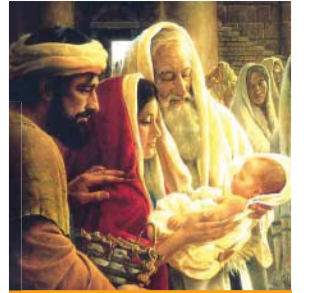




CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL  
CHRISTIAN UNITY  
WEEK 18-25 JANUARY

# Messenger

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FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD  
02ND FEB 2012

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## ● Statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka "Humanity is not safe if the child in the womb is not safe"

**The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL) learns that the government is to be engaged in enacting legislation that would permit abortion.**

The Holy Bible teaches that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1: 27). The Church has always held that God is the author of life and that it is God's supreme and the most sacred gift given to all of us. Hence, it is our greatest obligation to do all we can to protect, life from its natural beginning to its natural end.

Blessed John Paul taught that the Church ought to be at the service of life amidst the culture of death of our day. It was Blessed Mother Teresa who

said that "humanity is not safe if the child in the womb is not safe." We wish to state categorically that the CBCSL is not in agreement with and is opposed to any attempt at legalizing abortion since abortion amounts to murder.

Hence, we earnestly request the government not to proceed with this intended legislation since killing in every form is an abominable crime.



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE IN SRI LANKA

Bishop Norbert M. Andradi, OMI  
Secretary General - CBCSL

## ● His Eminence at opening of Engineering Faculty of Aquinas University College

# "Church faces the challenge to reconcile science and religion"

**His Eminence, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, and Chancellor of Aquinas University College, addressing the official opening of the Faculty of Engineering of the College stressed, that there is no contradiction between religion and science. "They are in partnership. While science tells us about the veracity of the physical world, religion speaks about the reality of the spiritual dimension which is enlightened by the soul that is within us."**

"Hence," His Eminence pointed out, "that a scientist, as a scholar and seeker of truth must be able to complement both intellect and spirit, i.e. body and soul in order to ascertain



the truth."

The official opening of the Engineering Faculty also coincided with the handing over of the entire building of Fr. Ignatius Perera's Radio and Electronics Laboratory. The dual ceremony took place at the College Auditorium.

His Eminence further added that all religious leaders and sages of antiquity, starting from

Plato and Aristotle were in a quest for the truth and bearing witness to the truth, the Church faces the challenge to reconcile science and religion.

He also praised the efforts taken by the Rector to restore Fr. Ignatius' Radio and Electronics Laboratory and bringing it under the purview of the Engineering Faculty.

Rev. Placidus de

Silva, Rector and Vice Chancellor of Aquinas University College, while thanking His Eminence for gifting the entire building of the Radio and Electronics Laboratory to the College, assured that the same services of Fr. Ignatius will be continued for the greater benefit of the youth.

Rev. Fr. Ivan Perera, Episcopal Vicar was the chief celebrant at the Concelebrated Holy Mass as a commemoration of the 31st death anniversary of Rev. Fr. Ignatius Perera.

Also present were Rev. Fr. Dinesh Fernando, Priest-in-Charge of the Faculty of Engineering and the Old Boys of the former Radio and Electronics Laboratory of Fr. Ignatius.

## Cuban crocodile meets the Pope



*A rare Cuban crocodile is presented by a member of Rome's "Bio Park" Zoo to Pope Benedict XVI, a supporter of endangered species.*

VATICAN CITY — A rare Cuban crocodile met a bemused Pope Benedict XVI, in the Vatican last Wednesday, as Rome's Bio Park Zoo celebrated its centenary with the eco-friendly Pontiff.

A staff member from the Zoo - which has 1,200 animals and is visited by 700,000 people a year - presented the 60-centimetre long crocodylus rhombifer crocodile to the Pope, who smiled bravely.

"Truly the world is dark wherever men and women no longer acknowledge their bond with the Creator and thereby endanger their relation to other creatures and to creation itself," the Holy Father said.

## A Call of the Heart



**Sharing in the joy and hope that the season of Christmas brings, the Buddhist staff of the Katana Pradeshaya Sabha, joined hands with the Christian members of the staff to show their creativity and skills in constructing this beautiful crib in the office premises.**

They were definitely not moved by the voices that call for inter-faith and ecumenism, but they were guided by a call from their hearts, that only the season of peace and goodwill could bestow.

*Text and Pic. Cecil Danicius*



## Holy Childhood Sunday 29th Jan

All parishes are requested to prepare the children in their Sunday Schools and Holy Childhood Cells, to celebrate Holy Childhood Day.

## Rev. Fr. Neville Joe elevated as Msgr

Rev. Fr. Neville Joe Perera, National Coordinator for Sri Lankan Clergy and Migrants in Italy and Chaplain to the Holy Father, has been conferred the title of Monsignor, by His Holiness Pope, Benedict XVI.



## Study Session on LLRC Report at SEDEC

**A Study Session on the recently released Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) Report, will be held on Tuesday, 31 January 2012 at 3.00 p.m. at Caritas Sri Lanka, SEDEC,**

**Auditorium.** This will be a familiarising session in the main areas of concern addressed in the Report with special focus on the LLRC recommendations regarding the rule of law, demilitarisation, freedom

of expression, devolution of power, human rights and humanitarian endeavours.

Strategies and mechanisms available for the implementation of these recommendations will be a prior concern.

## 'The Death of the Messiah'

**Aquinas University College will commence its Asecond short course titled "The Death of the Messiah," in the series of short courses in Biblical Studies, conducted by the Faculty of Theology.**

The course will first explore the Fundamentals of the Passion Narratives and thereafter will move on to the Exegesis of Mark, Chapters 14 to 15. It is designed to enable the faithful to nourish their spiritual life especially as we approach Holy Week.

The duration of the course will be nine consecutive Thursdays, commencing 2 February 2012, from 4.00 to 6.15 pm. The medium of instruction will be English. A minimum fee of Rs.500/- will be levied.

Please contact the Dean of the Faculty of Theology on Mobile: 071 7693519. Email: asaman\_7@hotmail.com or Secretary Theology. Mobile: 071 6169375, 0112694014/5. Email: aquinastheology@hotmail.com

## Application to obtain membership of Catholic Teachers' Union

Catholic teachers' serving in government schools are invited to join the Catholic Teachers' Union. Please call Catholic Education Office on telephone number 0112699129 to obtain applications or visit the Catholic Education Office during office hours or write to secretary, Catholic Teacher Union, Catholic Education Office, Archbishop's House, Colombo 8.

## Carol service at Koralawella - 2011



"Christmas is a day of great joy through out the world. It was on that silent night, a multitude of heavenly hosts sang glorious praises to God and the good news of great joy was brought to all people" said Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Gamini, Episcopal Vicar Southern Region, who was the chief guest at the Christmas Carol Service at St. Michael's Church, premises, Koralawella.

Day's programme consisted of prayer, carols sold and new, readings from the gospel, songs, dance and drama from participants in colourful costumes from the nine zones in the parish of Koralawella coming under Rev. Fr. Leo Camillus Parish Priest.

(Christie Ferdinando - Pic: Alex J. Silva)

## New admission at Minu/Andimulla Primary School



Admission to Grade 1 for year 2012 in government schools was held on 16th of January island-wide. Minu/Andimulla Primary School admission was held under the aegis of the Dean of the Katana and parish priest of Halpe

Rev. Fr. Amila Gomes.  
Mr. Indika Anuruddha old boy and Chair-

man of the Divulapitiya Pradesheeya Sabha was the chief guest.

They were welcomed at the school main gate with beetle leaves by the new comers and accompanied to the Main Hall of the School.

(Pic. Cecil Danicius)

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## Annual prize-giving at Nilpanagoda Sunday School



The Sunday School of Sacred Heart Church, Nilpanagoda in the Burulapitiya Parish held its annual prize giving recently under the guidance of Rev. Fr. John Camillus OMI.

Picture shows the Sunday School student and teachers with the Parish Priest, Rev. Fr. Subash Chaminda OMI.

(Pic. & Text: Lakshan Fernando)

# The Parish of Dehiowita, Ratnapura



A parish priest, a part from his pastoral care of his parish, also indulges in developing the infrastructure facilities of the Church and therefore he is being remembered by the parishioners even after his transfer to another station.

Dehiowita is a small parish in the Diocese of Ratnapura, four miles from Avissawella, on the Avissawella - Hatton Road, with an equally mixed Catholic community comprising of Sinhalese and Tamils.

It was made an independent parish in 1967, and the late Italian priest, Rev. Fr. Angelo Stefanizzi, SJ, was the first parish priest. In his endeavour to develop the parish, he purchased a 15 acre block of land above the church and started a farm with poultry, dairy, and piggery, giving employment to several youth.

He also set up a youth Agriculture Training Centre giving training to hundreds of youth who made use of the opportunity to improve their lives. After his transfer the farm was closed and today it remains solely as a rubber property.

His successor Rev. Fr. Peter wanted to replace the old church building with a new one. He demolished the building but before building a new church he passed away. His successor Rev. Fr. Sidath Vilegoda completed the building work.

Then came Rev. Fr. Tensin Perera. He built a parapet wall separating the main road and the church property. He replaced the old wooden pews with solid jak wood pews which are used even now. He took the youth and the parishioners on trips to several reputed churches in other parts of the country, free of

charge.

He was succeeded by Rev. Fr. Ladislaus who laid floor tiles in the church and renovated few chapels in the parish.

His successor Rev. Fr. Neville Janze solved two burning issues which his predecessors attempted but failed. One was to cut and remove a huge Bo tree close to the church. The other one was to evict a woman forcibly occupying the Ruwanwella church land.

The present parish priest Rev. Fr. Piyal Fernando built a stage close to the mission house which can be used by the Montessori and others for their annual events instead of renting out outside buildings. He did this without troubling the Bishop for financial assistance. The new stage is seen in the picture.

## Annual Blessings at Tewatte



The annual blessings for the year was conducted at the Tewatte Basilica, Ragama, officiated by Archbishop Emeritus, Rt. Rev. Dr. Oswald Gomis.

The event has been conducted for the 50th year and organised by the

Wennappuwa Committee of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Picture shows His Lordship accepting the offertory from a parishioner. Also in the picture are Rev. Fr. Priya Jayamaha and Rev. Fr. Frank Tissera.

(H.A. Caldera)



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# First Capuchian Tertiary in Sri Lanka

The Congregation of the Capuchian Tertiary Sisters of the Holy Family opened their first branch in Sri Lanka at St. James' Church, Madampella, belonging to the Katana deanery, which is a part of the Archdiocese of Colombo.

As one of the Franciscan Congregations in the World, they follow the example of St. Francis of Assisi in simplicity and humility.

The Capuchin Tertiary was founded by Friar Luis Amigo in 1885 in Valencia, Spain, for the sake of the abandoned and marginalized children and youth. Friar Louis' answer to the trauma and the suffering of these marginalized children was the formation of this religious congregation.

