIII - A Peaceful Passing

The serene thought of death accompanied Pope John XXIII throughout his life. Few modern figures have witnessed to the peace of Christian death as beautifully as Pope John XXIII. Known as “the Good Pope,” his kindness and humility won the hearts of millions. When he fell seriously ill in 1963, he faced death with serenity and trust. Those who were near him recall that his final days were marked not by anxiety, but by peace and prayer. As the end approached, he said simply, “My bags are packed. I’m ready to go.” His words reflected the heart of a pilgrim who had lived with simplicity and love. Even in his

final hours, he continued to bless those who came to see him. He told those around him, “Do not cry. This is the moment of meeting my Lord.”

Pope Paul VI: Faithful Until the End

The testament of Paul VI consists of a document dated June 30, 1965, thirteen years before his death. Pope Paul VI's papacy was marked by deep thought, pastoral sensitivity, and suffering. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council brought challenges that weighed heavily on him, yet he bore them with grace. In his final years, he often meditated on death. In a personal note written in 1972, he said, “I am constantly thinking of that final hour of my life, which is approaching each day. I prepare myself for it with a prayerful thought: Lord, when You will, as You will, how You will.”

Living Each Day in Readiness

The examples of the two Popes and many others call us to live each day with eternity in view. They teach us that death should not surprise us if we have lived in the light of God's presence. Life is fragile; time passes swiftly; tomorrow is not ours. But the one who lives close to God need not fear the call of the final hour.

To Live for that Hour

Jesus' life culminated with the Paschal Mystery. He has shown us the road to reach Heaven: he first walked the way to Calvary. He chose no other way to end his earthly work. He came to earth, healed the sick, preached the Good News, and founded the Church, but above all he lived for his “hour”. He lived for the hour when he would be lifted on the cross and draw everyone to himself (Jn 12:32). In that ‘hour’ he accomplished his work. Like



Jesus, we must live for our own ‘hour’. Each of us has an ‘hour’, and it is good to live in expectation of it and to offer it now for the purposes God has entrusted to us, even if we are in the full vigour of physical strength. This is the most “beautiful hour”, the ‘hour’ of life and not so much of death. That hour is the moment of our encounter with Jesus – we will see him! It is there that he waits for us, and with him, we will meet Mary, who we have so often called upon in life to intercede for us, “Now and at the hour of our death”.

A Prayerful Surrender

We do not know when the Lord will call us, but we can be certain that His mercy will meet us there. Death is not darkness, but dawn. Every life is a story that will one day find its final

sentence. But for the believer, that sentence does not end in a full stop - it opens into eternity. The lives of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI remind us that when faith has shaped our “now,” we will face the “hour” of our death with peace and trust. May our daily living be a quiet preparation for that meeting with God, into His marvellous light.

Conclusion

As we remember our departed loved ones this November, let us also prepare our hearts for our own final journey. The Mother of God, who stood beside her dying Son, will stand beside us, too, in our hour of need. Let us often whisper the ancient prayer, not in fear but in hope: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

COMP

THE UNKNOWN SAINTS OF EVERY DAY



Dr G Dolin MMI, DCL

**Give me, Jesus,
the simple holiness
that reflects your
face on my face,
your words in
my words, your
gestures in my
gestures, your
choices in my
choices.**

Holiness is simple yet tough because it is an everyday action which becomes part and parcel of everyone's life, their normal activities, usual conversations, and their relationships with others, etc. We shape this holiness of life day by day. Looking at the life of Christians who live among us, we come across some persons in whom there is no malice. They welcome everyone with kindness and tenderness, and they know when to speak and be silent at the right moment. They smile with those who smile and cry with those who cry. Nobody in the world considers them just like the foundations of a house that remain invisible. In fact, these simple and holy people keep the Church and the world going by their strong faith. I am awestruck in contemplative amazement – aren't they, His masterpieces!

Holiness Beckons Humility of Heart

Holiness is an attitude that makes put others above without devaluing oneself. Humble people do not boast of themselves but are fully aware of everyone's value. Humility does not place itself on a high pedestal, nevertheless, all those who see her, even the least insignificant experience the seraphic feelings of being loved, valued, appreciated, and welcomed within.

Holiness Inherently Embedded in Simplicity of Mind

Holiness is an attitude that never leads to judgement, malicious guise, and inapt words. In simplicity of the mind of a person, there is no room for hatred because Holiness inclines towards fraternal correction, not offense. It reminds one of their faults without condemning them guilty. Holiness is indignant without any intent for character assassination.

Holiness Leads to a Profound Interior Silence

Holiness is an attitude that propels a person to delve deep into the reservoir of God's unfathomable omniscience and savour an intimate dialogue with him drawing the nectar of wisdom. In silence, men always seek strength to face any challenges, and new avenues of joys coupled with sorrows. In silence, a person knows how to make space for others. It is a treasure chest which encompasses everything navigating through the ebbs and flows of life.

Holiness Calls for Listening

Holiness is an attitude that listens first and then speaks well of others without subterfuge, hidden and evil intensions. Silence



To Living in Patience and Joy

Our weakness opens the widest spaces to the power of God in our life. The quickest steps towards holiness are taken by those who know how to make the action of God and his love prevail in their lives. Call to holiness does not exclude anyone rather includes everyone and belongs to everyone. We

are all called to enter the realm of God's love through living a life of Holiness like saints. Hence, we must ask ourselves how much we have felt the fire of the Lord consuming us like the saints of God. We must ask ourselves as to if we have lived the holiness of life lived by simple saints. We must also verify the lifestyle of our communities of believers who are the saints of every day hidden from most people for they are silent, but their unassuming life is more eloquent than any revolutionary oration.

Plea to Jesus

Dear Jesus, teach me to walk the paths of simple holiness, in which You are the point of reference, to be like a weaned child in its mother's arms with simplicity and generosity. Give me, Jesus, the simple holiness that reflects your face on my face, your words in my words, your gestures in my gestures, your choices in my choices. Grant me the virtue of holiness that it is delicate, imperceptible yet visible, effective, sober, sweet, affable, dialogic, and welcoming. Oh Jesus, I want to contemplate on you until I discover that my heart is your heart, so much so that I have assimilated You and made You mine, not by my own merit, but only by Your Grace.

COMP

shortens the distance between God and humanity and allows us to meet, in contemplation, Jesus our master whose heart brims over with love and tenderness. It offers effective, stable spaces for internal purification and at the same time offers the gifts and graces necessary to persevere in them.

Holiness Induces Authenticity

Holiness is an attitude that seeks to speaking the truth leading to congruity of thoughts and deeds. Thus, our words become 'yes' when it ought to be 'yes' and 'no' when it must be 'no'. Also, the relationship that we establish with others become genuine and not double-standard, one to outline our official personality, the other to destroy our enemy. Authenticity does not compromise on values and virtues which are appreciated and experienced and it never poses ambiguous or indecipherable gestures which are incomprehensible and untenable.

Holiness is a Call from God

It is a call from God that excludes none but envelops everyone. It is a universal vocation to share and live. It is a vocation to live together, helping others to follow the same path. It is a call that

Jesus outlined in the Beatitudes as tools for walking in holiness. Since the Lord himself offered them to us, they can be translated into some significant verbs as cited below: To be vigilant: One must always be vigilant for laziness leads us to slumber and mediocrity. To Pray: Prayer helps have dialogue with God, the oxygen that we need to lead a holy life. To remain in the Lord: A continuous and uninterrupted dialogue with God allows us to remain steadfast in love. The Eucharist is an extraordinary gift to enter an intimacy with God. To reconcile: There is an inexhaustible Baptismal font which is constituted by the sacrament of reconciliation. To Live in Peace: What would be the purpose of prayer that does not lead to brotherhood? What meaning would God's forgiveness have without our forgiveness for others? Peace builds bridges and fills ditches; and breaks down walls of separation and animosity. To Serve: Resonating the sentiments of Jesus, even an offer of a cup of cold water belongs to the behavioural code of holiness. When we understand the beauty of service, a gesture of kindness and welcome, a thirst for forgiveness, a word of appreciation, a serene face, would above all generate space for others in our hearts and society.

CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN: DECLARED DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH BY POPE LEO XIV



**Dr Francis
Kodiyan MCBS**

The proclamation of St John Henry Newman as a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV on November 1, 2025, during the Solemnity of All Saints, marks one of the most significant ecclesial events of the decade.

Introduction

The proclamation of St John Henry Newman as a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV on November 1, 2025, during the Solemnity of All Saints, marks one of the most significant ecclesial events of the decade. The announcement, made at St. Peter's Square during the closing of the Jubilee of Education, recognizes Newman's profound contributions to theology, education, and the dialogue between faith and reason. With this declaration, Newman becomes the 38th Doctor of the Church, an honor that canonically acknowledges saints whose writings and teachings have enduring relevance for the life of the Church. This recognition of Newman is not simply a historical tribute but a prophetic gesture for our times. His life and writings speak directly to the spiritual and intellectual challenges of the modern world, offering a synthesis of holiness, intellect, and pastoral charity that the Church deeply needs today.

A Journey of Faith and Conversion

Born in London on February 21, 1801, John Henry Newman grew up in a Protestant household but experienced an early and profound sense of God's presence. His intellectual brilliance led him to Oxford, where he became a fellow of Oriel College and a leading figure in the Oxford Movement - a renewal effort within Anglicanism seeking to restore the catholic roots of the Church of England. Newman's intense study of Scripture, Church Fathers, and the historical continuity of the Church gradually led him to the conviction that the fullness of Christian truth subsisted only in the Roman Catholic Church. After long discernment, he was received into the Catholic Church on October 9, 1845, by Blessed Dominic Barberi. This conversion was a decisive act of conscience, one that cost him dearly in friendships, social standing, and security, yet it made him one of the greatest converts in Church history. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII elevated him to the cardinalate, recognizing his integrity, humility, and intellectual influence. His episcopal motto, *Cor ad cor loquitur* ("Heart speaks to heart"), summed up his theology of personal encounter and the primacy of conscience - the interior voice of truth that unites the human soul with the will of God.



Theological Depth and the Development of Doctrine

Among Newman's most enduring contributions is his classic work, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). In it, he argued that Christian doctrine is not static but dynamic - capable of organic growth in understanding while remaining faithful to its apostolic roots. This insight transformed Catholic theology by offering a framework for understanding how the Church's teachings can deepen over time without contradicting their original essence. This concept profoundly influenced the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), particularly in its documents on Revelation, the Church, and religious liberty. By showing that authentic doctrinal development unfolds through fidelity to tradition and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Newman helped the Church integrate historical consciousness with doctrinal integrity. Pope Leo XIV, in his declaration, emphasized that "Newman's vision of

doctrine as living truth has made him a guide for every age seeking renewal without rupture."

Equally vital is Newman's theology of conscience. He taught that conscience is not mere self-will or subjective opinion but the echo of God's law inscribed in the heart. To follow conscience faithfully, therefore, is to follow the voice of God. His famous statement that he would "toast the Pope, but conscience first" expresses not defiance but profound harmony - a recognition that authentic authority and conscience ultimately converge in truth.

Newman the Educator: Formation of Mind and Heart

Newman's educational philosophy, crystallized in his seminal work *The Idea of a University*, remains one of his greatest gifts to modern Catholic thought. He envisioned education as the cultivation of the whole person - intellect, character, and spirit - in pursuit of truth. A university,

he wrote, is "a place of teaching universal knowledge," where faith and reason engage in fruitful dialogue. Pope Leo XIV, in his homily at the declaration ceremony, drew deeply from this vision, calling Newman "the saint of the integrated mind," whose thought reminds educators that "the goal of education is not information but transformation." The Pope announced Newman as Co-Patron of Catholic Education alongside St. Thomas Aquinas, underscoring his continuing influence on schools and universities. In an era of fragmented knowledge and moral uncertainty, Newman's insistence that truth is unified and that reason, when honest, leads to faith, serves as a corrective to secularism and relativism. His understanding of education as a dialogue between intellect and virtue continues to inspire Catholic educators across continents.

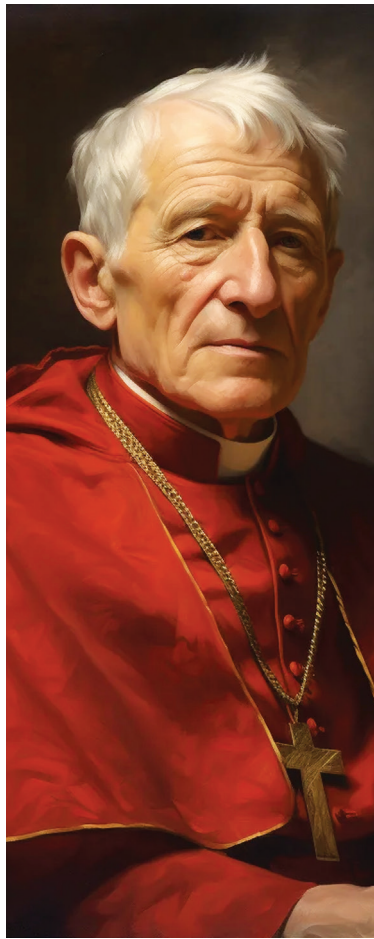
The Declaration: A Historic Moment

The declaration of Newman

as Doctor of the Church was celebrated in a solemn Eucharistic liturgy attended by cardinals, bishops, and delegations from universities worldwide. Representatives from the Church of England were also present, symbolizing the ecumenical importance of Newman's legacy. In his homily, Pope Leo XIV described Newman as "a light for new generations," whose faith journey illuminates how truth and holiness can flourish in the midst of doubt and modern skepticism. The Pope cited Newman's hymn, *Lead, Kindly Light*, as a spiritual anthem for those seeking divine guidance in a disoriented world. "Newman," the Pope said, "teaches us to walk by the light of conscience, not the glare of ideology, and to trust the slow, gentle radiance of divine truth." The declaration thus situates Newman among the greatest teachers of Christian wisdom - alongside Augustine, Aquinas, Teresa of Ávila, and Thérèse of Lisieux - whose writings transcend time and culture.

