



In the  
**Shadow**  
of the **Cross**



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# Editorial



*“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination and finish with education. The whole of life from the moment you are born to the moment you die is a process of learning.”*  
( Jiddu Krishnamurti)



**Rev. Fr. Alex SDS**

Every time an academic year comes to a close, we see a batch of students pass out of the college. Most of them would be heading towards their sacerdotal ordination, others towards their pastoral ministries. One palpitating question that keeps haunting the formatters' and educators is *“what will these persons become tomorrow?”* perhaps the only consoling answer is found in the famous song *“Que sera Sera”* (what will be, will be; the future's not ours to see). It will be good to keep in mind the above words of Krishnamurti that education has no end. It is the whole of a person's life and it ends only at death. If this is the case, then no single phase of education is complete but it is only a passage in the long process. There is a false myth among students that their education and formation ends the day they leave the college or university. This is very destructive myth which has to be corrected sooner than later.

A renowned Roman Philosopher Cicero, once he was visited by his friend who asked him “what are you doing in your old age?” the wise old man replied ***“I am growing old everyday learning something new.”*** This is the corrective attitude to education, namely, that we ought to grow old each day acquiring more knowledge and skills. We are basically human beings with imperfections and in the process of becoming always. That is why, we say that education is a lifelong process and so we need to grow constantly in knowledge, skill, moral and character. However, we learn in this magazine the teaching of Pope Francis about the *“Rejoice and be Glad”*, Consecrated life a call to greater authenticity, Dare to be different, Experiences of the International Formator, Presbyterian Churches and Community Building. I wish all the readers the best of learning and best into practice.

## Gaudete et Exsultate ("Rejoice and Be Glad") Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on holiness



*Rev. Fr. Alex SDS*



The word **Holiness** is derived from the Greek word *Hagios*. *Hagios* would mean something or someone set apart, segregated, cut out from others or things. It also means something or someone awesome. Holy Bible exhorts one to be holy, "You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord and I have separated you from other peoples to be mine" (Lev 20: 26). "Be holy for I am holy" (Lev 11: 44). But for Pope Francis holiness is not the prerogative of the chosen few. It does not belong to certain elite members of the Church who have tried to prove themselves holy by performing certain hard and difficult acrobatic acts of holiness. Hence, in the words of our Holy Father I like to contemplate in the following manner.

### **Holiness means being yourself**

Pope Francis offers us many examples of holy lives throughout this document: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the French Carmelite who found holiness in doing small tasks; St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuit founder who sought to find God in all things; St. Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians who was renowned for his sense of humor. The saints pray for us and give us examples of how to live, but we are not meant to be cookie-cutter versions of them. We are meant to be ourselves, and each believer is meant to "discern his or her own path" and "bring out the very best of themselves." As Thomas Merton said, "For me to be a saint means to be myself."

## **Holiness is accessible to all and attainable by all**

According to Pope Francis holiness is something which is affordable and accessible to everyone. He gives us an example. "This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through the small gestures like love of the Virgin Mary." A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth with seeing it a path of holiness. He believes that actively to identify oneself with the mysteries of the life of Jesus will lead one to grow in holiness and by committing oneself, body and soul to giving one's best to this endeavor.

## **Holiness is to appreciate Gods presence in all things**

As regard attaining holiness through ordinary, daily and even mundane activities, Pope Francis refers to a very important method of prayer recommended and also practiced by St. Ignatius of Loyola called Contemplation to obtain Love. "He had always grown in devotion that is ease in finding God: and now more than ever in his whole life, every time, any hour, that he wished to find God, he found him.

## **Holiness is an attitude of the realization of the beatitudes**

The essence of the teaching of Jesus on holiness is found in the Beatitudes. The beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card, so if anyone asks: what must one

do to be a good Christian? The answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. The word "happy" or "blessed" thus becomes a synonym for "holy." It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness". Pope Francis in his own simple way gives us a commentary on the Beatitudes,

Being poor of heart: that is holiness

Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness.

Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness.

Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness.

Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.

Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.

Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness.

## **Everyday life can lead to holiness**

You do not need to be a bishop, a priest or a member of a religious order to be holy. Everyone is called to be a saint, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us—a mother or a father, a student

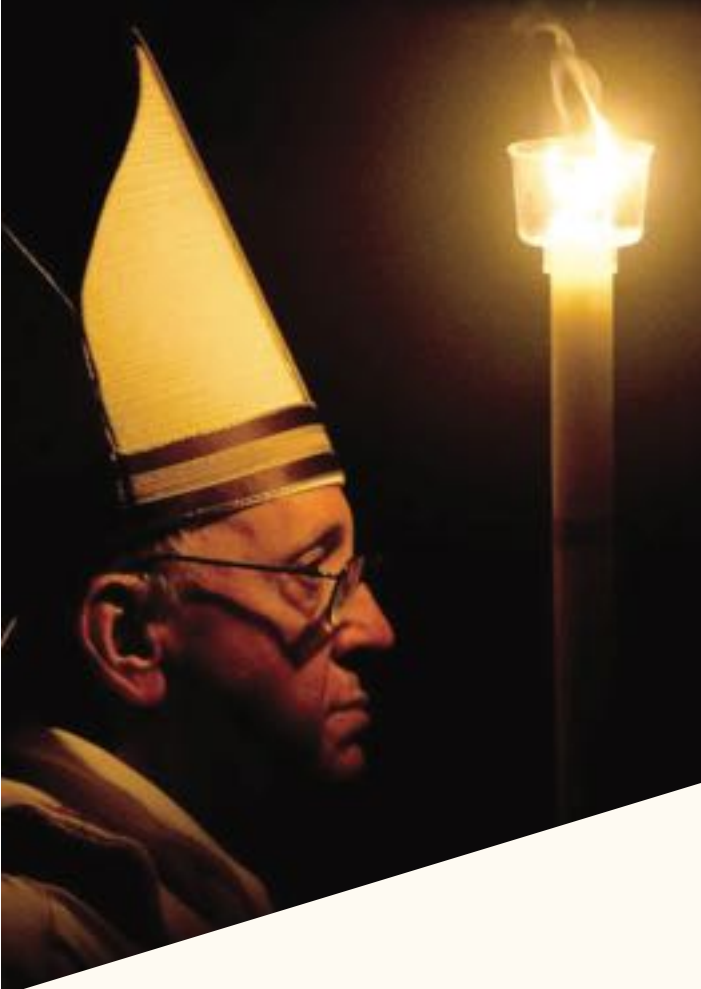
or an attorney, a teacher or a janitor. "Saints next door," Francis calls them. All we need to do is to "live our lives in love" and "bear witness" to God in all we do. That also doesn't have to mean big, dramatic actions. Francis offers examples of everyday sanctity, like a loving parent raising a child; as well as "small gestures" and sacrifices that one can make, like deciding not to pass on gossip. If you can see your own life as a "mission," then you soon realize that you can simply be loving and kind to move towards holiness. You also do not have to be "swooning in mystic rapture" to be a saint or walking around with "lowered eyes." Nor do you have to withdraw from other people. On the other hand, you do not want to be caught up in the "rat race" of rushing from one thing to another. A balance between action and contemplation is essential.