The Capuchin Tertiary Sisters are present in 32 countries around the world. The model of these Sisters is the Holy Family.

Their work involves youth rehabilitation, protection of chil-



dren, pastoral work, education, care of the sick and working in foreign missions.

Picture shows Rev. Fr. Laknath Cooray, Parish Priest of Madampella, with Rev. Sr. Mariglad-

ys Sanchez (Superior) Rev. Sr. Lorena Sacal, and Rev. Sr. Elena Saoy of the Congregation of Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, on the feast day of their founder on December 30th.

(Text & Pic.: Cecil Danicus)

## SSP takes oath as Attorney-at-Law

Mr. Noel Francis, Senior Superintendent of Police recently took oaths Attorney-at-law at the Supreme Court of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. He currently functions as Director/Police Medical Services Division of the Police Department. He obtained his LLB degree at the Open University of Sri Lanka.

He joined the police as a Sub Inspector in the year 1976 and had served in many parts of the Island including, the Northern and Eastern provinces. He was awarded commendation on six occasions by the Inspector General of Police for the services rendered by him during his 36 year career.

He had served in, United Nations' Missions in East Timor and Liberia as peacekeeper. He had followed training courses

in India, Malaysia, and Italy. He had also attended seminars and workshops in United States of America, France and Italy representing the Police Department. He is an active member of the Executive Committee of International Police Association (Sri Lanka Section) and is a member of the Asia Crime Prevention Foundation (Sri Lanka Section). He attended the World Congress of the International Police Association in Que-



bec, Canada in 1997.

He is an old Stu-

dent of St. Henry's College, Ilavai (Jaffna) and the Vice President of Old Students' Association of the College (Colombo Branch). He excelled in sports and soccer at the Ccollege and captained the soccer team of his school. He is the youngest son of the late Mr and Mrs. S. Lawrence of Ilavai. He is a devout Catholic and a parishioner of the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, Colombo-10.

## Ceylon Bible Society celebrates Bicentenary

"This Dedication Ceremony to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ceylon Bible Society is a kairos moment. The Society has rendered a great service in spreading the Word of God in this country. Therefore on behalf of the Catholic Church I wish God's bountiful blessings on the CBS for its good work".

So said Rev Fr. Tony Martyn, Assistant Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka in a

message of greeting delivered at the Bicentenary Year Dedication Service held last Saturday at St. Paul's Church, Milagiriya.

Rev Dr. Mani Chacko, General Secretary of the Bible Society of India delivered a special message on this occasion based on Deuteronomy 8:2 -12 ("Remember the long way the Lord your God has led You").



## Church in the World

### Woman named new Secretary-General to South African Bishops' Conference

CAPE TOWN (CNS): "I see my appointment as recognition from the bishops of the work that women are doing in this part of the World," said Sister Hermenegild Makoro, the new secretary-general of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference on December 12.



Sr. Makoro

She pointed out that "in parishes, women are taking the lead" and her appointment is natural extension of the many tasks performed by women in the Church.

Sister Makoro, who served a term as provincial superior of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood and has been associate secretary-general of the episcopal conference for six years, said the job "will be challenging, especially for me as a woman after the position has been held by men for so many years."

She will replace Father Vincent Brennan, a member of the Society of African Missions, who will retire in March.

During the height of apartheid in the 1980s, the late Holy Family Sister Brigid Flanagan was associate secretary-general of the bishops' conference and frequently stood in for Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, while he was imprisoned for anti-apartheid activities.

"The face of the conference has changed since those days," said Sister Makoro, who noted that "about 15 new bishops have been appointed in the past two decades."

The 60-year-old Sister Makoro was born in the village of Koeqana, Eastern Cape province and made her first profession in 1976.

She said that because she had worked for the Bishops' Conference for a long time, she understands how it operates. She said they "have open and vibrant discussions and I feel I will be able to challenge them if the need arises."

She said that in meetings of the Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa, which represents the Bishops' Conferences of Angola, Sao Tome and Principe, Botswana, Mozambique, Swaziland, Namibia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa, "I will be the only women among all the men. I don't feel like an outsider. There is mutual respect, and we all have the same interests at heart-the interests of the people of God."

Sister Makoro said her appointment might make them think about appointing women to leadership positions in their country's bishops' conferences.

### The Way of Life by the Editors of America, the Catholic magazine

Once again this January, hundreds of thousands of people will gather on the National Mall to protest Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion nationwide. The March for Life is a longstanding tradition for many Catholic parishes and student groups and serves as a crucial showcase for the pro-life cause.

Though the media sometimes downplay the march, the political potency of the event should not be underestimated. Here is a vibrant, grass-roots movement that predates the Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street. That so many of the marchers are young people is a clear sign that the pro-life message has lost little of its prophetic power.

This year's March for Life comes at a time of some uncertainty for the pro-life movement. Thirty-nine years after the promulgation of Roe v. Wade, a legal reversal remains elusive despite the presence of six Catholics on the Supreme Court. At the state level, even in conservative South Dakota efforts to criminalize abortion have failed. In Mississippi, the "personhood amendment," which would have defined a fertilized egg as a person, was easily defeated on the November ballot.

## SUNDAY PUNCH

by Camillus



THE CATHOLIC WEEKLY OF SRI LANKA  
**Messenger**  
පිළිතුරු

EDITORIAL

22 January 2012

## Trust begets trust and promotes Reconciliation

The Defense Secretary has appeared on television and stated that there is a threat of resurgence of an armed LTTE. He referred to the campaigns conducted by various Tamil groups among the Tamil Diaspora against the government and added that they are all committed to the establishment of a separate state of Tamil Ealam. Although they do not openly espouse violence to achieve such objective the Defense Secretary referred to various former hard core LTTE insurgent members among them.

The Tamil Diaspora is no doubt campaigning with foreign governments against the actions of the Government - its alleged violations of the human rights of Tamils and the alleged commission of war crimes during the last stage of the war. We do condemn their campaigning for a separate state. But still the present political leadership has failed to offer a viable political solution with greater degree of autonomy to the Tamil people. The Government is now on record that it is not willing to give land administration and police powers to the Provincial Councils. These Provincial Councils operate not only in the North and East but throughout the South as well. These Provincial Councils would no doubt welcome such powers.

These powers should be exercised free from political interference and only according to the laws of the land. No politician either at the center or in the provinces should interfere with the exercise of such powers which are carried out by the bureaucracy subject only to the over-all policies laid down by the politicians. This however is not what is happening. So what is required is to ensure that while these powers are devolved they should not be carried out except in accordance with the law.

The problem is that the political leadership prefers to exercise power not in accordance with the law and the Constitution but at its absolute discretions. This really is the problem at all levels of governance today.

The exercise of absolute power is fast disappearing in the world. Nor is it acceptable for the state to act outside the law. The LLRC has recommended that the para-military groups should be disarmed and they should be deprived of any special role in the administration of the North and East. Their leaders should exercise power only according to the law and the Constitution. Nor should any soldier or officer of the Armed Forces allowed to act outside the law and enforce their will on civilians through inspiring fear of reprisals. They should also be required to learn Tamil to be able to converse with the people.

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), expressed concern in their report about the large number of complaints of "abductions, enforced or involuntary disappearances, and arbitrary detentions. Recently colleagues of two political activists-Lalith Kumar Weerajayaratne and Kugan Murugananthan- went missing in the north on December 9th. On January 9th hundreds of demonstrators are reported to have marched through the capital demanding that the government release the activists, put an end to abductions in the north and pull the military out of former conflict areas.

It is perhaps in this context that the Defense Secretary made out a case for retaining the military in the North. But the military is looked upon by the Tamil people as the military of the Sinhalese. It is necessary for the Government to change this mindset of the Tamil people by retraining the military to adopt a friendlier attitude to the Tamils instead of viewing them with suspicion. The average soldier still looks upon the Tamils particularly those who are political activists as potential LTTERS. In fact, those political activists who are really potential LTTERS should be brought to book. The Government should keep on insisting that the Tamil leaders should forsake formally their demand for a separate state.

But political activism is not unlawful and those who engage in them should be protected like ordinary people. The military must be retrained to look upon the Tamil people even the political activists with trust. Trust begets trust and is a sine qua non for reconciliation. Reconciliation also requires an honest discussion on the political solution. We must not miss one more opportunity to resolve the problems of the Tamil people through a political solution.

What the Catholic Bishops highlighted at the North-East Inter-faith for Reconciliation (NEIFR) is very timely and appropriate. "Reconciliation is not a product but a process and should address the healing of wounds and restoration of an environment for people to live freely pursuing goals of their choice."

World Council of Churches  
 Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue  
 World Evangelical Alliance

## Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

### Preamble

Mission belongs to the very being of the Church. Proclaiming the Word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.

Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of five years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. This document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

### A Basis for Christian Witness

1. For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Pet 3: 15).

2. Jesus Christ is the supreme witness (cf. Jn 18:37). Christian witness is always a sharing in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the Kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God.

3. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission. For two millennia Christians have sought to follow Christ's way by sharing the good news of God's Kingdom (cf. Lk 4: 16-20).

4. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22-28).

5. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:44-48; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8).

6. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for

repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Rom 3:23).

7. Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 16:7-9; Acts 10:44-47). "They recognize that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. Jn 3:8).

### Recommendations

The Third Consultation organized by the World Council of Churches and the PCID of the Holy See in collaboration with World Evangelical Alliance with participation from the largest Christian families of faith (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal), having acted in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation to prepare this document for consideration by churches, national and regional confessional bodies and mission organizations, and especially those working in interreligious contexts, recommends that these bodies:

1. Study the issues set out in this document and where appropriate formulate guidelines for conduct regarding Christian witness applicable to their particular contexts. Where possible this should be done ecumenically, and in consultation with representatives of other religions.

2. Build relationships of respect and trust with people of all religions, in particular at institutional levels between churches and other religious communities, engaging in on-going interreligious dialogue as part of their Christian commitment. In certain contexts, where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, interreligious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation and peace-building.

3. Encourage Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith while deepening their knowledge and understanding of different religions, and to do so also taking into account the perspectives of the adherents of those religions. Christians should avoid misrepresenting the beliefs and practices of people of different religions.

4. Cooperate with other religious communities engaging in interreligious advocacy towards justice and the common good and, wherever possible, standing together in solidarity with people who are in situations of conflict.

5. Call on their governments to ensure that freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected, recognizing that in many countries religious institutions and persons are inhibited from exercising their mission.

6. Pray for their neighbours and their well-being, recognizing that prayer is integral to who we are and what we do, as well as to Christ's mission.

(Courtesy: *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* Volume 75, No. 9, Sept. 2011)

• M.P.M. Cooray Oration 2011

# "Reflections of a Catholic Doctor"

By Dr. Lucian Jayasuriya

I have chosen 'Reflections of a Catholic doctor' as my topic, to honour Dr Cooray.

