Pax Lumina

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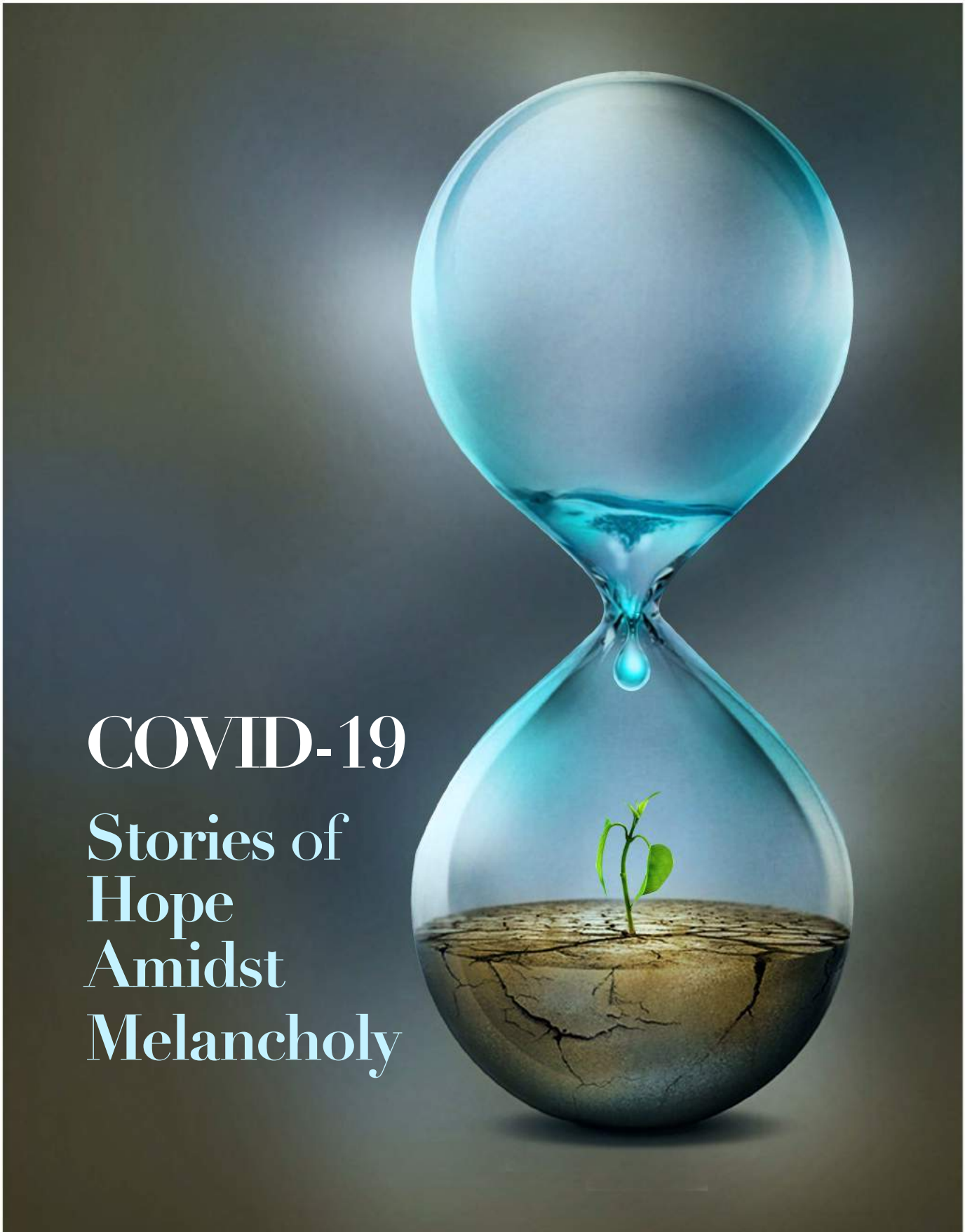
A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation



COVID-19

Stories of Hope Amidst Melancholy

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A Quest for Peace and Reconciliation

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LIPI, the Nodal Platform for Peace and Reconciliation Network of JCSA, aims at fostering peace with a multi-pronged approach.

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Editorial

A Journey Begins

This is the first issue of the magazine PAX LUMINA published by the Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations (LIPI), Kochi, Kerala. LIPI has been publishing for the past five years a monthly magazine in Malayalam, the language of Kerala. Also as part of its peace-making and peace-building activities it has been conducting training programmes and workshops for teachers, students and others from all walks of life who seek peace. This magazine is an attempt at broadening the scope of these activities beyond the geographical limits of Kerala. But the objective remains the same. Peace. And the concerns too remain, viz. conflicts, reconciliation, non-violence, justice, hope and love. Of course, all these are desirables, but how to achieve them, how to even desire them are what we hope to discuss through this magazine. And we believe peace in itself is the moral imperative which should illuminate our thoughts, discussions and actions in this regard.

Today the context of our discussions for obvious reasons is COVID-19. Many things about this disease and the virus/viruses causing it are unkown. But certain pointers are unwavering in their direction. The disease is global. The virus hardly respects human barriers, categories and power structures. And the prevailing leadership models at various levels are floundering.

On the other hand, a desperate search has started. For a cure, a refuge, a home and finally a ventilator and some oxygen. Old certainties seem fuzzy. Linear equations of power and money have become chaotic and yield no solutions. The controllers do not control anything. The situation admittedly is grim. And panic is creeping in. Solutions are not clear in sight. But the questions that come up with this pandemic are real and sharp.

For example: Is the corona virus a result of natural evolution or the product of human action?

In either of these cases, ramifications are grave. The former points to a possible scenario where the Planet Earth seeks retribution of the violence inflicted upon it. And the latter to the self-destructive need of those in authority to dominate, control and decimate who they consider to be the other. Actually the legion of others.

Or: What is the role of globalization in this pandemic?

Global interconnectivity of the world today is a reality. Is undoing this the solution? Even if it is so, is it feasible? To what extent is this desirable?

Or: Who are the most affected in this pandemic and who cares for them?

There are some impressionistic images about this from around the world in this issue.

Or: Will COVID-19 teach humans how to live a less conflicted and more peaceful post-pandemic life?

We will have to wait and see.

There are many such questions bordering on individual's attitudes and behaviours in the face of human suffering and mortality to the collective anxieties of survival of not only sapiens but of every living and non-living being on this planet. And probably here lies the first lesson from COVID-19, a lesson in humility.

In this issue, our writers have raised some of these important questions, shared their experiences of peace and hope in these COVID times as well as during other struggles they have encountered and are worth remembering now and have also indicated some tentative approaches to solutions. We place them before you admitting that we do not possess a panacea either for the ruthless damage being caused by COVID-19 or for the structural malaises of the present world order it has graphically exposed.

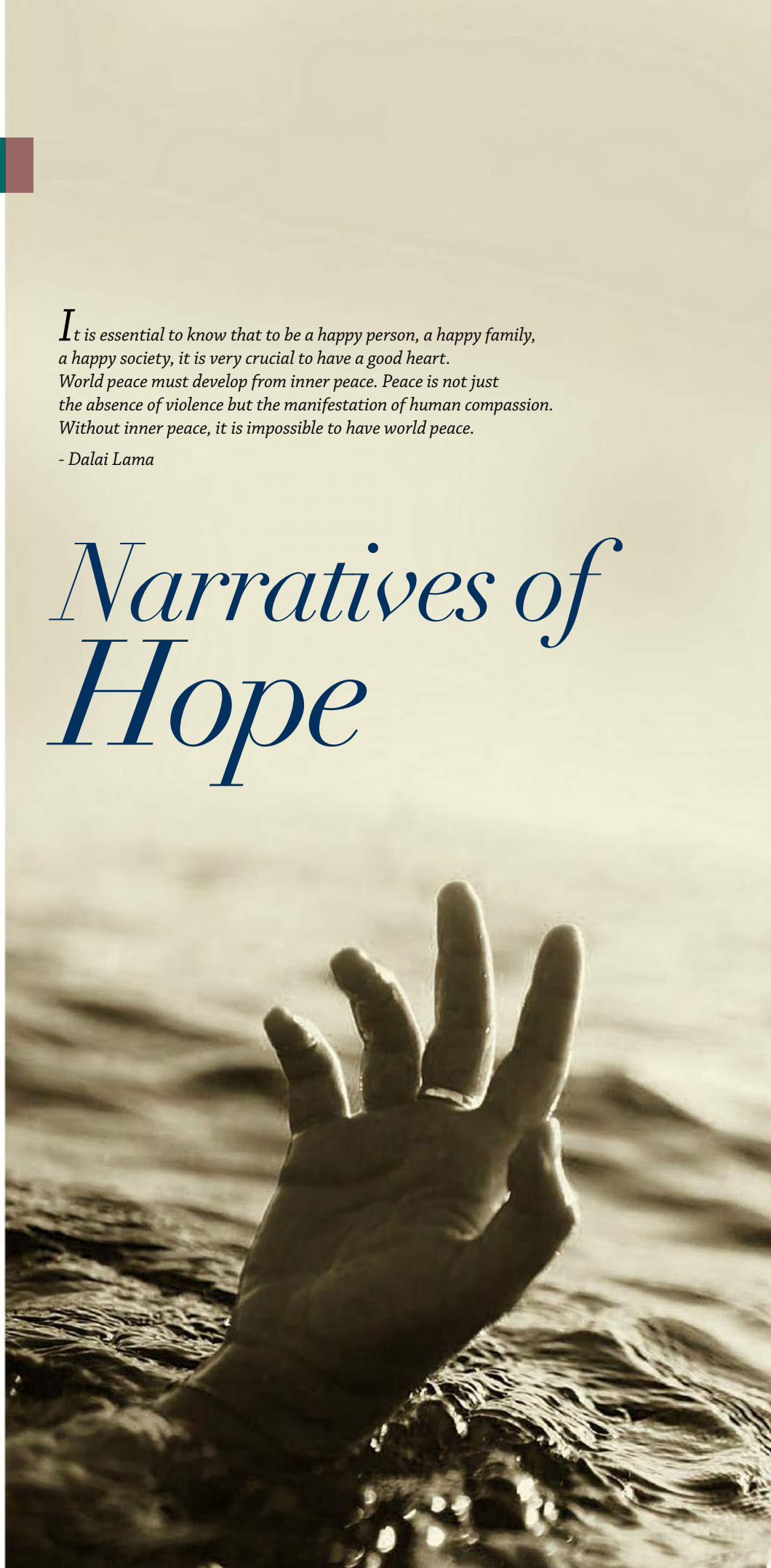
But this magazine starts its journey with a belief that hope is a choice and thoughtful choices can lead to meaningful actions. We invite all of you to be our partners in this journey of dialogue and action. We also hope that you will enrich us with your suggestions and feedback for this magazine as well as provide us with actionable opportunities for making peace a reality for everyone and everything on this planet.

Jacob Thomas
Editor

It is essential to know that to be a happy person, a happy family, a happy society, it is very crucial to have a good heart. World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not just the absence of violence but the manifestation of human compassion. Without inner peace, it is impossible to have world peace.

- Dalai Lama

Narratives of Hope



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CIRCLES of KINDNESS

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 07-09

The coming months will demand the best from us. Scientists and health workers will be at the frontlines of this war, even as a badly broken economy will ravage our dispossessed people. The only chance we have of overcoming one day is by cementing our solidarity.

In these days of the pandemic, a metaphor we hear very often is of war. Health professionals, governments and people the world over are fighting a war, indeed a world war, against a virus which threatens to destroy tens of thousands of lives, and some believe even much of the world as we know it.

Every war has weapons. Some weapons are obvious in waging this war – science; health personnel, equipment and infrastructure; public investments; state capacities; and the quality of political leadership. But what will be most decisive if we are to emerge victorious is a weapon rarely remembered, understood or nurtured. This is our solidarity.

And yet, this period has simultaneously witnessed the most profound decimation of our solidarities. Public health experts differ about whether such a harsh and comprehensive a lockdown was advisable in India. But assuming it was, it was designed and implemented entirely bereft of public empathy and compassion.

There are,indeed,many dazzling displays of such solidarity. Most of all, by public health professionals at all levels. Often badly let down by a state which has not invested nearly enough in their protection, testing kits, equipment and infrastructure, they still battle at the bunkers of this war. Unmindful of their own safety, cut off from their loved ones, they are fighting to save our lives.

And then there are what I call 'circles of kindness.' Each time I am on the streets helping distribute food to the homeless and the destitute, I am struck by the numbers of ordinary people reaching out to the hungry with food and care.

The police mostly allow people distributing food even though they have no formal permission. And I even hear reports of policepersons organizing food kitchens at the police stations for the hungry.

My young colleagues resolved to drive out to distribute cooked food and dry rations from the second day after the lockdown to the homeless who they knew would be worst hit. We organized masks and gloves, but the risk of infection always lurked. 'We cannot sit at home and watch people suffer hungry', one explained to me. 'I am frightened of Corona', another added. 'But their hunger is greater than my fear'.

In Nizamuddin, I asked a homeless man how he was surviving. He says he had just a little money saved up, which he is spending on food. But not just for his own family.He feeds also three other families which sleep on the pavement beside him. He is not related to them. But how can he eat and watch their children sleep hungry?

On another lane in Old Delhi, I spot a cycle-rickshaw cart piled with packets of roti and sabzi (vegetable). The owner of a modest tent-house, I am told, gets 500 meals cooked each morning, and distributes these to those rendered destitute by the lockdown.

In Ghazipur, during the long march of migrants, I find many people drive up, their cars packed with drinking water pouches and food, which they hand out to grateful walkers.

There are many young people in cities and towns who are defying their families by setting out each morning to distribute food to the hungry. Some sleep in separate rooms; others have moved out of their homes to their offices, to save their families from infection.

And yet, this period has simultaneously witnessed the most profound decimation of our solidarities. Public health experts differ about whether such a harsh and comprehensive a lockdown was advisable in India. But assuming it was, it was designed and implemented entirely bereft of public empathy and compassion.

Let us play a mind game. Suppose all of us in middle-class and formal sector employment were informed after the precipitous lockdown that none of us would be assured salary for the period of the lockdown. Instead the State would endeavour to pay some of us maybe two days' wages and 5 kilogram grain. Suppose we had little in our banks to fall back on. Suppose we were also stripped of our health insurance and could only depend on ramshackle public health systems. Would we then have accepted the lockdown as a reasonable and acceptable response to the looming pandemic?

Solidarity demands, instead, that we in the middle-class should have been outraged that the poor were cruelly stranded overnight without work and wages, unlike us. We should have demanded from the State that every worker in the informal sector must be paid for the entire duration of the lockdown, no different from us, at least the statutory minimum wage. But we did not.

Let us play another mind game. Suppose you worked far from the place you call home, and abruptly were left without food and work, terrified also by a disease which could kill you. Would you still obediently stay on in the city, ready to die among strangers, watching your children die? Or would you desperately do anything to reach your loved ones, even if this meant walking hundreds of kilometres, dodging an uncaring State. The inability to anticipate, and then to deal humanely with the largest exodus of people in India since partition, was another spectacular failure of public solidarity.

In our fear of the virus, it was as though we then needed to find some scapegoat for our fears and hate. The first were people from North-East India, who we subject to savage discrimination, only because their narrower eyes reminded ignorant racist people of China where the virus originated. Many were taunted 'corona', shunned, not allowed into stores and neighbourhoods.

Then the scapegoat became any outsider. We have reports from around the country where not just gated colonies but poor neighbourhoods and villages have blockaded themselves, with no stranger allowed in. Even migrants who managed to dodge the police, walked or hid in the boxes on trucks, try to return to their families in the dead of the night, willing to quarantine in their homes, but are not allowed to. And now, the biggest scapegoat is the Muslim. It is true that misguided leaders of a fundamentalist sect held a meeting which infected large numbers. But there were other misguided gatherings also at that time. And all Muslims cannot be held responsible for their mistake. But the air and social media is fevered with hate labelling Muslims corona bombs waging a corona jihad. Social and economic boycotts of Muslims are growing. Many fear violence. India is a country where corona virus has become an excuse to fuel such hate against a specific people.