In conclusion, for a Christian a call to holiness is ontologically ingrained at the very time of creation of man in God's image and in the very call to be a disciple of Christ at the moment of our Baptism. In one sense we share in the DNA of God. Hence we are called to **"BE"** holy by the fact that we are human beings. This was beautifully expressed by Fr Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: **"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."** ❁



"Make it a point always to study the holy rule, your book of laws, to meditate on it, to make it a part of your lives, in order that you may accurately observe the same."

***Fr. Francis Jordan***



# Consecrated Life

## A CALL TO **GREATER** AUTHENTICITY



**T**his very title raises a question or presupposes that consecrated life in the 21st century is wanting in authenticity. There is a lacuna in living out the consecrated life today. The crux of the matter lies in the two words *greater authenticity* and which call for

a real soul searching at the individual and community levels to examine where one lacks in authenticity, what are the obstacles one faces in consecrated life, the challenges the modern world is throwing at us every day and how they are in direct conflict with basic human desires and aspirations, and how to reconcile unrealistic idealism with pragmatic living and genuine human interests.

The consecrated are the people who are specially called. Are they called because of their public consecration or are they special category of people chosen, called to be

the *leaven or salt or beacon of hope* for the world? True, a great number of books and articles have been written about the Consecrated Life and its efficacy, importance and its ultimate aim, goal or purpose. But, in this article, I would like to state that it is a *call towards genuineness or authenticity of their fidelity to God*. The essential vocation for all Christians is to follow the Lord. This call is not something once and for all, as one finishes a project, essay or task. The motive for the consecrated life is to follow Christ more freely and to imitate him more nearly by the practice of the evangelical counsels. The religious state reveals in a unique way that the kingdom of God and its overmastering necessities are superior to all earthly considerations (LG 44).

Radical living may be the word for genuineness or *authenticity* of the call of the consecrated. In the Gospels, we see that there is a group Jesus chose from a wider group of followers to be his special disciples. Consecrated life is a response to this special call. It separates itself, therefore, from ordinary Christian life in that it involves a call to commit oneself to the concrete life style adapted by Jesus, our divine Saviour. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood a holy nation" (I Pet 2:9). Consecration is a choosing, empowering. It's a call to depend on God alone, not having a family of one's own, accepting all as one's family, being

available to all, to share the word of God, the good news to the poor, to the blind and the oppressed. (Lk 4:18). It may be worth mentioning that Jesus did not make vows but he lived the content of the vows fully, absolutely and totally: He was poor, celibate and obedient and committed Himself to the will of His Heavenly Father.



**Emergence of Consecrated Life:** Consecrated Life as we understand it today came into *existence* in the fourth century. In the early church we already find some people who wanted to follow the Lord in a more radical way by renouncing possessions and marriage in order to be closer in fellowship with him. When the Church became the state religion, a new charism or movement arose within the church. Consecrated Life came into existence as a protest movement against a church that had conformed itself so much to society at large and got involved in the worldly affairs. Historically, part of why religious take such vows is to become



a 'countersign' to the ways of the world: Poverty, possess nothing (slavery to things), Obedience, consecration of one's will, (selfish desires), Chastity, consecrate to God the power of love, (inordinate attachments, self control).

**Uniqueness of the mystery of the consecrated:** Consecrated Life is a relational identity, a deep intimate relationship with the Divine, the Christ. It is as if that one lives, moves and has one's being in Him alone. My life is a value. It is an attitude that it is I who no longer live but Christ who lives in me. Hence, it is a gift from the Lord to follow Him who is poor, celibate and obedient. That does not mean that those who follow the Lord are the better followers of Jesus. *This is another way to follow him.* The consecrated are called to live authentically and give witness to Christ more radically through the evangelical counsels.

One may affirm that the consecrated life is a state of life *recognized* by the Church. It is free responses to a special call from Christ by which consecrated give themselves completely to God and strive for the perfection of charity, moved by the Holy Spirit. This consecration is characterized by the practice of the evangelical counsels. The Life consecrated to God is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church.



He /She consecrate himself/herself intimately to God's service and to the good of the whole Church.

Evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are holy promises made to God in the presence of the community i.e. the Church. The Consecrated joyfully and freely offer themselves through these counsels their free will, mind and heart only to God and to His people to serve God unconditionally and His people with the same compassion that of Jesus. One is consecrated to follow Christ in His mission to establish the kingdom of God as George Sores Prabhu mentions the idea of the kingdom of God in the Bible. He made the conclusion that the kingdom of God is Jesus' vision of a new society.