The main reason why I chose this topic is because, it allows me to talk on many subjects, which I consider relevant. I must confess, that I have not studied Catholicism except for what I have learnt in school and from the pulpit on Sundays. This will be a shortcoming in my talk. First of all, I thank God Our Father for choosing me to be a Catholic, and also for making me a doctor. I am proud of being a Catholic, because the Catholic Church is holy, and because she teaches her faithful with clarity. It is the only Christian religion which speaks with authority, and does not change its teachings with time.

Therefore, the Catholic Church is our beacon of light, even if sometimes we fail to follow her teachings. One instance where many faithful find it difficult to follow her fully, is regarding her teachings on family planning – on the methods to prevent pregnancy. I thank and remember my Catholic parents, who made me a Catholic and nurtured me as a Catholic.

They educated me in Catholic English schools with difficulty. Holy Cross College, Kalutara and De Mazenod College, Kandana nurtured our Catholic faith, our thinking and behaviour. As boarders, at De Mazenod College, Kandana we were obliged to go for daily morning Mass.

I am very grateful to these two leading Catholic Schools, for making me what I am today.

## Aquinas Hall and Catholic students activities

I was at Aquinas Hall, at Have-lock Road for four years. It was also called the Catholic Hostel of the University. It was built by Fr. Benjamin Cooray, later Cardinal Archbishop of Colombo.

It was a purpose-built building, accommodating 40 hostellers, mostly Catholics. The Resident Warden was a priest. There was a chapel where daily Mass was available. Aquinas Hall was a centre of Catholic Students activity. The activists of the Catholic Students Union were there. Some were involved in the Catholic Students Federation. At that time, the Chaplain of the Catholic Students Federation was Rev. Fr. Thomas Kuriacose.

## Paddy Lands Bill incident

Some hostellers were involved in the Social Justice Movement of Rev. Fr Peter Pillai. This brings me to an incident associated with the Social Justice Movement. Rev. Fr. Peter Pillai had published a leaflet in Sinhala, criticising the Paddy Lands Bill of Mr. Phillip Gunawardena. This was in 1958. He wanted volunteers to distribute it in Pettah. I was not involved in the Movement, but I was also roped in.

About ten of us went to Pettah with the leaflets. We were shouting '*kumburu panatha, kumburu panatha*'. Within few minutes we heard "allapiyaw gahapiyaw, oya enne gahapiyaw." We were getting assaulted. Phillip Gunewardena's thugs had got angry. When colleagues were getting assaulted I ran, and as if by a miracle I was inside St. Phillip Neri's Church. There on my

knees I prayed, prayed more humbly, than I had ever done in my life. Out in the corridor, I handed over the pamphlets to a priest. Out in the street, a senior ordered us to vanish.

We got into buses and came back home to Aquinas Hall. Though some had been assaulted, there were no serious injuries. The strategy of individual retreat had been discussed before we ventured out, but none of us expected anything of the sort.

I was later called Paddy Lands Bill Jayasuriya for some time, by my friend the late Dr. Raja Johnpulle, because my initials were PLB. Details of this incident are given in the Aquinas Hall Magazine of 1960. This incident was described, to focus on the fact that Aquinas Hall, had a group of Catholic University students, who were ready to spend time and energy on Catholic activities.

Eminent priests such as Rev Frs. Dalston Forbes, Thomas Kuriacose, Tissa Balasuriya. Manik Muttukumaru have been residents of Aquinas Hall. Fr. S. J. Emmanuel who now heads the Global Tamil Forum, was a contemporary of ours at Aquinas Hall.

During our time we celebrated the Silver Jubilee of Aquinas Hall with Cardinal Cooray, Archbishop of Colombo as Chief Guest. Later on, the decay started when the Church decided that she could not afford a priest as Warden. The students took the law unto their own hands, did not pay the bills, accommodated outsiders in the rooms, etc. The Church made the regrettable decision to hand over Aquinas Hall to the University of Colombo. She lost a chance to continue moulding Catholic intellectuals from the University. Today, Aquinas Hall is a University Women's Hostel.

The Catholic Church managed a similar hostel, called Kitiyakkara for medical students. It was also closed. Today, many Catholic students find it difficult to get suitable lodgings in Colombo. Many cannot afford the cost of accommodation. In fact, our Guild gives financial support to ten medical students. Your Eminence, it may be good for the Catholic Church to start hostels for University students again.

## The Faculty of Medicine

At Medical College, the Catholic Students Society was a vibrant body. We had regular meetings and an annual trip. There were two praesidia of the Legion of Mary. One of our weekly tasks was to sell the Catholic Messengers at Borella Junction, for one hour on Saturday morning. This we did even on the Saturday before our examinations.

## Salt of the Earth and Light of the World

At this stage, I wish to reflect on what Jesus wants us to be. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mathew 5. 13-14)

The question is, are we different? Can people associating with us see something different, in us Catholic doctors? Can we be identified? Do we want to hide our faith sometimes? I leave it to you ladies and gentleman to decide.

Is it correct for Catholic doctors to strike? Whatever some say, when doctors strike, patients suffer and some die, even when emergency services are kept going. Did we become doctors to make people suffer or even allow them to die? Should we not stand up and be counted?

When in government service, I refused to strike and happily bore the consequences. We should not only not strike, but do a job of work so that we are examples to others.

If the District Medical Officer (DMO) comes for work at 8.00 am, and does his work with dedication, the others in the hospital follow. This happened at Ittapana. A DMO was required to see in-patients, morning afternoon and night. I did not only do that, but did all admissions after 5.00 pm. Please note that there was no overtime. However, we worked day and night. Reminiscences of Ittapana was published in the Ceylon Medical Journal 2004; 49: 144-46

Will we follow the teachings of the Church in difficult situations? Are we ready for a confrontation when an issue arises?

## The Intra-Uterine Device (IUD)

How many of us have inserted intra-uterine devices? The main action of an IUD, is to prevent the fertilised ovum from getting implanted in the uterus. That means, it is the instrument of a potential monthly abortion. As Medical Officer of Health Ambalangoda, I was assigned two IUD clinics. I refused to insert IUDs. My explanation was called. I replied that I did not become a doctor to cause abortions. The GMOA wanted me to follow government policy. Some Catholic doctors and priests would not give me a clear-cut answer. I was ready to leave government service on this issue. My dear wife Nimala backed me fully.

However, the Superintendent of Health Services, was tactful. He handed over my IUD clinics to the willing DMO. How many Catholic doctors in government service are ready to say NO if required to insert IUDs? If all Catholic doctors say NO how many potential abortions can be avoided?

When I was working abroad, I refused to prescribe the morning after pill. The main action of the morning after pill is also to prevent implantation. I was risking my locum job. However, the consultant was good to me. He told me to send such patients to him.

Though we are small in number, we have to be strong enough, with the power of God to bear witness to what is right. I think that we are doing it to some extent. The others listen to us. They know our views on many subjects. However, we can do better.

## The Catholic Doctors' Guild

In recent years the Guild has been active. We have had our regular Christmas projects with medical camps, helped needy medical students, gone on pilgrimage, and tried to educate people on family life and on natural family planning.

We had a seminar on poverty

10 years ago. A decision was made that we should work in the Parish. As a result the free medical clinic at Sacred Heart Church, Rajagiriya was born. We had the enthusiastic cooperation of Rev. Fr. Leonard Ranasinghe our Parish Priest then. The clinic has been conducted regularly every Sunday, by volunteer doctors and helpers. We have had no problem of money, as God our Father has seen to it that we have a set of regular donors, supplemented by money from the Parish. A dedicated clinic space was built in the new Jubilee Building of the Church. Although hospitals are nearby we have a regular clientele.

It is good for us doctors to give our expertise free of charge on a regular basis. I can tell you that it gives great satisfaction. The Guild has less than 50 active members. We have about 200 in the mailing list. But we are a very small number compared to what we could be. There are over 16,000 doctors in Sri Lanka. Catholic doctors in Sri Lanka should number about 1300. Unfortunately, we have not been able to get them together. We have tried to get branches of the Guild organised in Kandy and Galle, but have failed.

Can the Catholic Church take some action to get Catholic doctors together, to work with the Church?

## The Roman Catholic Church

The Holy Mother the Church is a great holy organisation. It is considered as one of the best managed organisations in the world. The gates of hell have not prevailed against it. The hierarchy of the Church consist of holy people, who have sacrificed their lives to God and to the Church. Therefore it is with great humility and trepidation that I comment on the Catholic Church.

The Vatican has acknowledged that Islam has overtaken Catholicism. We have to wonder why? Is it because Islam is much more strict than the Catholic Church?

The Church is on the decline in Europe and North America. Church attendance is decreasing in all countries of Europe including ardently Catholic countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Ireland. The reputation of the Church has been hit by paedophile priest scandals. The Church has quite correctly not changed her teaching on women priests, gay marriage, artificial contraception and abortion. This has regrettably reduced the allegiance to the Church.

On the other hand Catholicism is on the rise in Africa and Asia. Priestly vocations are declining in Europe. Africa and Asia now supply priests to Europe. There seems to be a reversal of centuries of missionary activity.

## Abortion

### Christian Europe & North America?

The Catholic Church has always said that abortion is a grave sin. However, it is legalised in many so called Catholic countries. It was legalised in the USA in 1973, by the Supreme Court, as a result of the famous Roe vs Wade case. Abortion is available almost on demand up to 24 weeks of pregnancy. However, there is a very active pro-life lobby in USA. I sometimes wonder whether the West is in post-Christian era.

(Contd. on Pg. 9)



# Marriage in the Original Covenant

## The Original Gift: Creation

In the beginning, we read in the first chapter of Genesis, God *created* all that exists. To create, in the sense that God alone can create, is to *love something into existence*. It is a tremendously committing step, the joyful, deliberate overflowing of God's goodness God knows all things, even that vast, hidden multitude of things and persons that it would have been possible for Him to create, but that he has decided never to create; God *loves* only those things and persons - that he has actually chosen to create. It is

his love, with all of its original, creative force, that stands as the ground and source of all of our being.

## The Original Community: Man and Woman as God's Image

*Male and Female He Created Them*

From the beginning, man and woman were created as - one, in a call to community that reflects the community of the Trinity: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27).

God called the first man and woman to be "one flesh," for "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gn 2:18). In heeding this call to community, primarily in marriage and the formation of a family, human beings fully realise their natural vocation to be the image and likeness of God in creation. Thus marriage is the original human community, and even as a natural institution, marriage is meant to be a means of grace both for man and for woman.

The natural union "between the first man and woman was open and free of shame (cf. Gn 2:25). Shame is a natural defence, a protective emo-

tion, against the possibility of being used by another person, or reduced to some value, in the eyes of another, that is only a part of our true worth; the presence of shame indicates our perception that this possibility is real (LR 174-93; TB 114-17). Adam and Eve felt no shame, because there was no risk that they would treat each other with anything less than a full recognition of the true dignity that they shared as the image and likeness of God.