Significance and Impact of Newman's Doctorate

The Church's recognition of Newman as Doctor carries profound theological and pastoral implications. It affirms the compatibility of faith and reason, a relationship central to Catholic identity. In a world marked by scientific advancement but moral confusion, Newman's thought bridges the gap between belief and intellect. His writings remind the Church that truth is not opposed to modernity but can purify and elevate it. For theologians, Newman provides a model of honest inquiry rooted in faith. His courage to question and his obedience to revealed truth make him a patron for contemporary theology and dialogue. For educators, he offers a vision of



learning grounded in wisdom and integrity. For the laity, he stands as a guide to living faith authentically amid the complexities of conscience and culture. The declaration also carries ecumenical significance. Newman's Anglican background and his respectful dialogue with Protestant traditions demonstrate that conversion need not erase one's past but transfigure it. His life invites both Catholics and Anglicans to rediscover the unity of truth and the charity that overcomes division. Pope Leo XIV emphasized this dimension, saying, "Newman belongs not only to Catholics but to all Christians who seek the light of Christ with sincerity of heart."

A Doctor for Our Times

The elevation of Cardinal

Newman comes at a moment when the Church faces unprecedented cultural and moral challenges. His message of interior conversion, integrity of conscience, and integration of knowledge and holiness offers a path forward. He shows that Christian faith need not retreat before the questions of modernity but can enter them with confidence and grace. Newman's canonization by Pope Francis in 2019 affirmed his sanctity; his new title as Doctor of the Church secures his place among the Church's greatest thinkers and teachers. Yet his influence will be measured not merely by scholarly citation but by how deeply his vision shapes the Church's engagement with the world. As the Church journeys through the 21st century, Newman's prayer remains ever relevant: "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, lead Thou me on." His voice continues to call believers to walk by the gentle light of truth, confident that the God of conscience will never fail those who seek Him sincerely.

Conclusion

The declaration of St. John Henry Newman as Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV is a celebration of intellect illuminated by faith and conscience purified by grace. Newman's life bridges past and future, reason and revelation, the academy and the altar. His thought equips the Church to engage the modern world not with fear but with the calm conviction that truth and love ultimately prevail. In honoring Newman, the Church honors the vocation of every believer to think deeply, live faithfully, and allow the "kindly light" of Christ to guide the journey from darkness to glory - heart speaking to heart, in the language of truth.

COMP

DILEXI TE – “I HAVE LOVED YOU”

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONSECRATED RELIGIOUS



Sr Inigo SSAM

Echoing Pope Francis's vision of “a Church that is poor and for the poor,” Pope Leo illustrates the Christological centrality of the Church's preferential option for the poor.

Introduction

A story from Greek tradition tells of a king who, after death, begged God to see Heaven. God granted his request. The king entered and walked around, but within an hour, he came back to God. “Please send me out of heaven,” he pleaded. “I can't live here.” God asked him why. The king explained, “Like everyone else, I entered Heaven. I saw many fruit-bearing trees close to me, but I was unable to pluck their fruit. Water flowed close to my feet, yet my feet could not feel it. Why?” God replied, “O King, you cannot have that beautiful experience immediately. In your lifetime, how many times did you stretch out your hands to help the poor? Only based on those actions can you now stretch out your hands to pluck the fruit. To what extent did you experience the sufferings of others and show your solidarity? Only then can your feet touch the water flowing beside you. For whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me. If you did nothing for them, you did nothing for me.” This story captures the essence of Christian love and judgment - it is not measured by wealth or power, but by how deeply we have loved and served others. St. Avila Theresa says, “Your entrance into Heaven depends upon what you do for others.” The last judgment, as depicted in the questions, “I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat... I was in prison, and you did not visit me,” is based entirely on our love for our neighbor.

Response to the Cry of the Poor

Our vocation as Christians and religious is to ensure that no one stands on God's left by removing hunger, poverty, and misery through acts of mercy. True faith demands compassion and love in action: “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 Jn 3:18). This same spirit lies at the heart of Pope Leo's Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi Te*. It calls us to rediscover love in action - to see service to the poor not as mere charity, but as the truest expression of God's love made visible in the world. The exhortation consists of five chapters, emphasizing that holiness is expressed through compassion for the poor and that faith and justice must walk hand in hand.



To Love God = To Love the Poor

This is the heartbeat of *Dilexi Te*. Drawing from the Gospel story of the woman who anoints Jesus with costly oil (Mt 26:8–11), Pope Leo reminds us that genuine love for God manifests as love for the poor. For Pope Leo, love for the poor is not optional, nor is it only for those involved in social work. If we love God, then we must love the poor, because that is where Jesus is found! He urges us not to turn away from poverty that is growing - even in wealthy nations - and warns against indifference. Poverty, he says, takes many forms. While material poverty is real, painful, and shameful, the Pope also reminds us of social, moral, and spiritual poverty. We need to wake up and feel the suffering of people in all its forms. He calls attention to the “double poverty” faced by women, who often suffer systemic inequality and exclusion, and exhorts the faithful to revisit the Gospel as

the foundation of social action.

God Chooses the Poor

The Holy Father reflects on how God’s heart has always favored the poor. This does not mean others are insignificant. It is like parents showing more attention to a weak and sick child than to their other children who are healthy and strong. Jesus Himself lived among the poor - born in simplicity, raised as a carpenter’s son, and proclaiming, “Blessed are you who are poor” (Lk 6:20). The Holy Father presents the Church’s response to migrants. The experience of migration accompanies the history of the people of God. The Church cannot speak credibly about the Gospel while ignoring the plight of migrants and refugees, for they are the face of Jesus. In this, Pope Leo sounds very close to Pope Francis. Pope Leo cites biblical examples - Abraham, Moses, the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt, and Christ Himself coming down to live among us.

He makes it clear that welcoming migrants is a crucial part of the Church’s mission, stating that, “The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are on the move. Where the world sees threats, the Church sees children. Where walls are built, she builds bridges.”

A Church for the Poor

Echoing Pope Francis’s vision of “a Church that is poor and for the poor,” Pope Leo illustrates the Christological centrality of the Church’s preferential option for the poor. He also shines a light on over two millennia of faith lived through service: From the deacon Lawrence, who, when challenged by Roman authorities to bring forth the treasures of the Church, presented the poor of the city and declared, “Here, these poor are the treasures of the Church,” to the Franciscans, Dominicans, and women’s congregations serving the sick and abandoned. By highlighting the vision of founders of

religious congregations and their amazing work in service of the poor, marginalized, excluded, and exploited, Pope Leo seems to ask women and men religious a pertinent question: “Are we doing enough for the poor today?” One does not have to look far to answer honestly, “No, we have not!” In this chapter, he also speaks about the examples of care for the sick in the lives of so many saints, as well as care for the poor in monastic life.

A History that Continues

Pope Leo traces the Church’s social teaching from Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* to Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* and Fratelli Tutti, reaffirming the Church’s preferential option for the poor. He draws inspiration from the Latin American Bishops’ Conferences and the witness of St. Oscar Romero, calling inequality the root of social evil. True love, he writes, “is contemplative - it sees beauty beyond appearance and accompanies the poor in their liberation.” Finally, in this section, he quotes the Aparecida document: “The stark difference between the rich and poor invites us to work with greater commitment to being disciples capable of sharing at a table that is open and inclusive, from which no one is excluded. We therefore reaffirm our preferential and evangelical option for the poor.” Let us examine our lives! Are we busy just organizing online and offline webinars and seminars, merely discussing the poor in our chapters, and just praying for them in our chapels, instead of actually getting involved in making creative plans for their upliftment?

A Constant Challenge

In conclusion, Pope Leo asserts that the poor are not a problem to solve but members of our

The stark difference between the rich and poor invites us to work with greater commitment to being disciples capable of sharing at a table that is open and inclusive, from which no one is excluded. We therefore reaffirm our preferential and evangelical option for the poor.

family. Quoting the Aparecida document, he calls Christians to spend real time with the poor - listening, walking with them, and transforming situations from within. The parable of the Good Samaritan serves as a call to reject indifference and to “go and do likewise.” Consecrated life, he notes, must be prophetic - marked by simplicity, courage, and solidarity. Religious communities should not retreat from the margins but stand firmly with the excluded. Pope Leo reminds us that real wisdom often comes from those we rarely listen to - the laity, the poor, etc. These voices are not optional; they challenge the Church to remain truthful to the Jesus of the

Gospels - the Jesus of Nazareth. Pope Leo says the Church’s social teaching has always been shaped not just by theologians or beautiful writings, but by those who live at the periphery of our society - the laity, the poor, and by the religious who live and work among the wounded. I found this message incredibly challenging! How often do we listen to them in our parishes and institutions or include them in our discernment and decision-making?

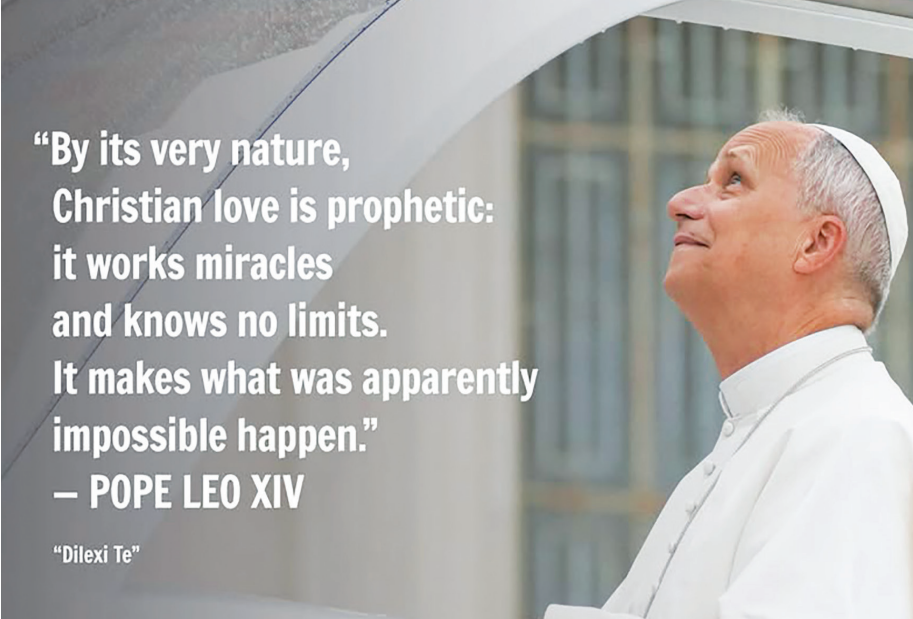
Implications for Consecrated Religious: A Call to Renewal

Dilexi Te holds special significance for consecrated men and women. It comes at a time when outreach to the poor faces challenges. No congregation was founded for the well-off, nor was any founded with a bank balance. The founders were God-experienced persons who heard the cry of God through the cry of the poor. Just as Yahweh heard the cry of the Israelites and came down to liberate them from slavery, the founders were disturbed by the realities of their times and localities and responded to the crisis with creativity and courage. Our predecessors started institutions with the intention of continuing their founders’ original charism and mission in various places. As consecrated religious, we are invited to learn several crucial lessons: Simplicity and Prophetic Witness: Consecrated life is, by its very nature, prophetic. It calls us to live visibly among the poor in solidarity, resisting materialism, consumerism, and also ‘me-ism’. When large sums are spent on dinners, decorations, and flower arrangements without tangible effects, shouldn’t we review some of our jubilees and solemn celebrations? Is our worship divorced from life? The poor cry out to us today. As reli-

gious, do we have the prophetic courage to respond to them proactively and accompany them in their struggle for a more just, humane, and hope-filled world?

Recognizing Christ: We are called to recognize the suffering Christ in the wounded faces of the poor, making our service to them not merely a humanitarian act but a fundamental way of encountering Jesus Himself. Integrating Faith and Works: "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17). Our prayer life must be integrated with concrete action through our various ministries. Pope Leo resonates what Pope Francis had already said: "A prayer that does not lead to practical action for your brother or sister - the poor, a person in difficulty - is a sterile and incomplete prayer." If the poor beggar doesn't move our hearts, then the prayers inside never will. Empowering the Marginalized: Our mission is to empower the weaker and underprivileged through integral development, not just academic education, but by uplifting them through innovative and creative ways. Instead of solely strengthening our institutions and alienating ourselves by building walls, we must empower others. Pope Leo anticipates those who might say, "It's complicated" or "we need more time." But he does not leave room for delay. Justice postponed is justice denied. The time to act is now! We must start today!

The Poor as Our Evangelizers: We usually think we are serving the poor and that they are the receivers. Pope Leo flips that idea: the poor teach us patience, resilience, hope, and trust in God - lessons we cannot learn anywhere else. In fact, we are the receivers, and they are our benefactors. We need to allow ourselves to be evangelized by their experi-



**"By its very nature,
Christian love is prophetic:
it works miracles
and knows no limits.
It makes what was apparently
impossible happen."
— POPE LEO XIV**

"Dilexi Te"

ences. Oases of Hospitality: Religious communities are called to be oases of dignity and hospitality, where no one is excluded. Like a mother, we are called to welcome, protect, and integrate migrants, refugees, the sick, and the uneducated. We must place them at the very heart of our life and mission, ensuring our charism translates into tangible gestures of love and justice. We need not go far away in search of the poor. In our own campus and in our own institutions, are we going to make them part of our planning? Are we going to accept their suggestions and feedback by listening to them?