*To be continued*



# A Short Report

## ABOUT MY VISIT (My Impressions)



**Fr. Heribert Kerschgens SDS**  
**International Director of Formation**

In February 2018 I had the chance to visit India as chairman of the "International Formation Team" for a second time. First and foremost, I want to say "THANK YOU VERY MUCH" to all the confreres, especially to Fr. Sunil Thomas SDS, the Vicariate Superior, and to all the leaders of the IMV, who supported me in a very excellent way. All steps were very well organized, everything was well prepared everywhere. I want to say "THANK YOU VERY MUCH" to all confreres, to all the Fathers and the Brothers, as well as to all the formandi at their different stages of initial formation for your very warm welcome. All of you created a wonderful brotherly atmosphere so that I could feel at home immediately.



All of you have helped me to understand the different cultures of India and the reality and the challenges and visions of our IMV better and better. Your openness, your trust and the brotherly sharing were great. I have learnt a lot.

### **My visit had two aims:**

My first aim was working together with the formandi about Salvatorian formation, initial formation in general and Salvatorian ministry. Therefore, I prepared different workshops. Lectures and discussions, based on personal reflection and experiences, were the main elements of the methodology of these workshops. I focussed on different topics at the different stages of initial formation. My second aim was to deepen my personal understanding of the background of the country, of the different cultures in India and of the formation in IMV and at the same time to strengthen the confraternal relationship to my confreres. Therefore, I asked all formators and formandi for a personal talk. These personal talks really helped me a lot to understand the circumstances of India and of the IMV better and better. During every talk, I learnt something new. These personal talks and the sharing of time during meals, recreation, travelling etc... were amazing opportunities to strengthen the fraternity.



My first stop was at our formation house in Bangalore. I had the opportunity to discuss our Salvatorian formation in the entire Society with the students. I could explain the differences in the Salvatorian Formation and I illustrated this with photos of the different formation houses, which I took during my visits. We talked about the different cultures, the different behaviours and the challenges of the different countries and of the international formation. I also faced the challenges which the young brothers have at the beginning: No common language, new food, different climate, the new lifestyle – starting a religious life in a community far from home. I am really happy about the work of the formators and all confreres in this house who help the young brothers to adapt to this new reality. Although all of the brothers are from India – one country – I experienced the challenges of an “international community”. I could see and hear how the confreres and students tackle these challenges. I could observe the different talents of the confreres, especially in music. Unfortunately, I could not talk personally with all of the students due to my short stay there. The two days in Bangalore were an amazing starting point for this visit.

Warangal was my second stop. Here I gave two different workshops. The first workshop was held only with the third-year brothers, who would be finishing

their studies in the coming weeks and who would be preparing themselves for the Novitiate. The aim of this special workshop was to help to prepare them for the Novitiate. They will go to a different country and will stay together with brothers who come from different nations. The cultures, the traditions and the behaviours are sometimes different from those in India. Of course, this experience is not something new, but taking the step of leaving one's own country has a different quality. Here, in Warangal, I had the opportunity for personal talks with all of the students as well. This was a chance to think about personal questions and experiences. What I know from the brothers who made their Novitiate in the EAMV, is that they are happy about this time. The new experiences, the new behaviours, the new inputs coming from different nations and countries are a real enrichment. I am sure that these experiences help to deepen the understanding that we are an international Society. Of course, there are also conflicts due to the different traditions. It is not easy to adapt to new circumstances immediately, but once we have managed these challenges, I am sure that we will grow as an international Society. Furthermore, a real network can grow based on these common experiences and based on the time spent together. The social Medias we use help us to perpetuate our brotherly relationship and to keep in

touch as confreres and friends as well. It is an enrichment to know confreres from different countries personally. This is the personal experience I made during the last years and it will be an enrichment for the brothers, too.

The second workshop dealt with the topic "The aim of initial formation". We discussed the role of the formandi and their main responsibility for their own formation. The formation program, the formators, the studies, the spiritual life and the guidance by the spiritual director are all needed and important. All of these help us to grow as religious, but each individual has to be the active person. I am the main responsible person for my formation. Nobody else can establish and deepen my personal relationship to Jesus, the basis of my religious life. My formators, my spiritual director, the advices given by the formation program or by spiritual books can only support me to establish and to deepen my friendship to God. The main work is up to myself. We talked about "the vocation, my call" and pointed out that vocation has three elements, like a tree: First we are called to be a "man, a human being" as the roots of a tree and of my vocation. Second, we are called to be a "Christian" as the trunk of the tree. And third we are called to be a "religious" (or maybe another call; the initial formation has to help the formandi to understand what the personal call is) as the branches

of the tree. We need to grow in all of these three parts and the duty of initial formation is to help the formandi so that they can grow in all these three elements. If we don't take care of the roots or the trunk, the branches will have no chance to grow in a good way, they cannot be fruitful. Therefore, we must take care of the "roots" and the "trunk" in our formation and the formators and the formation program must focus on these topics.



I learnt a lot about the vocational journey of the brothers, about their families, their background. I observed a lot of talents, but we also talked about the struggles, the questions, the fears and doubts of the brothers. It was a brotherly sharing and I am deeply grateful for the openness and trust. The common prayers were a deep and an amazing experience as well. For me it was great to see so many young brothers taking the same path. The liturgy was full of this power and creativity of youth, an experience which

I do not have in my country and my Unit in the same way as here. The prayer time was a kind of "petrol station" for me. Spiritual life needs this concrete experience. Therefore, I am happy that I could participate in the lively prayer time here and in the other places I visited.

I also had this experience of the power and the creativity of youth during my third stop in Shillong. Here I had the experience of a brotherly reunion because I know all of the brothers from my first visit in 2016 personally. We could improve our brotherly connection. We could reflect on the differences we have faced since our last meeting. It was a great pleasure and honour for me that two of the new ordained priests, Fr. Kitbok SDS and Fr. Ambrose SDS came to Shillong for a personal talk. It is amazing to see how the brothers are starting their new mission as Salvatorian religious and priests.