God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone I will make a suitable helpmate for him" (Gn 2:18). Thus we know that the woman was to be the rep-

resentative of God to the man, for it is God from whom all help comes, to men (Ps 121:1-2; cf. CCC 1605). Likewise, the man was to represent God to the woman, as her own "helpmate." For them to be fully human, it was essential that they form a community, within which they would each encounter the Lord.

*(Continued on next week)*

*(Courtesy: Marriage Together in Christ Catholic Truth Society)*



## The School of Prayer in the House of Nazareth



Discourse of the Servant of God Paul VI, during his visit to Nazareth is memorable.

The Pope said that at the school of the Holy Family we "understand why we must maintain a spiritual discipline, if we wish to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become disciples of Christ," he added: "In the first place it teaches us silence. Oh! If only esteem for silence, a wonderful and indispensable spiritual atmosphere, could be reborn within us! Whereas we are deafened by the din, the noise and discordant voices in the frenetic, turbulent life of our time. O silence of Nazareth! Teach us to be steadfast in good thoughts, attentive to our inner life, ready to hear God's hidden inspiration clearly and the exhortations of true teachers" (Discourse in Nazareth, 5 January 1964).

*(Courtesy: Osservatore Romano)*

## Psalm 23 - an assurance of all I need!

- The Lord's my Shepherd - **Protection**
- I'll not want - **Self sufficiency**
- He makes me down to lie - **Rest**
- In pastures green He leadeth me - **Refreshment**
- The quiet waters by - **Peace**
- My soul He doth restore again - **Renewal**
- and me to walk doth make - **Encouragement**
- Within the paths of righteousness - **Guidance**
- E'en for His own name's sake - **Affiliation**
- Yea, tho' I walk in death's dark vale - **Testing**
- Yet will I fear no ill - **Courage**
- For thou art with me - **Hope and trust**
- And Thy rod and staff me comforts still - **Security and discipline**
- My table Thou hast furnished - **Provision**
- In presence of my foes - **Victory**
- My head Thou dost with oil anoint - **Respect and blessing**
- And my cup overflows - **Abundance**
- Goodness and mercy all my life - **Unlimited forgiveness**
- Shall surely follow me - **Reliability**
- And in God's house forever more - **Stability**
- My dwelling place shall be a - **Loving HOME!**

• Nilanthi Aarasaratnam

replied Joanna.

"Is your mother better now?" asked Malik solicitously. "Yes, thank God. I wish now that I had taken her to the General Hospital which is free," said Joanna.

"We do have free healthcare and free education in this country but we grumble about the quality and we talk of the high cost of living," remarked Malik.

"We must learn to pray and trust in God whatever happens. When my mother fell ill, I stopped praying and just panicked. We must remember that God is walking by our side and that He carries us when times get rough," said Joanna.

"Yes, things happen to us and it is easy to lose our cool. We must remember the story of the Footprints and how God carries us when adversity comes our way," said Malik, adding, "That way, there is only one set of footprints on the sand during the tough times." "Let us put our trust in God come what may," concluded Joanna.



## Tears

A bouquet of roses, O Mary we offer you today,  
Gathered from our garden, with hearts full of love, we pray  
That the future years may bring us closer to you and your son  
Binding us together, with no room for the evil one.  
We have hurt you Dear Lady by our sinful deeds  
And also not helping others in their utter dire needs  
Each time you see a clenched fist with money inside  
While the malnourished and hungry die on the road beside  
The rich squandering money on women wine and song  
Tasting forbidden fruits as they gaily go along  
unable to help the poor tears flow down your pallid cheeks  
And their tears mixed with yours, as they silently weep,

Many people have seen you cry  
And we the guilty know the reason why  
We promise you dearest mother to never let this happen again  
So smile on us dear lady as we will not try in vain  
Guard us from every evil and grant us heavenly grace  
Until life's journey is ended after the struggle with the human race  
And when the pearly gates are opened to see the face of the Lord  
We shall bow down in adoration of The Almighty God  
While angelic voices fill the heavenly air with their song  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluiah!

Annette Gunasekera



## TAKE TIME FOR A MINUTE OF HUMOUR - SMILE!



Teacher, explaining Kiribanda's home work said, "I do not see how it is possible for a single person to make so many mistakes!"

Kiribanda said proudly, "You are correct teacher: It wasn't a single person, only my daddy."

Rev. Fr. Fracfid Anthony Fernando O.M.I.



## A CROSS

The Way 66

By Sirohmi Gunasekera

## Trust

"Oh dear, I have to pay back a loan. With the interest it is about a lakh," moaned Joanna. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be ... " Haven't you heard that saying?" asked her friend Malik.

"Yes, but I couldn't help it. I had to borrow money to pay for the medical expenses of my mother."

# St. Sebastian: In Art

The earliest representation of St. Sebastian is a mosaic in the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (Ravenna, Italy) dated between 527 and 565. The right lateral wall of the Basilica contains large mosaics representing a procession of 26 martyrs, led by Saint Martin and includes Sebastian (see pic: top left). The martyrs are represented in Byzantine style, lacking any individuality, and having all identical expressions.



frequently depicted of all saints by late Gothic and Renaissance artists, in the period after the Black Death. Sebastian appears in many prints and paintings, due to his continuous popularity with the faithful. Among many others, Botticelli, Perugino, Titian, Pollaiuolo, Giovanni Bellini, Guido Reni (who painted the subject seven times), Mantegna (three times), Hans Memling, Gerrit van Honthorst, Luca Signorelli, El Greco, Honoré Daumier, John Singer Sargent and Louise Bourgeois all painted Saint Sebastian. The Saint is ordinarily depicted as a handsome youth pierced by arrows. There were other scenes of his arrest, confrontation with the Emperor, and final beheading.

Another early representation is in a mosaic in the Church of San Pietro in Vincoli (Rome, Italy), probably made in the year 682. It shows a grown, bearded man in court dress but contains no trace of an arrow (see top right). The archers and arrows begin to appear by 1000, and ever since have been far more commonly shown than the actual reason of his death by clubbing, so that there is a popular misperception that this is how he died.

As protector of plague victims and soldiers, St. Sebastian naturally occupied a very important place in the popular medieval mind, and hence was among the most

The paintings we produce below are not in keeping to their actual proportions and chosen at random (see from left) : Painting by Il Sodoma, (c. 1525 Galleria Palatina Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy ), Painting by Andrea Mantegna (c.1459 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria), Painting by Hendrick ter Brugghen depicting Saint Sebastian tendered by Saint Irene and her maid (1625 Dutch Golden Age Renaissance Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio), Painting by Guido Reni who painted a series of different Saint Sebastian paintings, Painting by Raphael (Renaissance c. 1501-1502 housed in the Accademia Carrara of Bergamo, Italy), Painting by El Greco (1578 in Cathedral of San Antolín Palencia), Painting by Carlo Saraceni (c. 161015 Castle Museum Prague), Painting by Botticelli (1474, Staatliche Museum, Berlin).



## Ekamuthu Oray Makkal - a journey of love

A group of Professionals committed to working towards Unity and Reconciliation between the North and South of Sri Lanka, working on an inter faith platform came together in 2009 to form 'The Unity Mission Team' locally known as the Ekamuthu Oray Makkal.

The focus is on children between the ages of 15 to 20 years said Bertal Pinto-Jayawardena, Co-ordinator of the Unity Mission Team. The vision is to reach out to inspire, encourage and support the children of the North, and link them up with children from the South of our Nation. This resulted in the Unity Camp concept being designed, he said.

The initial project of The Unity Mission team was to reach out to children who were at Menik Farm with milk food and school books in 2009. However the efforts of the group evolved with the changing needs of the children of the North, extending from provision of school books and footwear to small scale infrastructure support to help re-build school facilities.

The need for medical care has been identified and large scale medical camps were conducted at Kayts and at Viduthalthivu, supported by the Sri Lanka Navy and the Sri Lanka Army, with Lanka Hospitals Ltd., supplying the

pharmaceuticals. The Unity Team had nearly 30 Specialist and other Doctors on board for each of these Camps.

The initial Unity Mission Camp was held in December 2010 with 500 children from the North/ Wannu attending the Camp. This was, at that time, the largest group of children who had travelled down to Colombo for any such programme. The second Unity Mission Camp was held in Mullaitivu in June 2011, with 500 children



Compiled by: Kishani S. Fernando

## Tomb of St. Sebastian in Rome

To visit the ancient Basilica dedicated to St. Sebastian in Rome (see pic. above), you have to go outside the old Roman gate and travel the historic Roman Road - via Appia.

The first church here was a great basilica built in the 4th century over the site of catacombs. These catacombs were temporarily used as places of sepulture of two other saints



martyrized in Rome, Peter and Paul, whose remains were later transferred to the two basilicas carrying their names whence the original name of the church, "Basilica Apostolorum," the Basilica of the Apostles. In the 9th century, it was re-dedicated to St. Sebastian, who was martyred in the reign of Diocletian, and who was buried here.

The chapel above the tomb of St. Sebastian is attributed to the 17th century. At the shrine of St. Sebastian is a statue of the dying saint by Antonio Giorgetti, one of Bernini's pupils. It may have been made after a drawing by Bernini himself.

Opposite that shrine is the Chapel of Relics, with the original footprint relic from Domine Quo Vadis, and an arrow said to be one of those that killed St Sebastian as well as the column he was tied to when he was killed. The chapel was designed in the 18th century. The sarcophagus of Pope St Fabian (236-250) was discovered here in 1915. The Church celebrates the feast of both St. Sebastian and Pope St. Fabian on 20 January.

in attendance. The third Unity Mission Camp was held in December 2011.

The Camps also focused on leadership development, personal capacity enhancement and integration. The healing and reconciliation experienced through this interaction and the benefit to our Nation's future is incalculable. The objective of the camp the enhancement of unity, reconciliation and healing is achieved with bonding of friendships between children of the North and South, which have gone to blossom and flourish. This is in addition to the educational and economical support afforded from caring people in Colombo. A significant feature of these Camps is the logistical support and partnership extended by the Sri Lanka Army towards the welfare of the children and the successful achievement of the overall objectives underlying the purpose of conducting the Camps.

The Unity Mission has many programmes planned for 2012. Unity Camp 4 is scheduled to be held in Padaviya, while Camp 5 will be designed as a special Leadership Programme. Other programmes include the setting up of Skills and Livelihood Development Centres, and a Scholarship Fund. For more information you can check out the website- [www.unitymission.lk](http://www.unitymission.lk).

# The Childhood of Jesus

The heartwarming events of the first Christmas were now an indelible memory replete with the haunting fragrance of poverty, meekness and the incomprehensible love of God for sinful man. The babe of Bethlehem, the Son of God, was now living amongst us and life had to go on.