The coming months will demand the best from us. Scientists and health workers will be at the frontlines of this war, even as a badly broken economy will ravage our dispossessed people. The only chance we have of overcoming one day is by cementing our solidarity. By holding one another in circles of kindness, across all our differences of class, ethnicity, religion, gender, age and national boundaries, by standing with one another, and caring for one another.

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COVID-19 Expect the UNEXPECTED

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 10-12

Lockdown: A Pause of Mixed Fortune

Just three months ago, say in the month of Januray 2020, we never imagined that the world would get into a lockdown phase so quickly, so comprehensively and so unpredictably. It came upon us with such a surprise that we almost lost our way. Yet can we consider this surprise as a gateway to the unexpected? – a portal to another different world of 'pause'. We are pausing to think, to reflect, to distance and to relish. We are recognizing that there is 'time' beyond everydayness; there is 'space' beyond what we occupy. More birds in the garden, quieter moments to listen to them, more spaciousness in our neighborhood, more

The hope that is emerging from 'lockdown' is the recognition, albeit unwittingly, that the health of the other and of everybody is required for one's own health. Health is social. One cannot immunize oneself without everybody on board. This renewed sense of planetary belonging opens up a portal of hope for humankind. We are thinking and feeling global.

time to delight in old lullabies, to read and listen to poetry. All these in the midst of disturbing images of migrant laborers walking hundreds of miles, days on, hoping to reach home. Criminal negligence on the part of those who declared lockdown! While one hundred chartered flights are deputed to ferry in children from foreign countries, there are no buses and trains for the poor migrant labourers. The former are political class, the latter a negligible lot. Expect the unexpected! What type of world is emerging from this lockdown phase? On the one hand it opens up space and time in a new revelation of 'pause mode', on the other, it seems to create a world of exclusion, leading to the slow death of democratic space. Corona is mixed experience of 'pause' with uncertainties; both are real and both could be promising depending on where you are located in this lockdown phase!

Birthing Perpetual Newness

The hope that is emerging from 'lockdown' is the recognition, albeit unwittingly, that the health of the other and of everybody is required for one's own health. Health is social. One cannot immunize oneself without everybody on board. This renewed sense of planetary belonging opens up a portal of hope for humankind. We are thinking and feeling global. COVID-19 is a pandemic; it's reach is global; its search is global; it's findings may also be planetary. Corona could be a portal for a more inter-connected and inter-dependent world order, bringing health, food and shelter for everyone; because without everyone on board, there is no escape from Corona! This renewed sense of planetary thinking could usher in a new world of social democracy where everyone's health, food and shelter become the responsibility of all.

One recognizes the other even as one distances from the other. This paradoxical absenc-ing in order to be presenc-ing might define the mode of being in the future. Khalil Gibran was right – let there be space between your union! We need to create space in our togetherness; it's a new consciousness of being, of being together in distance!

We need to create space in our togetherness; it's a new consciousness of being, of being together in distance! Are we birthing a new way of being compassionate? To distance in order to protect the other; to protect oneself in order to safeguard the other.

Are we birthing a new way of being compassionate? To distance in order to protect the other; to protect oneself in order to safeguard the other. One creates boundaries in view of protecting one another; whereas, COVID-19 violates all boundaries. Corona creates and destroys boundaries. Frontiers are made porous. Our certitudes and absolutes are being interrogated. Are these birth-pangs of a new age and a new order? Rabindranath Tagore is fond of using the term 'chiro nuton' (perpetually new) referring to the Ultimate. Are we humans being invited to think anew, to shed the baggage accumulated over the ages that have acquired absolute status that we don't even recognize? To experience the unbearable lightness of being.

Break the Chain of the Deadly Virus

The whatsApp video song (Thakarkanam) of Kerala police woman making passionate appeal to the general public to rally round in order to break the chain of Corona virus is a welcome image. Police force is presenting itself as a constructive social force, building up social network. The Health Minister of Kerala, by now world famous Shailaja Teacher (as she is popularly known in Kerala) ably supported by Chief Minister of Kerala – Sri. Pinarayi Vijayan – is reinventing the role of an elected government in these critical times. This indeed is consoling.

The Chin refugee women from Myanmar in New Delhi are working overnight to make masks to supply to emergency wards in Delhi hospitals to join India in its fight against Corona. This is, in spite of the fact that India refuses to give them even refugee status. These images are weaving a new silent narrative for a different possible world of peace and reconciliation.

In this lockdown set up, new forms of teaching and learning are taking shape. Beyond the formal setting of buildings and class rooms, online learning is freeing the mind to reach the unreachable, to find the lost ones, to befriend the excluded and to learn the unthinkable. Borders are being redrawn.

These are images that could usher in a world of the unexpected. We require imagination. Our certainties and absolutes are shattered. Our borders are broken. We need new tools of imagination. "Imagine a circle empowering within, Freedom so new to employ.... New world order can break through at last; Imagine...imagine... imagine." (O'Murchu).

The imagination of peoples - Citizens groups, NGOs, Religious groups, Well-wishers, Neighborhood communities - is feeding the poor, migrant workers and daily labourers. As long as their imagination is not locked down, hope never fades! Imagine through Corona! Imagine beyond Corona! Imagine!

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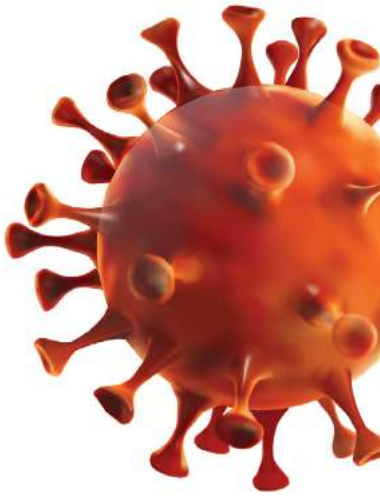


C for COVID, CHANGE and more

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 13-16

COVID-19 has changed us, the way we live and relate to one another. It has been extremely hard for many. In the long run, however, the world seems to be changing, more accepting of the other, consumption patterns have changed and more people seem to be responding to the least of our sisters and brothers.

The pandemic COVID-19 has gripped the world, in a manner which no other catastrophe, calamity or crisis has done before. The defining quantum is the 'unknown'; no one knows how and where and in what manner it will strike. In a recent statement, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said some 80% of the positive cases in India were either completely asymptomatic or with very mild symptoms. That makes this pandemic all the more scary for most. The fear of the unknown has already taken a toll everywhere.

The UN's World Health Organization (WHO) had already declared the pandemic as a global emergency on 30 January this year. India was a late starter having woken up to this reality with a token 'Janata curfew' on 22 March and finally with a nationwide lockdown from the midnight of 24/25 March. Thankfully, at least one State in India, Kerala got its act together much earlier. Kerala has the dubious distinction of having the first positive case of the coronavirus in the country. The State Government, however, left no stone unturned to deal with the pandemic. Today, the efforts and responses of Kerala are being hailed as a model for the world to emulate. Sadly, the sudden lockdown and the immediate suspension of every form of public transport left millions of migrant workers (most of them daily wage-earners) stranded all over the country. Having to fend for themselves thousands undertook the

In the midst of all this suffering: of illness, hunger and fear- there are also several positive stories emerging: of hope and resilience; of courage and selflessness; of availability and generosity; of sacrifice and kindness and much more.

painful trek back to their native places, walking hundreds of miles without food or drink. Some died on the way. Many have been incarcerated in different States. Some are still walking.

In the midst of all this suffering of illness, hunger and fear there are also several positive stories emerging of hope and resilience, of courage and selflessness, of availability and generosity, of sacrifice and kindness and much more. People have reached out to those in need as never before often at great risk to themselves. Health care professionals, other care-givers and their support teams have worked round the clock to save lives and provide the much-needed medical assistance despite lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or other necessary medical facilities. Police and other security officials and those who need to ensure that the basic protocols are maintained have also done so painstakingly and at great risk.

Being 'locked down' now for over a month naturally has had an impact on me. I realise that I have changed in several ways and I think that there is a palpable change all around me: among the people I interact with telephonically through social media and online. I would like to look at this multi-dimensional change through what I would like to call the C-prism.

Challenges

It has been a time of challenges on so many different fronts. For the first time in our lives we are under a 'lockdown' and one is not sure how to deal with this situation. It came so suddenly (though we should have read the signs at least two months earlier) and at this moment we are really not sure whether it will be lifted on the day proposed or will be further extended. The challenge to 'stay home' is not easy. One has to strike the balance between just relaxing (lazing about) or doing something constructive. 'Social distancing' is in a way a 'new' for India ; in the sense that as a people we are so used to being in overcrowded trains, buses and streets. Many of our families are large. We are always in the midst of people, we thrive in the hustle and bustle of daily life. So maintaining a physical distance is certainly a challenge. Then there are the 'masks' to be worn. Again it is not an easy thing to be done. "Washing hands" regularly is not something one is averse to but in areas which do not have running water, it does become an issue. Yes there are plenty of challenges in this new state of life!

Contemplation

The Contemplation to Attain the Love of God is regarded as the capstone of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The pandemic has in more ways than one provided opportunities for contemplation and nearness to God. There is plenty of time for prayer: daily prayer, monthly recollection, annual retreat and even the entire four weeks all rolled in one. It can be considered a gift from God the ability to stay calm, to stay cool being enveloped in this, as the mystic puts it so beautifully, 'cloud of unknowing'. At this moment, one really

does not know what the morrow holds. It perhaps no longer matters. One suddenly realizes that there are bees, birds and butterflies all around. Were they always there or have their 'tribes' increased because of lesser noise and other pollution? The Final Contemplation does make all the more sense today as "one finds God in all things" and from the depths of one's heart one cannot help but say that radical prayer the 'Suscipe', "Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess".

Communication

Whilst it is mandatory to maintain social distance and even to 'stay-at-home', there are newer and more enhanced ways of communication today. Yes constant communication with God seems more than ever paramount. Communicating with others seems to have become a new normal in this rather abnormal situation. Social communication has become as never before: one is simply inundated with messages, memes and photos all the time on WhatsApp, on Messenger, on Telegram, on Instagram, on Twitter, on Facebook. Some of them have been really useful. Messages of hope, that all will be well again. Besides, there have been some excellent programmers on webinar and other communication platforms. Places of worship are closed but services are livestreamed.

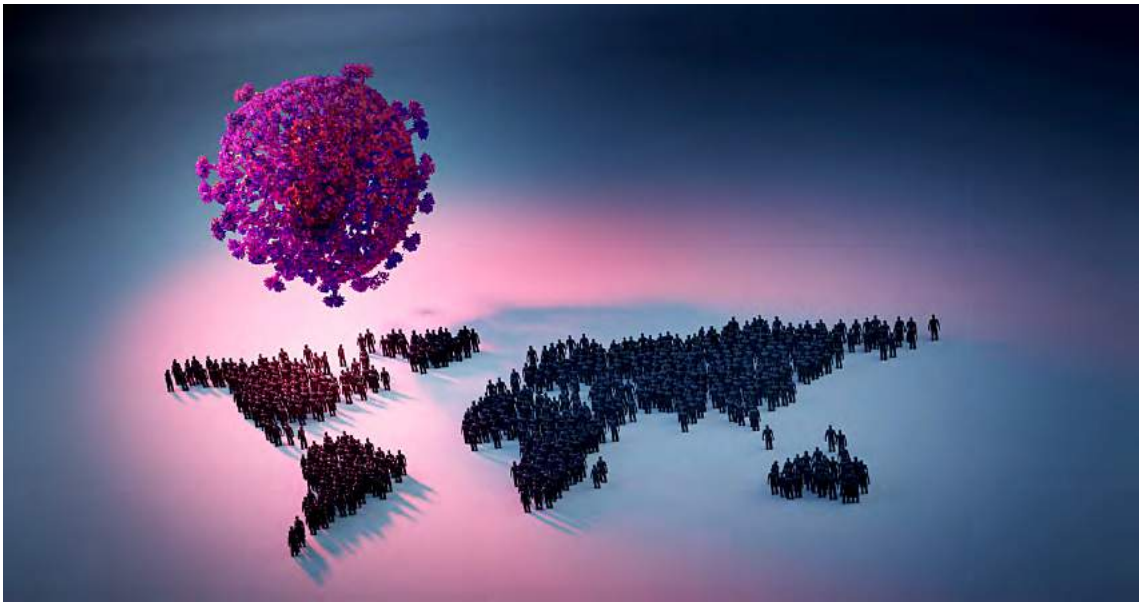
Creativity

When one is in the midst of such a pandemic, one naturally looks to ways and means of becoming more creative. The sheer 'helplessness' of the situation is perhaps a motivator to look at things differently and even to do things differently. In that sense, one begins experimenting, doing things that one has never done before. For example, with the help of a younger Jesuit companion here (who did the video recording and provided other necessary technical assistance), I began doing brief reflections on Contextual Spirituality. These were posted on YouTube. I am simply amazed by the responses. Hundreds have viewed them and I have received many positive comments from all over. Creativity helps in bonding, in bringing people together. When there is something creative done, there is a natural outpouring of appreciation; this in turn, encourages one to do more.

When one is in the midst of such a pandemic, one naturally looks to ways and means of becoming more creative. The sheer 'helplessness' of the situation is perhaps a motivator to look at things differently and even to do things differently. In that sense, one begins experimenting. Doing things that one has never done before.

Collaboration

The pandemic, in several ways, has brought out the best in many persons all over the world. There are numerous stories of caring and sharing which have seen the light of the day. Collaborating with women and men of goodwill, cooperating with the government and other official agencies is what keeps happening. Collaborating with others in response to migrant workers and daily wagers helps build trust and increases efficiency. In times like these, one has also been receiving plenty of support from others (and one is also able to



reciprocate). All this helps in coping with the reality we have been thrown into

Compassion

One hears and experiences stories of compassion all the time. Of people reaching out to others, at great risk to their own lives. There are the doctors and nurses and their teams everywhere who have been giving without counting the cost. There is a girl, Anushka, an undergraduate at the Delhi University. She is one of those few that actually has a lockdown travel pass. She sets out early from home every single morning (sometimes as early as 4 am) on her scooty, to distribute food and rations and medicines all over the city. Mongolpuri, Shahadra, Mustafabad, Najafgarh, IP Extension, Patparganj, you name it, she is probably given out food there, every day, sometimes alone, other times with friends. There is a Jesuit, Fr Frazer Mascarenhas who made the premises of the Jesuit School in Bandra, Mumbai a shelter home for 150 stranded migrants – and provided them with all what they needed. Then there is this group of migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh who were quarantined at a primary school in Palsana village in Sikar District, Rajasthan. When the Village Sarpanch went to meet them, they pointed to the poor state of the school building, and said if he could arrange paint and brushes, they could spend their time well. In a week, they changed the face of the school building which had not been painted for years. When the Sarpanch wanted to pay them from the panchayat funds, they politely declined and said when we are getting free food and are being looked after so well by medical staff and by the villagers, what more do we need? We should also do something for the village. These and several more stories of compassion, of courage and commitment!

COVID-19 has changed us, the way we live and relate to one another. It has been extremely hard for many. In the long run, however, the world seems to be changing, more accepting of the other, consumption patterns have changed and more people seem to be responding to the least of our sisters and brothers. God, they say writes straight on crooked lines. COVID-19 is clearly one example!

INTERNATIONAL Responses

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 17-35

The entire world is hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Tens of thousands have lost their precious lives. Updates from hot-spot countries arrive us each day through the media. Since Covid has a tendency to spread out exponentially, other countries are also to be on constant vigil and taking up precautionary measures. Even when following country-specific strategies and policies to mitigate this catastrophe, responses have been widely different. Representatives from 10 countries have responded with their country status regarding COVID-19 besides suggesting some insights and measures for bringing the world to a new normal.