Conclusion

Dilexi Te is not merely a document - it is a mandate for transformation. It is a rich Apostolic Exhortation that offers an overview of everything the Church has done, continues to do, and should continue to do with and for the world's poorest. It speaks forcefully to the Church today at a time when many are excluded and marginalized. Truly, this is a document to be read, meditated on, and studied, but above all, to be put into practice. It calls consecrated life to rediscover the radical Gospel path: to walk with the poor, listen to their stories, and allow their lives to evangelize

us. It is an invitation to recommit ourselves as consecrated men and women. As Paul says in Philippians 2:4, "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." And in verse 5, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Acts 4:34 exhorts us: "There was not a needy person among them." Unless we reduce our needs, which are often merely wants, how can we share with the needy? Today, as our own comforts and demands multiply, our service risks becoming service to oneself. If we plan in our communities to put screens on all our doors and windows, how can we think of giving clothes to the poor? "It is not a sin to be rich," Pope Leo reminds us, "but woe to us if we do not share." Dilexi Te leaves us with a stirring challenge - to let love become active, courageous, and transformative, so that every encounter with the poor becomes an encounter with Christ Himself. This is not an option but an obligation and a necessity. Our service is admired by everyone. But when we serve and uplift the poor and marginalized and stand for justice on their behalf, we are sometimes accused of proselytism. Let us be prophets in doing good and face the consequences courageously.

COMP

HOLINESS WITHOUT HALOS: WISDOM OF GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE



**Sr Vijaya Vinitha
Pinto BS, LCL**

**All the faithful,
whatever their
condition or
state, are called
by the Lord,
each in his or
her own way to
perfect holiness.**

Introduction

When was the last time we paused to ask ourselves, ‘Am I holy?’ Or when did we last hear someone remind us that every person is called to holiness? Perhaps it was during an All-Saints’ Day homily or a quiet moment on a retreat. Yet as soon as we step outside those sacred spaces and rush to work, manage responsibilities, fight distractions, or navigate the digital world, such noble thoughts often fade into the noise and demands of everyday life. We tend to split life into two parts: the ‘holy’ world of prayer, and the ‘ordinary’ world where we work and struggle. In a divided mindset, we may begin to question whether holiness can truly coexist with our imperfections, anxieties, and limitations. In a world marked by conflict, consumerism, political noise, and endless digital distractions, the word ‘holiness’ can sound outdated or even unrealistic. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad), insists, “Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church” (GE 9). He re-proposes the call to holiness as something practical, deeply human, and entirely possible within the risks, demands, and opportunities of modern life.

Are we holy?

A woman steps out to shop, then she meets a neighbour, and gossip begins to surface, yet she chooses silence over scandal; though tired, she sits and listens patiently to her children who want her attention; she prays the rosary with faith while battling anxiety; she pauses on the street to offer a kind word to a poor person. Is she holy? Pope Francis says, yes, these are small steps forward in holiness. He calls such gestures ‘middle class of holiness,’ the ordinary, hidden, almost unnoticed faithfulness of everyday life. Holiness is woven into the choices of ordinary people who consistently choose love over indifference, patience over irritation, prayer over distraction, and mercy over judgment. It shines in parents who nurture their children with tireless love, in men and women who labour generously for their families, in the sick who endure suffering with grace, and in religious whose radiant smiles never fade in their communities. In their steady perseverance shines forth the beauty of lived faith. These are the

hidden saints among us. God's presence is revealed not only in extraordinary miracles but in the ordinary love of neighbours, friends, and families.

The Call to Holiness

To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest, or a religious, nor does it necessitate withdrawing from ordinary affairs of life to spend much time in prayer. This call to holiness is rooted in God's own words, "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:16). The Second Vatican Council document, *Lumen Gentium* beautifully affirms, "All the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his or her own way to perfect holiness." Consecrated persons pursue holiness by joyful fidelity to their vows, as witnessed in St Teresa of Calcutta, whose humble service

radiated Christ's compassion. Married couples embody holiness by loving each other as Christ loves the Church, as in the faith-filled home of Saints Louis and Zélie Martin. Workers live holiness by labouring with honesty and generosity, inspired by Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, the farmer and layman who upheld his conscience with quiet heroism. Leaders reflect holiness by seeking the common good, following the example of St Óscar Romero, who stood for truth with courage and integrity in the face of injustice. Young people can strive for holiness as St Carlo Acutis demonstrated through his love for the Eucharist and his creative use of technology for evangelisation. Thus, holiness is diverse, personal, and rooted in the daily fidelity of ordinary life. It prompts us to ask, what might holiness look like in my home,

workplace and relationships?

Signs of Holiness in Today's World

Perseverance: Perseverance means remaining steady in love and faith even when life grows restless or difficult. It is the courage to keep doing good despite fear, discouragement, or fatigue. True perseverance is born of prayer. In moments of anger or anxiety, prayer anchors us in peace, reminding us that God holds our lives and fills our hearts with serenity.

Patience

Patience is the quiet battle against self-centeredness and anger. It is a refusal to let anger dictate our words or actions, and choosing understanding over impulsive reactions. In an age where social media amplifies judgment and misinformation, patience be-



comes a form of holiness. It calls us to respond with kindness even when provoked, becoming living witnesses to God's steady love in a world susceptible to outrage.

Meekness

Meekness is gentle strength and free of self-importance. Authentic humility often grows through the acceptance of humiliations such as misunderstandings, unfair treatment, or being overlooked, as Christ did. Meekness is not passivity or silence in the face of injustice. Rather, it is the ability to speak truth with gentleness, without anger, pride, or resentment. This humility brings a deep peace that the world cannot give.

Enemies of Holiness

Contemporary Gnosticism
Pope Francis warns that two ancient heresies continue to resurface: Gnosticism and Pelagianism. Gnosticism is the reduction of faith to ideas rather than encounter. It is a false way of living faith. It reduces faith to an intellectual exercise. The gnostic mindset believes holiness is achieved by knowing more, mastering theories, or holding pure concepts, but it forgets the heart of the Gospel. Gnostics treat the Gospel as a set of concepts instead of a living encounter with Christ. It creates a "God without Christ, a Christ without the Church, and a Church without her people." In such a framework, wonder, surprise, and grace slowly disappear.

Contemporary Pelagianism

Pelagianism relies on human strength rather than grace. It believes that we can earn holiness through discipline, perfectionism, or strict adherence to rules. While diligence is good, the danger is that it forgets to see God's grace. Some may speak of grace, yet secretly rely on their own strength, becoming rigid, judgmental, or



spiritually self-sufficient. This mindset drains the joy and turns the Church into what Pope Francis calls 'a museum piece.' True holiness grows from humility, surrender, and trust. Grace transforms us gradually, tenderly, not by force, never overnight.

Conclusion

Not long ago, I overheard two elderly nuns in their late seventies speaking softly to one another. One whispered, "Our time is not yet over. We still have to go on." The other nodded and replied, "Yes, we still have opportunities to become saints." Their simple exchange captures the very heart of Christian hope. Holiness is not the accomplishment of the young, the strong, or the extraordinary. It is the lifelong journey of anyone who desires God. As long as God grants breath, He grants opportunities for transformation. In a world unsettled by conflict, distraction, and uncertainty, holiness becomes

the quiet courage to choose love over indifference, mercy over judgment, faith over fear. Pope Francis beautifully encourages saying, "Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality, or joy" (GE 32). Therefore, holiness is not an impossible task but a humble openness to God's transforming grace. It unfolds in the fidelity of ordinary life, such as the tasks we perform, the relationships we nurture, and hidden moments known only to God. Holiness is less about shining halos and more about faithful hearts. It is not an escape from the world's brokenness but a hopeful way of entering it, trusting that God continues to shape us patiently and tenderly through every season. And, so we must ask: What does it truly mean to be holy today? Can holiness coexist with our wounds and vulnerabilities? Perhaps the answer is closer than we think...maybe holiness is already beginning... here, now, within us.



INSIGHTS FROM THE DOCTRINAL NOTE

MATER POPULI FIDELIS ON MARIAN TITLES



**Rev Dr Merlin
Rengith Ambrose**

The shortest route to Christ runs straight through Mary! As St. Louis de Montfort assures us, honouring the Blessed Mother is done "simply and solely to honour Jesus all the more perfectly."

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), on 4 November 2025, published a Doctrinal Note *Mater populi fidelis* ("The Mother of the Faithful People"), on Some Marian Titles regarding Mary's Cooperation in the Work of Salvation." The Note fundamentally reaffirms Catholic doctrine, which has consistently underscored that all aspects of Mary's identity and role are oriented towards the centrality of Christ and the salvific work He accomplishes. This document serves as a response to numerous inquiries, particularly concerning the proposed Fifth Marian Dogma, which encompasses Mary's Spiritual Maternity alongside the designations of Co-redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate. To begin with, it is essential to clarify that this Doctrinal Note focuses on titles rather than doctrine itself. Its purpose is not to alter any doctrine but to address the use of specific titles to enhance the clarity of the Church's teachings.

Regarding the title "Co-Redemptrix", the Note concludes: "It is always inappropriate to use the title 'Co-redemptrix' to define Mary's cooperation. This title risks obscuring Christ's unique salvific mediation and can therefore create confusion and an imbalance in the harmony of the Christian faith". When an expression necessitates extensive elaboration to maintain its intended meaning, it may ultimately detract from the faith of the People of God and prove to be counterproductive. Consequently, the Church affirms that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer, with the role of Mother Mary being both significant and profound, yet ultimately subordinate and contingent upon Him. While Blessed Mother Mary played a cooperative role in the economy of salvation, her participation was never autonomous or parallel. The Note recalls Saint Paul's words: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The takeaway is that the true theology remains unchanged, that is, Mary's unique participation as the one who said "Fiat" to the Annunciation, who suffered alongside her Son at the foot of the cross as a mother, and who is given to us as the Mother of the Church. Yet at this time, the DDF deems it "unhelpful" to use the title "Co-redemptrix."

On the title, "Mediatrix", the Note also emphasises that "the

biblical statement about Christ's exclusive mediation is conclusive. Christ is the only Mediator". The Note acknowledges that "mediation" is often understood in everyday life as cooperation, assistance, or intercession. Consequently, the term would inevitably be applied to Mary in a "subordinate" sense. This text emphasises that Mary plays a unique role in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, as she was the one through whom the Redeemer was born (Gal 4:4). However, it clarifies that her role does not add to the efficacy of Jesus' mediation, as there is no mediation in grace apart from that of the incarnate Son of God. Therefore, the title "Mediatrice" is acceptable only if understood in a participatory and subordinate sense (she intercedes, accompanies, and cooperates, but does not add effectiveness to Jesus' salvific action).

The document states that the title "Mediatrice" can be used with caution, provided it is made clear that Mary's role in mediation is not parallel to that of Christ, but rather subordinate and participatory. Mary's mediation should not be viewed as a secondary option to Christ's; instead, to put it simply, her role is to guide us to Him, who is the true Mediator.

According to the note, the title of "Mediatrice of All Graces" risks "presenting Mother Mary as the one who distributes spiritual goods or energies apart from our personal relationship with Jesus Christ." The DDF concluded that "some titles, such as 'Mediatrice of All Graces,' have limits that do not favour a correct understanding of Mary's unique place." "She is the mother who gave the world the author of redemption and of grace, who stood firm at the foot of the cross (cf. John 19:25), suffering alongside her son and offering the pain of her maternal heart



pierced by the sword (cf. Luke 2:35)," the document said.

The note suggests that the term "Mother of Grace" or "Mother in the order of Grace" can be understood as Mary's maternal support throughout our lives, highlighting her greater presence in the daily lives of the faithful compared to other saints. Consequently, she should not be perceived as a parallel channel of grace alongside Christ; rather, she functions as the mother who directs her children towards the divine. In this role, she fosters within them a receptivity to grace that can only originate from God. The doctrinal Note advocates the use of established titles like "Mother of God," "Mother of the Church," and "Mother of the Faithful People," which are seen as expressing Mary's maternal and intercessory role in a balanced way.

While praising devotion to Mary, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith firmly rejected moves to formally proclaim Mary as "co-redemptrix" or "co-mediatrice." Mary's mediation should be understood not as a complement that enhances God's work, but in

a way that affirms that "it neither takes away from nor adds to the dignity and efficacy of Christ, the one Mediator." The Dicastery explains that Mary's maternal cooperation is "singular and pre-eminent," yet distinct from the redemptive act accomplished by her Son alone. Her role, the note says, is to "lead the faithful to Christ" rather than to "share directly in His saving action."

The shortest route to Christ runs straight through Mary! As St. Louis de Montfort assures us, honouring the Blessed Mother is done "simply and solely to honour Jesus all the more perfectly." This is the sublime secret: Ad Jesum Per Mariam - Through Mary to Jesus. And remember the liberating wisdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe: "Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did." May our love for our Blessed Mother Mary increase!

Rev Dr Merlin Rengith Ambrose, a priest from the diocese of Kottar, is a professor of Canon Law at St Peter's Pontifical Institute and the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Canon Law in the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI).

WILL YOU PUT YOUR HOPE IN TECHNOLOGY OR IN GOD?



Don Aguiar

Transhumanism places its hope in science and technology, promising freedom from suffering, longer life, and human enhancement - a kind of new gospel of progress. Christianity, instead, points to God's grace: eternal life, the redemption of suffering, and the perfection of our humanity in Christ.

Disneyland recently revealed that it was going to unveil an animatronic version of Walt Disney. This robotic version of Disney was going to show the world what he was like by mimicking his words and actions when he was alive. But his granddaughter Joanna Miller rejected the idea, saying, "You could never get the casualness of his talking, interacting with the camera, (or) his excitement to show and tell people about what is new at the park. You cannot add life to one empty of a soul or essence of the man."

This is the coming age of transhumanism, of trying to give eternal life to mere mortals. Transhumanism, though the culmination of a materialist quest, increasingly sounds more like a religion where artificial intelligence (AI) represents the way by which humans will reach ultimate perfection. Pope Francis warned against such a false hope in this cornerstone of transhumanism: By turning to AI as a perceived 'Other' greater than itself, with which to share existence and responsibilities, humanity risks creating a substitute for God. However, it is not AI that is ultimately deified and worshipped, but humanity itself - which, in this way, becomes enslaved to its own work. (*Antiqua et Nova* 105). At this point it's time to look at some of the major tenets of transhumanism and compare them to Christianity, so as not to get confused by the mirage of humanity being saved by technology. I found five major points where the two diverge.