## The Circumcision

In accordance with the Jewish Law eight days after His birth, Jesus was circumcised. Luke describes the event as follows:

"When eight days had passed and the boy must be circumcised He was called Jesus, the name which had been given Him by the angel before even he was conceived in the womb." (Lk.2: 21)

This was the first shedding of divine blood that was to take place. More was to follow thirty three years later beginning with the Garden of Gethsemane where he sweated drops of blood and ending with his death on Calvary.



## The Presentation

The Jewish Law prescribed that the baby boy should be consecrated in the Temple after the mother had undergone a forty-day period of purification. Can you imagine that the mother of Jesus who was the epitome of purity had to subject herself to the ordeal of purification. The law required it and she obeyed it.

Accordingly after the fortieth day had passed Joseph and Mary went with the baby to the Temple in Jerusalem for the consecration. There was a man in Jerusalem by the name of Simeon. He was very righteous and devout. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen Jesus Christ the Lord. Moved by the Holy Spirit he was in the temple when Joseph and Mary arrived with the child. When he saw them approaching the sanctuary he was struck by their poise and dignity and the matchless beauty of the young mother. Simeon took the baby in his arms and praised God saying with a voice filled with joy - "Ruler of all, now let thy servant go in peace, according to thy word, for my own eyes have seen that saving power of thine which thou hast prepared in the sight of all nations. This is the light which shall give revelation to the Gentiles; this is the glory of thy people Israel" (Lk.2: 29 - 32)

Joseph and Mary marvelled at what was said of the baby. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary the mother-

"Behold this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel; and for a sign that shall be contradicted" And looking at Mary with eyes filled with sympathy he added -

"As for thy own soul, it shall have a sword to pierce it." (Lk 2: 35)

A cold shiver must have run through the Immaculate Heart of Mary but she said not a word, because she was always conscious of the fact that Jesus was the Son of God.

There was in the temple at that moment a prophetess by the name of Anna, a widow who had fasted and prayed in the temple. She was 84-years-old. Going up to Joseph and Mary she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law they returned to Galilee to their home town of Nazareth but not before they had to undergo the terrible experience of having to run away to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod who was determined to destroy the child.

## The Flight into Egypt

When the Magi, the wise men of the East had gone to Bethlehem and worshipped the child, they returned to their countries by a different route because they had been warned in a dream about Herod's evil intentions. When Herod found out that the Magi had outwitted him he was very worried because he thought that the Messiah was a political leader who would endanger his position. He reacted with satanic ruthlessness and ordered the killing of all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and the vicinity.

Before this order was put into execution an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him, "Get up take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell



you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Accordingly Joseph got up and took the child and his mother that very night and left for Egypt. The Gospel does not give us any description of this hazardous journey. The lone stretches of the desert wilderness were the only witnesses to the plight of these holy



The Crypt of the Holy Family at St. Sargius Church in Egypt, where they lived for some time during their stay in that country.

fugitives as they sped towards the safety of Egypt. How long the journey took especially with a babe in arms and what hardships and deprivations the holiest of families had to undergo have not been recorded but we can imagine what a terrible ordeal it must have been filled with fear and anxiety.

There is in the church of St. Sargius in Egypt a crypt which according to tradition was built on the site where the Holy Family lived during their stay in that country.

On the death of Herod an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Get up take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

So the family returned to Israel and having been warned in a dream not to stay in Judea because Herod's successor was another tyrant, he returned to Nazareth in Galilee. And Luke's gospel states, "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him." (Lk. 2: 39; 40)

Jesus would have been like any other boy in Nazareth engaging in innocent fun and games with them under the watchful eyes of his parents who doted on him.

## The Pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover

Every year the Holy Family went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. In accordance with this custom when Jesus was twelve-years old, they went on this annual pilgrimage. They stayed in Jerusalem for seven days until all the ceremonies were concluded. The next day Joseph and Mary joined the many caravans of camels and mules that were heading for Nazareth. Jesus was not with them but they did not worry thinking that he was with His travelling companions. When they stopped for the night on route they became aware of His absence. They were in a panic and returned immediately

to Jerusalem to look for Him. For two days and two nights they searched for Him all along the route and in Jerusalem. On the third day they were amazed to find Jesus "seated in the Temple in the midst of learned doctors hearing them and asking them questions, while those who heard him were filled with amazement at his understanding and his answers."

It was Mary who spoke, "Son why have you treated us like this, Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

The boy Jesus replied.

"What reason had you to search for me would you not tell that I must needs be about my father's business."

Joseph and Mary did not understand what He was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But Mary treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men (Lk. 2: 41 - 51)

## The Holy Family in Nazareth

There is absolutely no doubt that despite their modest means the Holy Family was the happiest family in Nazareth, an example to all of us even today. For the next eighteen years Jesus helped Joseph in his carpentry business. He became a skilled carpenter himself. He visited the synagogue often, learnt all the Old Testament prophecies and learnt his prayers at his mother's knees. Humble as they were Joseph had to work very hard to keep the family going but with Jesus by his side work became a pleasure. Mary's heart was filled with delight as she watched her son grow up to be a strong and healthy young man who would be equipped to face the great challenges ahead of Him.

Walter Rupesinghe





## Reflection.....

Contd. from Pg. 5

### Abortion in Great Britain

The history of legalisation of abortion in Great Britain is interesting. The British Abortion Act of 1967, allows surgical abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy. In Northern Ireland which is still religiously more conservative, abortions are still banned unless a woman's life is at risk. Britain last changed the Abortion Act in 1990, lowering the time limit for abortion from 28 weeks to 24 weeks. In 2008 the House of Commons voted to retain the 24 week limit. Since then there are moves to reduce the limit to 20 to 22 weeks. This ongoing debate seems to be due to pangs of conscience, and also due to the very active pro-life lobby in Great Britain.

### Abortion in Sri Lanka

#### What is the situation in Sri Lanka?

The Penal Code Sections 303 to 307 are the relevant laws. The law allows abortion only if the mother's life is in danger due to the pregnancy. This is consistent with the teaching of the Church. Legislation was brought to Parliament, few years ago to allow abortions for pregnancies arising from incest, rape and for major congenital abnormalities. However, it was withdrawn, due to pressure not only from Catholics but also from other concerned persons. However, an estimated number of 650 to 1000 abortions are carried out in Sri Lanka daily. The daily births are just over 1000. Therefore, this very religious country aborts about 2/3 the number that are allowed to be born.

Studies show that most of the abortions were on married women, who were seeking to limit the number of babies. Another fact is that the abortion rates are not lower in the Catholic belt from Kaltura to Chilaw. The method most commonly used is called by the euphemism, menstrual regulation. This involves mechanical suction of the contents of the uterus. A woman who misses her periods goes to a private clinic, and the procedure is carried out for a comparatively small fee.

Blessed Pope John Paul II very often reminded the world that abortion is a grave sin. He talked about the Culture of Death. The hierarchy of the Church in Sri Lanka has very rarely preached about it. I have not heard a sermon on this subject. The Church in Sri Lanka has been at best lukewarm. There has been some activity in the SEDEC (Social and Economic Development Centre) led by Dr. Eshan Dias and some Rev. Sisters, and at the Paul VI Centre. The Catholic Doctors' Guild produced a poster to be exhibited in the churches. The Natural Family Planning Association, which propagated Billing's Ovulation Method has died. We have failed to organise pro-life groups as in the UK or USA.

By the time a woman realises that she has missed her periods the baby is three weeks old. The baby's heart has started to form. By five weeks the heart is beating. This is about the time she is going for so called menstrual regulation. If we can explain to her that the heart of her baby is already beating she may not go through with the procedure. There is a need for a well funded organisation with full-time dedicated staff at least to educate the Catholic laity.

### The Sacrament of Reconciliation

When we were children, not all in the congregation received Holy Communion. Among the laity there was general reluctance to receive Communion daily. It may have been due to reverence to the Eucharist. Today almost all at Mass receive Communion. I sometimes wonder, whether people have become more holy than a half century ago, or is it that we feel that we really cannot commit grave sin.

This reminds me of what the holy man, Rev. Brother Athanasius who was Director of De Mazenod College told us. He was the unofficial Spiritual Director to some senior boarders. The boarders used to receive Communion daily. He told us that it is good not to receive Communion occasionally. His argument was that receiving Communion should not be routine, and that every time we receive Communion we have to be prepared to receive Jesus Christ.

The routine reception of Holy Communion, maybe has resulted in a perception that Confession

is really not necessary. Of course during Easter, the priests remind us that we should make our Confession at least during Easter. But what are the facilities that the Church in Sri Lanka provides for people to make their confession? I should say, little.

If one goes to a Catholic Church in England, he will find that there is a dedicated day and time in the week, that a priest will be seated at the confessional, even if there are no penitents. We do not have that system here. True, a priest is obliged to hear confession when requested. But many a time the priest is not available or is busy. The only places I know where one can find a priest to hear confession are St. Anthony's Church, Kochchikade and St. Philip Neri's Church, Pettah.

A priest being theoretically available 15 minutes before Sunday Mass does not work. Some time ago I wrote to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, recommending that each Parish has a date and time dedicated for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I did not even receive an acknowledgement.

However, I must say that I was pleasantly surprised by His Eminence Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith. He had requested views of the faithful about the Church. I replied to supplement, what we wrote from the Guild. He replied. One of the subjects I had written was about the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

### Participation of the Laity in the Management of the Church

I also wrote to Your Eminence about getting the participation of the laity. Just saying that the Catholic Church needs active participation of the laity is not enough. We know that Parish Councils meet monthly. But we do not know what is decided at these meetings. This is where we can learn from the established Protestant Churches. There, the laity is highly involved in the management of the Church, including finances. That is why, even small congregations are able to manage their churches.

The Catholic Church would be able to collect much more money, and undertake much more activities, including helping the poor, if people have a say on how the money is spent. What we need is transparency in the management of the Church. I am not saying the money is not managed properly. I am saying that we do not know how the money is used. That makes people reluctant to contribute. The church should use lay expertise, especially to manage finances and estates. It may be worthwhile employing salaried staff for these. There is a reluctance to trust the laity.

## Feast of St. Sebastian January 20th

A Roman warrior par excellence  
Under the command of Diocletian  
Massacred the innocent Christians  
On account of their steadfast faith.

Sebastian was empowered by God Almighty  
To acknowledge his grave folly  
And be a dynamic force  
To spread God's kingdom with grace.

This unexpected change of Sebastian  
The chief officer of imperial household  
Aggravated the wraths of Diocletian  
Causing Sebastian to suffer bitter consequences.

Archers were deployed to shoot him with arrows  
But it was of no avail  
He escaped death despite the blows  
And appeared miraculously before all.

Subsequently he was flogged to death  
As he was a beacon of light to his faith  
He entered Almighty God's kingdom  
Winning the crowns of martyrdom

*Leonard Wijesiri*

For example the Archdiocesan Commission on Structural Adjustments is asked to 'Study how a paradigm shift could be effected giving more space and responsibility to the laity and making them effective collaborators of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan'.