Every Breath Counts

Jospeh Puthenkulam (Italy) • joeputhensj@gmail.com

On January 20, highlighting the news of the lockdown in three cities including Wuhan, my Chinese classmate messaged, “Friends, the virus is spreading. Be careful.” The first of many messages to follow. “Corona in Germany. Take care!”, added a Korean friend on February 2. Quoting a comment of an Italian who visited Nigeria, my Nigerian colleague messaged me on February 28, “Corona came to Africa through us.” On March 6, the Chinese classmate messaged again, “First case of Corona in the Vatican, be on the guard!” Crossing continents, the virus came close.

22.8 per cent of the Italian population is above 65 years. Last year (2019) those above 80 numbered half a million. Obviously, the elderly are hit first by the novel corona virus (COVID-19). Average age of Italians who have died

from Covid-19 is 81! Among the dead,6 per cent are above 90 years old, 42 per cent of among 80-89 years old and 35 per cent are among 70-79 years old. This reality upsets Italian society that is primarily bonded on family. About 66 per cent of the young, between 18 and 34 years old live with their parents. Moving out after marriage is often to places near their parents. Even when jobs require them to move far, it is common among the Italians to gather during the weekends and share meals together.

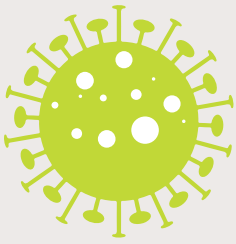
Giuseppe, 91 years, is used to walk to her daughter’s homefor lunch. Leaving for work, Valeria leaves her kid with her mother-in-law. Visiting the sick has been on the daily schedule of Don Alberto, a

parish priestwho hosts weekend faith-sharing and meals. All these turned topsy-turvy! Living in communion is hampered by social distancing. This virus hits the Italian families very hard. A state of stillness, all over!

Italy is in despair, deprived of the basic human traits to move about and contact others. One is afraid to cough or to sneeze! The towns that attracted tourists round the year are empty. So are the deserted pilgrim centres. Amidst this strange disorder in life, gestures of care and hope glitter every day through posters hung on balconies, assurances of prayers over social media and increased online communication. "Let me not cause a contagion" – this thought helps individuals and families to bear with isolation.

Every breath counts. Stories of suffering and contagion remind this. Where the most essential alone is significant, one is forced to choose the most urgent and leave the rest. Customs and costumes, rubrics and habits, all are changed. The virus hits the poor and the rich alike. Where the human calculations fail, we are learning gradually to overcome our fragility by uniting hearts and converging initiatives. The present pain makes us recognize that 'divided we fall and united we stand'; what affects one affects all.

The fight against Corona offers multiple warnings. Integral development is possible only when the basic needs of everyone are taken care. Though improper to mention now, the present struggle for survival reminds us of the daily struggle of millionsfor survival. A baby dies of poverty every ten seconds globally; every year about a million die of hunger; numerous are victims of malnutrition. Why is it that this reality does not become headlines? How come this dire situation is not urgent? These questions force us to replicate the



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present measures to overcome COVID-19 to the pandemics that we have become used to!

Many noble rays of hope survive. China, South Korea, Germany and such nations arresting coronavirus boosts others in this fight for survival. Globally, the commitment of the medical professionals and farsighted governmental measures instil courage in people. The effective struggle of Kerala, a densely populated Indian state, too finds a place among the beacons of hope. We are witnessing the best of humanity emerging in this global struggle. We recognize that integral health depends on sound mind and serene spirit. Attending to body-mind-spirit boosts immunity and increase survival rate.

The impossibility of bidding proper farewell to the deceased is traumatic. The region of Lombardy of northern Italy suffers the most in this regard, deprived of the consolation of communion and mourning. The post-pandemic days would require health-psychic-spiritual sciences to join hearts to revive neighbourhoods and to get families back on track.

The health service of Italy is commendable as all the needy can access healthcare. Whether one is poor or rich, the criterion is the gravity of one's ill-health. Nothing else matters. This is a consolation for the needy. However, the cost-cutting and commercialization in the past decades resulted in insufficient hospitals and medical personnel during the present health emergency. The warning is clear for those who have eyes to see! Investing in basic human resources and needs is far more urgent than allotting huge budget for defence procurement. Human security cannot be neglected in the pretext of national security.

Beyond the social distancing and isolation, we can recognize the silver lining of the cloud. 'Tuttoandrà bene' (all shall be well). Social media have the task of alleviating our fears rather than multiplying falsehood and paranoia. Vigilant collaboration is the need of the hour. Even when the reality outside forces me to withdraw, rather than recoiling in gloom we can extend towards fresh hope. The Abrahamic tradition offers a paradigm for survival. When a people had the deadly snakebites in the desert, God asked Moses to lift a bronze serpent that those bitten would look up and live! Amidst the pandemic storms, we still hear 'Fear not'. When the present suffering tends to isolate us, the humanity unites, full of hope, to resist. To resist every form of death, to embrace life in the most human way.

Looking Out from the Cave

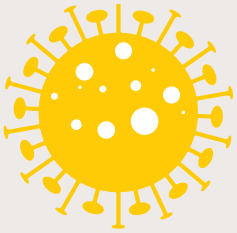
Martin Sebo (Slovakia) • msebosj@gmail.com

First, let me give a few numbers for a better picture. Slovakia has about 5.45 million of inhabitants. When I pen this, Slovakia has registered 1403 infected people by COVID-19 and so far there are 23 deaths directly related to COVID -19. Day by day new cases are being reported. And yet, there are a lot of people who have not been tested yet or unaware of their disease.

For reason of objectivity and clarity, it is better to compare the situation in Slovakia with our neighbours. The number is relatively low in comparison with our neighbouring countries: Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine. On the one hand, the low infection rate is understandable if we take the fact that our neighbors have much larger population than that of Slovakia. Taking into account the absolute numbers, we are still ahead of them. On the other hand, the relatively low

infection rate is the result of governmental precautions which took place about two weeks ahead of our neighbours (beginning of March).

The governmental steps took place right from the beginning as our first case had appeared. One of the first actions the government took was a recommendation for social distancing, hygienic rules, wearing face masks and respirators. However, there was a terrible lack of facial masks and respirators, and therefore, many people decided to make their home-made masks in order to protect themselves. It has been working well. Now, when they are available in our pharmacies and drug stores, their price went up multiple times.



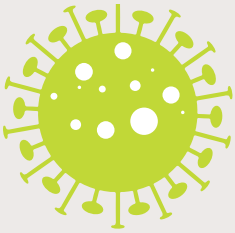
I think the imminent threat from the virus, apart from the economic effects, is the mental damage, growth of selfishness and rise of cold-blooded relationships. People are in the confinements of their homes and many fear losing their jobs.

The governmental actions have been gradually increasing with regard to keep "normal" life and economy running as much as possible. However, with time and disease spreading, the actions have become more restrictive and is taking its toll. Since the second week of April, we have been restricted from free movement and mostly people stay home. The borders are closed for travelling, anyone (except the trade and transportation of goods) who enters the country is checked for virus and obliged to enter the government confinement for two weeks regardless of condition. The transportation is limited. Most businesses and administration have been closed. Schools, shopping centres, culture and sport events have also been closed or cancelled for more than four weeks. The other factor that has helped to keep the infection rate low is the discipline and seriousness with which people took the pandemic. I think it relates to some extent to a fear and panic that media have been spreading. I certainly do not doubt the information service from the media, but it definitely has its effect on peoples' mind and has a greater impact than it has been expected or wanted. The problem is that the mainstream media has spread a lot of information, sometimes confusing and not entirely based on truth regarding COVID-19 virus situation in other countries, such as Italy.

Italy was the first country in Europe infected with COVID-19, and we could see right from the beginning what was happening there. The government's restrictions came in Italy with much delay and general attitude of population seemed a little indifferent. As the infection rate and death toll raised rapidly high, the situation changed. The situation in Italy which seemed for some time out of hands of their government officials and police was the main factor that had impact on our government's restrictions and mentality of general population.

It is very hard to predict what will happen in future with our economy. We do not know when there will be a vaccine to COVID-19 and we do not know when the restrictions and confinement will end. So, any predictions in terms of the extent of damage or the recovery of economy seem useless. Slovakia is a European Union U member with open economy and is heavily dependent on car production industry (three foreign car companies work in Slovakia: Volkswagen, Peugeot and KIA motors). The car production then relies on subcontractors which is the running engine of the economy. It is these which will feel first the effect of frozen economy. Detrimental to the continuity of governmental actions against the pandemic, elections took place in March and a new government replaced the old one. The government brought a number of restrictive actions to "shine" better than their predecessors. Some actions are good, and some seem to be very chaotic. People are very surprised by drastic and insensitive actions by the new government in order to limit

social gatherings. They argue: “the more people stay home, the sooner we beat the virus and the business will start again.” In another case, the parliament passed a law allowing the people to pay back bank loans and mortgage with delay of 6 months. However, in addition to their regular payments they have to pay additional interest for delay. It is not reasonable that when every business has to shut down without profit, banks are exempted from any cost. The governmental financial help for large businesses is primary (majority are foreign companies) and the help for small business is very selective and inadequate. Wages in March will be cut and about wages in April it is doubtful if people will get paid. I think the imminent threat from the virus, apart from the economic effects, is the mental damage, growth of selfishness and cooling of relationships. People are in the confinements of their homes and many fear losing their jobs. That means a lot of insecurity even though the people do not feel the full impact of the economic downfall and fear of spreading the virus. The country is paralyzed right now and everybody hopes that Easter will change things for better. The government wants to open small businesses on Tuesday after Easter even at the risk of more spreading the disease. It seems that the human factor is overshadowed by economic interests. Personally, I am trying to understand this time of pandemic. An image of Plato’s cave appearing in my mind gives us a chance to leave from the darkness of cave we are otherwise in to a real light. Our cave experience of confinement can become a possibility for us only if it is driven by higher human values. We can benefit from this time as long as we can see other people around us. Many good examples can be seen in our society, namely care for elderly and lone people. “Human first” must be the slogan of today. But it can also become a catalyst of our dark side if economy and calculation only are allowed to rule.



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German Experience with COVID-19

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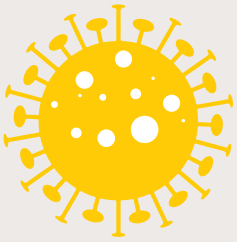
It was on 27 January 2020 that Germany confirmed its first case of COVID-19 and even then, there lulled a false sense of security that everything was ‘under control’. However, in the course of a few weeks, things changed dramatically, for the worse and by February 28, Germany had 48 confirmed cases and was ranked second in Europe,

after Italy with 644 cases. And this seems to be the exact point when Germany sprung into rapid action, eventually emerging as a country where the number of deaths from the virus



Here is a look into Germany's stoic, systematic approach that led to a relatively low mortality rate, despite escalating infections. While there is no single contributory factor to this, some of the main factors that contributed to the low death rates include early tests, transparent communication, a well-prepared health IT infrastructure and digital health.

was remarkably low in comparison with other nations, especially neighbouring European countries. Despite the high number of confirmed cases, the death rate in Germany remains around 1.5%, which is relatively low when compared to nations dealing with similar total case numbers.

Here is a look into Germany's stoic, systematic approach that led to a relatively low mortality rate, despite escalating infections. While there is no single contributory factor to this, some of the main factors that contributed to the low death rates include early tests, transparent communication, a well-prepared health IT infrastructure and digital health.

A great contributing factor is the earlier testing and tracing system carried out in Germany. Professional contact tracing was carried out when the first cases were reported and this gave the country valuable time to prepare for facing the outbreak. The German Health Ministry also drafted changes to the Infection Protection Act thereby enabling, among other measures, the tracking of those exposed to COVID-19. It even went a step further and tested people who presented only milder symptoms as they could be monitored and quarantined to prevent cross-infection.

One of the most interesting aspects was that unlike China, Germany did not cover up the outbreak from both its citizens and from the world. On March 18, German Chancellor Angela Merkel addressed Germans directly to deliver hard facts about the COVID-19 and to assure government protection in the face of what she described as 'the gravest challenge the country had faced since the Second World War'. In her own words, she said, 'Es isternst', which means 'This is serious' and these three words held great power, as Merkel does not do drama or appear in the TV. While she made no specific announcements, what stood out about her address was her direct, honest and empathetic tone. For weeks now, Germany's leader has deployed her characteristic rationality, coupled with an uncharacteristic sentimentality, to guide the country through what is considered as a relatively successful battle against the novel Corona virus. At the same time, it is undeniable that her job is complemented by a well-respected, highly efficient scientific and medical expertise distributed across Germany and the hard-earned trust of the public.

Additionally, the average age of Corona virus patients in Germany has been lower than elsewhere, thereby limiting the risk; the number of people tested for the virus is higher than in other countries and cases are mostly carefully tracked. The country's efficient public health-care system is also credited for Germany's low mortality rate as the country has more than 28,000 intensive care beds with sufficient respirators available. The Federal Minister of Defense Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer

also unveiled plans to double this number from their current level, thereby further increasing the country's preparedness against COVID-19.

Digital Health also came to Germany's rescue here, as telemedicine made it possible to monitor patients without having them risk going out and infecting others. Telemedicine platforms, bots and IT systems enabled efficient crisis management and accurate resource planning. Health Innovation Hub, a think tank established by the German Ministry of Health published a list of trusted telemedicine services (including costs, reimbursement policy, functionality and prices) in response to the pandemic and this enables follow up appointments and prescription renewals to be carried out remotely, without compromising the quality of the health care services offered. While this leads to a reduction of work load in the clinics, this also helps the citizens ease their worries about their health when they are cut off from healthcare services,while they remain home.

In another interesting development, there was a 48-hour hackathon titled '#WirVsVirus' (We versus Virus) that was held from 20 – 22 March 2020 under the patronage of the head of the German Federal Chancellery, Prof. Dr Helge Braun. The hackathon was intended as a starting point for an ongoing participatory process to develop collaborative solutions for the challenges posed by COVID-19, and addressed the COVID-19 related challenges identified by the German Federal Government and society. The hackathon featured 42,968 people, 1,924 innovators and 2,922 mentors. Of the different ideas and proposals that emerged out of the hackathon, 20 - including an online platform for using 3D printers, and websites to coordinate logistics and find job openings for people who currently cannot report to work- were selected for financial support.

However, judging by the country's rational, fact-led approach at the governmental level and the trust citizens place in its government, one can assume that the country will move forward with extreme caution with a view to safeguarding the successes it enjoyed so far.

Germany also took swift action sooner than other nations to prevent the spread of the virus, by closing schools and most retail businesses. A widespread crackdown was also implemented late March, where the government announced that people need to maintain a social distance of six feet, while also forbidding gatherings of more than two people. Germans were also asked to stay home, unless going out was absolutely necessary. The general approach is characterized more by appealing to the compliance rules, rather than enforcing micromanagement laws. And for most part, the Germans are voluntarily adhering to the restrictions imposed on them, even though there are exceptions.

As the time of this article going to print, the virus is still far from being defeated and it is still unclear what lies ahead for Germany and the world in general. However, judging by the country's rational, fact-led approach at the governmental level and the trust citizens place in its government, one can assume that the country will move forward with extreme caution with a view to safeguarding the successes it enjoyed so far.

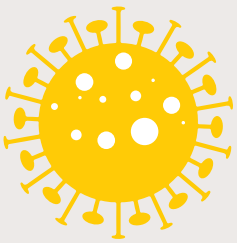
A Long Good Friday

Thomas Cattoi (Berkeley) • tcattoi@scu.edu

In the centre of Novara -my hometown in Italy- numerous Baroque churches attest the long duration as well as the crucial cultural and religious influence of the Spanish occupation, which lasted from the mid-sixteenth century until the beginning of the eighteenth. At the beginning of the great pestilence that ravaged the Duchy of Milan in 1576-7, St. Charles Borromeo, the great Archbishop of Milan, organized a grand penitential procession through the streets of Milan, carrying a cross containing the relic of the Holy Nail -ilSanto Chiodo- which is still preserved in the Cathedral of Milan. Memories of the recurrent bouts of plague that affected the region of Milan in the late 16th and 17th centuries can easily be found in the religious architecture of the time, but also in other urban markers.