The formation house in Shillong is a community where all the members are professed members and this is different from the other formation houses of the IMV. Our vows are the sign of Salvatorian identity, not the ordination. Therefore, we have the big chance to celebrate this unity here in Shillong. Salvatorians stay together connected by the same vows, but in different ministries as Fathers *and* Brothers. All of them wear the same Salvatorian

habit. We have the chance to explain the specifics of a life as a religious to the people who visit us: We have a visible community of brothers independent of the ministry or the ordination. And during the recreation, for example, I felt that this unity was still alive. I want to encourage this community to strengthen this atmosphere more and more; some small signs are able to have a big effect.

We also held a workshop. For three days we discussed the topic “Salvatorian ministry in a changing world” in a lively manner. The workshop was based on articles published in the book “Dialoguing with Father Jordan” edited by Fr. Michael Overmann SDS. It was an exciting workshop with an open discussion. We pointed out our chances and visions and we also pointed out the problems we saw and the questions we had. We looked at the limits of the individual and of the Society and the Unit. But I noticed that all of the confreres were looking for solutions. I could feel that all of them wanted to improve our Salvatorian life, our Salvatorian formation and Salvatorian ministry. I also felt the openness to work wherever the Society has a need. We talked about universality, what it means and how we can establish this in our daily work. We saw that it is not easy to create unity in diversity, it is not easy to establish a deep spiritual life if we are working in the apostolate where every confrere is

very busy. And we looked for solutions: What can we, can I do to improve our Salvatorian life? We noticed: It is a challenge to work with the poor and we see that we need more apostolate in this field, especially in the IMV. We discussed the call to be “an expert of Soteriology”. As Salvatorians we have to consider healing of the people first. It is our charism to ask: How can we support the healing of a person? This is our first and most important ministry: To make the love of God tangible, because we have to proclaim the Saviour, Jesus Christ.



The IMV is a growing unit with a lot of powerful and talented young members; young men with a lot of different abilities and characters. It is a beautiful colourful puzzle. It is very important that these abilities can grow. Initial formation is responsible for making personal growth possible. And thus, new apostolate will also be able to grow. Growing is a chance and a challenge at the same time. Most important is our relationship to Jesus, the Saviour. We must take care of this relationship, which develops

during the time of initial formation. A danger is that after initial formation we lose this relationship due to our work if we only focus on our apostolate and forget the community and the personal and common life of prayer.

The personal talks were very deep as well. As I said: It was a reunion. We could continue some topics which we started two years ago. I have learnt a lot about my confreres, about myself and especially errors in my thinking, about the visions and struggles of my brothers and the circumstances of this amazing country and Unit. And: I really know all the holes on the golf course of Shillong now because we took the chance for a walk in this area for our personal talks.

I want to stress that I had a fruitful time in the IMV. It was a pleasure for me to work with the formandi. I really enjoyed holding the workshops with the formandi and having a lot of lively discussions. I have been enriched by all the talks I had: by the personal talks with formators and formandi, by the talks in groups, by the serious and the funny talks.

Let us pray that our Saviour will accompany, enlighten and strengthen us to improve our relationship to him and our brotherly relationship to our confreres more and more, so that we are able to become a visible sign of the salvation to all the people we are sent to by Jesus, our Saviour, whom we have to proclaim.



*“Human greatness does not lie in wealth or power, but in character and goodness. People are just people, and all people have faults and shortcomings, but all of us are born with a basic goodness.”*

*Anne Frank*













# DARE TO BE DIFFERENT, STAND OUT FROM THE REST

The world has witnessed the outstanding eminent personalities who stood for their principles and ideologies and fought for justice and truth. Some of them fought for the liberation of their countries and some of them fought against injustice and discrimination of the society. They all stand tall as the immortal and ever living examples to the world where all can be inspired and enlightened by imbibing their qualities. The founding father of Salvatorians, Fr. Francis Jordan is another example who lived up to these principles, and founded the Society to work for the glory of God beyond the limit of any country, caste and color with the motto of "Make known the Saviour by all Means and Ways.



***Fr. Benny Valliyaveetil SDS***

Here are a few such wonderful personalities who inspired the world to fight against injustice of discrimination; and eventually succeeded in their efforts. The struggle of these personalities against the discrimination is the witness to the world, how the discrimination can make people to suffer and ruin their lives. The cry of those people lives on in the history in a subtle way. Their message to renounce and to eradicate such evils from the world is a powerful call to live a harmonious and peaceful life.



### **Martin Luther King Jr.**

Martin Luther King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta Ga. His father was the pastor of a Baptist church. As a young boy he had bitter experience of separation between the white and the black people. The law prevailing at the time separated the African Americans from schools, parks, theaters, hotels and eating places. They had to sit in separate places in the trains and buses. This system of separation made king to hate such laws.

The whole system, he thought, was unfair and unjust. Even more, he hated the violence that grew out of segregation. He had seen the Ku Klux Klan riding at night. It meant that an African American would be beaten or killed for going against the system. These things almost made Martin to turn against white people. Martin rose as a warrior against such evil system of the society. He fought against such discrimination and segregation. He was

a big crowd puller, and thousands of people used to gather to listen to him. His famous speech- "I have a dream- that one day all this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed; we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal". This speech made a huge attention to nook and corner of the world.

He regarded that love is a powerful transformational force of good in life. There is a lot of hatred going around but the best way to shine light and bring kind awareness is through love. He taught people to win hate by love. Unwaveringly he followed the message of Jesus Christ. His fight against the system bore fruits, the government has abolished the separating law, today black and white people can walk together freely along the aisles of the road. The world has witnessed Barack Obama a black man became the president of America on November 4, 2008. He was the first African American to be elected to that office.

### **Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela**

Rolihlahla Mandela was born into the Madiba clan in Mvezo, Tanskei on 18 July 1918. The story and life of Mandela's fight for democracy and rights for all regardless of race is legendary. Mandela will be remembered as a man who went beyond the call of duty. History will remember him as one of the greatest men who ever lived. His



selfless love and sacrifices succeed in the history of generations of South Africa and the world. He showed his fellow countrymen that it was possible –perhaps even imperative to forgive one’s enemies. Mandela led by example, inspiring South Africa’s political and racial rivals to work together to build up a democracy. He said, “I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the idea of democracy a free society in which all persons will live together in harmony and with equal opportunities”. The peace talk earned Mandela the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. His tireless effort and hard work against the system of Apartheid made him South Africa’s First Black President. The presidential elevation was a victory over the discrimination of colour and race.