However all five members of the Commission are priests!.

I recommend that we Catholic doctors always remember that we are highly privileged. We have been given talents by God Our Father, not to hide them but to multiply them. We should use them in the service of people, especially the poor and marginalised.

We are called to be the Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World. We may not measure up to what is expected of us, but we should always strive to do our best for God Our Father.

## For a quiet-time retreat.....

The newly renovated "Santana" Retreat House - Galaha in the Diocese of Kurunegala is now available for booking with more facilities for Retreats, Seminars,

Workshops, Conferences and all other residential programmes.

It has a capacity to accommodate 50 persons and a quiet atmosphere conducive for

meditation and relaxation.

For more information and bookings please contact the Procurator General.

**Rev. Fr. Basil Rohan Fernando**

For more information and bookings please contact the Procurator General.

**Rev. Fr. Basil Rohan Fernando**

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# REMAINS OF A MEDIEVAL DAY

*The secular world and even some Catholics today are mystified by the cult of relics in the Middle Ages. But a recent exhibition at the British Museum in London showed how the veneration of the mortal reliquiae of the great saints linked the human to the divine.*

Most of us have memories that occasionally cause us a pang of acute, involuntary embarrassment. We flinch from our youthful naivety and vulnerability, while at the same time feeling protective towards our former self.

Sometimes those moments of humiliation and awkwardness may have been turning points that made us aware that things were not as we had hitherto assumed. We may remember these events precisely because they marked a moment of transition and helped to make us, for good or ill, what we are.

I suspect that many Catholics feel a similar discomfort about the medieval cult of relics. I well remember my perplexity as a very new postulant, when the whole community processed to the altar after Benediction one Sunday to kiss a reliquary which, I was told, contained a fragment of Jesus' swaddling clothes. Even in the first flush of enthusiasm for convent life, I balked at that. It was so disturbingly reminiscent of Chaucer's Pardoner, who claimed to have in his bag a piece of the sail of St. Peter's boat and tried to pass off a pillowcase as Our Lady's veil.

But it is never healthy - in either personal or collective life - to disown or deny the past, because, whether we like it or not, it has shaped our identity. Scholars such as Peter Brown and Mircea Eliade have shown that, far from being an unfortunate superstition, the cult of relics was developed by some of the most significant theologians of Late Antiquity and was a serious attempt to explore the human capacity for the divine. It coincided with crucial moments of transition in church history, with the emancipation of Christianity after centuries of persecution and with the turbulence following the collapse of Roman rule in Western Europe.

## UNIVERSAL EXPRESSIONS

The British Museum's new exhibition, "Treasures of Heaven: Saints, relics and devotion in Medieval Europe", is a valuable opportunity for Catholics to reconnect with this important episode in their past, to examine its symbolism, and, perhaps surprisingly, to find that the cult of relics throws light on some of our current predicaments.

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest and most universal expressions of the religious impulse. Long before people began to map their world scientifically, they developed what has been called a "sacred geography." Certain places were revered as centres that linked heaven and earth, and people of all cultures travelled long distances to encounter the sacred there. In the ancient

world, it was usually things such as temples and holy mountains, groves or rivers. But in the fourth century, Christians began to locate the divine in a human being.

This important shift in religious thought inspired the great Christological debates about the Incarnation of God in the man Jesus. Was it possible that a mere human being, who had died an agonising and disgraceful death, had embodied the divine? And, if so, what were the implications for Christians who were also "sons of God"? For St. Athanasius, the answer was clear: "God became human so that humans could become divine." No one seemed to have fulfilled this potential for the divine nature more perfectly than the martyrs who had followed Jesus to the death and often revered as "other Christ."

People had long gathered at the grave of a martyr but now these tombs became places. Because the souls of the martyrs already with God, their physical remains (reliquiae) provided a new link with heaven. could intercede with God on behalf of devotees, in rather the same way as in Roman society a patron mediated between mighty and the powerless.

By the sixth century, the landscape of Europe was dotted with a network of shrines, containing a relic of a martyr. Sometimes the shrine housed the tomb that contained his or her entire body. More often, however, one of the martyr's bones, a drop of his or her blood, or - so closely was the body connected with heaven - something that had merely touched one of his or her relics was contained in a jewelled casket or statue. St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us that pilgrims crowded round their saint "like bees around a hive" to ask for his help or seek a healing miracle.

The new sacred geography of Europe testified both to the spread of Christianity and the unity of Christendom. After the fall of Rome, it linked the Christian world together, as relics were donated by Eastern Churches to the lost western provinces. The shrines, located outside the city in the cemetery area on the margins of the town, provided the bishops, who were becoming the new leaders of Western society, with a power base that was distinct from the pagan centres of public life in the city centre.

## PILGRIMS

The pilgrims who thronged to these shrines were not blindly credulous. They would not have been as preoccupied with authenticity of a relic as we are today, because the rituals enabled them to feel the saint's presence there

for themselves. In the pre-modern world, ritual was not the product and expression of religious ideas that were taken on faith; on the contrary, these ideas were largely the product of carefully crafted ritual. Like a great theatrical performance, a carefully devised ritual could have a powerful effect on those participants who knew how to respond to it with imagination and sympathy.

Pilgrims would arrive at a shrine wearied by the rigours of their journey, fasting, and with a sense of heightened anticipation. They were thus primed for a transformative experience. The shrine itself, with its glimmering mosaics, magical light, fragrant incense and luxuriantly shady trees carefully reproduced the imagery of paradise, so a pilgrim immediately felt that he or she had entered a different dimension. The architecture pointed constantly beyond itself: The covered surfaces, submerged chambers, grilles and gates hinted tantalisingly at something that was just out of reach and endlessly elusive.

We have largely lost the skill of ritual, which is essentially an imaginative "play" of make believe, requiring participants to behave as if something were the case and finding in consequence that they are suddenly caught up in the rite and are no longer pretending. Our thinking is more literal and discursive, and this has sometimes made religion problematic. But the very contradictions of the relic cult enabled those pilgrims who would have found it impossible to follow the abstruse theological debates about the Incarnation to appreciate the essential paradox of all religious thought.

Pilgrims had to overcome their natural aversion to a dead body by kissing the relic; this subversion of normal responses propelling them into an alternative state of mind. We do not cope well with death in modern society: we speak of people "passing away" and try to push death out of sight. But the cult of relics helped pilgrims to embrace mortality. In the ancient world, contact with a corpse was usually polluting, but Christians now declared that dead flesh, symbol of humanity's ultimate defeat, was redolent of the divine.

## SOCIETY'S HEROES

A society's heroes reflect its values and our modern cult of celebrity perhaps reveals a disturbing triviality at the heart of our culture. The medievals, however, revered men and women whose heroism had elevated them to divine level. The public reading of the martyr's story (*passio*) did not dwell on his or her agony for its own sake but concentrated instead on his or her miraculous impassivity. "This martyr did not blench under torture," Victricius, Bishop of Rouen, reminded his congregation as he stood beside the city's relics.

"This one was cut about, yet stood up still". A divine power had been at work, which transformed their suffering into triumph.

But the rites were also a potentially subversive critique. In a harsh and exploitative society, for example, the *passio* presented the martyr as a victim of a cruel and unjust imperial power and the sanctity of the "patron" saint threw into poignant relief the corruption of the patronage system here on earth. The 'shrine was home to society's rejects - the cripples, the possessed, the mentally ill and the destitute, who were given shelter and employment there and were always included in the great processions. They would walk beside the aristocrats and bishops in a demonstration of how society ought to be.

Finally, the golden reliquaries that will be on view in "Treasures of Heaven" had their own message. In medieval culture, gold was often seen as "dead" matter. It symbolised the tribute extorted from the masses by the aristocracy, who decked themselves in golden ornaments and weapons. But in the intricately crafted and jewelled relic cases, profane wealth had been redeemed and transferred instead to the realm of the sacred.

It is a modern habit to reject vehemently what has been personally superseded, but the cult of relics reminds us that, like our medieval forebears, we have our blind spots. It is surely an act of *pietas* to honour a devotion that was for centuries central to Catholic spirituality.

**Karen Armstrong**

(Courtesy: *The Tablet*)

## Queen of the Silver Screen of Yesteryear

The 89th birthday of Rukmani Devi will be remembered today at a memorial function at Sausiripaya, Colombo 07, which commences at 2 p.m.

She was born on the 15th of January 1923 at Ramboda. The name in her Baptism certificate was Daisy Rasamma Daniels.

Two distinguished Sinhala scholars at that time gave her the name Rukmani Devi, when they saw her singing talent under her Guru - the well known musician and singing maestro H.W. Rupasinghe. Mr. Jayantha Weerasekera - (in whose name there is a street in Colombo) gave her the name "Rukmani"; and Mr. Michael Sannas Liyanage added the name "Devi".

She sang her first ever song "Siri Buddhagaya Vihare" with Rupasinghe Master (as he was known in his lifetime). All her earlier songs were classics, which

were on gramophone records, because there was no radio at that time. Her songs, like *Dedi Kala Matha - Pembara Matha - Sara Sirini Ramya, Siri Seth Sadai Moksa Puray, Te Pan Dina Dina Wedi Wediye*, became more popular after the advent of radio. Her rendering of Nama Mariyani, to the melody of Franz Schubert's Ave Maria, was also very popular, specially among the local lovers of classical music.

Rukmani Devi came to be known as "The Nightingale, of the Silver Screen of Sri Lanka, after her appearances in the movies. She played the lead female role in the first ever Sinhala film "Kadauna Poronduwa" (Broken Promise).

Some of the earliest films were produced by the Minerva Players of Negombo, whose leader was Rukmani Devi's own brother-in-law B.A.W. Jayamanna. Their films were in



**Rukmani Devi** alphabetical order, which were as follows:-

Broken Promise (*Kadauna Poronduwa*) Changing Fate (Peralane Iranama) Defeated Aim (*Veradunu Kurumanama*) Evasive Denial (*Sengavuna Pilitura*) Fanatic Faith (Umathu Visvasaya) Grizzly Guardian (*Kapati Arakshakaya*) Hasty Decision (*Hadisi Vinischaya*) and Iranganee.

Films of the Minera Players ended with the demise of their leader.

But Rukmani continued her films, until the time of her death under tragic circumstances on

## Alfred Perera

October 28, 1978.

Today's commemoration at Sausiripaya is organised by "The Rukmani Devi Commemoration Society" which was formed on 28th October 1989 under the auspices of the late President R. Premadasa. It was the first such Society to be re-registered in Sri Lanka.

President Premadasa was also instrumental in organising the Rukmani Devi Centre For Performing Arts, in Negombo and also in declaring open a new road there in Rukmani Devi's name.

Veteran Media personality Henry Priyashantha Mendis, who has been the President of the Rukmani Devi Commemoration Society from 1989 up to now, is in charge of today's celebrations at Sausiripaya.