First, transhumanism seeks to extend life indefinitely. Although the means to do this have not been expressly accomplished, this is the goal and the hope. However, this hope is based on the merging of technology and humanity. According to Ray Kurzweil's vision of transhumanism, "We would transfer or 'resurrect' our minds onto supercomputers, allowing us to live forever. Our bodies would become incorruptible, immune to disease and decay..." For Christianity, the way we attain eternal life is based on cooperating with God's grace - not technology. In short, transhumanism attempts to extend one's human earthly existence, whereas Christianity aims to extend one's spiritual existence. Let's imagine scientists do find the means to extend life indefinitely. Do you think that exten-



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sion will be available to ordinary citizens, or perhaps to the highest bidder? For Christianity, on the other hand, eternal life is open to all mankind regardless of economic status. Both Christianity and transhumanism appeal to the virtue of hope; the question is in whom are you going to put your hope, Jesus Christ or the transhumanists?

Second, transhumanism seeks bodily and cognitive enhancement by means of technology. Biological enhancement has already happened by means of hearing aids, pacemakers, hip replacements, and ear devices, which are all physical repairs in our bodies. Transhumanism hopes to bring this to a new level by enhancing our very thoughts by means of AI. The comments of Elon Musk demonstrate this when he says that “the long term aspiration with Neuralink would be to achieve a symbiosis with artificial intel-

ligence.”

Christianity, on the other hand, states that humans are blessed with free will and a conscience, “the ‘inner voice’ where a person discerns right and wrong in light of reason and God’s law” (CCC 1776). Free will can only operate without undue coercion by an external force. Having AI connected to the mind and feeding it ideas would be the ultimate external force. As Ryan Bilodeau writes in *Crisis Magazine*, “The Church has long defended the rights of individuals to make moral decisions free from external coercion, and Neuralink’s potential to influence human thought could represent a profound threat to this freedom.”

Third, transhumanism seeks to redesign human nature and change the nature of the human being. Scientific advancements could eventually reach the point where genes can be edited,

either to eliminate disease or to enhance traits such as hair and eye colour, muscle strength, or intelligence. We could soon enter a new age of eugenics where genes are decided before an embryo begins the natural growing process. These genetic changes could potentially reshape the human species over generations. Christianity is opposed to altering human nature at the genetic level and considers that toying with God’s creation. Instead, creation is considered a gift that is to be appreciated and respected as God’s handiwork. Embryos are not a product to be manipulated according to likes and dislikes, but fundamentally a human being who has a right to be accepted as is. In transhumanism, embryos can be envisioned to be good or bad according to their traits such as hair or eye colour. What difference is there between that and the past, where some humans

were considered non-human because of their race or ethnicity? It's a new form of the same old racism and eugenics.

Fourth, transhumanism and Christianity differ greatly in their understanding of consciousness. Transhumanism identifies consciousness as a mere movement of neurons, or the passage of information from one neuron to another – that is, only chemical and physical interactions. Since consciousness is a matter of data transfer, at some point a scientist could be able to transfer consciousness from an individual to a robot, a phenomenon called “mind uploading.” But Christianity sees consciousness as a proper characteristic of the soul which God created as a unique individual, and thus unable to be transferred to another entity. The soul is what gives life, unity, and identity to the body, without which there is only a corpse. Aristotle calls the soul the “form of the body,” and it contains the powers of intellect and free will, which transcend the materiality of the body. Consciousness, reason, and moral decision-making originate in the soul and are communicated by means of the body.

Finally, transhumanism pretends to eliminate suffering altogether by means of technology. David Pearce, a prominent transhumanist, puts it this way: How can we fix the problem of suffering? How can we design a new architecture of mind with a civilized signalling system: life animated entirely by gradients of bliss? How can we extend a bio happiness revolution to the rest of the living world? How can we create a transhumanist ‘triple S’ civilization of superintelligence, super longevity and super happiness

for all sentient beings? Christianity is not opposed to healing measures, but it offers to give meaning to suffering as a means to save souls and unite closely with the Suffering Servant. “Each man, in his sufferings, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.” (Salvifici Doloris §19) Look at all the scientific advancements of the 20th century – they have not solved the problem of human conflict. Wars are raging over territory as I write this article. Technology does not improve human relations per se – only living a life of virtue and charity can do that. The Church states in *Antiqua et Nova*, “AI, like any technology, can be part of a conscious and responsible answer to humanity’s vocation to the good. However, AI must be directed by human intelligence to align with this vocation, ensuring it respects the

dignity of the human person.”

In conclusion, transhumanism and Christianity both recognize that we are not satisfied with our limits and long for something greater. But they differ profoundly in how that longing is fulfilled. Transhumanism places its hope in science and technology, promising freedom from suffering, longer life, and human enhancement — a kind of new gospel of progress. Christianity, instead, points to God’s grace: eternal life, the redemption of suffering, and the perfection of our humanity in Christ. In the end, the question is simple yet decisive: will our hope rest in machines of our own making, or in the God who made us for life without end? Put another way, the choice is not between progress and faith, but between a false eternity crafted by man and the true eternity offered by God.

COMP



CONSEQUENCES, IMPACTS, SYMPTOMS, AND COPING STRATEGIES



**Fr Sahayam
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Recent studies reported that the country ranks third globally in pornography consumption, a statistic that raises serious moral, psychological, and social concerns.

Recent studies have revealed India's concerning position among the leading nations in pornography consumption. The Times of India (2018) reported that the country ranks third globally in this regard, a statistic that raises serious moral, psychological, and social concerns. In his address to priests and seminarians on October 26, 2022, Pope Francis warned that pornography inflicts profound harm on both viewers and participants by weakening the human spirit and undermining the priestly vocation. This issue also carries direct implications for pastoral ministry, as priests and church leaders frequently encounter its effects in their communities. Understanding these consequences enables them to provide more targeted guidance and spiritual support to individuals and families grappling with the moral and emotional challenges associated with pornography.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Article 2354), pornography "consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners to display them deliberately to third parties," and it constitutes an offense against chastity. The word pornography originates from the Greek *porne* ("prostitute") and *graphein* ("to write"), originally referring to writings about prostitution. In modern usage, the term encompasses a range of written, visual, and audio-visual materials that depict sexual activity primarily intended to stimulate sexual desire.

Regular exposure to explicit material can lead to significant behavioural and emotional changes, often developing into compulsive or addictive patterns similar to substance dependence. Once internalized, these images remain deeply rooted in the brain's emotional memory center, the amygdala. Pornography distorts one's perception of self and others, diminishing the recognition of divine dignity within the human person. It draws individuals into an illusory world that fuels emotional intensity and fantasy, leading to addiction and a desensitization to natural and healthy expressions of intimacy.

Cybersex and Online Sexual Behaviour

Cybersex refers to consensual online sexual activity intended to achieve arousal or orgasm. This may involve downloading explicit material, exchanging sexual messages or stories, visit-

ing adult chat rooms, posting advertisements to find partners, or engaging in interactive sexual acts through digital platforms. Parappully (2006), in *Human Formation of Priests: Challenges in the Asian Context*, observed that the rapid expansion of Internet access has contributed to increased online pornographic behaviour, even among seminarians and priests. He noted that sexually oriented chat rooms attract numerous users, including members of the clergy, some of whom struggle with pornography addiction.

In India, the widespread availability of digital platforms combined with psychological and social factors such as loneliness, curiosity, stress, low self-esteem, and a lack of genuine happiness

has heightened the allure of pornography. This trend negatively influences both personal well-being and social relationships. From a neuropsychological standpoint, balanced brain functioning depends on appropriate levels of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin. These chemicals are naturally stimulated through prayer, loving relationships, creative activity, physical exercise, purposeful work, and acts of service. Engaging in spiritual practices not only supports the healthy release of these neurochemicals but also deepens communion with God, providing a more enduring and meaningful source of fulfilment. Without sufficient awareness, education, and

intervention, pornography will continue to present grave moral, psychological, and social challenges.

Negative Psychological and Social Effects of Pornography Wasted Time and Decline in Productivity

Excessive engagement with pornographic content consumes valuable time and disrupts academic, spiritual, and professional responsibilities. Prolonged exposure can lead to procrastination, diminished self-discipline, and reduced focus. Over time, individuals may withdraw from meaningful human connections, investing emotional energy in virtual experiences instead of real relationships.



Reduced Self-Esteem and Personal Worth

Constant exposure to pornographic imagery often results in lower self-esteem. Viewers may compare themselves with the exaggerated and unrealistic portrayals common in pornography, which fosters dissatisfaction with one's body, abilities, or relationships. These comparisons frequently lead to anxiety, self-doubt, and depression, culminating in social withdrawal and diminished motivation for personal or spiritual growth.

Emotional Instability and Difficulty Forming Attachments

Pornography disrupts emotional regulation, making it harder to build and maintain authentic relationships. It encourages a purely physical understanding of intimacy, neglecting emotional and spiritual dimensions. As empathy and tenderness decline, relationships become transactional rather than compassionate, weakening the foundation of genuine human connection.

Psychological Distress, Anxiety, and Shame

Pornography addiction often produces internal conflict, guilt, and emotional fatigue. The tension between moral conviction and compulsive behaviour creates ongoing psychological distress. Repeated failures to stop may lead to chronic anxiety, depressive symptoms, and even psychosomatic illness.

Confusion About Love and Intimacy

Constant exposure to pornography distorts one's understanding of love by equating intimacy with physical gratification rather than emotional or spiritual communion. As a result, relationships lose depth and become centered

on personal pleasure rather than mutual respect and affection. This confusion undermines emotional maturity and weakens the capacity for faithful, lasting commitment.

Coping Strategies for Overcoming Pornography Addiction Deepening One's Relationship with God

For priests and religious individuals, maintaining celibate integrity requires an ongoing and profound relationship with God. A life grounded in prayer and communion with Christ fulfils emotional and spiritual needs, reducing dependence on external or superficial attachments. Practices such as the daily recitation of the Rosary, Eucharistic Adoration, spiritual reading, retreats, and regular spiritual direction help sustain inner strength and openness to divine grace. As St. Paul reminds believers, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19); this truth underscores the sacredness of human sexuality and the call to purity of heart.

Seeking Professional Counselling

Professional therapy, particularly cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), has proven effective in treating pornography addiction. CBT helps individuals recognize how pornography reshapes neural circuits, how sexual imagery becomes ingrained, and how to interrupt addictive patterns. Through structured strategies, individuals learn to manage triggers, reframe thought processes, and develop healthy coping mechanisms.

Joining Support Groups and Engaging in Physical Activity

Participation in support

groups provides encouragement, accountability, and a sense of shared struggle. Physical exercise, meditation, and creative outlets such as art, music, or reading can redirect mental focus and foster emotional balance. Incorporating these healthy activities into daily life helps individuals replace harmful habits with restorative ones.

Conclusion

Individuals who struggle with pornography addiction should seek help early to facilitate timely treatment and foster a healthy, accountable, and porn-free environment. Many priests and religious leaders hesitate to address sexual struggles, which can lead to prolonged isolation and emotional distress. Establishing supportive community structures within seminaries, religious congregations, and dioceses can create safe spaces for honest dialogue and mutual support, reducing the stigma surrounding this issue. Encouraging transparency within these settings promotes healing, responsibility, and personal growth. Organizations such as Integrity Restored and Covenant Eyes provide valuable resources and practical tools for recovery. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness but of courage and maturity. Without proactive intervention, individuals risk remaining trapped in cycles of addiction that gradually erode personal integrity, spiritual vitality, and human flourishing.

Fr. Sahaya Roselin, MMI, of the Congregation of Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, is an award-winning psychologist honoured with the Brainwave Breakthrough Award and an honorary doctorate for his research contributions. He is currently pursuing advanced research studies at St. Joseph University, Chennai.

DR PAUL C VITZ: A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO FAITH, PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE HUMAN PERSON



**Shebin Joseph
Cheeramvelil**

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“Faith does not silence reason,” he writes, “it gives it something worth saying.” In the rediscovery of God, psychology rediscovers man; and in that rediscovery lies not only the future of psychology but the moral and spiritual renewal of our age.

In an age when psychology has become increasingly fragmented, technical, and morally indifferent, Dr. Paul Clayton Vitz (1935-) stands as one of the few modern thinkers who has re-anchored the science of the mind in a vision of the whole person—a being who is not merely biological or cognitive but spiritual, moral, and relational. Vitz’s intellectual pilgrimage, from atheism to Catholicism, symbolizes a larger movement in modern thought: the recovery of meaning in a culture that has lost its metaphysical centre. His philosophy challenges the reductionism that treats ‘man as an autonomous machine or self-determining will’ and instead proposes ‘an integrated anthropology’ in which freedom, reason, and faith are mutually illuminating.

For Vitz, the crisis in psychology is not primarily empirical but ontological. It concerns the question of what kind of being the human person is. When psychology abandons metaphysical and moral realism, it ceases to study the person and begins to study behaviour detached from being. “The problem with psychology today,” he wrote, “is not that it is unscientific but that it has become subhuman. It studies

man as if he were a rat with opinions.” His lifelong project has been to restore what he calls a “Christian anthropology of the person,” grounded in Thomistic realism, Augustinian interiority, and the Catholic vision of the person as ‘*imago Dei*’ - created for love and destined for communion. Through books such as *Psychology as Religion*, *Faith of the Fatherless*, and *A Catholic Christian Meta-Model of the Person*, Vitz builds a philosophical bridge between psychology and theology, showing that true self-knowledge begins in reverence before the mystery of being.

Paul C. Vitz was born in California in 1935, at the height of America’s post-war confidence in science. Educated at the University of Michigan and later earning a Ph.D. in Psychology from Stanford University (1962), he was formed intellectually by the reigning paradigms of behaviourism and humanistic psychology. At Stanford he studied under the influence of thinkers such as B. F. Skinner, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow, whose optimism about human perfectibility reflected the secular humanism of mid-twentieth-century America. Vitz later recalled, “In those years, I was an

atheist by default. The question of God simply did not arise; we assumed science had rendered Him irrelevant.”