All of this appears very distant from the reality of California in 2020. The San Francisco Bay Area where I have lived since 2006 was actually one of the first locations in the United States to introduce a stay-at-home order. At the School (JST-SCU) where I teach, all classes have been held online since March 10, and it is now over a month since I last visited my office. The school year is set to end in this unusual way, with a flurry of oral exams held on Zoom. As a husband and a father of two small children, I have been largely at home with my family, trying to balance work with the task to keep the children busy and entertained. With many parks closed, this task is not always easy.

In situations like this, it is perhaps easy to get overwhelmed by the relentless stream of painful news. When 9/11 happened, people were already getting a lot of their news from the internet, but social media had yet to appear on the scene. Now, there is no interruption to the constant onslaught of information- an onslaught where reliable and unreliable news is mixed up, and where partisan perspectives appear to skew the conversation even in an unprecedented situation of emergency. Some people get involved in arguments of all sorts on their Twitter and Facebook accounts; others withdraw into their private life, trying to navigate all sorts of professional and personal challenges. There appears to be no clear end in sight.



In times like this, it is difficult to remain hopeful. At the same time, there are hidden intimations of hope- like buds on a branch that look small and insignificant, but will blossom later in the spring, and eventually carry fruit. Perhaps this whole pandemic is like a long Good Friday. Eventually, Easter morning will come.

A friend of mine works as a nurse in a hospital in San Francisco with COVID patients. Her team is so busy that they have hardly any time to go and get food for themselves, but more than once they had food delivered to the hospital, ordered and paid for by complete strangers who want to express their gratitude to them for their work. A former student of mine works as a chaplain in another hospital, and spends countless hours with the families of the patients- people who cannot even be at the bedside of their loved ones, who sometimes, sadly, pass away alone and unattended. Both these people know that they risk getting infected themselves, and yet they continue to do their part. In the face of their courage, being asked to stay home no longer appears so daunting.

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What Can We Learn from COVID-19?

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The COVID-19 lockdown period has taught me three lessons.

a) The deeply human meaning of Catholic (kath'holic)

b) The deeply human meaning of Religion (re'ligion)

c) The deeply human meaning of Ecology and Economics (oeko'logy and oeko'nomics)

a) The deeply human meaning of Catholic (kath'holic and kath'holicity)

Think of these pairs or sets of words that I have tried to order from the more abstract to the more concrete: universal and particular; universality and particularity; whole and part; wholeness and "partness"; total and partial; totality and partiality, world and country, worldliness and patriotism, ethnic or tribal

groups; humanity and ethnicity… You keep going… The very special last pair is this: for-all or for-us.

Then, let us go to the Greek origin of kath-holon and kath-holic: this adjective or predicate is built from the roots "kata" (here "towards") and "holon" (here "whole", "totality", with an old Indo-European root *w'olon, still audible in English). Thus, kath-holon means for all, for everyone; for the whole world, worldly; for the cosmos, cosmic; for the universe, universal. Briefly, "kath'holic" is more like work-a-holic and world-a-holic: empathically and caringly working for all, for all the world.

Now, if during this pandemic you develop a vaccine, or invent a new medicine or a low-dose radiation treatment, or build a cheap, practical

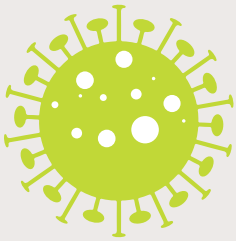
respirator, or sew face masks, or design distancing and protection measures or intelligent economic-restart policies, or care for the sick, or whatever, it is easy to see if you are kath'holic in this specific sense or not. Here is a test. (You can run the test yourself and not tell anybody your score):

Do you carry out your type of creative work to help others, including those who cannot pay for it, or you do it because you see the opportunity to make a profit? Do you share the information with everybody, or you rather withhold it until somebody pays you what you deserve? Do you distribute the product to every country of the United Nations through the World Health Organization, or you hoard the products for use in your own country? Would you recommend expelling citizens of other countries and their children, or helping them just the same as your documented citizens? Do you demand that the elderly be preferred if you are retired, or that the economically able citizens be preferred if you are quite a few years away from retirement, or none of the above? It will be easy to test if you are kath'holic or not. No need to tell others.

b). The deeply human meaning of Re'ligion

In these long days and nights, I have been rethinking, first, what would be a deep human meaning of an ideal religion in the abstract, and, second, of an ideal kath'holic religion in the abstract. I assume you feel bound to your fellow men and women as members of the same genus "Homo", the same species "sapiens". But, to say the least, that bond is very weak. Is that bond strong enough for me to behave ethically with all my species-relatives? Is it for you?

If beyond that generic or specific bond with other humans, you also share with a large group of people the same ethnic



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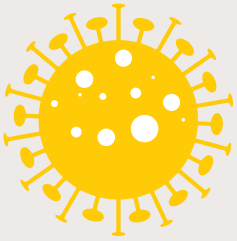
or tribal blood of your ancestors, you feel a bond that is strong enough to give your life and blood for your tribe, your ethnic group, your extended family. But is that always moral, or does it seem to go against "kath'holicity" if you are also willing to kill your enemies, the enemies of your tribe or ethnic group? But if you also share the same re'ligion, you feel a stronger bond, a firmer link, a sense of community (koinonia) that goes beyond any biological links, beyond any tribal or ethnic or blood or family ties. You feel a double bond with those who share the same blood and the same re'ligion.

Perhaps there are some bona-fide atheists that feel that strong bond to all men and women in the world, too; God bless them! They should thank God they are such good atheists. I am only saying I feel it is much easier for me to think of every human being as my brother or my sister (or both, to be politically correct with LGBT's) if I believe we have the same Great Grand Parents. (Sincerely, I doubt whether those atheists really think of us theists as brothers and sisters; why would they want to exterminate all of us if they could? Let that be as it may).



Is your re'ligion (A) for-all, for the whole world, universal, or (B), is it for the 'select few' or even the selected many, for the elect, for the saved, for the predestined? If (B),I am sorry:that re'ligion did not pass the test: it is not a kath'holicre'ligion.

Assuming you are not an atheist, I am not saying that my re'ligion or your religion is true or false; I am just saying that if you share this type of parental re'ligion, if you acknowledge that you have the same Great Grand Parents, the same God Father and/or Mother Goddess, then you feel that you belong to the same tightly bound and re-bound family and you feel firmly ligated and re'ligated to your re'ligiousfamily or community (koinonia). You easily and sincerely call all the members of your religious community "brothers and sisters". I am sure you will agree. But now, the problem is that many re'ligions, including many self-denominated "Catholic", have killed many of the adepts of other religions, or, what might be even more sinister, think that their God will burn the infidels forever in Hell.

Now, here is the 'kath'holicity' problem again: Is your re'ligion kath'holic or not? I am not saying that if your re'ligion is non-kath'holic, it is false, or bad or wrong. I am just saying that I prefer a re'ligion that is kath'holic to one that is not, especially if that non-kath'holic re'ligion threatens to kill us kath'holics as infidels, dogs, swine or other pests. I would prefer that every re'ligion would extend the feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood to all men and women in the world, not only to those inside their re'ligion. There might be no scientific or philosophical reasons to extend this feeling so far and wide, but I am not speaking of reasons, I am speaking of feelings, of bonding, of attitudes, of internal energy to care for all men and women as brothers and sisters. What would be more conducing to live a little longer a little happier?

Now, we already had a test to examine yourself and see how you feel in the kath'holic-non-kath'olic spectrum. Here is a test for your preferred re'ligion to see how it feels in this scale:

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Do you think that only the believers in your religion will be saved and go to Heaven, and non-believers or other-believers will go to Hell? I am sorry, that religion, however respectable, is non-kath'holic.

Do you pray to your God or Goddess or both in this pandemic that your religious brothers and sisters be spared, or that your country be preferred by His or Her mercy and bounty? Then, I am sorry, but you very respectable re'ligion is not kath'holic.

Does that re'ligious community (or koinonia) organize or have organized a war or conquest or crusade to recover whatever temple or tomb or holy place that has been taken away by other re'ligious or ethnic communities? Then, it is not a kath'holic koinonia. Does

your religious community (koinonia) excommunicate the critics, the reformers? Then, it is not a kath'holic koinonia.

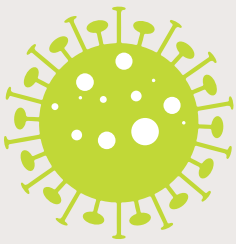
Well, with those finer meanings of kath'holic and re'ligion, at least we can talk about it while in lockdown, and, better yet, we can work together for all, for the whole world.

c) The deeply human meaning of Ecology and Economics.

This third lesson had been appearing and disappearing from my attention for some time, because of the permanent quarrels of economists and ecologists in the last twenty years. The confrontations peaked during the presidential campaign four years ago, and the same quarrels raged in Turkey, in Brasil, in the Philippines. Limiting carbon emissions in factories or not. Signing the Rio and Paris agreements or not. Fracking or not. Mineral ore exploitation in the natural parks or not. Abiding to multilateral commercial treaties or not, and so on.

In November 2016, I could not believe my eyes and ears when I saw on TV that 50% of Americans had voted NO to environmental issues that would benefit everybody else, and YES to economic growth at the expense of everybody else. Then came the pandemia. Ecological concerns revived all over the world. Clean air and water, no more deforestation, lower carbon dioxide load in the atmosphere, health first, protect lives first. But protecting lives would endanger the economy. If you want to save lives, you must shut off the economy, and all the economic indicators started oscillating wildly. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) down, unemployment up, oil prices plummet, death toll up. Ecology vs. Economy again.

I started my favourite archaeological, etymological and semiological word games, and I soon found out that



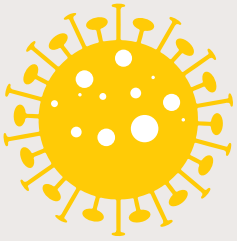
How come all those people -oeko-nomists and oeko -logists - are speaking about house management of the same home but disagree in every issue?

Economics and Ecology both come from the same Greek root, eco - or oiko- or oeko: house, home, household, refuge, "domus" in Latin. How come all those people-oeko-nomists and oeko-logists-are speaking about house management of the same home but disagree in every issue?

A few decades ago, I read James Lovelock 1979 book"Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth" and in 1988, "The Ages of Gaia". I could not believe my eyes. It was all 100% Teilhard de Chardin. For both of them our home-our Oekos-is the whole Earth, Mother Gaia. Our habitat, our Oeko-system is a living organism.

Now, the Corona virus pandemia has forced us to realize that we are all neighbours, next-door neighbours; all men and women are now living in the same home, house or oekos, be they Chinese or Indian or other Asiatic, European, African, American and Oceanian, or all combinations and permutations thereof, infected or not.

The pandemia has shown us that even thinking with Teilhard and Lovelock of our house, home, habitat, domus or oekos as the whole Planet Earth or Gaia, just now it is getting to be too narrow, overcrowded, filthy and very dangerous to your health. We transmit viruses and diseases, especially psychiatric



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ailments, to all peoples on Earth and all homes on Earth, where large-screen TV sets and cell phones are always being watched, and now they are also serving to watch us 24/7 by processing Big Data. We have already started polluting our neighbouring outer space and even plan to send garbage to the Moon. No use for a science called "Macro-economics" anymore, where each individual country was an economic unit: countries are not units of anything anymore. We now need a new kath'holic anthropology, sociology, political science and ethics: a new ecology and ecometrics.

What is Essential in Life?

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At the time of this writing, I have spent over 30 days in "lockdown" at Creighton University (Omaha, NE, USA). I spend a little longer in silence these days, reflecting on the current pandemic and finding hope. This exercise helps me focus on what is "essential" in my life. It also gives me hope that when this pandemic ends, we will all gain a greater appreciation for our common humanity. Just as we all share in the responsibility to stay home and stay safe, we also share common needs and desires. I recently asked my students, currently finishing this semester with online classes, to name an unexpected grace they have found in this pandemic:

"...is realizing all the things that I am grateful for that I can't do anymore and the people I can't see. It's given me time to reflect at my time at Creighton and all the people in my life that I come to cherish."

"I have actually enjoyed spending time with my family and my parents LOVE having both my brother and I home. I have also been reading more ... and I learned how to make cold brew coffee!"

"a grace I've found from being quarantined at home is getting more time to enjoy hobbies such as drawing and painting that I used to not have time for."

"I've had the opportunity to play basketball with my brothers on the sport court in our backyard. It's refreshing to see that I still "have it" as I've been winning most of our competitions."

"it's given me much more time to cook, especially new recipes! ... My proudest

accomplishment so far has been making delicious ratatouille inspired by the Disney film, of course."

And many of us would name similar things. We all would be grateful for the good health of our friends and family. We would give thanks for the roof over our heads. Many of us would thank our teachers who work hard to educate our children. And we would thank the "essential" personnel who work to keep our workplaces sanitized, who remove our trash and clean our streets. We would give thanks for the police and fire departments who keep our communities safe. We would be grateful for the grocery store workers and those who deliver our food, medicine and mail. We would give thanks for the arts, music, literature and drama. And I'm sure all of us are grateful for our medical doctors, nurses and health care professionals who risk their lives to save our lives.

Our world will be very different when the pandemic ends. No one knows exactly what it will be like, but we can all play an active role in shaping that future world. That gives me hope. If we take time now to give thanks for the "essential" things in our lives, then we can work later for a world in which these "essential" things are in everyone's lives.

I also find hope in the internet, to which many people in the United States have easy access. Of course, the internet can be source of discord and division. Some attribute the current political polarization, at least in part, to the internet. And many have suffered from online bullying and exploitation on the internet, especially in social media. On the other hand, the internet has tremendous potential to unify the world. We can stay connected despite social distancing. Further, the internet could be used to track new cases of the virus and generate more accurate models of its spread through a community. It also provides us real time updates and news. As a biologist, I find hope in listening to science podcasts about the coronavirus. Finally, the internet has facilitated the education of millions of children whose regular schooling has abruptly ended. Regrettably, not everyone has access to this important and increasingly "essential" resource. As I sit in isolation, I hope for a future in which everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, will have access to the internet.

In addition to envisioning a better future, a "new normal" for our world, there are concrete actions we can take now to assist each other during this pandemic. Writing a simple thank you note to our health care workers is something everyone can do. Those with means can donate food and money to those in need, especially homeless shelters that are experiencing shortages. If it's safe to do so and you're eligible, consider donating blood. Current shutdowns have made it difficult for hospitals to get a steady supply of donated blood. And we can all check in on our neighbours, especially our elderly and vulnerable neighbours. We can ensure that they are getting enough to eat and have their needed medication.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis who, during Holy Week, prayed the following: "It is a difficult time for everyone. For many, very difficult. Let us try, if we can, to make the best use of this time: let us be generous; let us help those in need in our neighbourhood; let us look out for the loneliest people, perhaps by telephone or social networks; let us pray to the Lord for those who are in difficulty…"

COVID-19 and Refugees in Afghanistan

Linto Kanichai (Afghanistan) . lintosj@gmail.com

The outbreak of COVID-19 has slackened the life in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Public Health in Afghanistan registered 41 new positive cases bringing the total to 933 confirmed cases, as on April 18, 2020. The Minister of Public Health, Mr Ferozuddin Feroz cited on March 24, 2020, that if proper precautionary measures are not ensured 16 million people in Afghanistan may become the victims with COVID-19. The Governor of Herat has already raised concerns in the alarming rise in the death toll of refugees from Iran, as the causalities have already climbed to 1,812 . The situational response towards COVID-19 pandemic amidst fragile peace processes and escalating violence in Afghanistan is rather grim. The pilgrims returning to the homeland and the refugees from Iran offer a tough challenge to the existing task force deployed in Herat, the Western border of the country. With inadequate health facilities, the nation appears to approach a catastrophe. Though international assistance is sought after by the government, the response is quite bleak. Moreover, the common folk hardly care for the regulations by the government. A vast majority is carried away by irrational beliefs like, consumption of hot black tea can terminate the infection of COVID-19.