# Vatican encourages a recovery of 'apologetics'

VATICAN CITY - In the Catholic Church, it's true that everything old can be new again, and the Vatican wants one of those things to be the art of "apologetics" - dusted off and updated to respond to new challenges, including those posed by militant atheists.

The term "apologetics" literally means "to answer, account for or defend," and through the 1950s even Catholic high school students were given specific training in responding to questions about Catholicism and challenges to church teaching.

At least in Northern Europe and North America, the effort mainly was a response to Protestantism. Today, while sects and fundamentalist groups challenge Catholics in many parts of the world, almost all Catholics face objections to the idea of belief in general, said Legionary of Christ, Father Thomas D. Williams, a professor at Rome's Pontifical Regina Apostolorum University.

## \* Lost Appeal

Father Williams is author of "Greater Than You Think: A Theologian Answers the Atheists about God," written in response to the late Christopher Hitchens' book, "God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything," and similar works.

Over the past 50 years, apologetics lost its general appeal because "it was considered proselytism," an aggressive attempt to win converts that was replaced by ecumenical dialogue, he said. It didn't help that many Catholics started seeing all religions as equally valid paths to salvation, so they thought it was best to encourage people to live their own faith as best they could without trying to encourage them to consider Christianity.

Among the Regina Apostolorum students, he said, there is a renewed interest in apologetics - usually covered today under the heading of fundamental theology. "You can change the name, make it gentler and nicer, but you always have to give reasons for your hope and belief," he said.

While there have been scattered attempts to train Catholics to explain their faith to others since Vatican II, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has asked for a more widespread effort to get apologetic material into the hands of Catholics.

## \* Response

In early January, the congregation issued a note on preparing for the Year of Faith, which will begin in October. Addressing national bishops' conferences, the congregation said, "It would be useful to arrange for the preparation of pamphlets and leaflets of an apologetic nature" so that every Catholic could "respond better to the questions which arise in difficult contexts" from sects to moral relativism and from secularism to science and technology.

The congregation included a reference to the biblical admonition from the First Letter of Peter: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope."

The passage continues by saying responses should be given "with gentleness and reverence," which Jesuit Father Felix Korner said means taking the attitude that "the person talking to me has a real question; through the question I discover the deeper grounds of my hope and joy; I try to respond by making myself and our faith understood."

The Jesuit, a theology professor



The Vatican

at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University and expert in Christian-Muslim relations, said, "Apologetics in the restricted, poor, primitive sense later became: 'I learn some answers, and I respond to any question as if it were an attack by refuting the other.'"

## \* Newness

To make apologetics part of a true Christian witness, he said, involves "being interested in the newness of the question" posed and "challenged by its rationality, daring to explore deeper my own tradition and hope."

Pope Benedict XVI and the Pontifical Council for Culture have chosen the path of dialogue to explore the issues and objections to faith raised by some secular humanists, atheists and agnostics. The Pope invited nonbelievers to his day of dialogue for peace in Assisi last October and the pontifical council has launched a dialogue project called "the Courtyard of the Gentiles" to explore issues raised by experts in the fields of politics, economics, law, literature and the arts.

An effort to combine dialogue and apologetics is found in Catholic Voices, an organization in the United Kingdom that compiles detailed responses to current questions and trains Catholics to present official church teaching civilly and clearly in the media when questions

are raised on controversial topics.

## \* Articulate Catholics

The need for articulate Catholics who could remain calm under fire became evident after a 2009 formal debate in England in which Hitchens and the actor Stephen Fry faced off against Nigerian Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja and Ann Widdecombe, a Catholic member of Parliament. The crowd clearly was on the side of Hitchens and Fry, who argued against the motion that "the Catholic Church is a force for good."

Jack Valero, coordinator of Catholic Voices and U.K. press spokesman for Opus Dei, said the group began by trying to respond to objections raised by groups protesting Pope Benedict's 2010 visit to Scotland and England. The issues included homosexuality, contraception, assisted suicide, clerical sexual abuse, abortion, AIDS, same-sex marriage and women in the church.

"Once we had identified the issues, we studied how best to answer them and developed our apologetics materials," Valero said.

But having written responses isn't enough. "If somebody communicates aggressively, which is not a very Christian way to behave, then the message does not come across," he said.

## English Course at Nimani Centre - A boon to Post A/L Students.



A student receives his Certificate from His Grace, Oswald Gomis. Looking on is Rev. Fr. Merl Mendis OM, Director of 'Nimani Centre'.

"The English Course conducted by 'Nimani Centre' is a very useful Apostolate," so said the Archbishop Emeritus

of Colombo, Most Rev. Dr. Oswald Gomis, who was the chief guest at the Graduation Ceremony held at Lions Club Hall,

Pamunugama, recently.

This Life Education Programme was successfully conducted by the Nimani Centre for the tenth consecutive year. A mixed group of 12 girls and 6 boys completed the Non-residential Course.

The ceremony itself was very colourful, with the girls neatly clad in pink sarees and the boys in dark blue suits.

Rev. Fr. Merl Mendis OMI, the Director of 'Nimani Centre' in his opening address said that the quest for knowledge did not end with the Graduation. He said that there should be a follow-up after the Graduation. He also stressed the importance of Parents' responsibility to enhance the knowledge gained by the students. Fr. Merl announced that three students obtained First Division passes which was highly commendable. He reminded how the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in the education in our country.

Archbishop Oswald Gomis also spoke of English as a link language and that it has set rules. English being an in-

ternational language is indispensable and therefore promotes knowledge he said. His Grace also pointed out that Catholics will be cornered in society unless they are educated. Hence, the need for English education.

Mr. George Anthony who spoke on behalf of the Parents, thanked Fr. Merl for his painstaking efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of the students.

This English Course has helped the students physically, mentally and spiritually. Fr. Merl specially thanked Mr. Ajit Rodrigo who made his spacious Bungalow available free of rent.

His Grace the Archbishop presented the Certificates to the 18 students. The students sang a farewell song, and presented a Souvenir to Fr. Merl as a spontaneous gesture of their gratitude and appreciation. Two Priests and two Nuns also graced the occasion. The proceedings ended with a Tea Party.

**Russel Fernando.**

## ❖ Short Story

# The Great Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

By Chandrani Warnasuriya

Everybody in the neighborhood knew them to be Jews, for they wore long white robes with a mantle over it, and a traditional (sudar) a kerchief twisted into a turban covering their heads.

The conversation between the three men in the Courtyard opposite Saul's house where he stayed with his brother in Jerusalem, was getting heated up. Saul a man of medium stature and a Pharisee obviously was the more learned of the three. A teacher in the synagogue he adored the Law and hated anyone who would dare to oppose it or break it.

## \* Crazy Religion

Speaking in a strong and high-pitched tone of voice and getting more and more agitated with every word he spoke he said, "This crazy religion must be stopped. It's all against the Laws of Moses which our fathers and fore-fathers strictly adhered to," he went on, stamping his foot on the ground and squeezing his wrists in a fit of anger.

"That's right as protectors of the Law we should hound them out," said Shammai a Scribe who met with Saul daily at the Synagogue at public prayer.

"I am not in the least sorry I consented to the stoning of that lunatic of a man Stephen," said Saul in a gesture of approval at what he had done a few days ago outside the walls of the synagogue.

"Did you know the more they are imprisoned the more they are swelling in numbers?" said Ahaz who was a soldier among the Sanhedrin. Then turning to Saul he questioned, "Do you think we can put an end to

this hazardous movement spreading like a wild fire? I don't think so." He said, feeling somewhat nervous about the situation.

"Why not?" blared Saul, quite impatient and getting more vexed over it.

"In that case, the High Priest and the Council will have to take more severe steps to nip them in the bud," said Shammai nodding his head with concern.

"We will get them all here to Jerusalem and put them in prison and be done with them," said Saul quite firm about his decision.

"Bring them all to Jerusalem?" interrupted Ahaz, surprised and indignant at Saul's reply.

"Yes! Drag them all here as prisoners," said Saul quite confident about it.

"But how? Without any Orders from the High Priest we can do nothing," said Ahaz "Of course I've already got the papers from the High Priest to go over and speak to the authorities in Damascus," said Saul with a wry and a sarcastic smile on his face. Then turning to the two men he said, "I must be on my way, I have to get there before dark, I will see you as soon as I get back," he said. Then with a hurried look at the two men, he dismissed them with a quick "Shalom," and started towards the door and rushed up the steps, briefly touching the Mezuzah hung high up by the door.

## \* Tola

All this time, Tola, Saul's little niece sat by the window watching and waiting for her uncle Saul. Clutching her favorite pet Minnie, a black and white Persian cat, stroking and petting it gently, she strained her neck and

squinted again and again in that direction to see if her uncle was done with his friends.

Tola loved her uncle Saul very much for he never failed to bring her the little "treasures" she liked whenever her uncle returned from his errands. But today Tola felt something different. The past few days had been somewhat hectic for her uncle. He seemed to be getting busier and busier with several of those men coming in and going out, visiting her uncle. The streets had gotten noisy with soldiers stampeding up and down, cautioning people and stopping them from flocking around to listen to the Apostles.

Tola was right. Today it was certainly going to be different for her uncle. But the little girl hadn't the faintest idea that it was a great day indeed! A big day, that was going to make a Big deal....., a Big difference....., in her uncle's life!

Saul came striding up the steps in a great hurry. Tola was barely able to snatch a hug from him before he shot past into the living room, picked up a bundle of papers and was about to hurry back towards the door. Tola sighed. She was sad at the thought that her uncle had not paid much attention to her as he used to, but was about to leave now. She clutched Minnie close, as her uncle gave her another big hug and said, "Bye Tola I'll be back soon and don't you worry about it. I will sure bring you those "treasures," when I get back this time," he said.

"Where are you going with those bundle of papers, uncle Saul.....?" cried

Tola, trying to hide a sob almost choking her.

Just then Minnie jumped out of Tola's hand and sped across the door, nearly getting trampled under foot of Saul's giant strides. Saul hesitated....., he stopped... then he turned back taking a few steps back to the living room. Then taking out a Time-Piece from a pocket in his under garment, he looked at the time. "Gosh I am getting late," he said to himself and turned around to say a few caring words to Tola before he left. By this time however Tola was gone. She had run after Minnie and was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh!... for that spooky cat," gasped Saul, "No respectable Jew would like to believe in bad Omens!" he mumbled to himself, as he rushed back towards the door.

"Whaw.....! Whaw.....! Whaw.....! Woohoo.....! went the dog outside moaning and howling fiercely.

## \* Bad Omens

Saul stopped and hesitated once again. Turned back and took a few steps back into the living room. He sat down Plonk! on the armchair beside, and pondered.... Then twisted and turned the head covering, fixing his turban that had loosened itself. "Oh! For that wretched dog.....Who wants to believe in bad Omens? Not me." Saul wrestled with thoughts about an impending doom or misfortune that would impair the journey he was about to take. Then he got up from the chair and holding firm the bundle of papers swishing them under his arm tight he proceeded towards the door once again.