As a young professor at New York University, Vitz immersed himself in experimental psychology and the study of personality theory. His early career was intellectually successful but spiritually barren. The more he analysed human motivation, the more he felt psychology had lost the capacity to speak about the meaning of existence, the moral drama of choice, and the mystery of suffering. The mechanistic view of the human mind, he realized, could predict behaviour but not explain the yearning for beauty or truth that animated it. “The more psychology explained man,” he later wrote, “the less it understood him.” This inner dissonance - between empirical success and metaphysical emptiness - became the philosophical tension that would drive his conversion. Vitz’s conversion to Catholicism in the 1970s was not a sudden emotional experience but the result of profound philosophical re-evaluation. He came to recognize that secular humanism, while promising liberation, had produced what he called



“the culture of orphaned souls.” Modern man, cut off from transcendence, had lost the capacity to answer the most basic question: Who am I? In his own words, “Atheism promises freedom but gives only loneliness. It removes God from the heavens and finds only the echo of one’s own voice.”

Theologically, Vitz encountered in the Catholic tradition a vision of the person that was both intellectually rigorous and spiritually complete. Philosophically, he discovered that reason itself points beyond itself: the order and intelligibility of the world presuppose a transcendent source of meaning. His conversion thus represented what he later called “the re-conversion of reason to truth.” He began to see that psychological health depends on moral order and that moral order in turn depends on metaphysical

realism - the conviction that good and evil, love and justice, are not social constructs but reflections of divine reality. Echoing Augustine, Vitz concluded that “the heart is restless because it seeks a home that only truth can give.” This realization transformed not only his faith but his understanding of psychology. The discipline, he argued, had become trapped in functional analysis - it described how behaviour worked but not ‘why’ it mattered. The task of psychology, therefore, was not merely to explain mechanisms but to recover meaning, moral purpose, and transcendence. As he wrote later, “The human soul is not a laboratory specimen but a moral drama unfolding before God.”

Following his conversion, Vitz re-oriented his vocation from technical research to the development of an integral psychology,

one that unites empirical science with philosophical and theological wisdom. He remained at New York University for over three decades, teaching personality theory, motivation, and the psychology of religion. In his classrooms, he became known for insisting that psychology must serve the moral life rather than replace it. “Science explains mechanisms,” he would tell students, “But theology reveals meaning; the person stands where both meet.” In his later years, Vitz joined the Institute for the Psychological Sciences (now Divine Mercy University), where he helped formulate a Catholic-Christian model of the person. This model views man not as an isolated self but as ‘an embodied soul,’ a relational being whose ‘freedom is fulfilled in love.’ For Vitz, therapy is never value-neutral. Every psychological theory presupposes a hidden anthropology - an implicit image of what it means to be human. His goal was to make that image explicit and truthful: the person as creature, moral agent, and pilgrim of grace. “To heal the mind,” he often said, “we must form the soul.”

Through decades of teaching and mentorship, Vitz inspired a new generation of psychologists, theologians, and philosophers to pursue a vision of science rooted in metaphysical realism and ordered toward the good of the person. The philosophical foundation of Vitz’s psychology is deeply personalist and realist. Drawing upon St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Jacques Maritain, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), he articulates a unified vision of man as a being created in the image of God, embodied in nature yet oriented toward transcendence. From Aquinas, he inherits the conviction that truth is objective and accessible to reason: “Reality is not a psychological projection; it is the gift

of Being itself.” From Augustine, he learns that the human heart is the meeting place of God and self: “The modern world looks outward for identity, but the soul is found in the silence within.” From Hildebrand and Maritain, he takes the insight that freedom is fulfilled not in self-assertion but in self-gift: “Freedom without love becomes the freedom to destroy.”

“Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship” (1977), written amid the rise of humanistic psychology, this book exposes what Vitz calls the “secular liturgy of the self.” Modern psychology, he argues, has become a surrogate religion that promises salvation through self-esteem and self-actualization. “The modern self seeks redemption in self-expression; it builds cathedrals of mirrors and calls them therapy.” Drawing on Augustinian and Thomistic thought, Vitz insists that genuine fulfillment arises not from self-exaltation but from ‘self-donation.’ The person finds wholeness in humility and love, not in narcissistic autonomy. Philosophically, the book anticipates later critiques of expressive individualism and moral relativism, showing that a culture that worships the self eventually loses the concept of virtue.

In “Sigmund Freud’s Christian Unconscious” (1988), Vitz performs an intellectual retrieval of Freud by uncovering the Christian moral residue that underlies his thought. Freud’s theories of guilt and repression, Vitz argues, implicitly acknowledge the moral order they seek to deny. “Freud exiled God from his theory, but he could not erase Him from his conscience.” The book re-establishes the connection between psychology and ethics, suggesting that even modern secularism carries within it an unacknowledged memory of transcendence. This insight deepens the philosophical understanding of culture: rebellion against

God paradoxically testifies to His presence in the moral imagination. An expanded and refined edition of “Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism” (2013), *Faith of the Fatherless* integrates research from developmental and attachment psychology to show that belief and unbelief are formed through relationships of trust. Vitz distinguishes between ‘defiant atheists,’ whose rejection of God arises from anger or trauma, and ‘indifferent atheists,’ who grow up in an environment of spiritual neglect. “The child who learns to trust a loving father,” he writes, “is being trained for faith without knowing it.” The book thus presents a philosophical anthropology of faith: belief is relational and moral, not merely cognitive. By tracing the biographical roots of disbelief in figures such as Nietzsche and Sartre, Vitz exposes the spiritual wounds of modernity and offers a healing vision in which love restores reason’s openness to truth.

“A Catholic Christian Meta-Model of the Person” (2019), the comprehensive synthesis, is the culmination of Vitz’s career. It articulates a systematic Catholic psychology grounded in classical metaphysics and empirical insight. The model presents the human person as created, embodied, relational, fallen, and redeemed, integrating biological, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions into a single teleological framework. “The person is not a puzzle to be solved,” Vitz writes, “but a mystery to be revered.” Against modern reductionism, he insists that psychology must acknowledge man’s final cause - union with the divine good. Therapy, therefore, becomes not merely clinical care but moral formation and spiritual accompaniment: “Mental health is not the absence of pain but the presence of purpose.”

Dr. Vitz’s influence extends

across psychology, philosophy, and theology. He has helped establish a Catholic integration of psychology and faith, shaping institutions such as Divine Mercy University and inspiring the Society of Catholic Psychologists. His work re-introduces virtue ethics and spiritual anthropology into clinical practice, encouraging psychologists to see their work as a vocation ordered toward healing the whole person. Vitz’s ideas have also profoundly affected Christian apologetics. By showing that atheism often stems from relational wounds rather than pure reason, he provides a compassionate framework for dialogue between belief and unbelief. In a society afflicted by identity confusion, loneliness, and mental-health crises, his insights are prophetic.

In the twenty-first century - marked by digital narcissism, relativism, and loss of meaning - Vitz’s call for an integral humanism remains urgent. His synthesis of science and faith reminds us of that psychology without God cannot understand man, and that the path to healing the mind passes through the restoration of the soul. Dr. Paul C. Vitz stands as a philosopher of integration and renewal, bridging the empirical and the transcendent, the scientific and the sacred. His life demonstrates that conversion is not the abandonment of reason but its perfection - an ascent from knowledge to wisdom. Through his scholarship, he has renewed psychology as a moral and spiritual science, reclaiming the dignity of the person as a being called to truth, love, and communion. “Faith does not silence reason,” he writes, “it gives it something worth saying.” In the rediscovery of God, psychology rediscovers man; and in that rediscovery lies not only the future of psychology but the moral and spiritual renewal of our age. “Psychology can describe the human heart,” concludes Vitz, “but only faith can heal it.”

COMP

FROM CAPTIVITY TO CALLING THE LEGACY OF PRISON MINISTRY INDIA

Fr Francis Kodiyan, MCBS



**By Santan
Nago, FS**

Introduction

From Captivity to Calling – The Legacy of Prison Ministry India is a moving and faith-filled chronicle of how God’s mercy reaches even the darkest corners of human existence. Across 244 pages and seven chapters, the book offers an inspiring account of the origin, spirituality, mission, and enduring witness of Prison Ministry India (PMI) - a movement that truly embodies Jesus’ mission “to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). From its humble beginnings to its national and international impact, the book traces how PMI has become a beacon of hope for thousands of prisoners and their families, bringing light into forgotten spaces of society. Each chapter reads like a testimony of divine compassion and human transformation.

Jesus’ Mission for the Lost

The opening chapter presents the origin and development of PMI as a Christ-centered response to the cry of the incarcerated. It portrays PMI as a movement born of prayer and compassion, rooted in the mission of Jesus to bring freedom to captives (Lk 4:18). Through its core values, rehabilitation centres, and milestones, the reader sees how PMI has grown into a national network that restores human dignity. “Bringing

light to darkness” becomes more than a phrase - it is the living mission of volunteers who carry Christ’s mercy into prison cells.

Rising on Wings of Prayer

The second chapter delves deeply into the spiritual foundation of PMI. It shows that the ministry draws its strength from prayer, repentance, and intercession. “Rising on wings of prayer” captures the mystical core of this mission. The Way of a Pilgrim and the Jesus Prayer are presented as tools of inner transformation for both prisoners and volunteers. This spirituality of brokenness and grace makes clear that prison ministry is not mere social service but a journey of sanctification - for those behind bars and those who serve them.

Lifestyle of Dialogue and Peace

The third chapter offers a glimpse into the PMI lifestyle - marked by dialogue, friendship, and reconciliation. The motto “Let my people go” expresses the liberating dimension of the ministry. Through touching experiences, including visits to the Foreigner Restriction Centre in Tumkur, this section highlights PMI as an olive branch of peace, bridging divisions and healing wounds. The ministry

appears as a lifegiving stream, where mercy flows freely and transforms hearts.

Witness of Hope

Perhaps the most compelling part of the book, this chapter presents extraordinary stories of redemption - individuals who met Christ in confinement and emerged renewed. From Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyen Văn Thuen, who found purpose in suffering, to Charles Colson, who moved from political power to prison evangelism; from Albin Matthew, who turned from crime to compassion, to Renny George, whose dramatic conversion still inspires thousands - each narrative is a testament to God’s boundless mercy. The inclusion of figures like Darren Tan, Arthur Booth, Blake Russell, Henri Pranzini and wolves in El Salvador become lambs, finding God behind bars, widens the canvas of redemption, showing that grace knows no borders. Every life here proclaims the Gospel truth that no one is beyond God’s reach.

Brethren Behind Bars

This chapter invites readers to see prisoners not as problems but as persons to be healed. With compassion and pastoral insight, it portrays their struggles and resilience - from the wrongly convicted Beniamino Zuncheddu

to habitual offenders and even those on death row. The conviction that “prisoners are our friends” echoes Christ’s words, “I was in prison and you visited me.” The reflections here challenge society to move from punishment to healing, and from judgment to mercy.

The Jubilee of Prisoners and Prayers that Transform

The sixth chapter celebrates PMI’s Jubilee of Prisoners, its All-India Prison Pilgrimage, and other significant milestones that renew the spirit of forgiveness. The Jubilee theme - liberation and renewal - echoes the biblical call to set captives free. This section also describes PMI’s psychological and spiritual support to prisoners and volunteers, along with practical guidelines such as the “Ten Commandments for Coordinators.” The inclusion of Schindler’s List as a story of redemption underlines the power of compassion to transform history. The final chapter is a treasury of prayer - ranging from the Jesus Prayer and David’s Prayer for Discernment to the distinctive Missile and Torpedo prayers used by volunteers. These devotions reveal the contemplative heart of PMI, reminding readers that prayer is not an escape but a battle fought in faith for souls in

bondage. Without prayer, there can be no transformation.

A Message of Redemption and Compassion

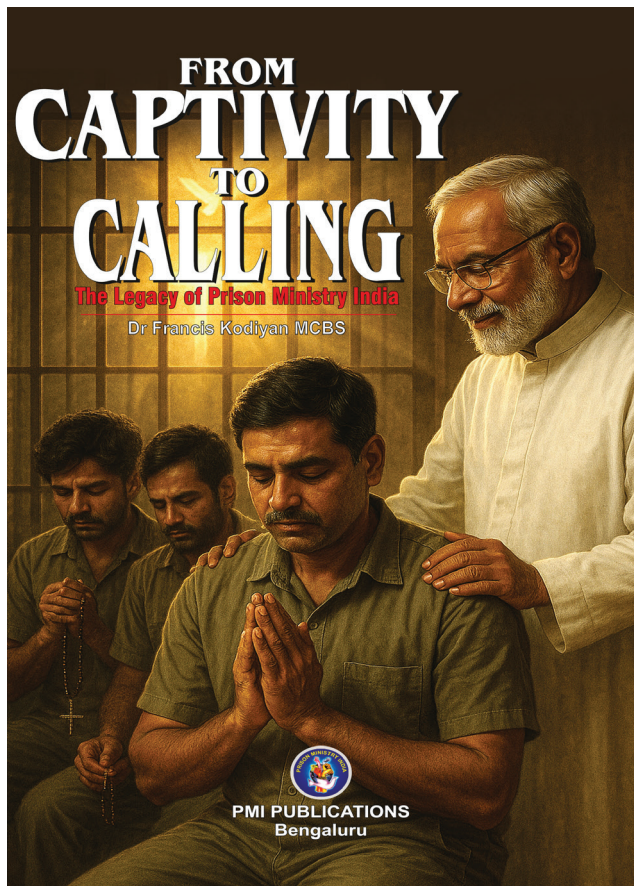
What makes ‘From Captivity to Calling’ so remarkable is that it weaves history, theology, and testimony with deep compassion. The messages from Bishop Jose Pulickal, Chairperson

India, whose vision and experience give depth and authenticity to every page. As a writer, Fr Francis possesses a rare flair for communicating through writing - his words flow with clarity, conviction, and compassion. With pastoral sensitivity and spiritual insight, he presents the many facets of PMI - its origin, spirituality, lifestyle, and mission - with both narrative warmth and theological precision. Through his writing, readers sense his lived experience among prisoners, volunteers, and the poor in spirit, making the work deeply personal and credible. This is not an institutional chronicle but a spiritual testimony of how love redeems, prayer transforms, and hope endures even in captivity. Each page echoes the Gospel truth that no sin is greater than God’s mercy and no prison wall can confine divine grace.