### **Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**

He was born in a downtrodden family of untouchable caste called Mahars. The Mahars are considered low-caste and treated as untouchable in a caste ridden society. As a child, he had a

bitter taste of discriminatory treatment due to his caste at an early age. He and his brothers had to carry gunny bags to sit on inside the class room because they were not allowed to sit on the class chairs. They were denied drinking water facilities and excluded from game and mixing with other children. Even teachers would not touch their note books for fear of pollution. Ambedkar determined to endure and study and learn. His bitter experiences could not stop his determination. Rather he underwent these humiliations with a great purpose in life. While studying aboard, he mixed with students of various nationalities and races which was an eye-opener for him.

Despite his foreign education, he had to endure insults while at work due to his low caste origin. He was the victim of the cruel Dalit discrimination. He suffered the ignominy of having documents files hurled by peons at his face. These scorching incidents goaded Ambedkar to work for the protection of Dalit rights and upliftment of the status of the Dalits. He was considered



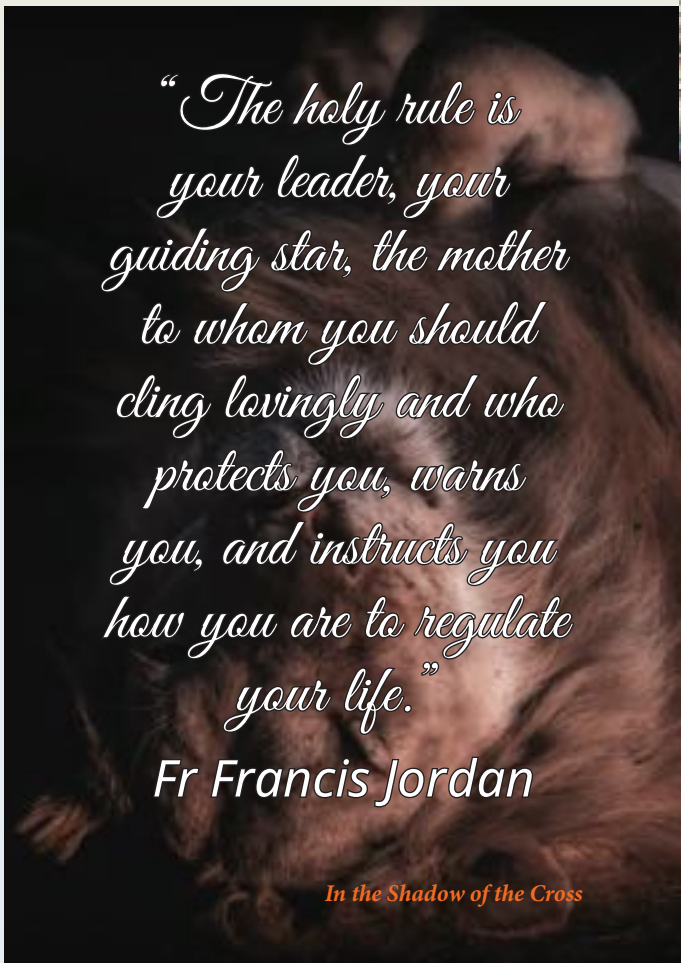
a crusader for the human rights of the Dalits in India. He was a great champion of the Dalit cause because he succeeded in turning the depressed class movement into a revolutionary movement throughout India. Today India has witnessed the oppressed classes walking on the streets of cities and villages with confidence and poise.

The life and work of these people show the cruelty and brutality of discrimination that existed in the society. How people suffered for decades due to this evil system of the society! Over the centuries many people shed their blood fighting against this injustice, exposing the dangerous evil effects. After having known the fact of the dangerous consequences of the evil system from our past, the question is, did the society achieve the liberation from the clutches of this evil? Isn't it still prevailing among us? Why such evil cannot be wiped out totally from us? Do we need again other crusaders like Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela?

Categorically, history affirms that discrimination is always a hindrance to the growth of humanity and society. It distorts and destroys the rights and privileges of the people. As Salvatorians we are called to work for the Glory of God. Overcoming of any kind of discrimination in our attitude is our moral obligation. The founder had the vision of equality, working with spirit

of unity beyond the boundary wall of nation, language, color, caste and creed. Each member of the Salvatorian Society is a soldier to fight against such evils and work for the motto of the Founder. It is said that nobody is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background or his religion. People must learn to love. If they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. Love comes more naturally to the human hearts than its opposite.

Let us learn to love and teach to love beyond all the limitations, for a better today and tomorrow.



*“The holy rule is your leader, your guiding star, the mother to whom you should cling lovingly and who protects you, warns you, and instructs you how you are to regulate your life.”*

*Fr Francis Jordan*



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES



*Bro. Velpuri Srinu SDS*



## ORIGIN

Presbyterianism is a distinct movement that occurred during the 16<sup>th</sup> century protestant Reformation. It is a part of the reformed tradition or Calvinism within Protestantism which traces its origins to the British Isles, particularly Scotland. Presbyterian Churches derive

their name from the Presbyterian form of Church government that is; a Church governed by representative assemblies of elders. Presbyterianism was especially influenced by the French theologian John Calvin, who is credited with the development of Reformed Theology and the work of John Knox, a Scotsman and a Roman Catholic Priest, who studied with Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland. He brought back reformed teachings to Scotland. The normal pattern of government of Presbyterian churches is a hierarchy of four interrelated bodies: the **Session** of a local Church, consisting of the minister(s) and elders who are the

congregation's elected representatives; the **Presbytery**, consisting of ministers and representative elders from within a prescribed area, which oversees Sessions, congregations, and ministers in its area; **Synods**, which are geographically defined to include Presbyteries in a larger area and have important functions in the judicial process as a court of appeal, and the **General Assembly**, the Church's highest court of appeal, consisting of ministers and elders, usually in equal numbers, elected by the Presbyteries. Within all these bodies ministers and elders have an equal vote and decisions are made by majority voting. The powers of each body are limited by the Church's constitution.