A sizeable population is caught up between infection and starvation. To aggravate the crisis, the price of food materials has got tripled. Since it is the spring season, farmers are forced to be in the agricultural field though lock down is the mandate by the government.

The flareup of COVID-19 pandemic has hit the health, economy and welfare

projects generating a spiral effect in Afghanistan. To address the challenge, JRS aligned its activities to alleviate the predicament according to the mandates of government. Currently JRS is branched out in four provinces of Afghanistan, viz., Bamyan, Herat, Kabul and Daikundi. In Bamyan,JRS initiated the leadership to reach out 41 villages with an awareness campaign.Thestaff teamed up with a local educational enterprise to engage in the advocacy. The mode of awareness campaign embraced two phases. The first phase aimed at distribution of flyers and posters, fixing banners and broadcasting awareness message through public address system placed on the top of motor cars. The second phase zeroed in on dishing out hygiene kit to pregnant women and old people. The kits were supplied through the Community Health Workers (CHWs) of each village. Mr Mortaza Mouzavi, a JRS volunteer, rolls back to the memorable moments during the awareness campaign.

On March 28, 2020, I was distributing the flyers in Lalakhil village. I gave a copy of flyer to an old woman. To my surprise, the woman shouted at me, "What should I do with this piece of paper? These days the food is expensive, and you are bringing for us these pamphlets. Instead of these things you can bring something to eat." This event disturbed me a lot.

In Kabul and Herat, JRS staff identified deserving families to reach out with hygiene kit and food supplies.Amidst the

COVID-19 crisis, the accompaniment of JRS staff is extremely inspirational and enterprising.

COVID-19 pandemic is a phenotype, process and progeny. A phenotype is the total characteristics displayed by an organism that results from the expression of the genes of an organism as well as the influence of environmental factors and random variation. The freedom of COVID-19 has unfolded a new domain to humankind. Assuming all bigger claims in developmental science, the pandemic has revealed how insignificant and handicapped humanity can be. Secondly, COVID-19 is a process. It's a process of discovery and purification of oneself to scout out one's inner nature. The crisis has situated the humanity to have a journey into within by slowing down and purifying the elements. Finally, being a progeny, COVID-19 has placed the world in a state of liminality. It enhances a new world order, where as Immanuel Levinas says, "The face of the other." COVID-19 has revealed that the other person is exposed and expressive in other ways than through the literal face. The progenitorial nature of COVID-19 outbreak leaves the humanity in the impossibility of capturing "other's" infinity.

Rays of Hope

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The first case of COVID-19 was reported here in Croatia on 25 February for someone who came from Italy. More than 2000 cases have been confirmed since then. Sixty three people lost their lives. The strategic planning and execution led by the government and its health ministry facilitate the fight against COVID. Enforcement of social distancing and other preventive measures help flatten the curve and low mortality rate. Social media plays a vital role in communicating with the public. However, there are problems often when people are reluctant to obey the rules. If it is a sunny day they go out to the beaches. In such a situation, they do not keep social distance of two metres. People in the city are under higher pressure because they do not have enough space for moving. They are mostly dependent on shops and restaurants, online shopping is encouraged though. People in the

villages are under less pressure.

There are also some rays of hope. Many innovations are taking place in diverse areas during the 'shelter-in.' The educational system is running online since the lockdown. Online worship and ceremonies are the viable means for spiritual enhancement.

While in Covid lockdown, we in Zagreb, the capital city of Croatia, had an earthquake of Magnitude 5.5 recently which took lives of many and destroyed several monuments of historical importance. The virus and the natural disaster affect every aspect of life in Croatia.

Controlling COVID-19 in South Korea

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More than ten thousand Covid cases have been confirmed till today with 253 people losing their lives. The curve is seen flattening now; credit goes to the government.
There was initial resistance to law enforcement like social distancing and ban on religious ceremonies. This created tension between certain religious groups and the government. Hate speeches were on in the social media. Gradually people understood the seriousness of the disease and things came to normal. The healthcare ministry operated its activities region-base, deploying doctors and nurses to those regions which are in real need. Testing has taken place on a larger scale that one out of hundred has undergone the test. Hope everything will be fine in a few weeks. We are all vigilant to prevent the second phase of COVID spread.

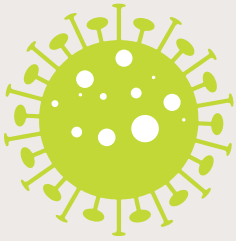
Towards New Narratives

Teresa Kotturan (UN/NGO, New York) • scfederationunngo@gmail.com

Living in New York during the COVID-19 pandemic is a unique experience- a desert experience in a city that never sleeps. Daily news updates indicate New York has become the epicentre of the crisis, with an ever-growing number of infected people and the increasing number of people dying daily. Though, physically distanced from people, at the conscious and subconscious level I am impacted by the fears, anxiety, suffering, distress and angst of people all over the world. Living in solidarity with the pain and suffering of the world can be heavy on one's heart. Stress level is heightened when one is privileged to accompany friends who are hospitalized to endure the long-drawn treatment modalities which heal some and lead others to eventual death in isolation, without a goodbye from loved ones. Losing a friend recently to the pandemic is part of the painful experience.

The decision of the United Nations to cancel/postpone all the scheduled meetings in early March, impacted the lives of all Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Representatives working in New York. While forced to work from our homes, we had to figure out new ways of doing advocacy and networking online, in order to challenge the systems of injustice and exploitation for justice, peace, and for the flourishing of the earth and people, especially those living on the margins in our globalized world. As the COVID-19 pandemic crossed borders and devastated lives across the world, we witnessed a tendency among countries to turn inward. The ineptitude with which world leaders responded to the pandemic have exposed existing inequalities and injustices.

Though COVID-19 is an equalizer, vulnerable people, those living in poverty, the homeless, migrants and refugees in temporary shelters, people in slums, and those locked up in the prisons and jails are impacted unequally. The call to self-isolate in confined homes and shelters, the vulnerable population is exposed to the threat of being infected, with no means to seek healthcare and sustenance. The pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences on women and girls. During the lockdown, women who experienced domestic violence earlier are now trapped at home with their abusers without access to any kind of protection. There is an increase in reported domestic violence during the pandemic which could lead to increased homelessness.



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Nearly 70 per cent of all the frontline responders in the health and social sector, both formal and informal are women. They are risking their lives to serve the community. Most women do not have the option to self-isolate, they cannot afford to miss work and if they fall ill cannot avail of paid sick leave.Millions of children's lives are affected during the crisis – without adequate nutrition, tech support to learn online and exposed to domestic violence.

These are the issues that we NGOs are following up through online meetings to urge the Member States for the adoption of policy measures and recommendations at the UN and relevant international forums for a global response to the COVID-19 emergency. Beyond the country specific responses, the UN need to adopt measures that uphold international cooperation in a true spirit of multilateralism to contain and mitigate and defeat the pandemic.

In a short span, our lives have been changed irreversibly. We are living in a fragile world, where our vulnerabilities have been exposed – we have been disarmed. Old narratives will not meet the current challenges. You and I are called to create a new pathway, a paradigm shift at a personal and societal level. Going forward, we need to open up the ocean of compassion and love present in the depth of our being for 'an explosion of compassion'. Globalization of economies need to give way for the globalization of compassion, kindness, understanding and solidarity for the creation of a COMMUNITY OF CARE.

How do I navigate my life during these difficult times? It can be described in two words – discipline and structure. Living alone, working from home without going to the office and interacting with colleagues and collaborators requires schedules and structures. It is an attempt to live each day intentionally and mindfully. It meant rising up early, and be present to the Presence within me and around me in contemplation. It is finding joy in the simple things that lifts up one's

being – lighting a lamp, striking the singing bowl, watching the new dawn and the offer of new life from God. It also means, to lift up to God all who have been a part of my journey and the world in gratitude. Physical and mental health is maintained through a routine of exercises and walks around my apartment. In fact, the entire world is on a transformative journey. Every crisis demands transformation. While living the now in gratitude, I need to prepare myself for change, for metanoia, a spiritual conversion. There is no going back to business as usual. As we are living in history making times I turn to Laudato Si, the Encyclical by Pope Francis, to guide me for an ecological conversion and develop a spirituality of global solidarity.

In the midst of social distancing, reaching out to others to create community, solidarity, sense of purpose and wellbeing with my Sisters, friends and colleagues was part of the daily ritual. Relationships and friendships help us create meaning to our lives, we are all in it together and together we can withstand the ravages of the pandemic. Our ability to outlive the pandemic and forge for the new normal depends on our ability to recognize our interdependence and capacity to be people of compassion. Today it might mean reaching out to touch someone and be strengthened by another virtually. Phone calls, emails and messages from friends and family around the world have been a source of strength in isolation. People are crying out for hope and I am called to be an instrument of hope alive in the midst of despair.

Pope Francis

The terrible trials of internal and international conflicts, often aggravated by ruthless acts of violence, have an enduring effect on the body and soul of humanity.
Every war is a form of fratricide that destroys the human family's innate vocation to brotherhood.

Mother Teresa

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

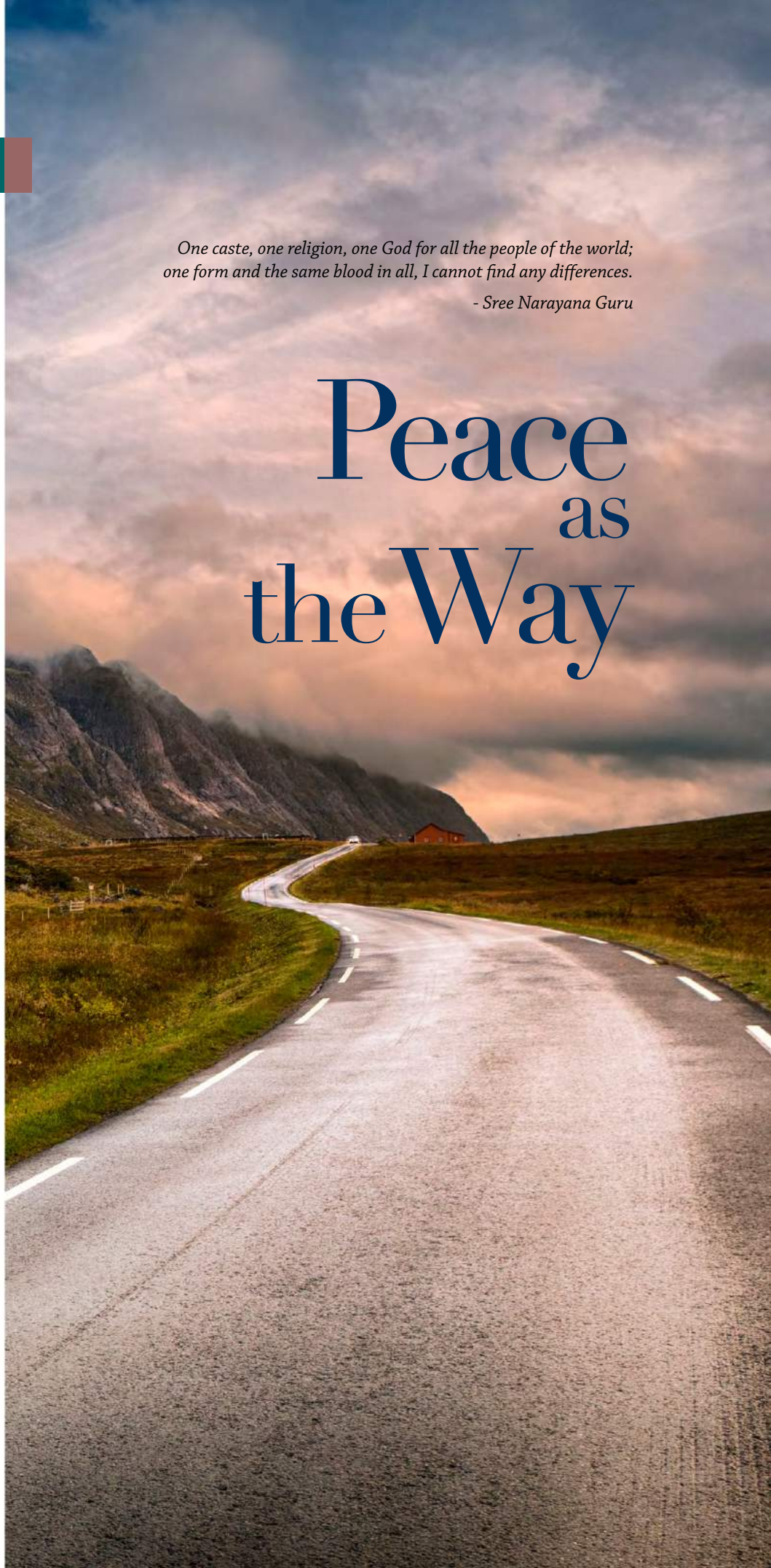
Khalil Gibran

You may forget the one with whom you have laughed, but never the one with whom you have wept.

One caste, one religion, one God for all the people of the world;
one form and the same blood in all, I cannot find any differences.

- Sree Narayana Guru

Peace as the Way



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Post COVID World
A Peace Perspective

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 /37-39

A fragile virus, unable to withstand a tiny soap driblet, is holding humanity on tenterhooks. COVID-19 has turned out to be the most formidable threat ever confronted by humanity. It is impacting human thought and life as nothing before it could do. Scientists and political administrators across the board look hot and bothered. A whole new discourse has been created around the virus. Ironically, it boils with the terminology of war. 'We are waging a war and we have to crush the enemy and come out victorious' is the refrain, though not very sure about the nature of the expected victory. Another notable feature of the scenario is that under forced lock down peoples' imagination has been running wild. Predictions and projections about the impact of Coronavirus on the future of humanity and future world order abound; there are prophecies of hope and prognostications of perdition. Some self-styled futurologists even assert that

Coronavirus has proved, among other things, the utter futility of armament build ups and weapon stockpiles and people now know for sure that atom bombs and ICBMs are of no avail in times of real existential crises. So they have started looking inward, into the inner recesses of the self for guidance. People seem to be realising the need for nurturing inner, spiritual life and it may be read as another positive fall out of the present threat.

Coronavirus is going to divide human history into Before Corona (B.C.) and After Corona (A.C.) and life is going to be qualitatively and quantitatively different in the days to come. But the strange thing is that though the COVID-19 threat is frighteningly real the basic facts about its origin and subsequent transmission are still shrouded in mystery.

Among the most widely circulated theories around the virus threat two stand out. Many commentators affirm that the virus has been developed by scientists / virologists in war laboratories as part of biological war project. But how did the virus get out of the laboratory and got transmitted so extensively is unknown and yet to be traced. There are others who view it as a corrective measure created by Mother Earth to protect itself from being totally devastated by human affront. Speculations apart, when we turn to what is really happening in Nature and among sensitive humans the total picture is neither sombre nor hopeless.