## The Universal Church acclaims St. Paul to be the Apostle of the gentiles. Here's a Short Story about his great conversion.

Next, a house lizard fell right on his foot from a mantle over the door and wriggled out! Saul shrugged his shoulders perturbed and in dismay for a moment.

"This is ridiculous, I don't want to believe it," he mumbled to himself again.

As he stepped out, the dog outside went once again Whaw...! Whaw...! Whaw...! Woohoo! ...Whining and moaning fiercely. Saul hesitated..., but this time he had vowed to himself not to give in to weird thoughts about bad Omens. Rushing out the door, not waiting twice to glance at the wretched animal, Saul went straight over saddled his horse quick and disappeared down the road, off to Damascus, to carry out his infamous mission of persecuting the Christians or bringing them bound as prisoners to Jerusalem.

His mind still reeling and cutting, and choking him tight, Saul struggled with his thoughts about bad Omens and impending doom. Then he shrugged his shoulders, like wiping them away and throwing them down the drain by the wayside as it were, as he rode, whipping his horse to speed up. "Forget it, this is rubbish no stupid cat or wretched dog will stop me from doing what I have to do." He muttered to himself again and again.

Passing through many towns and villages Saul came closer and closer to Damascus and was in near sight of the great wall of the city.

Then suddenly the horse stopped to a cringing halt, neighed loud, raising his hoofs high up trying to forge ahead, but quite sadly he was unable to do so. Then suddenly, Boo...m! it was blinded by a great and mysterious light that in a clap of thunder had bolted from the

skies and spread all around it. His master who was riding it was equally blinded, and jilted from the horse fell flat on the ground.

Saul raised his hand helplessly in an effort to cover his eyes. At first he thought he was caught up with a mass of lightening and thunder piercing the clouds, but no! as an iridescent and bright light spread all around him, he thought he heard a voice call him from the heavens!

## \* The Voice

"Saul!...Saul!....," Now he distinctly heard the voice call out his name. "Why are you persecuting me?" The voice went on. Terrified and frightened, Saul cried out, "Who are You Lord?"

"I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting. It's not going to work. You cannot fight me!" the voice replied.

Saul scrambled to his feet and got up. He was filled with great remorse at what he had done persecuting the believers of Jesus. Then he asked, "What am I to do Lord?"

The voice answered, "Get up and go to Damascus, and there you will be told what you must do."

Though he got up Saul still could not see. Some men rushed to his side. They thought Saul had a nightmare and had gone blind. So they took him down to Damascus to the house of a man named Judas. Blinded for three days he awaited another vision and was healed by Ananias whom Jesus had sent to heal him.

Saul now converted to be a strong believer in Jesus took the name Paul and went about preaching the Good News about Jesus and working and preaching among the Gentiles converting thousands to the faith.

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**What it says ..... in the Readings**

**The kingdom of God is close at hand; believe the Good News. (Mk. 1: 15)**

**LITURGICAL - CALENDAR YEAR B**  
22nd Jan. - 29th Jan. 2012

- Sun: THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME**  
Jona 3,1-5,10, 1 Cor. 7, 29-31, Mk. 1: 14-20
- Mon:** 2 Sam. 5: 1-7,10, Mk. 3: 22-30
- Tue:** Memorial of St. Francis de Sales, Bishop & Doctor  
2 Sam. 6: 12-15,17-19; Mk. 3: 31-35
- Wed:** Feast of The Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle  
Acts 22: 3-16 or 9: 1-22; Mk. 16: 15-18
- Thu:** Memoiral of SS Timothy & Titus Bishops  
2 Tim. 1: 1-8 or Tit 1: 1-5, Lk. 10: 1-9
- Fri:** Memorials of St. Angela Merici, Virgin  
2 Sam 11: 1-10,13-17, Mk. 4: 26-34
- Sat:** Memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas  
2 Sam. 12: 1-7,10-17, Mk. 4: 35-41
- Sun: FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME**  
Deut 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 7: 32-35,  
Mk. 1: 21-28

**Prayer of the Faithful**

**Response: Lord hear our prayer**

For the Church that it may work tirelessly to bring the Good News of Christ's salvation to all people, but especially to the poor. We pray to the Lord.

**Response: Lord hear our prayer**

For those who make and enforce our laws that they may be firm but at the same time kind and fair. We pray to the Lord.

**Response: Lord hear our prayer**

For those who have fallen, and for those who have lost their way in life; that they may find understanding and love from the followers of Christ. We pray to the Lord.

**Response: Lord hear our prayer**

That we may never become complacent or self-righteous; that we may always hear the call of Christ to a deeper and a more authentic life. We pray to the Lord.

**Response: Lord hear our prayer**

**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**First Reading. Jonah 3: 1-5, 10.**

The prophet Jonah is sent to Nineveh to preach the message of repentance. The people accepted God and repented. God in his kindness spared the people.

**Second Reading. 1 Cor. 7:29-31.**

For St. Paul coming of the Lord is to happen at any moment. Therefore, he wants the people to be prepared. They should not be attached to any worldly things or affairs.

**Gospel. Mk. 1:14-20.**

After the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus preaches the Good News of repentance. He calls the first disciples.

**Reflection.**

Whether it is our Baptismal vocation or a special call from God for a special mission. Our prime mission is to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. It requires detachment from the world and most of all from sin. Before the birth of Jesus as in the first reading, during the time of Jesus as in the Gospel and after the time of Jesus, that is the time of the Apostles as in the second reading and for that matter even today, the Good News for the people has been the same. "DETACH YOURSELF FROM THE WORLD AND SIN, REPENT AND BELIEVE."

From the time man sinned against God, God's redemptive Love has been at work. From time to time, through many people God tried to save mankind. Finally, He saved mankind through His son, Jesus the Saviour.

The people of Nineveh were living in sin and so they were condemned and were to be destroyed. But God out of love sent Prophet Jonah with a message of repentance. The people accepted his message, repented and were saved.

John the Baptist prepar-

ing the way for the Lord preached a message of repentance. After he was arrested, Jesus came into the region, to Galilee not to condemn, protest, fast unto death or fight for the freedom of John, but to proclaim the message of repentance. He even chose many Apostles to help him and to continue his work after him.

In the second reading we see the Apostles, especially St. Paul carrying the same message, repent and believe.

So as we in this New Year prepare ourselves in various ways to serve the Lord, let us keep in mind that even today, for the kind of society we live in, the message is a message of repentance. Let us therefore, in all humility and courage proclaim the message of repentance lest the whole world be destroyed by sin.

Due to the urgency of the need to save the world from suffering and sin, we might think of condemnation and fighting our way through, but it will only add to the burden and will bring in more and more suffering and sin.

There is no weapon like Love. There is nothing like voluntary repentance and conversion. Let us therefore, imitate the Lord. Let us proclaim with Love, a message of repentance.

Blessed is he who is able to make people repent and convert them from their sins, they are the most fruitful people on this earth.

**Aid Story.**

St. Vincent de Paul dearly loved a young man who had grown up like a wild flower. A violent ray of passion entered the young man's soul and the flower withered and fell, the young man became so licentious that the saint wept bitterly. "Well" St. Vincent said to him one day, "I cannot persuade you any longer to give up your bad ways because I see that my words are of no help. However, there is

one thing I would like you to do." "What is it?" asked the young man. "Take this picture of the Crucifix and look at it every night before retiring." The unusual request seemed so easy to the young man that he promised to comply. That night he glanced at the picture for the first time, and he was so moved that it took him a while to get to sleep. Christ's sorrowful face kept staring at him and reached the depths of his soul. The following night he was afraid to look at the picture.

The patient Christ was looking at him all night and he could not sleep. The next morning the young man went to see St. Vincent, "Father" he said, "I give up. Your attempt has won me over to Christ."

**Aid Story 2.**

A drunk stumbles into the local parish during the Easter vigil while the pastor is baptizing new Catholics, briefly immersing their heads under water in the Baptismal font. The drunk nearly trips on the font bumps into the pastor, who thinks he's one of the catechumens. Though the priest is almost overcome by the smell of booze, he asks the drunk, "Are you ready to find Jesus?" "Yes I am." Replies the drunk. So the pastor dunks him, He pulls him up and asks, "Have you found Jesus?" "No," says the drunk, "I haven't." So the pastor dunks him again longer this time. He pulls him out of the water and asks again, "have you found Jesus?" The drunk answers, "No."

By now the priest is getting a little frustrated, so he immerses the drunk again, but this time he holds him down for about 30 seconds. When the drunk begins kicking his legs and thrashing his arms, the pastor brings him back up out of the water and cries, "for the love of God, man, have you found Jesus?" The drunk wipes his eyes and catches his breath and asks, "Father, are you sure this is where he fell in?"

**Rev. Fr. Ciswan De Croos**

**Simeon as role model**  
**The Canticle of Simeon**  
**The Nunc Dimittis**

For many years in the Pacific northwest there was a famous monk (now deceased) who, as a novice in his monastery, had received the name of Simeon. He revealed in the description of the biblical Simeon as a man who was "righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him."

The modern monk told everyone that he tried to live his life so that this would be a description of him as well.

His choice of Simeon as a role model was a wise decision.

Luke's description of Simeon as possessing the Holy Spirit is unique in the gospels, and it speaks volumes about the interplay between the Old and New Testaments.

The great figures of John the Baptist, Zachariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, the prophetess and a few others, connect the deep spirituality of the Jewish world into which Jesus was born with the transformation of that

world by his life, death and resurrection.

But of these, few have as many lines of gospel texts as Simeon. Both Luke's narration of his story and Simeon's words reverberate down the centuries and continue to speak to modern listeners.

Simeon was given the gift by the Holy Spirit of knowing he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, and he recognized the baby Jesus as that Messiah. His prayer, the *Nunc Dimittis*, has been used for centuries as part

of the divine office and is prayed by thousands of people each day as night prayer.

What is so powerful about Simeon and what people say about him today is that he seems so timeless. He suddenly appears from nowhere with just a few incredibly praiseworthy words of introduction, and he lives out a promise made to him by God.

He amazes Joseph and Mary by calling Jesus "a light for revelation to the gentiles, and glory for

your people Israel."

Simeon goes on to tell Mary that, "This child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel." He speaks of a sword piercing Mary's heart so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

One woman told me that even as she tries and often fails to pray the divine office every day, the one prayer she will never omit is the *Nunc Dimittis*, where Simeon says to God, "now, master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation."

She said she wanted so much from God to keep her faith strong and wished that she could be like Simeon.

This woman went on to say, "Listen to that faith. What had he seen? He had seen a baby, just a baby. He didn't see any miracles, he didn't hear any preaching, and he didn't see the resurrection. He saw a baby and two overwhelmed parents. But he believed! And that meant that he could die in peace."

**(Father Thomas Faucher Catholic News Service)**