Presbyterian Church has four ministries such as **elders, pastors, teachers, and deacons**. Elders may participate in preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments. Ministers who share in the government of the Church are ordained as Ministers of the Word of God and Sacraments. These ministers are elected by the people, but their ordination is an act of the presbytery. Presbyterians have stressed the need for an educated clergy, requiring college or university degrees, and additional seminary training, but presbyteries may modify specific requirements. Most Presbyterian Churches ordain both men and women as ministers and elders.

## DOCTRINE

As members of the Reformed theological tradition, all Presbyterians acknowledge the Bible as the supreme standard of faith and practice. The many Confessions of Faith produced by Reformed bodies at various times hold important but secondary positions as subordinate standards for the Church's doctrine and ministry. In August 1560, the parliament of Scotland adopted the *Scots confession* as the creed of the Scottish kingdom and in the same year in December, the *first Book of Discipline* was published, outlining important doctrinal issues and regulations for Church government. In time, the Scots Confession would be supplanted by the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, which were formulated by the Westminster Assembly between 1643 and 1649. They are governed by sessions made up of representatives of the congregation (elders); a conciliar approach which is found at other levels of decision-making (presbytery, synod and General Assembly). Presbyterian Church government was ensured in Scotland by the Acts of Union in 1707 which created the Kingdom of Great Britain.

## THEOLOGY

**Presbyterian theology** typically emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Scriptures, and



the necessity of grace through faith in Christ. They also follow the Reformed tradition of rejection of Real Presence, rejection of images and the theory of divine Election. The elect are certain of salvation and are blessed by God in their life.

## **SACRAMENTS**

Presbyterians traditionally have held the position that there are only two sacraments:

- Baptism, in which they would baptize infants, as well as unbaptized adults by the *Aspersio* (sprinkling) or *Affusion* (pouring) method, rather than the Immersion method.
- The Lord's Supper (also known as Communion), in which they would believe that Christ is present in the bread and wine through the Holy Spirit, as opposed to being locally present.

## **FEASTS AND CELEBRATIONS**

Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Pentecost Day/ Assembly Day of Prayer

## **PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN INDIA**

The Presbyterian Church in India was founded in 1841 by missionaries from the Presbyterian Church of Wales (formerly the Calvinistic Methodist Church). Rev Thomas Jones and his wife arrived in Cherrapunji

(Sohra) in June 1841 and from there their work spread to Sylhet today is Bangladesh and Cachar Plains, Assam, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. But before this around 1813 the Serampore Mission which was established by William Carey (1761-1834) started working in at the foot of the Khasi Hills. The same year a mission was started at Jowai in the Jaintia Hills. Krishna Paul the first missionary began a translation of the Bible into Khasi using Bengali script. But this mission was closed in 1838, but the Welsh missionaries revived this effort. Rev. William Pyse arrived to strengthen this work. The first Presbytery was formed in 1867 in Khasi Hills, and 5 presbyteries were established in 1895. As the work made rapid progress, the Assembly of the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Church was constituted in 1896, which had jurisdiction over all the mission fields of the Presbyterian Church of Wales in North-East India. Since the Church grew in character and membership, two new Assemblies came to be created in 1924, the Lushai Assembly and the Cachar Plains Assembly. The existence of the Assemblies led to the constitution of a higher body, the synod of the Presbyterian Church in Assam in 1926. In 1930, the Cachar Hills Tribes Assembly was inaugurated as a fourth Assembly. But now, the Cachar Plains could not function due to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.



In 1953, the highest Church body, the “Synod”, was renamed “Assembly”, while each of the constituent Assemblies was called “Synod”. In 1959, the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Assam received new members from South Manipur within its fold. In 1968, the name of the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Assam was changed to the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in North East India (APCNEI). The name Presbyterian Church of India was assumed in 1992. The number of the Constituent Synods of the Assembly increased from four to nine with the creation of RiBhoi Presbyterian Synod and Biateram Presbyterian Synod in 1996; the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Mihngi and Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Sepsngi in 2002, the Zou Presbyterian Church Synod in 2006, Karbi Anglong Presbyterian Church Synod in 2014. The Presbyterian Church of India continues to play a vital role in the worldwide Church and enters

into partnership agreements with Sister Churches. At present, the Presbyterian Church of India or PCI is affiliated with the world Alliance of Reformed Churches (1997), National Council of Churches in India (1997), Council for World Mission (1978), and Christian Conference of Asia (1985), Reformed Ecumenical Council (2003). It maintains a strong link with the Presbyterian Church of Wales.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND STATISTICS**

According to 2014 statistics the Presbyterian Church of India had a total strength of 14, 05,781 members and 3,210 local churches or congregations, and 1030 ministers.

### **UNITS**

1. Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod (Aizawl)
2. Cachar Hill Tribes Synod (Halflong, Assam)
3. Manipur Presbyterian Church Synod (Churachandpur, Manipur)
4. Biateram Presbyterian Church Synod (DimaHasao, Assam)
5. RiBhoi Presbyterian Church Synod (RiBhoi District, Meghalaya)
6. Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Mihngi (Jowai)
7. Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Sepsngi (Sepsngi)

8. Zou Presbyterian Church Synod (Churachandpur, Manipur)
  9. Karbi Anglong Presbyterian Church Synod (KAPC Synod) (Karbi Anglong District, Assam)
  10. Meitei Presbyterian Singlup Provisional Synod (Imphal, Manipur)
- Presbyterians are generally against unity and ecumenical activity. Some of the Presbyterians, however, joined the two church unions of Church of South India (1947) and Church of North India (1970).