We know ours was a foot-loose world. It looked as if humans were on the prowl; armed with science and technology and propelled by scientific temper so-called humans had set out to conquer and subdue nature. And in the process, they polluted every element – earth, air, water, space, light, almost everything they touched – making the planet almost uninhabitable, not only for humans but for every creature, sentient and non-sentient. Mother Earth was on the verge of a collapse, and badly needed healing and repair for survival - not merely her own survival but the survival of everything she had created, nurtured and fostered. And then came the Corona, and when, crossing geographical borders, it started moving across continents (no matter how) terror-stricken humans are forced to lock down and stay indoors. Free from human interventions for just a few weeks on end Mother Earth has started moving, slowly but steadily, back to her steady state. There are visible signs of regeneration and balancing in nature and reassuring reports pour in from around the world about this happening: rivers, which had been turned into sewage canals by selfish humans, are cleaning and purifying themselves without any 'National Missions' or budgetary allocations, carbon footprints are getting reduced and air is getting filtered, not bothering about provisions of Kyoto Protocol or Agenda 21. There is great good news that the Earth has finally fixed the largest ozone layer hole above the Arctic, healing one million square kilometres (https://www.indiatimes.com/technology/). Most non-human species, once driven out from their natural habitats had taken refuge in cranny recesses, are now re-capturing and re-occupying their stolen spaces, and enjoying freedom of movement denied to them for centuries by man. The scenario

imparts optimism and hope. It looks as though we are witnessing the decline and fall of Anthropocentrism and the enthronement of Biocentrism.

We know humans are both extroverts and introverts. There are materialists among them as well as spiritualists and while some observe and reflect on the material/physical aspects of life, others are predisposed to meditate on the inner and the transcendent. The lockdown provided humans abundant opportunity for deeper and wider reflection. While the powers that be and their subservient scientific community continue to traverse the beaten track, gear up and sharpen their strategies for world domination, setting economic globalisation as their goal and heaven, there is a different constituency that opts for an altogether contrary pathway. A cursory survey of (what I would categorise as) COVID literature – writings related to the different dimensions of the pandemic – that fills newspaper columns and social media space would convince one that, within the ambience of the lockdown, serious reflections - intellectual, moral and spiritual – do take place. Coronavirus has proved, among other things, the utter futility of armament build ups and weapon stockpiles and people now know for sure that atom bombs and ICBMs are of no avail in times of real existential crises. So they have started looking inward, into the inner recesses of the self for guidance. People seem to be realising the need for nurturing inner, spiritual life and it may be read as another positive fall out of the present threat.

Also, the deleterious effect of modern civilisation and the consumerist way of life it promoted have become clearer to humans than ever before. More and more people are getting disillusioned and exorcised and hence they, repudiating the theory that there is no alternative to globalisation and the culture of greed, are experimenting in alternative ways of living. The (old slogan of the World Social Forum (2001) that another world is possible is reappearing with a new elan. Some peace activists have reframed the slogan as: another world is an imperative and so possible. They revisit Gandhi's concepts of Simplicity, Self-reliance, and Swadeshi (Neighbourhood principle) and Reverence for nature and accept them as the guiding principles of their praxis. History teaches us that in every major crisis point in life, there will be more than one way out. But the problematique has always been: which alternative model humanity would choose and follow? Robert Frost's lines resonate in memory and I quote them to conclude:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(The Road Not Taken, 1916)

The question before us today also is: Is humanity going to take the road less travelled by. That would make all the difference not only for itself but for Mother Earth as well.

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The Song *of* Life

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When did you last sing a song or heard someone singing? When did you last hear the chirpings of the birds and wondered how soothing to the ears they sound? When did you last skip the barber for more than two weeks in a row? When did you realize that you too can cook?

Spouses came to know each other a little better and children had the fortune of home play under careful gaze of parents as governments grappled with ideas to quarantine people, not to control but to save them. Today the roads are empty, and the trees are full of birds of different kinds, and the haste of life is halted. It is the beginning of the unknown.

One must settle down with oneself and ponder a while. The song of life that was lost to worldly pursuits was making a whispering return. It is time to think and act. I used this lockdown to ask a few questions-some big ones and many small ones-and sought some light to come through. The good thing was my willingness to listen to all, for I had plenty of time to indulge with myself and others who were visible to me. It was also the beginning of a new journey.

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Pandemics have happened in the past too, but rarely have they brought the whole world to its knees. The most developed nations are the worst affected. The helplessness of the mighty made the weak tremble in fear. The fallacy of big civilizational leaps in technology was exposed. It lay bare the weak underbelly of preparedness to face unpredictability on such unprecedented scale. COVID-19 laughed at us and our sense of superiority.

It seems we have learnt

how to send rockets and build space stations and work on nano technology but missed out on ourselves. We frenzied on the path to development without asking-development for whom and in which direction? We stockpiled nuclear weapons and gleefully rejoiced at the glory of having developed biological weapons but failed to ask a simple question-whom are these going to be used against?

Today many such questions haunt us for answers. The COVID-19 virus has spared none-rich or poor, the most powerful and the most vulnerable, the healthy and the diseased, the heads of States and corporations and the beggar on the streets. I jokingly said to my friend "Covid is the most equitable virus guided by a great sense of justice... It does not discriminate between persons... It's a legal positivist... Do whatever you like it will run its course if it comes across you."In consequence, it has united us in a new-found commonness of purpose. This is God's way of summoning us to look inwards and listen.

Covid lockdown has made rivers and the air clean. Home quarantined people are eating healthy food and sharing time with one another. Long lost friends call up after years of silence and online portals are abuzz with unparalleled activity. The food on the table looks so delicious and every little thing, because it is scarce, has become precious. Crime rates are low as survival instinct takes precedence over unwanted indulgences.

As a scholar of law, I felt such pandemics teach us subtle lessons for life. It gives us an opportunity to reset trajectories for a better future, one that encompasses the hopes of every other fellow-being on earth. I am not sure if we can achieve this resolve, but I am sure we can put this to our new song.

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a better future, one that encompasses the hopes of every other fellow being on earth. I am not sure if we can achieve this resolve, but I am sure we can put this to our new song. It must lead to the supreme good, an end of action that is desired for its own sake. How to achieve that? Use the lockdown to seek answers.

Never have so many people in history listened to their respective governments than they do today-without questioning the intention of nation-states-for each one of them wants to survive. Similarly, it is the turn of the governments to listen to the people and their legitimate demands. Sovereignty cannot isolate and protect nations from international prosecution for acts of negligence that cause damage beyond their territories. We know that numerous UN resolutions, the Kyoto,Doha,Paris, and Madrid conferences have been large unsuccessful attempts towards fixing climate change or creating a safer planet for our future generations. It is time, therefore, to take multilateral negotiations seriously.

In some ways, COVID-19 is the result of our indulgences. It is the mindless self-seeking desire of a profit-driven power centric development model that has become the template for the future. This song of inequality must be abandoned. Can we do that? Yes, we can!

A wandering monk I met on the empty streets said, “Mother earth is under great pressure and the wails of those adversely affected fall on deaf years…. we must listen to nature”

Is there a way out of this spiralling inequities? Yes, if we write a new song- a song of care, of love and compassion. A song for ourselves, our families, our neighbours, our communities, our nation and beyond…a song for the earth. COVID-19 has united us and we must take this as a God-sent opportunity to move ahead with resilience and compassion. The song of life never stops even when we are confronted with our worst fears… because the song is life’s longing for itself.

We must sing again…

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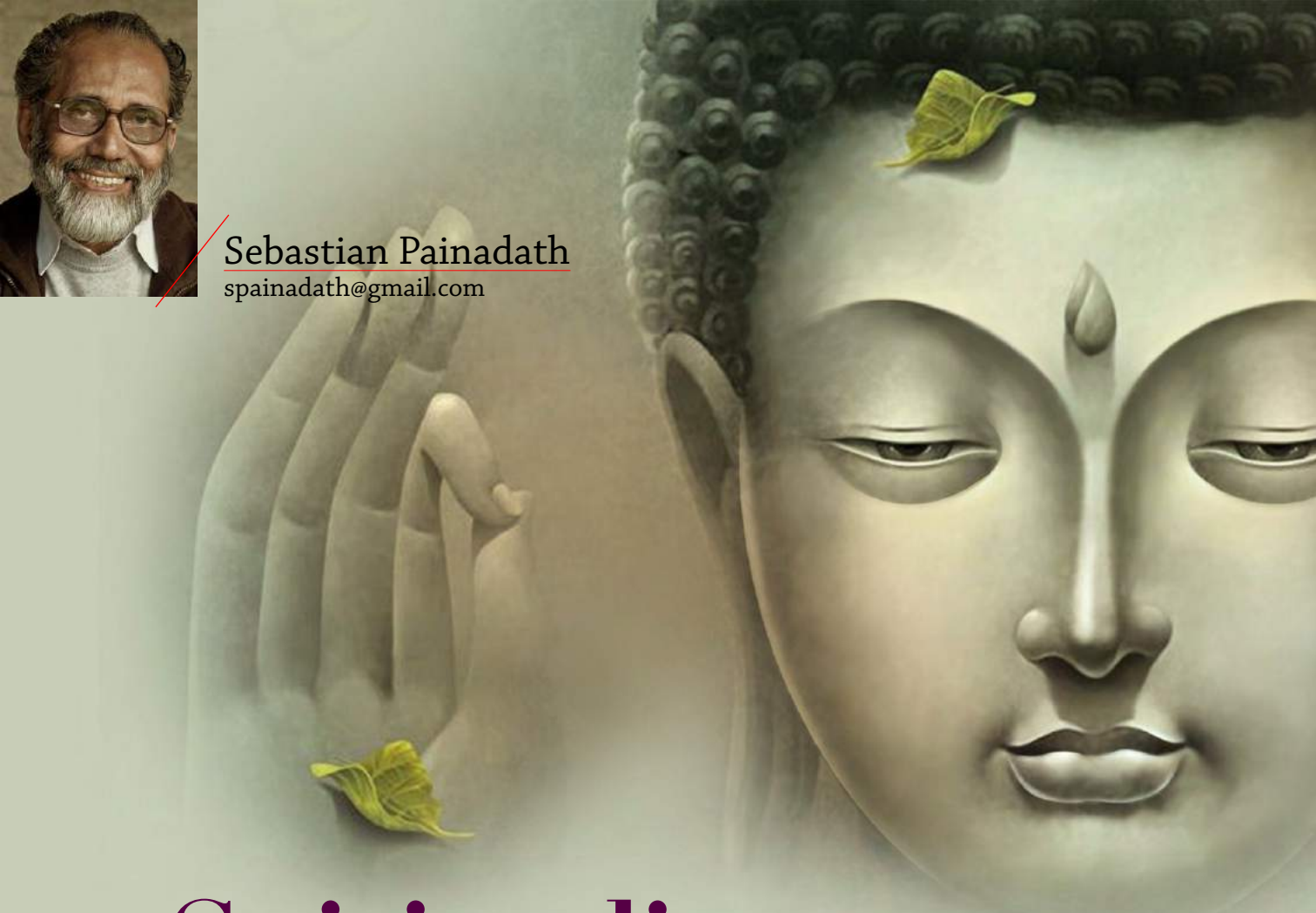


Spirituality and Religiosity

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 43-45

The whole world is struggling with a pandemic: the coronavirus. Perhaps never before has the entire humanity found itself united against a common enemy like this. The virus has brought people of all nations together irrespective of religion and culture, language and ethnicity. This is the positive aspect of a crisis like this. At the same time, as humans today we realise how fragile we are, and how much we are interconnected with one another and with the things of nature. Whatever be the source of this epidemic, it has broken our blind trust in three assumptions: (i) science will give answer to all problems, (ii) wealth makes life secure, and (iii) religion leads to final liberation. Of these, the first two have been much discussed. Let me share some reflections on the third element in relation to the concern for peace in the world.

In most countries, public religious functions are suspended. Believers have to stay back home and do the religious practices. They realise thereby how sacred the family space could be. The Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church speaks of "domestic Church" in

The Indian Upanishads make a consistent distinction between nirguna-Brahman and saguna-Iswara. The Divine is the ineffable mystery; God is a personified form of the incomprehensible reality. The Divine, and hence spirituality, opens the infinite horizons of consciousness; God, and consequently religion, promotes an inter-personal encounter.

the sense that through cordial relations within the family one is led to an intense experience of the divine presence. By getting confined to home, people experience a relaxed time to be together and to celebrate love and gratitude in an unprecedented way. Peace at home is the basis for peace in the world, since the family is the living cell of a community.

The suspension of public religious functions is also an invitation to reflect on the distinction between spirituality and religion. Spirituality, as the word indicates, is the experience of the Divine as Spirit. The word Spirit, with its equivalents in all classical languages, means breath, wind, vibration, movement. Spirituality is, therefore, the experience of the divine dynamism. Religion is a culturally conditioned articulation of spirituality. As long as we are bodily beings with social relationships, we need symbolic forms of religion. As long as we have mental and emotional components we do need concrete expressions of spirituality in creed, cult, code and community. Spirituality is the core of religion; religion is an expression of spirituality. These are mutually related.

Religious beliefs, rituals, values and structures are meant to promote spirituality, but they can also block the spiritual experience. The elements of religion evolve out of the cultural fabric of a society. At the source of every religion we do find a spiritual movement. But in the course of time, political and economic greed as well as personal and ethnic interests dominate on the sacred landscape of religion and create ambivalent structures. There have been reform movements in the history of all religions to return to the original spiritual inspiration. The present crisis in humanity could be taken as an invitation to return to the spiritual sources.

In spirituality, one experiences the Divine as Spirit, as vibrant presence; in religion, one tends to posit static images, which the mind needs. Spirituality is the inner awakening to the all-pervading divine vibrations; religion often consists in encountering God in personified symbols. Mystics of all religious traditions make a distinction between "the Divine" and "God". Meister Eckhart, the 13th cent. Christian mystic, used to say: "You have to let God go in order to experience the Divine." The Indian Upanishads make a consistent distinction between nirguna-Brahman and saguna-Iswara. The Divine is the ineffable mystery; God is a personified form of the incomprehensible reality. The Divine, and hence spirituality, opens the infinite horizons of consciousness; God, and consequently religion, promotes an inter-personal encounter. As long as we humans are personal beings, we do need personified forms of the Divine; but the reality of the Absolute is beyond our grasp. Spirituality transcends the boundaries of religion. Spirituality is universal; religion is something particular. Spirituality elevates the human consciousness to the Divine; religion is a culturally conditioned form of meeting God.

Spirituality evolves under the inspiration of the divine Spirit; religion tends to get stuck in concrete forms of creed and cult. Spirituality moves ahead with the dynamics of the Spirit; religion often gets stuck in the past. Spirituality tunes human consciousness to the divine dynamism; religion puts up static forms of God. Spirituality invites people to realize the deep mystical oneness with the transpersonal source of divine love; religion makes people meet God in the form of a personified thou. In spirituality, there is unity in humanity; in religion, there is tremendous diversity. We need to recognise the diversity of religions, and the freedom of human persons to seek the Divine in diverse ways; at the same time, we have to experience the deep unity in spirituality, for all are called to a higher, divine, consciousness. Ultimately, there is only spiritual message in all religions: realize, you are divine! The present crisis could be taken as an invitation of the divine Spirit to realise the unity of humanity in the Divine.

Spirituality promotes personal and societal transformation; religion is bound up with traditions and structures. Spirituality sensitivises people to universal justice-with-compassion; religion is often associated with communal sensibilities. Spirituality extends the term we to universal fellowship; religion tends to restrict it to a limited community: we and they. Unless religion gets rooted in the universal spirituality, there is a danger that religious feelings will be hijacked by political powers and communal forces. There is ample evidence of that today in the world.

The corona crisis has brought the entire humanity to a common struggle. Never before has the world community experienced such a bonding in fighting out a common enemy. This bonding has a humanitarian concern, but deep down a spiritual objective too: in spite of the differences in religion and culture, we humans are part of a universal community, in which we and they do not matter, but only WE in the most comprehensive sense. And this WE is in tune with the rhythm of nature too. Deep down, this is an invitation to realise the universal spiritual bonding of humanity with nature within the divine dynamism of love.

This is the way to peace in the world. Peace is not something that we humans create by our efforts, rather it is a divine gift that we receive. Of course, we need to explore ways to eliminate prejudice and discord which disturb civic peace. But ultimately peace emerges from a divine source. Peace evolves when we are in tune with the divine vibrations. When one is at peace within oneself and in concord within the family, the foundation is laid for a culture of peace in the world. This is the spiritual aspect of peace. These days of lock down in several countries can well be used as a grace-filled occasion to discover the divine dynamics of peace.