Conclusion

From Captivity to Calling stands as both a document of faith and a manual of compassion. It is essential reading for those engaged in pastoral care, evangelization, or service among the marginalized.

Through its stories, reflections, and prayers, the book invites readers to see Christ in every prisoner and to join the mission of setting hearts free. Indeed, as this book beautifully proclaims, the true measure of Christian discipleship is not in power or prestige, but in compassion that touches the lost, the least, and the last.



of PMI; Fr Simon Chiramel, MCBS, Provincial of MCBS Param Prasad Province; the foreword by Sr Amala, DC; and acknowledgments by Fr Francis add a pastoral warmth that reveals the unity of the Church in this mission of mercy. At the heart of the book stands Fr Francis Kodiyann, pioneer and co-founder of Prison Ministry



**Bibin
Ezhuplackal MCBS**

Overview & Plot

The story of conclave begins with the unexpected death of the Pope, after which Cardinal Thomas Lawrence (played by Ralph Fiennes) is tasked with overseeing the conclave - a gathering of cardinals from around the world locked in the Vatican until they elect his successor. Amid the ritual and ceremony, Lawrence discovers a secret left behind by the late Pope - one that could destabilise the Church's foundations. Within this high-stakes environment, we witness tensions between tradition and reform, faith and doubt, power and humility. The candidates include contrasting personalities: a staunch conservative, a liberal American, a moderate Canadian, and a forward-thinking African cardinal, among others.

Key Themes and Values

The film explores several interlocking themes such as tradition vs. modernity: The tension between those who cling to established rituals and hierarchies and those who push for a new vision of the Church is central; faith, doubt and conscience: Lawrence's internal conflict - his role as one of the most senior cardinals combined with his personal spiritual wrestling - reveals how faith can be both an anchor and a source of turmoil; power and politics: although set within the

auspices of the Church, the film frames the conclave's behind-closed-doors manoeuvrings much like a political election - ambition, strategy, alliances, leaks; humanity and institution: despite the grandeur of the setting, *Conclave* emphasizes the human dimension: personalities, flaws, pride, fear. The institution is large, but the people making decisions are very human.

Direction, Cast & Style

Edward Berger brings a disciplined visual style. His use of symmetry, framing, and the sequestered rooms of the conclave build a claustrophobic, tense atmosphere. Berger milks every last drop of tension and intrigue... the use of symmetry... is a potent indication of the stifling constraints and formality of this world. Ralph Fiennes in the lead role delivers what many critics call one of his strongest performances. The ensemble cast (including Stanley Tucci, John Lithgow, Lucian Msamati) is praised for giving weight to supporting roles, elevating the material. Production design and cinematography create a rich backdrop of ritual, marble halls, smokey corridors, the Sistine Chapel setting: all contributing to immersion. The score by Volker Bertelmann is bold and atmospheric, though some critics

argue it sometimes overwhelms the subtlety of the scene.

Criticisms & Weaknesses

Some critics argue the film becomes too pulpy, leaning into thriller tropes at the expense of depth: "a little too convinced of its own dramatic import." The final twist, in particular, divides viewers. One review says: "Ends with a truly goofy final twist that clarifies just how silly the material has been the entire time." Portrayal of the Church and its politics: Some feel characters are drawn too broadly (caricatures) or storylines oversimplify complex institutional issues. For example: "rival viewpoints ... are caricatured with a broad brush ... the deck is predictably stacked in favor of those who advocate change."

Recommendation

Conclave is a compelling film that delivers both smart entertainment and food for thought. If you enjoy tightly-wound dramas about power, institutional processes, faith, or secret worlds, this one hits many marks. The acting and production values are top-tier. At the same time, if you prefer more subtle, deeply nuanced explorations of faith or church life, the film may feel more stylised than profound in places.

COMP

CARLOS FILIPE XIMENES BELO: MISSIONARY OF PEACE AND THE VOICE OF EAST TIMOR



Sr Amala DC

Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo's life mirrors the luminous paradox of the Gospel: strength through meekness, victory through suffering, and justice through love.

Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, born on February 3, 1948, in Wailakama, Baucau, East Timor, stands as one of the most luminous witnesses of Christian faith and courage in modern times. A member of the Salesians of Don Bosco, he became the Apostolic Administrator of Dili at the height of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor. Through his words and witness, Bishop Belo embodied the Gospel call to reconciliation and peace, transforming the Church into a voice for a silenced people. His story is one of missionary endurance, prophetic courage, and unwavering faith in humanity's capacity for justice and forgiveness.

Christianity in East Timor: Faith in the Crucible of Suffering

To understand Bishop Belo's mission, one must first understand the deep Christian roots of East Timor. Portuguese missionaries brought Catholicism to the island in the 16th century, and by the time of independence from Portugal in 1975, Christianity had become interwoven with the Timorese cultural soul. However, only 30 percent of the population was Catholic at that time. When Indonesia invaded East Timor later that same year, the Church became the only institution able to stand publicly with the people. During the next two decades of occupation, Catholicism became not merely a religion but a symbol of identity and resistance. Churches turned into sanctuaries, and priests became the guardians of dignity and hope. As St. John Paul II wrote in his Letter to the Bishops of East Timor (1999): "I call on everyone to cling to hope in the victory of the Cross ... I most firmly condemn the violence, which has also been furiously unleashed against the personnel and property of the Catholic Church." This papal appeal captured the very mission Bishop Belo was living daily: to keep alive the light of faith in a time of persecution.

Family Roots and Early Formation

Belo was born into a devout Catholic farming family - the fifth of eleven children of Filipe and Ermelinda Belo. His childhood was steeped in the rhythms of prayer, community, and work. The family prayed the Rosary together, celebrated Sunday liturgies with joy, and placed great value on education and honesty. From a young age, Carlos showed an unusual seriousness and empathy for others. He loved serving at Mass and listening to stories of missionaries who built schools and cared for orphans. His family's



Prophetic Courage: A Voice for the Voiceless

Belo's courage reached a turning point in 1989 when he wrote a secret letter to the United Nations Secretary-General, detailing atrocities committed in East Timor and appealing for an international referendum. It was a daring act that risked his life. Yet his moral authority only grew. He denounced massacres, spoke out for political prisoners, and personally sheltered refugees and wounded survivors in his residence. After the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre - when hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were gunned down by Indonesian troops - he opened the cathedral as a sanctuary and prayed beside the bodies of victims. His episcopal ministry exemplified what Pope Francis today calls "a Church of the peripheries." In his 2024 address to the clergy and religious of East Timor, the Pope said: "For we know that in the heart of Christ the existential peripheries are in fact the center. A Church that does not see the peripheries and hides in the center is a sick Church." Belo's entire life had already embodied this insight - his pulpit was the prison, his parish the poor, and his theology the lived experience of a crucified people.

The Nobel Peace Prize and the Triumph of Faith

In 1996, Bishop Belo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize alongside José Ramos-Horta "for their sustained efforts to find a peaceful and just solution to the conflict in East Timor." The world finally recognized in him a prophet of peace whose weapon was prayer and whose strategy was dialogue. In his Nobel acceptance speech in Oslo, he declared: "Under your shoulders, dear young people of the entire world, weigh the responsibil-

example of faith amid hardship sowed in him a conviction that God's love must be expressed through concrete service. In 1968, Belo entered the Salesians of Don Bosco, drawn to their charisma of forming the young "to be good Christians and upright citizens." After theological studies in Portugal and Rome, he was ordained a priest in 1980. His missionary heart, shaped by Don Bosco's optimism and compassion, longed to return home to serve his people amid suffering.

Missionary Vocation in a Time of Darkness

When Fr. Belo returned to East Timor, he found his homeland under military rule, its people traumatized by violence. In 1983, at only 35, he was appointed Apostolic Administrator of Dili, making him the spiritual leader of a nation under occupation. His pastoral approach was courageous yet tender. He prioritized three missionary dimensions: Education as Liberation - He revitalized Catholic schools and youth cen-

ters, believing education to be the most powerful tool against oppression. He often said, "Justice from love, and love from justice." To him, Christian formation was inseparable from the quest for human dignity. Dialogue and Nonviolence - Bishop Belo rejected vengeance and hatred. His sermons constantly called for reconciliation: "The world censures those who take up arms to defend their causes... but when a people chooses the non-violent path, it is all too often the case that hardly anyone pays attention." Faith as Resistance - For Belo, preaching the Gospel in a time of terror meant proclaiming hope. The Eucharist, the Cross, and the Beatitudes were his people's sources of strength. He reminded them that "Peace without justice is an illusion. Justice without forgiveness is vengeance. Forgiveness is not forgetting but remembering with love." These words, drawn from his Nobel lecture, summarize his missionary vision: peace born from truth and sustained by mercy.

ity to transform tomorrow's world into a society where peace, harmony and fraternity reign." These words captured both his missionary heart and his Salesian conviction that young people are the artisans of peace. True to his humility, Belo dedicated the award to his suffering people and used the prize money to rebuild schools, orphanages, and training centers. He reminded his fellow Timorese that peace was not a political gift but a moral task rooted in forgiveness and education.

Legacy of Faith and Service

Even after stepping down from his post in 2002 due to health concerns, Belo's legacy continued to shape East Timor's new chapter as an independent nation. He later served quietly as a missionary in Mozambique, returning to a life of simplicity and prayer. His vision continues to guide the Church in Timor-Leste, which Pope Francis has called to be "a Church that evangelizes through tenderness, mercy, and education." (Address to the People of Timor-Leste, 2024). The Pope also exhorted: "May the faith, which has enlightened and sustained you in the past, continue to inspire your present and future." Belo's example fulfills this papal exhortation. His life revealed how faith, when joined with social responsibility, becomes a force for national healing. His pastoral leadership integrated the Church's two essential dimensions - proclamation and transformation. He evangelized not only through words but through the power of compassion lived in history.

izes through tenderness, mercy, and education." (Address to the People of Timor-Leste, 2024). The Pope also exhorted: "May the faith, which has enlightened and sustained you in the past, continue to inspire your present and future." Belo's example fulfills this papal exhortation. His life revealed how faith, when joined with social responsibility, becomes a force for national healing. His pastoral leadership integrated the Church's two essential dimensions - proclamation and transformation. He evangelized not only through words but through the power of compassion lived in history.

Relevance for Today's World

The moral authority of Bishop Belo remains deeply relevant in a century still scarred by conflict, inequality, and displacement. His teaching that "justice from love, and love from justice" reminds us that authentic peace cannot be built upon indifference. In

a world where violence often masquerades as strength, Belo's faith-based resistance exemplifies the Christian alternative - active nonviolence rooted in truth. He echoed the Beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers," by translating it into concrete acts of shelter, advocacy, and education. Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), captured this same spirit: "Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is tireless commitment to recognize, ensure, and concretely protect the dignity of every human person" (*Fratelli Tutti*, n. 230). Belo's entire ministry was a living commentary on that truth.

Conclusion: A Missionary of Reconciliation

Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo's life mirrors the luminous paradox of the Gospel: strength through meekness, victory through suffering, and justice through love. Rooted in his family's simple faith and inspired by the spirit of Don Bosco, he became a voice for the voiceless and a bridge between heaven and earth. In the words of Pope Francis to the people of East Timor (2024): "The Gospel of Jesus has the power to transform and generate a new society." Through Bishop Belo's prophetic witness, the Gospel indeed transformed a nation. His life invites every Christian to rediscover the missionary vocation of peace - to bring light into darkness, dialogue into division, and forgiveness into fear. He stands in history not only as a Nobel laureate but as a disciple who made the Beatitudes flesh: humble, merciful, pure of heart, and fearless in love. For East Timor - and for the world - Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo remains the enduring image of what it means to be a missionary of peace, justice, and reconciliation in the heart of Christ.

COMP



SEVEN NEW SAINTS ILLUMINATE THE PATH OF HOLINESS ACROSS THE GLOBE



Sr Xavera SCS

On 19th October 2025 in St Peter's Square, pilgrims from around the world gathered to witness a historic moment: the canonisation of seven new saints.

On 19th October 2025 in St Peter's Square, pilgrims from around the world gathered to witness a historic moment: the canonisation of seven new saints. Pope Leo XIV reminded the faithful that this celebration is more than a ceremony - it is a testament to the universal communion of the Church, "embracing all the faithful, across space and time, in every language and culture, uniting us as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the living temple of the Holy Spirit." The lives of these seven saints, spanning continents, centuries, and diverse vocations, demonstrate that holiness is not a distant ideal but a daily journey lived in love, courage, and service.

Saint Ignatius Maloyan (Armenia, 1869-1915)

Saint Ignatius Maloyan, martyred during the Armenian genocide, stands as a compelling example of unwavering faith and pastoral courage. Even under persecution, he strengthened his flock rather than abandoning them, declaring, "I cannot betray my God for the fleeting comfort of this world." On the day of his martyrdom, he comforted fellow prisoners and blessed them with words of hope. His steadfast faith reminds us that fidelity to God often demands sacrifice, yet it brings lasting peace and reconciliation. The Armenian people continue to carve crosses into stone, bearing witness to his enduring legacy and courage.

Saint Peter To Rot (Papua New Guinea, 1912-1945)

From the mountains of Papua New Guinea comes Saint Peter To Rot, an ordinary catechist whose extraordinary courage inspires believers even today. During World War II, he secretly continued his pastoral work, instructing children and families in the faith while defending the sanctity of marriage against local authorities who promoted polygamy. He famously said, "God our Father is with us, even in the darkest times." Peter's life demonstrates that holiness often flourishes in quiet perseverance and trust in God, even amid fear and uncertainty. His example reminds us that courage in service can leave a lasting impact on the lives of others.