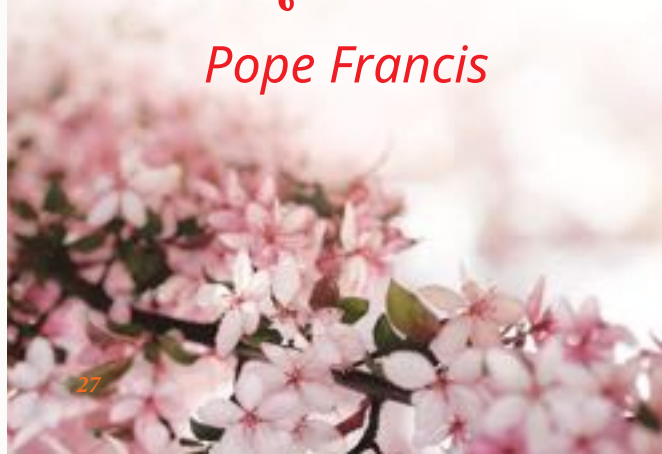
## CONCLUSION

The Presbyterian churches work for peace and promote justice and communal harmony in the country. Their mission is also to eradicate poverty, to build inclusive communities of women and men in the Church and in the society. Moreover their motto is to be good stewards of God's creation.



*“But we cannot forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others.”*

*Pope Francis*



# COMMUNITY BUILDING



**Fr. Sunil Thomas Kashamkattil SDS**

A consecrated life is a journey, rather than a theory. It indicates a way, it is a search and an adventure, an invitation for us to be open to the unknown, to share and search together through the clues we find in an attitude of humility, letting ourselves be awed by what we discover... this journey poses challenges that must motivate and provide a new charm to the meaning of being a member of the Community.

Our community life is and should be the consequence of the choices we have made and there are divergent (different) talents, interests and forces that interplay in the life of the community.



These can be better harnessed and utilized provided we have the insight into the dynamics of these, and the tools to integrate them. Here we are trying to look into some of the attitudes that could help us to form a healthier and more mature community.

Community is a place of belonging, the rock where we are grounded and in which we find our identity. As a child suffers loneliness and anguish when it feels that it does not belong to anyone or anywhere, so also an individual feels loneliness when he/she realizes that she/he does not belong to anyone or anywhere. The longer we journey on the road to inner healing and wholeness, the more the sense of belonging grows and deepens. If our community gives us a sense of belonging, it also helps us to accept our aloneness in a personal meeting with God. The danger for some of us today is to think that *"I am the centre and everyone is there for me"*. We must die to this form of destructive egoism and be reborn in love, where we learn to receive and to give.



The fundamental attitude to true community, where there is true belonging, is **OPENNESS**: listening to God, to each other, to the world and to other communities. Openness to self has a liberating effect. It helps to eliminate Defense mechanism and unworthy motives. It paves way for Real communication with others that is sharing and exchanging. It makes one a better person, more social, more loving, and more genuinely Christian. Openness leads to personal growth, greater maturity, self-fulfillment, mutual trust, and mutual acceptance. These are elements that create the necessary climate for involvement, and sharing.

When there is belonging and openness, it also has concern for each other. This is what I mean by caring and bonding. Gangs, sects, clubs, spirituality centers are not communities, because they are not bound to one another. They become communities only when people start to truly care for each other. *"Sometimes our light goes out but it is blown again into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who rekindle this*

*inner light"* (Albert Schweitzer).

In a community people are called to cooperate – work together. Work has to be done; food must be prepared; prayer and other activities must start in time; people must be welcomed; old and sick must be taken care of; younger must be formed. There has to be clear organization and discipline in a community; otherwise here will be chaos and terrible inefficiency. In community, collaboration must find its source in communion. Where people feel each other and walk towards the same goal, they cooperate better. Cooperation without communion quickly becomes like a work camp or factory, where unity comes from external reality. Communion is based on some common inner experience of love; it is the recognition of being one body, one people, called by God to be a source of love and peace. When a community is just a place of work, it is in danger of dying.

Community is the place where our limitations, our fears and our egoisms are revealed to us. We discover our poverty, weakness, our inability to get on with some people, our mental and emotional blocks, our affective and sexual disturbances, our seemingly insatiable desires, our frustrations and jealousies, our hatred and our wish to destroy. We are condemned to inner isolation and death. Community life brings a painful revelation of our limitations, weakness and darkness.



The unexpected discovery of monsters within us is hard to accept.

In marriage, each partner sacrifices his or her ego for a relationship in which man and woman become one. That is also the pain of community life. Community is the place where the power of ego is revealed and where it is called to die so that people become one body. Jesus said, *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (Jn 12.24).

When the inner pain surfaces, we can discover too that community is a safe place. Some people really listen to us; we reveal our terrible monsters; the community becomes a safe place to accept ourselves as we are with our wounds. We are broken, but we are loved. We can grow to greater openness and compassion. The community becomes the place of liberation and growth.

There are two great dangers to community. They are **“friends and enemies”**. People very quickly get together with those who like themselves; who please us; who shares our ideas. We nourish each other and flatter each

other. Our friendship is enclosed in mutual flattery and approval, preventing us to see our inner poverty and wounds. Friendship becomes stifling, a barrier between ourselves and others.

There are also antipathies (enemies) in the community. They are always people with whom we do not agree, who block us, who contradict us and who stifle the treasure of our life and freedom. Their presence seems to awaken our own poverty, guilt feelings and inner wounds. We seem incapable of expressing ourselves or even living peacefully when we are with them and we push them away. These blocks are natural. It would be foolish to deny them. When you go into some communities, you can quickly sense these tensions and under-ground battles. People do not look each other in face. They pass each other in the corridors like ships in the night, without any communication. A community is community when all the members have consciously decided to break these barriers and come out of the cocoons of “friendship” to stretch out their hands to “enemies”. Paul says that Jesus came to break down the dividing walls of hostility between two groups of people to make them both one (Eph 2.14).