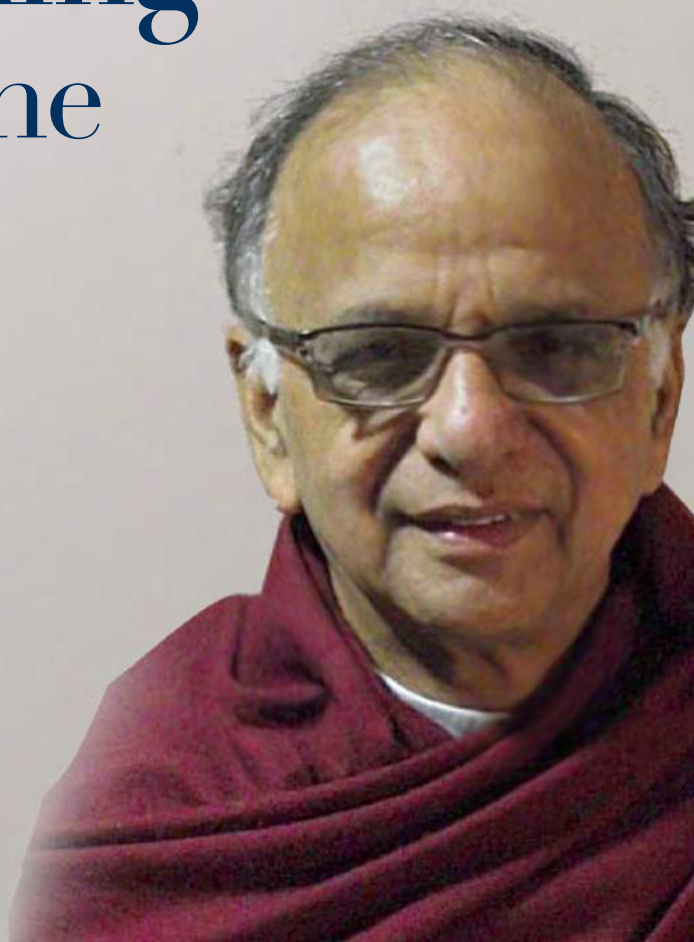
INTERVIEW

Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil /
Augustine Pamplany

Hailing from the Southern State of Kerala, he embraced the Northeast India as his life-long habitat. The serenity and tranquillity of his person is loud enough to produce the resonances of peace and non-violence across the tribal hills of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur. In unmistakable terms, he has proven that the person of the peace-builder is as important as the peace-building measures. His peace-building legacy stands out unparalleled in the entire praxis of peace-making exercises. His sharing and reflections are unfading imprints on the peace literature of the world. This is Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil!

Peace-making Efforts in the Northeast

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 46-57



? Would you kindly share some personal information about yourself as to how long you have been working in the Northeast and what motivated you to go the Northeast?

Thank you for your kind interest in the Northeast and in my peace-work. I was 14 years old when in 1951, I left for the Northeast. I always wanted to be a missionary, and was very eager to go precisely where the need was the greatest.

In my youthful understanding, I took it for granted that the need was the greatest in some *far away corner of* India. I thought that this far away region close to the Himalayas was exactly the place that I was looking for. A missionary invitation from that northern border of India, seemed to me like an answer to all that I had prayed for. So, nearly 70 years here; 60 years specifically in the Northeast. Now I belong here.

? *Could you give a short sketch on the ethnic setting of the North-eastern region to explain the background of several reported ethnic conflicts?*

Northeast is home to more than 200 ethnic groups, at least 20 to30 significantly big tribes. Some people refer to the region as a veritable anthropological museum. In earlier times, most tribes lived in the isolation of the mountains or in deep forests. There were tussles, of course, between communities like in any other place, but to describe the region as the land of 'warring tribes' as media often does is terribly wrong. I feel greatly pained when I hear things like that.

Think of how many wars took place in Europe before the two World Wars, or list those in India in different periods of history… or elsewhere. Think of the irrationalities linked with any major conflict anywhere in the world in any period of history, and then you will see how the clash could have been avoided with some measure of mutual understanding. Why, then, give negative name only to some weaker communities and call them "warring races"? Some anthropologists coming from more advanced nations, wanted to arouse the curiosity of their compatriots describing certain tribes they studied as "head-hunting" tribes in their own times. And those titles have remained. Today's anthropologists are critical of their predecessors' hasty judgements

There were tussles, of course, between communities like in any other place, but to describe the region as the land of 'warring tribes' as media often does is terribly wrong. I feel greatly pained when I hear things like that.

of simpler communities, and misinterpretations and generalizations based on inadequate data.

The reasons for conflicts have to be studied contextually, which I will try to do below. But no description is complete.

In recent years, when these tribesemerged from their earlier isolation, and began assessing their strengths in relationship with other communities with regard to their resources, competences, political influence, and look at themselves in comparison, there arose an anxiety in their mind about the advantages another tribe or other tribes had/gained over them in one respect or the other.

A fear came upon individual tribesfor their future, wondering in whose hands their destiny would be, and at whose mercy they would have to live in days to come. When such fears persisted, tensions rose over relatively minor or unavoidable matters:land disputes, perceived cases of injustice, accusations of ignoringearlier agreements, jealousy over market advantages, political power especially related to oncoming elections. If tensions aggravated, ultimately it was the mistake of one or a few, or the arrogance of a local leader that ignited the fire.

it is always far better to create in the two conflicting groups an interest in looking forwardwith a view to building a reliable future, than evaluating past mistakes, distributing responsibility for past failures, and imposing sanctions upon those who failed.

Once a quarrel begins, one offense leads to another, even defence is taken as offense. Houses are burnt, crops are forced collected, people are killed, travel in different directions become impossible, the bulk of the peoplerush to a place which they consider relatively safe and set up what may be called refugee camps, until the government intervenes.

? Government of India had to legally ban the head-hunting practice of certain Naga tribes. How could such a practice be popular among tribal communities who are considered to be unambitious and benevolent?

To the best of my knowledge, the British had banned what was described as the "head-hunting" practice long ago, though a few stray incidents have been reported even after Independence. These were mostly individual cases of private vendetta. But as I said earlier, every society goes on the defensive when it feels threatened. So with these our tribes. Of course, there have been cases in early history, when a pretentious chief wanted to show the measure of his strength and adopted aggressive policies with regard to his neighbours. In the past too, therefore, lives were lost in violence, and the winners boasted.

As I said earlier, it was the anthropologists' eagerness for sensationalism that made them describe a tribe as a community of head-hunters as though that was their main job, because their winners in a conflict rejoiced over their military victories. We should not be hasty in labelling other people negatively and stereotyping communities is unfair.

Of course, many of the tribes of the Northeast arecomposed of self-confident and assertive people. They had never been ruled by others. Communities like the Nagas, Mizos and others were never conquered. They had never been under other communities like the tribes in many other parts of India.

? Would you highlight some of your engagements with facilitating peace in the Northeast?

It is a long story. I would emphasize just two things here. First:in the peace-making effort, we should spend a long time "listening" to people concerned,and do so "respectfully". Listening with sensitivity itself has a healing power. There should be no hasty judgements, no attributing of motives, no quick condemnations. On the contrary, the peacemaker must remain a learner all the time, wanting to know a little more about the 'facts and feelings' connected with what has happened.

And the second: it is always far better to create in the two conflicting groups an interest in looking forwardwith a view to building a reliable future, than evaluating past mistakes, distributing responsibility for past failures, and imposing sanctions upon those who failed. I know that many peace-workers with other experiences will

not agree with me, but the experience of our team says, it is better to look forward than backward. Once some sort of agreement is made with regard to the future, if it is done in all sincerity, spontaneously the parties concerned will apologize for the past, sometimes admitting even grievous wrong-doing. They may even cry together and ask one another why they fought at all.

? Would you like to highlight an instance or experience that was most striking to you?

Dealing with young people who have suffered, what I have experienced most of all is the benefit of making space for Anger, giving them a chance to express themselves. I used to tell my co-workers "People have a right to be angry". Such statements should be understood in the context. Someone who has lost his house and several members of his family definitely has a right to be angry. He is close to despair.

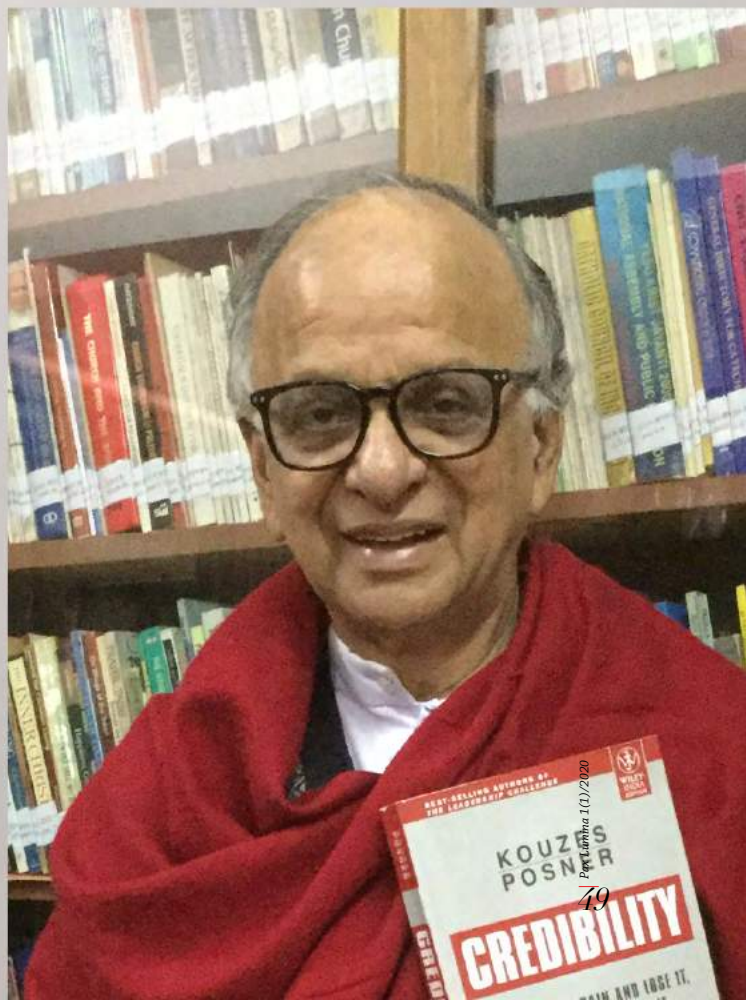
In one instance, a young man confessed to one of our peace-workers that he had only one ambition: "to kill ten on the other side, and die". I used to tell my co-workers not to lecture to such a person in distress at that moment, but to sit down and listen to him with keen interest. Remain sensitive. Be emotionally with him in full measure. Allow him to pour out all his feelings. Enable him to see that you understand him, especially the cause of his suffering, and sympathize with him fully.It is too early to adopt a moralistic tone, administerinsensitive admonitions, and propose easy solutions to his anxieties.

Allow time to pass. The person concerned will be far more calm the next day. However, allow him to express himself again on different occasions, involve him in giving assistance to the victims of violence, and suggest that he may have other ideas after some time. A time comes when he is a transformed man. He has returned to his normal self. But what I have described above is the hardest thing to do.

? What were your strategies and measures in the peace-building mission?

We do not go with strategies, we are desperate to respond to the compulsions of the situation. We are eager to look at reality in its concrete details, before we develop our plans. Reality is not in our hands. Here is where we differed with people who return from a Peace Training Centre after a lengthy course. They are quick in generalizing things based on their theories. We look at realities. The experience of our Joint Peace Mission Team says, each case is different.

We have been involved in assisting in about ten different cases of conflict in



which hundreds of houses were burnt and dozens of people were killed, even more. Each time we went through a new learning process. We usually concentrate on the moods of people, on the sensitivities of communities thanon the actual grievances of people concerned both before and after the incident, and concentrate on the aspect of soothing emotions, eliciting their cooperation, seeking their suggestions.

When that is done only, we try to bring some representatives of the two parties together,inviting them to listen to each other, whispering possible alternative ways forward, and allowing them to make their own decisions. Final decisions are made usually in the presence of the Administration. At this final stage, we may not be even present. We are happy if peace has come. We are happier, if much fuss is not made about our contribution, though aspontaneous expression of appreciation from anyoneis always welcome.

? What are the major challenges to peace-building in this part of the country?

The greatest challenge to Peace in the Northeast, in recent times, has been colliding political interests of diverse groups: dominant communities, political parties, ruling cliques; andself-interested motives even of well-meaning people. If petty political interests get mixed up with the actual grievances of the two parties (tribes) concerned, then the matter is going to get complicated. If the coming of peace somehow threatens the political interest of a party or a community (e.g. danger of failure in elections, or the damaging of the image of a particular leader), there will be a mighty effort to see that the cause of peace fails. And this happens.

> I did not go into peace-work to succeed, I just wanted to help my people in whatever way I could. Their asituation was so desperate. If failure would be result, failure was welcome.

As you well know, there are times when good people do not do so good things…and we are helpless. Even currently we can see a party that is ideologically better adopting a worse approach to a problem, or supporting the wrong person, or backing an unacceptable policy. Life is not as simple as 1+1 make 2.

People in conflict themselves are mostly simple. They just want solutions to their problems. They are human. They are willing to accommodate. But power-hungry politiciansare unwilling to compromise if the return of peace threatens their power. And the cause of peace fails.

? How best would you define the importance of the person of the peace-builder? What personal cautions are advised to the facilitators in the peace-building exercises?

If a peace-maker is sincere, he knows that peace comes by itself, sometimes in spite of him. Peace returns, not because of what he has done, but because of how things combined correctly: people, opinions, experiences, emotions, interests, long term aspirations. It is not the perfect person that brings peace, but

the accommodating person, the flexible person, the person that keeps learning all the time, and helps a little towards the right combination of things. He lets go his opinion a hundred times, keeps healing hurt sentiments, integrating differences… integrating others' ideas and insights into a healthy whole when solutions are taking shape, making sure the final outcome seems to belong to all people concerned.

It will be a pity if a person goes into a peace-venture to win attention, to show his smartness, to try out some theory that he haslearned recently, or to add a crown to his glory. Life-and-death issues are far more serious to be put at risk for the sake of such passing vanities.

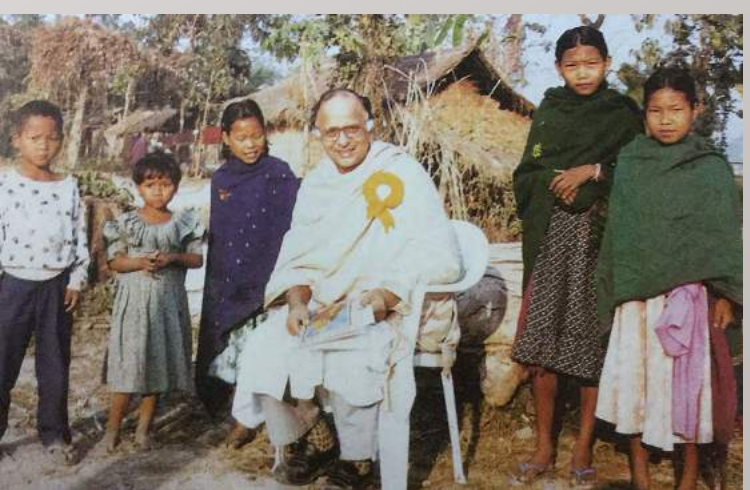
? Do you have any instances of failure with mediation in peace-building, or instances where you think you could have adopted another strategy to succeed?

It is a very interesting question. I have only moved from one failure to another. In fact, I moved into peace-making only to fail. I did not go in sure of success. I moved into that work in tears. My people had been killed, their houses burnt, their children and the aged forced to run to the nearest shelters along with those who survived. When I went in, searching for a way of helping them there were two and a half lakh people in 42 relief camps spread over several districts, around the Kokrajhar area.