Saint José Gregorio Hernández (Venezuela, 1864-1919)

Venezuela gives us Saint José Gregorio Hernández, known as "the doctor of the poor," who healed not only the body but also the soul. He often reminded patients, "Prayer and science together



heal the soul and the body.” Through his compassionate work, he shows that holiness can be lived in ordinary professions when guided by love, care, and a deep sense of divine mission. Saint José’s life demonstrates that service rooted in faith transforms both those we help and ourselves.

Saint Carmen Rendiles (Venezuela, 1903–1977)

Saint Carmen Rendiles, founder of the Congregation of the Servants of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, dedicated her life to feeding the hungry, sheltering the abandoned, and offering guidance to those in despair. She would encourage her sisters, “Charity is the lamp that lights the path to God.” Her life reminds us that faith, hope, and love are not abstract virtues but living realities, expressed through concrete acts of mercy and compassion. By following her example, we learn that holiness is found in practical acts of service that bring light to the lives of others.

Saint Maria Troncatti (Ecuador, 1883–1969)

Saint Maria Troncatti, a Salesian missionary, devoted her life to caring for indigenous communities. She often travelled rugged terrain, bringing medicine, education, and spiritual

guidance, reminding those she served, “Where there is love, there is God.” Her dedication shows that holiness flourishes in the margins, where service to the vulnerable becomes a reflection of Christ’s love. Each act of care, no matter how small, carries eternal significance, challenging all believers to recognize the face of Christ in those who are often forgotten.

Saint Vincenza Maria Poloni (Italy, 1802–1855)

Saint Vincenza Maria Poloni, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, devoted her life to the sick, elderly, and abandoned. She guided her sisters with the words, “Let every small act of mercy be a reflection of God’s infinite love.” Her life demonstrates that holiness grows in humble, daily acts of service, patience, and love. Saint Vincenza reminds us that the path to sanctity is often walked in quiet, faithful acts of mercy that bring light and hope to the lives of others.

Saint Bartolo Longo (Italy, 1841–1926)

Saint Bartolo Longo experienced the transformative power of God’s mercy. Once distant from faith, he dedicated his life to orphans, the poor, and the promotion of the Rosary. He often said, “Through Mary, I

have found the way to Jesus, and through prayer, the strength to serve.” His life teaches that conversion is always possible, and that anyone, regardless of their past, can become a source of hope, mercy, and holiness for others. His example encourages all believers to embrace God’s mercy and share it through selfless service.

Conclusion

Pope Leo XIV concluded the canonisation ceremony by urging pilgrims to return home “with hearts full of gratitude and the desire to imitate the new Saints.” These seven saints—from Armenia, Papua New Guinea, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Italy—offer a universal witness to the accessibility of holiness. Their lives remind us that faith, courage, service, prayer, and love are not abstract ideals but living realities expressed in daily life. Through Saint Ignatius Maloyan, we learn courage in the face of persecution; through Saint Peter To Rot, perseverance amidst fear; through Saint José Gregorio Hernández and Saint Carmen Rendiles, practical charity and compassion; through Saint Maria Troncatti and Saint Vincenza Maria Poloni, humble service to the vulnerable; and through Saint Bartolo Longo, the transformative power of conversion. Collectively, they inspire us to see Christ in others, care for the marginalized, and radiate hope and mercy in the world. These saints demonstrate that holiness is attainable in ordinary circumstances - through patient care, steadfast faith, and loving service. By following their example, we too can become living witnesses of God’s love, transforming our families, communities, and societies into places of hope, charity, and grace.

COMP

WHEN PARTICLES WALK THROUGH WALLS: THE MYSTERY OF QUANTUM TUNNELLING



Fr Augustine
Pamplany CST

Quantum physics studies how matter and energy behave at the smallest scales, where particles act like waves, waves act like particles, and events that seem impossible can actually occur.

Imagine you are rolling a little ball up a hill. If the ball does not have enough energy, it will roll back down and remain on the same side. That is how things behave in everyday life. But when we step into the tiny world of atoms and particles, nature behaves in ways that surprise us. The rules of the small are not the rules of the large.

This strange miniature world is the realm of quantum physics. Quantum physics studies how matter and energy behave at the smallest scales, where particles act like waves, waves act like particles, and events that seem impossible can actually occur. In this realm, puzzles appear everywhere: particles can be in two states at once, they can vanish from one place and reappear somewhere else, and they can behave as though they are both here and there. One of the most famous of these puzzles is quantum tunnelling.

In classical physics, a particle must climb the hill to reach the other side. In quantum physics, a particle can sometimes appear on the other side even when it does not have enough energy to climb it. This astonishing, almost magical event is called quantum tunnelling. As one helpful description puts it: “Quantum tunnelling is when a particle passes through an energy barrier that would normally stop it.” Why can this happen? Because in quantum mechanics particles are also waves. A particle’s wave function spreads out and has a gentle tail that extends beyond a barrier. A small part of that wave can seep through the barrier, making it possible for the particle to be found on the other side. It is as though the laws of nature leave a hidden door open, just wide enough for the smallest things to slip through. For everyday objects such as footballs, people and buildings, the chance of tunnelling is unimaginably tiny, so we never see it. But for electrons, protons and very small circuits, tunnelling is real and measurable.

The idea of tunnelling emerged in the early twentieth century, when scientists like Schrödinger and Gamow were trying to understand radioactive decay and the strange behaviour of subatomic particles. At that time, tunnelling was a bold idea, but the mathematics worked beautifully. A century later, something remarkable happened. The 2025 Nobel Prize in Physics was awarded to three scientists - John Clarke, Michel H. Devoret and John M. Martinis - for experiments that made quantum tunnelling visible in electrical circuits that one can literally hold in the hand. Their work on

macroscopic quantum mechanical tunnelling and energy quantisation proved that tunnelling is not a tiny curiosity locked inside atoms. It can shape the behaviour of larger, engineered systems. Their research pushes the boundaries of quantum technologies, especially quantum computing and quantum sensing. Quantum tunnelling is no longer simply a theory. It is a practical, measurable, and powerful feature of nature.

The impossible trick of quantum tunnelling happens constantly in the tiny world of atoms. Imagine a ball passing straight through a wall instead of bouncing back - that's the basic idea. Tunnelling is essential for the universe. It is

why the Sun and all stars shine. The heat inside the Sun is not quite enough to force hydrogen atoms to fuse and make energy. But thanks to tunnelling, the atoms can slip through the invisible energy barrier, allowing fusion to happen. This powerful, tiny event creates the energy that sustains life on Earth.

In modern technology, tunnelling helps us build things at the smallest scale. Scientists use a Scanning Tunnelling Microscope where electrons jump across a tiny gap between a probe and a surface. By measuring this "tunnelling current," the microscope can create images of individual atoms, which helps in developing new tiny technologies. Your phone and

computer also use tunnelling. In flash memory chips, the electronic barriers are so thin that electrons frequently tunnel right through to store information.

Tunnelling is also the foundation of quantum computers. In these advanced machines, the units of information (qubits) can tunnel between different states. This strange quantum behavior makes quantum computing possible, leading to new discoveries in medicine and engineering. The 2025 Nobel Prize was given to scientists who showed that this "magic" could be seen and measured in electrical circuits big enough to hold in your hand, bringing the strange quantum world into practical technology.



Quantum tunnelling invites a wider reflection on reality. If particles can cross barriers that are supposed to be impenetrable, perhaps the universe is more flexible and mysterious than classical logic suggests. It shows that matter is not the hard, solid stuff we imagine. It is wave-like, relational, and full of possibilities. As one might say: "Matter is not simply inert and solid, but fluid and capable of moving through obstacles." This does not merely change physics textbooks; it changes how we see the world. The tiny becomes a teacher. The impossible becomes possible. The universe becomes more surprising, more open-ended, more enchanted.

For those within the Christian tradition, tunnelling offers a gentle echo of spiritual ideas. Christianity teaches that matter is not only valuable but destined for glory. The belief that our bodies will be raised in the resurrection affirms that matter is part of God's story and not merely temporary or inferior. Quantum tunnelling shows that matter has depths we did not expect. It is not a dead lump but a dance of energy and possibility. Barriers in the quantum world are not absolute. They can be crossed in ways that defy ordinary expectation. This loosening of boundaries hints that the divide between matter and spirit may not be as sharp as once assumed. "Tunnelling mystifies the fundamental nature of matter," one might reflect. It suggests that the material world is not closed, mechanical and inert; instead, it is open, permeable and full of hidden pathways. In this sense, tunnelling subtly parallels the Christian belief that matter is capable of transformation. It allows us to see the physical world as some-

thing more than a machine. It becomes a place where mystery touches the visible.

When the Gospel says, "The Word became flesh" (John 1:1 and 1:14), it expresses a profound idea: matter can hold divine meaning. Quantum tunnelling does not prove this, but it illustrates how matter itself can behave in ways that stretch our imagination. Imagine again the particle behind a barrier. According to ordinary rules, it cannot cross. And yet, by a hidden process, it appears on the other side. The movement is not by force, but by a deeper law that operates quietly and mysteriously.

In a poetic sense, this can serve as a symbol of human hope. Our bodies, though finite, are not only matter. They are alive, dynamic and woven with meaning. The softening of barriers at the quantum level hints that the universe itself is more open than we think. If nature allows surprising passages for the smallest parts of reality, perhaps the ultimate barriers of

human life - pain, limitation and even death - are not as final as they appear.

Christian faith teaches that the body does not simply end; it is transformed. While quantum tunnelling does not guarantee this, it can inspire a sense that matter participates in mystery rather than opposing it. Quantum tunnelling is not only a scientific idea; it is an invitation to see the world differently. The small reveals the hidden beauty of the large. The rules we assume are solid become flexible. The universe opens little doorways where we thought there were only walls. The story of tunnelling shows that science can be precise and poetic at the same time. It tells us that the world is full of puzzles, surprises and unseen layers of meaning. It encourages us to look at matter not as dull clay, but as something alive with possibility. Perhaps that is the greatest lesson tunnelling offers: the universe is deeper than it appears, and wonder lives in the smallest of places.

COMP

“ Quantum tunnelling invites a wider reflection on reality. If particles can cross barriers that are supposed to be impenetrable, perhaps the universe is more flexible and mysterious than classical logic suggests. ”



GET READY FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MATT.
3:1-12

DECEMBER 7, 2025
2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

From Wilderness to Fruitfulness

Today's readings capture the very essence of advent spirit and advent spirituality. The prophet Isaiah (11:1-10) refers to the stump of Jesse - the once-glorious Davidic line reduced to nothing; and from this dead wood, a tiny shoot emerges - a new David, the Messiah full of promise. He is endowed with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, and above all, knowledge of the Lord. One difference, this time, is that he is not a warrior king like David of old, but the Messiah of peace, who judges with justice and rules the whole creation in peace, where "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb." It is about the restoration of the right relationships (shalom) with God, humans and entire creation. The responsorial Psalm (Ps 72) resonates with the same (Isaiah's) vision: in the reign of the Messiah, "Justice shall flourish . . . , and fullness of peace forever." Life stirs again where none was expected.

In the second reading, Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is the shoot from Jesse - the fulfilment of the hopes of Israel. He teaches us that the coming of Christ heals the fractures between peoples, languages, and cultures in all ages. The king-Messiah offers justice for the poor, mercy for the oppressed, and compassion for the lowly and, thus, brings about reconciliation and harmony.

The Gospel speaks of John the Baptist, the herald of the Messiah, as a voice in the wilderness! The Word of God speak through John from a place of emptiness, symbolizing divine silence over the centuries of expectation and waiting. John's message is simple but upsetting: he invites all to a baptism of repentance and radical change of heart to welcome the messiah, who would separate the true from the false, the fruitful from the barren with his winnowing fan and axe, symbol-



Fr Joseph Palakeel MST

izing the new criteria of judgement. The Messiah will burn away what is dead to make room for new life, by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Advent invites us to allow the Word of God to resound in our inner wildernesses, and purify and transform our lives and turn our hearts and minds toward God.

These vivid imageries of 'dead-wood to buds' and 'barren deserts to fruits' indicate God's power to bring life out of death, hope out of desolation, and new beginnings out of what seems hopeless or lost. Christ (Messiah) brings hope to where all seems lost and unites all peoples to the worship of the true God. Advent invites us to embrace the "way of the Lord" that is both an interior path of repentance and renewal and a social path of (re) turning to justice and peace. That is exactly the spirit of advent and the meaning of Christmas and redemption. And from this divine silence, buds begin to blossom - the promise of new fruit, new life, new hope.

Advent journey begins in stumps and wildernesses of life, where life seems barren, voices are few, yet where the Spirit is active and God-encounter and renewal happens. The mystery of Advent is that when God comes new shoots grow even on the dead stumps; the wildernesses of the human heart turn to be fertile fields of fruitfulness of the spirit; justice and peace begin to reign where division and fear ruled the day. Advent thus calls us to move away from barrenness and brokenness to become people of the new shoot. Advent invites us to prepare the way for Christ by making space for the poor, the forgotten, and the marginalized in our hearts and in our communities.

MATT.
11:2-11

**DECEMBER 14, 2025,
3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
(GAUDETE SUNDAY)**

Patient Waiting Brings Blooming Joy

The readings today invite us to cherish the Advent joy of recognizing God's transforming presence at work even in broken hearts and barren places. In the first reading, prophet Isaiah assures a shattered people returning from exile to "take courage, and fear not ... God himself will come and will save you" (Is 35: 4). At God's arrival "the wilderness shall rejoice" and bud forth and blossom" and "flourish like the lily" (v. 1-2), meaning that God Himself will restore their 'blind', 'deaf' and the 'lame' (v.5-6a). Isaiah is hinting at an end to barrenness, isolation and suffering and a time of abundance and song be-

gins. God's coming transforms not only the landscape of the earth (blooming desert) but also the landscape of the human heart (healing, hope and new life): "the redeemed of the Lord ... shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away" (v.10). This is the first form of Advent joy - joy that comes from believing that God is coming give life and bring healing.