As long as we refuse to accept that we are a mixture of light and darkness, of positive qualities and failings, of love and hate, of altruism and egocentricity, and of maturity and immaturity, we will continue to divide community into enemies and friends. We will go on



erecting barriers around ourselves, thus cutting ourselves off from others.

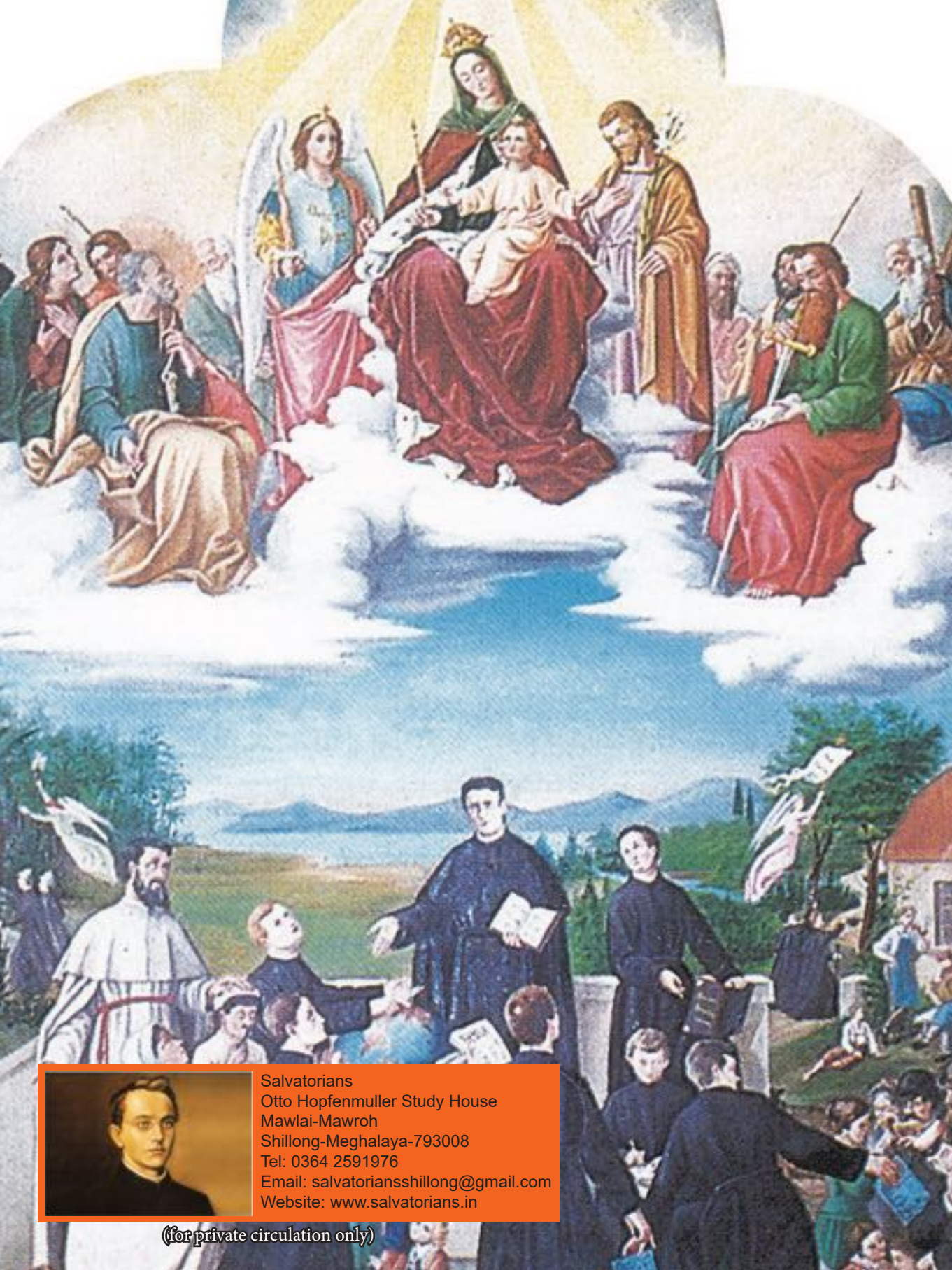
In community it is easy to judge and then to condemn others. We lock up people in categories. He or she is like this or like that. When we do that we refuse them the possibility of growth. This is the sin of community life. When we judge, we are pushing people away, creating a wall or a barrier. When we forgive we are destroying barriers; we become closer to others.

To defend ourselves and judge others is the nature of broken humanity. Each one of us carries within us wounds and fragilities; we can be quickly frightened by other people and their ideas. We all have the difficulty truly listening to others and appreciating them. However, we all must look on our emotional life and deepen our spiritual life in order to be more centered in truth, in love and in God. In spite of all the trust we may have in each other, there are always words that wound, self-promoting attitudes, situations where vulnerabilities clash. That is why living together implies a cross, a constant effort, an acceptance which is daily and mutual forgiveness. Mutual trust among the members of the community is born of each day's

forgiveness and acceptance of the fragility and poverty of ourselves and of others. It is often after suffering, after very great trials, tensions and the proof of fidelity that trust grows.

A community life is an orchestra. Each instrument is beautiful when it plays alone, but when they play together, each given its own weight in turn, the result is even more beautiful. A community is like a garden full of flowers, shrubs, and trees. Together they witness to the beauty of God. We are all with very different temperaments. Some are organized, quick, precise and efficient. They tend to be legalistic and defensive. Others are more open, flexible and love personal contact. Others are more shy and tend to become depressed and pessimistic. There are introverts and extroverts. God calls all these opposites together to create the wealth of the community. We discover that difference is not a threat but a treasure. It is important that the community welcomes those gifts in love and gratitude so that we can participate in each other's gifts and help each other to build the community.

Our community is only truly a body when the majority of the members is making the transition from **"the community for myself"** to **"myself for the community"**, when each person's heart is opening to all the others without any exception. This is the movement from **egoism** to **love**, from **death** to **resurrection**. It is a place where the majority is emerging from the shadows of egocentricity to the light of real love



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