However, St. James, in the second reading (Jam 5:7-10), exhorts us Christians to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord, without anxiety and bitterness, even as a farmer waits for the timely rains and abundant harvest. God will do justice in his own time, and we who trust in the Lord should wait with quiet confidence for the coming of the Lord. God's coming is like a slow, yet surprising bloom. Amidst the hurriedness of the contemporary world, people lose joy of life because they expect instant gratification and immediate answers. But the advent joy grows slowly - like a flower blooming in the desert; spiritual fruits do not grow overnight. Patience is the soil and hope is the seed. Those who trust in God wait patiently for the springtime God is preparing for them, even amidst the barrenness of their deserts - failures, dryness in prayer, uncertainty. Advent time is a 'sacramental period of waiting' - a time of quiet trust that God's promise is germinating even when the soil looks barren.

Yet it is quite human to struggle with doubts and uncertainty, even as John the Baptist himself experienced after being jailed. At riven Jordan he boldly pointed to Jesus and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and he even send away his own disciples to follow Jesus. But arrested in put in prison, his world has become a kind of wilderness and he is tossed by doubt and fear, whether his mission has failed. In his agony and eagerness, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus: "Are you the one?" And Jesus does not disappoint him and He sends an answer quoting Isaiah that the seeds are sprouting and desert is starting to bloom: "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed... the poor have the Good News." John's suffering is not removed, but his joy was doubled like that of a farmer who sees the first green sprout.

The blooming desert of Isaiah and the patient farmer waiting for rain (James) and John's eager question teaches us that joy is not a reward at achieving but the grace of endurance to keep us waiting, walking and trusting for God's coming into our deserts and desolation like a cool rain

and a desert bloom. When our faith feels tired or uncertain, we have to turn and see again what God is already doing around us - small miracles of healing, kindness, and grace. And our joy will return, when we trust the graceful assurance of faith that even when we don't see it, the seed is alive because God is at work, bringing life from the desert and light from the shadows. When trust transforms into patient waiting, hope meets grace and faith blooms into the Christmas joy.



DECEMBER 21, 2025
4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Emmanuel - God with Us

Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy (Mt 1,1-17), which relates Jesus to David and Abraham by means of a tripartite pattern of fourteen generations, and presents him as the culmination of the whole history of the people of Israel. The genealogy links Jesus to the patriarchal fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It also ties him to the tribe of Judah from which the royal lineage of David stems. In order to achieve this end, the evangelist employs a chain of the aorist active *egennēsen* (“generated”) repeated 39 times in Mt 1,2-16a, each of them having both a subject (a father), an object (a son or sons) and sometimes the name of the mothers, Tamar (v. 3), Rahab and Ruth (v. 5), the wife of Uriah (v. 6), and Mary (v. 16). Mt 1,16b, however, breaks this coherent pattern by introducing the aorist passive *egennēthē* (“was conceived”): Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom Jesus, who is called Christ, was begotten. This syntactical construction using *egennēthē* effects the displacement of Joseph, the husband of Mary, in the regular progression of father begetting son, and relates the birth of Jesus to Mary alone. It casts doubts on the incorporation of Jesus into the genealogy of Abraham and David through Joseph, who is only the husband of Mary and not the biological father of Jesus. After concluding the genealogy in Mt 1,17, the evangelist resolves these issues in Mt 1,18-25.

Mt 1,18-25 elaborates how the prophetic



Dr Paul Kunjanayil MCBS

promise about Emmanuel, God with us, became a concrete reality through the birth of Jesus. In this realization, Mary, Joseph and an angel of the Lord become instrumental. V. 22 may make it clear how much the evangelist wants to highlight the fulfilment of the prophecy through the birth of Jesus Christ. It was, however, not a unilateral activity of the Lord. On the contrary, He demanded human cooperation for effecting this marvellous event in history. Mt 1,18-25 describes Mary and Joseph as the human instruments in the execution of this divine promise. It also gives hints to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. The evangelist highlights the role of Joseph who actively intervenes in the birth inclusion of Jesus in the Davidic family, accepting Mary and naming the child. An angel of the Lord plays an important role in guiding Joseph according to the will of the Lord. Joseph in turn acts as per the directions of the angel of the Lord. Joseph is the protagonist in the narrative, while Mary remains just being related. Though she is only spoken about in this pericope, her role too is very crucial. By allowing herself to become pregnant from the Holy Spirit after her betrothal to Joseph, Mary exposes herself to the possibility of public scorn and even to the danger of public trial and death. The work of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' conception underlines the divine origin of Jesus. Joseph's decision to divorce Mary points to the gravity of the situation in which Mary and Joseph found themselves, as well as the risk to the future of the child and the fulfilment of the Emmanuel prophecy.

Joseph's unwillingness to expose Mary to public disgrace demonstrates the positive traits of his personality. The angelic appearance to Joseph proves the readiness of the Lord to help his people in need. The obedience of Joseph, which is expressed through his accepting Mary, having no sexual relations to her until she gave birth to a son, and finally naming him Jesus (Mt 1,24-25), actualized the incorporation of Jesus into the Davidic descent. It is the total submission of Joseph and Mary to the divine will that made the birth of Emmanuel possible. According to Mt 1,18-25, it was Joseph and Mary who first experienced “God with us” in the person of Jesus. By cooperating in the birth of Jesus, they opened the way for all the nations of the world to have the same experience of the presence of God in the person of Jesus. Therefore, they serve as models for us to receive Jesus Christ, “God with us.”

MATT.
2:13-15,
19-23

DECEMBER 28, 2025
FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF
JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

The Holy Family: A School of Faith and Trust

“When they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt...’” (Mt 2:13). This passage captures one of the most striking images of the Holy Family, not in comfort or celebration, but in flight. The Son of God begins His earthly life as a refugee, carried by His parents into a foreign land to escape death. In this moment, we see that holiness is not found in ease or privilege, but in trustful obedience to God’s will amid uncertainty. The courage of the Holy Family in this journey should inspire us in our own faith journey to trust in God’s plan even when it leads us into the unknown.

St John Chrysostom reflects on this Gospel, saying: “The Child who is Lord of all is carried into Egypt, fleeing from Herod, that He might sanctify every place of exile and suffering.” The Holy Family’s flight transforms what is painful into something sacred. Through their trials, Mary and Joseph teach us that faith means trusting that even in chaos, God is at work. This transformative power of faith should give us hope and reassurance in our own trials, knowing that God is always present and working for our good.

St. Joseph, silent yet steadfast, listens to God’s message in his dreams and acts immediately. Pope Francis, in his apostolic letter *Patris corde*, calls Joseph “a tender and loving father” who “teaches us that faith in God includes believing that He can work even through our fears, our frailties, and our weaknesses.” Joseph’s obedience reminds us that holiness often looks like quiet



Fr Royston Pinto SJ, LCL

faithfulness in small, hidden acts of love. Mary, too, embodies the depth of faith. She has already said “yes” to God at the Annunciation, but her “yes” continues through uncertainty, poverty, and exile. St Augustine beautifully writes, “Mary was more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ.” Her holiness is not only in bearing the Saviour, but in believing in Him when the path was dark.

The child Jesus, though vulnerable, is the light guiding this small family. Their unity under God’s providence reveals what true family life means. As Pope St. John Paul II taught in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, “The family is the first and vital cell of society.” In the Holy Family, we find a model of love grounded in faith, humility, and mutual service, a household centred not on wealth or comfort, but on God. This unity under God’s providence should make us feel connected and united in our own family life, knowing that God is the centre of our homes.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, we are called to imitate their trust. Families today face many “Herods”: fear, instability, economic hardship, cultural confusion, but like Joseph and Mary, we are invited to respond not with despair, but with faith. When we welcome Christ into our homes, He transforms them into places of refuge and grace. May we, like the Holy Family, learn to hear God’s voice amid the noise of the world and follow where He leads, confident that in every trial, He journeys with us.

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ONE IN FIVE CATHOLICS WORLDWIDE IS AFRICAN

The latest figures from the Vatican confirm what many within the global Church have sensed for years: Catholicism's demographic center of gravity continues to move southward. While Europe struggles with empty seminaries and shrinking congregations, Africa's churches are thriving, its vocations multiplying, and its faithful expanding at a pace unmatched anywhere else in the Catholic world. According to the Pontifical Yearbook 2025 and the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* 2023, released in March, the African continent saw a remarkable increase of 1,285 priests in 2023 - a 2.7 percent rise - at a time when the global number of priests actually declined. The total number of Catholic priests serving in Africa now stands at 54,944, both diocesan and religious. The continent's Catholic population has also surged, climbing from 272 million in 2022 to 281 million in 2023, an impressive 3.3 percent increase. That growth means one out of every five Catholics in the world now lives in Africa. The episcopate too continues to expand, with the number of bishops rising from 740 to 771, representing 14.2 percent of the world's total. Seminaries across the continent tell a similar story of vitality. Africa now counts 34,924 major seminarians - about one-third of the global total - despite representing just a fifth of all Catholics. ■

TEHRAN NAMES A METRO STATION AFTER THE VIRGIN MARY

Card Dominique Joseph Mathieu, Latin Archbishop of Tehran-Isfahan, sent to AsiaNews his thoughts regarding the inauguration of a metro station in the Iranian capital dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Maryam-e Moghaddas). The prelate writes: "If there is a wish to be made, it is that commuters, in a spirit of contemplation, may see, beneath the closed eyelids of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the bas-reliefs of the station and in the statue to be unveiled at the inauguration, a gaze filled with love". Through this "God comes to meet His creation - men and women from around the world, brothers and sisters of a common house, His witnesses by divine will." Tehran Metro is currently undergoing renovations. Iranian and international media have reported on the new metro station's upcoming inauguration. For some, this is a sign of openness, while for others, it is merely an act of propa-



ganda, since minorities, including Christians, face critical challenges in the Islamic Republic. Construction began around 2015 and has encountered numerous engineering challenges, given the dense urban fabric of that part of the capital. The station reaches 34 metres below ground level, covering approximately 11,000 square metres of built area. Over 100,000 cubic metres of soil were removed during the project. Located near the Armenian Church of Saint Sarkis in central Tehran, the Saint Mary (Maryam-e Moghaddas) station features large reliefs of Jesus and Mary. "It was built," Mayor Alireza Zakani wrote in a recent post on X, "to honour Saint Mary and to demonstrate the coexistence of divine religions in Tehran." "The name of a station," explains the Latin Archbishop of Tehran-Isfahan, "becomes a landmark, sparking curiosity, strengthening bonds, and fostering new encounters." ■

KERALA: WITH MOTHER ELISWA, AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD AND HUMANITY

At this time when Churches around the world are celebrating the solemnity of All Saints and the glorious horizon that awaits us all through the memory of our deceased, Catholics in the Indian state of Kerala are looking in a special way to the witness of Mother Eliswa Vakayil, a nun was proclaimed blessed on Saturday, 8 November. The ceremony was held at the Basilica of Our Lady of Redemption in Vallarpadam, in the Archdiocese of Verapoly, and was presided over on behalf of Pope Leo XIV by Cardinal Sebastian Francis, Archbishop of Penang in Malaysia, whose family is originally from Kerala. Mother Eliswa (1831-1913) was a pioneer of religious life among the women of Kerala. In 1866, she founded the first female religious congregation in Kerala and the first of the Carmelite family in India, which later became the Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites. She lived in the spirit of Carmel, combining contemplative union with God with active

service, especially through the education and advancement of women. In 1868, she founded the first school of the sisters with an adjoining hostel and orphanage for girls in Koonammavu, Kerala, opening new horizons for women in society and in the Church. ■

"I'M ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE" SAYS PM MODI TO SYRO MALABAR BISHOPS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met a delegation of senior bishops from the Syro-Malabar Church in the national capital on Tuesday to discuss matters concerning the Church and the Christian community in India. The delegation was led by Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil, head of the Syro-Malabar Church, and included Archbishop Mar Kuriakose Bharanikulangara of the Faridabad Archdiocese, along with several other bishops. Kerala BJP leaders, including State President and former Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Shone George, were also present at the meeting. Described as cordial and constructive, the meeting centred on the welfare of Christian minorities and their role in India's social and developmental framework. "I am always at your service," the Prime Minister told the delegation, according to sources present. While reports initially suggested discussions on inviting the Pope to India, BJP leaders clarified that there was no discussion on the arrest of nuns in Chhattisgarh or on inviting Pope Leo XIV. They also confirmed that there was no discussion on attacks on minorities, though broader concerns related to community development and cooperation were raised. Following the meeting, Rajeev Chandrasekhar described it as "primarily a courtesy call," during which the bishops spoke about micro-minority rights and their contribution to nation-building. "The Prime Minister listened attentively and assured the delega-

tion that the government is open to dialogue on all issues," he said. ■

JUSTICE KURIAN JOSEPH CALLS FOR GREATER LAY INVOLVEMENT IN PRIESTLY FORMATION

Lay participation in priestly formation will enhance the quality and effectiveness of priests, said Justice Kurian Joseph, former judge of the Supreme Court of India. He was speaking at the inauguration of the 24th annual gathering of the rectors of major seminaries held at the Alpha Pastoral Centre in Cochin. "Formators are like gurus, and seminarians must learn from their gurus," Justice Joseph said. "The Church today needs priests with human qualities, emotional balance, and the ability to understand the realities of a changing world." Archbishop Varghese Chakkalakkal, chairman of the CCBI Commission for Vocations, Seminaries, Clergy and Religious and Archbishop of Calicut, presided over the session. He stressed the importance of integrating psychological insight and deep spiritual grounding in the formation of future priests. Bishop James Anaparambil of Alleppey delivered the keynote address, urging rectors to include more lay persons in seminary formation. "Involving lay people will bring fresh perspectives and help future priests connect more closely with the communities they will serve," he said. The annual report of the Association of Rectors of Major Seminaries (ARMS) was presented by Rev. Dr. Charles Leon, Executive Secretary of the Commission for Vocations, Seminaries, Clergy and Religious. Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara, deputy secretary general of the CCBI, offered felicitations, while Rev. Dr. Richard Britto, president of ARMS, welcomed the participants. Rev. Dr. Kommareddy Marreddy, vice president of ARMS, proposed the vote of thanks. ■

ALPHA PASTORAL CENTRE, EDAKOCHI, KERALA



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