I must apologize if I become emotional telling these stories. Re-telling this story in later times, often I have broken down… I just could not continue. I did not go into peace-work to succeed, I just wanted to help my people in whatever way I could. Their situation was so desperate. If failure would be the result, failure was welcome.

But when after several failures you continue working, there is some chance of succeeding. One minor success gives you a wee bit of courage. It leads to further effort. Then someone gives you an encouraging word, someone offers you a suggestion, someone comes actually to help you, someone offers to take risks with you. In a short time, you find that so many people are willing to help, that some have exceptional ability, others have persuasive power, others have organizing skills, others are wizards in planning relief…and all are generous. Coronavirus is showing today too that people can be very generous.

Some 400 volunteers worked for 6 months in turn to bring relief (food, drink, medicine, clothes) to the victims of the violence at Kokrajhar. Their life itself could have been in danger. I forgot the Archbishop's House and was continuously with them in relief camps during that period. The work was exhausting. But the morning prayers and the mass, which we called the "Mysticism of the Brief Moment", supplied the needed energies. Our ecumenical teamcollaborated in the



> Mother Teresa plunged into the streets of Calcutta, not because somebody asked her to do that. She felt compelled by the need of people left helpless on the road side, especially victims of Partition and communal clashes. She responded to a need, she answered a call.

relief work all those months; and as time went on, we moved on to direct peace work. It was a big peace effort, difficult to describe in detail. But peace came at last.

After that, our Peace Team was invited to several other situations of conflict in the region to help. It would be a long tale. Every situation was unique. No strategy could be merely replicated, except the strategy of adapting oneself to the actual needs and compulsions of each situation.

? How far have you been supported and recognized by the political leadership in your mission? How do the other segments of society look at your mission?

As you will have seen from what I said above, the last thing we were worried about was recognition. However, we worked in close collaboration with the local Administration. They appreciated what we were doing. Mr. Profulla Kumar Mahanta, the Chief Minister of Assam, thanked us again and again on several occasions. The Governor did the same.

In later years, Mr. Tarun Gogoi, the next Chief Minister, appreciated what we did in similar other contexts. We met the Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Manipur when we were working in their areas. We worked independently, but collaborated with the local Administration. They respected our work.

? I have repeatedly come across the following powerful formulation in your writings "even the most violent man longs for peace in the depths of his heart." This relates well with the famous prayer of Jesus, "Forgive them Father, they do not know…", or Dostoevsky's dictum, "I refuse to believe that the basic state of humans is to be in sin." Would you like to reflect a bit on the humanistic grounds of your perception of warring humans?

Thank you for seeing a deeper meaning into my simple statement which amounts to saying, 'have a respectful understanding of the other person, take note of even a spark of goodness in him/her.' That is the attitude that a peace-maker should always cultivate.

Seeing goodness in the other, you generate goodness even where it is not present. It is by tapping the resource of goodness in one person's heart and linking it with the same sort of goodness in persons on the other side that you bring about mutual understanding, stimulate sympathy, and bring about peace.

A little Jewish girl called Anne Frank who suffered under the Nazi regime recorded in her diary her conviction that 'at the depth of one's heart ultimately everyone is good.' Her diary was translated into all possible languages and sold out in millions. We do admit that man is inclined to anger and human races have always been busy with wars from the

earliest stages of their history. Cain killed his brother. The Israeliteswaged fierce battles against the Canaanites and Philistines. The earliest epics of most races have centred round war: Odyssey, Aeneid, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Beowulf. Most nations rejoice over their warrior heroes who defended their people and even acquired new possessions for them. Our Hindutva friends remind their colleagues that most of their gods are armed, encouraging them therefore to be assertive and proud.

But if we think more deeply, the early heroes of our Indian civilization were not fearsome warriors like Hercules and Achilles. Buddha and Asoka, for example, held out an unmistakable message of peace.

Buddha's teaching was against violence in diverse forms in his times: in worship, against animal-sacrifices offered by the Vedic Aryans; in the social order,violent imposition of the caste-system by the expanding Kshatriya races under the guidance of the Brahmins; in inspiration, worship of violent gods who motivated their worshippers to widen their territoriesand bring them under the Brahminic order.

What is little realized is that Buddha belonged one of the sub-Himalayan Mongoloid tribes, related to many of the tribes of Northeast Indialike theBodos and Garos. Violence in life, in relationship andin worship was repulsive to them, as we have seen earlier.

Asoka's family too was closely related to the Licchavi tribe. Hence, the tribal value of fairness was deeply embedded in him. He too gave himself to propagating the message of peace after seeing the suffering he caused to others by his violent conquest of Kalinga. His message went out to the ends of Asia.

The message of peace that Jesus preached made its quiet wayfrom the shores of Galilee to the entire society within the Roman Empire. Don't forget that Jesus belonged to one of the tribes of Israel. His message of peace was found most welcome to a society that had suffered under a violent political order for centuries. Oppressed people were eagerly waiting for such a message of mutual belonging, concern for one another, and social peace.

The way that Jesus and his followers passed on the message of Peace was also most creative: not only by not inflicting violence on others but by accepting violence upon themselves, Martyrdom. Their message was clear: just as extreme selfishness leads to violence, extreme unselfishness leads to utmost generosity… even to the point of laying down one's life.

There were others who protested against a selfish society, adopting a way of life that effectively meant "Social Distancing"…withdrawing into the desert or mountainsas hermits and monks. The moral authority they acquired enabled them to intervene for Peace in diverse historical contexts. Similar traditions continued in the Catholic Church. St. Francis was one of the many saints in Catholic history whose lived message of peace has influenced the entire world.

I was a bit long in answering your question to show that history is not all about "warring humans." But I must admit that almost every major peace effort emerged in a situation of violence.

If peace meansmere passivity, inactivity, dullness, monotony, indifference, complacence; or the absence of creativity, of energy, of diversity, difference of opinion, of intelligent criticism, stimulating interactions; and especially, if a unfair situation is given the name 'peaceful' while it promotes inequality, injustice, and exploitation…there is bound to be a reaction. Inequality eventually leads to violence (EG 60).

So, your point of "warring humans" remain true. Even as the entire world is worried about the rapid spread of Coronavirus, Kim Jong-un of North Korea is busy sending ballistic missiles into the sea; a group radicals have blown up a gurudwara in Kabul!

But there is good news too. Hundreds of thousands of doctors, nurses and medical personnel are risking their lives to save the lives of others. May works of peace triumph over activities of violence. That is where we make our small contribution. Jesus told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27).

? Has your South India, particularly Kerala background helped you in any way to commit yourself to peace?

I should be pretentious if I were to claim that my own place of origin is the ideal zone of peace. Nonetheless, I would be unfair if I did not recognise what I received from my region, my state, the community to which I belong and the family that brought me up. I can give only what I received from my elders in the family, from my teachers in my faith-community, from the cultural heritage of our larger society, and the value-systems that were inculcated into us by our common social thinkers.

At the same time, I must add, I received much from the people of the

> The trouble is that religious causes get mixed up with ethnicity, political loyalties, negative memories, sectarian prejudices, pretensions of individual leaders, international influences, flow of money, etc. Despite all this, I do not know any other formula than dialogue, in whatever form it can be given shape.

Northeasttoo whose love and concern also nourished me, whose ideals and aspirations inspired me, in whose anxieties I am also a part. We should learn from each other, not only how to fight the Coronavirus, but also how to take in hand situations of anger and how to keep a "Social Distance" from our prejudices and negative memories.

Returning to my native tradition, let me only refer to one dimension of the great St. Thomas Heritage (Paithrukam): his undaunted courage when he said, "Let us also go,that we may die with him" (Jn 11:16). This sort of risk-taking is a core value in our tradition. It stands at the heart of all missionary courage. We have heard about risk-taking in business deals and political calculations, but does it become visible also in apostolic ventures and humanitarian services? That is the dynamic spark that we should seek to preserve and lead to a full measure of fruitfulness.

> For me, peace-making is not an activity but a spirituality. It means, sharing the Gospel that contains the Message of Peace. That is being missionary.

? Given your experience of the Northeast, do you have any recommendations to make in addressing the aggressive political violence in certain parts of Kerala?

I am too little acquainted with the Kerala situation today and the nature of political violence in parts of the state in our times. Any suggestion I give would be too theoretical to be useful.

In any case, if someone wants to plunge himself into an actual dialogue with some colliding parties in their neighbourhood, what I would suggest to him is that he spends much more time on confidence-buildingefforts than on compiling a list of grievances, at least at the first stage; similarly, more energy on shared concern for the common good than ideological subtleties; more concern for a happy future togetherthan on specific winning point on either party. If political leaders in that contextwant the quarrel to go on to promote their own interests, the peace-maker may have to wait for a miracle or a change of heart! Or will he pray for a unique 'persuasive power'?

If the conflict is based on religion, presently that is the hardest problem in the world today. Even the wisest people on earth are not breaking much new ground. All we can do is to make an effort to search along with others, and keep learning from other experiences all the time.

The trouble is that religious causes get mixed up with ethnicity, political loyalties, negative memories, sectarian prejudices,pretensions of individual leaders, international influences, flow of money, etc. Despite all this, I do not know any other formula than dialogue, in whatever form it can be given shape. For example, as of now, those who exaggerate their loyalty to the two major religions in India are at loggerheads. Some form of conversation is required between their representatives at various levels and in various ways. People are not against each other, though their interests clash.

For us ordinary people, what we need to promote is healthy neighbourhood interactions and relationships, so that there would be people to appeal to in situations of trouble. People in responsible positions in both communities and are respected in the wider society e.g. teachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, representatives of associations, religious personnel, should keep in touch which each other and explain matters to each other in moments of tension, remove misunderstanding and build up confidence. Though theoretical dialogue has its own role, real, life-related and situation-related conversation is a vital need.

? I have a feeling that the peace-building efforts in Northeast region do not sufficiently address the poor economic and educational background of the population. That may be the root cause of repeated ethnic violence. Any comments?

While the need for further progress in the field of education in the region is true, one of the greatest miracles in our region has been the speed with which the tribal people of India (especially those on the hills where the Church concentrated most) caught up in three or four generations with the people of other

parts of India who had the tradition of education for centuries. The literacy rate in Mizoram is ahead of that of Kerala. Arunachal that was shockingly behind is fast catching up with others ever since missionaries entered the state some twenty years ago. Since the people of our region are open-minded and eager for education, they are bound to make further progress in the days to come. This does not deny the need for further progress in the field of education.

The actual reason for conflict in the region is the real or perceived sense ofunfairnessdue to the speedy rise of inequality, which is something new to tribal communities. In traditional tribal society all were equal; even the chiefs that had a few more rights had only limited power. General gatherings for discussions were part of the system. Councils and committees made the final decision. Land was collectively owned.

The insertion of this tribal society into the larger Indian society brought both blessings and anxieties. Those who held top positions in the new political structure (like Ministers, MPs and MLAs) and those who were able to take advantage of new economic possibilities (like contractors and political agents) speedily grew rich, and introduced sharp inequalities in a traditionally equal society. The culture of corruptiontoo came from outside, but took root soon enough. Large sections of people were left behind. Discontentment grew within the community.

And in the inter-tribal context, those tribes that had the advantage of early education or were quick in adopting new things speedily marched ahead of others. So, it happened that grievances grew between neighbouring communities as we had described earlier. It will not be an easy task to address these mighty problems which are part of the present social processes. In any case, life is all about addressing problems as they arise. Tensions must be reduced, those trailing behind in the race must be helped. That is our mission.

? Media had highlighted your nomination to Nobel Prize in Peace. While you are keen to caution against the temptation to be in the limelight, do you think such recognition would have added to the peace-mission in the North East?

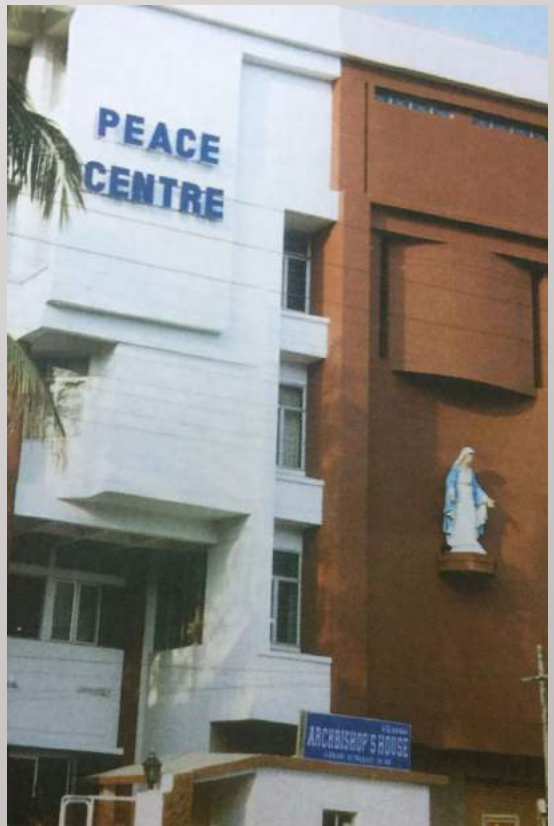
Others know more about the Nobel Prize proposal than myself. I saw the report in newspapers and nothing more. All I remember is that over twenty years ago I was given the Bombay-based Maschio Award for Peace, last year the Ambassador for Peace Award from the International Human Rights Council in Delhi, and just recently the ICPA Award.That is already more than enough. More than what I deserve! I believe many of them are 'consolation prizes' for an aging man. I am eighty-four. Are they saying, "Good-bye"?

In any case, I followed the advice of St. Francis de Sales, 'never ask, never refuse.' If an award edifies someone, it is welcome. May be, the public comes to know that missionaries are not only in the sacristy, but are fully involved in public life as well. I am gratefulto those groups who had a kind thought in this regard. But I am not going to make the least effort towards any such recognitions on my own.

? Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations (LIPI) is a peace initiative based in Cochin under the leadership of the Jesuits, organizing mainly academic and contextual researches for peace-building. Do you have any advice for them?

I am glad that the Jesuits have such an institute. A theoretical approach to this problem is also important. Last year I visited the Bergof Peace Foundation in Berlin and the Department for Peace studies in the Tubingen University, when I was in Germany for a MISSIO work.

Peace Centre, Guwahati



They keep in touch with actual situations around the world. It is a great skill to combine theory with practice. We need to combine them constantly, keep reflecting and learning from each other. The Jesuits are on every continent, and the Institute can easily keep in touch with realities on the ground anywhere in the world. They will know best what they could do in pursuit of their goals. I believe it is an accident of history that in my retirement, I have been pulled in the direction of further reflection on inter-community relationships. It happened mainly through my relationship with the Washington-based Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. I have been to several State Universities in India, China, and Africa, when their Philosophy department organized conferences on themes like peace, inter-community understanding, dialogue of civilizations, inter-religious relationships, etc. Of late, my favourite themes have been: healing of historic memories, contextual understanding of anger, bringing balance into situations of exaggerations.

I am not an academician. I have not done any special studies beyond my ordinary theology. But I believe that the Church should be wherever humanity is in agony. Christ in Gethsemane who took the pain of the world upon himself is an Icon for me. In certain contexts, we can do so little to help. But we can be "sorrowful even unto death" (Mt 26:38), sweat blood (Lk 22:44)i.e.,co-suffer with the victims of coronavirus, victims of violence. For me, peace-making is not an activity but a spirituality.

If a negative virus like COVID-19 can be so powerful, the positive virus of love, sympathy and fellowship will rescue the world, not only from ailments, but more specially from violence. Thank you, Fr. Augustine Pamplany for your interest.

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Reflection on art as a means for promotion of peace and reconciliation, based on art therapy workshop for the young Afghan and Sri Lankan refugee volunteers, organised by Jesuit Refugee Service of India.

Art for Peace

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 58-60

"Art is a beautiful thing that gives us the feeling of joy and love," said Narges, an Afghan girl who participated in the art workshop in Ashirvad, Banglore, organised by Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in December 2019. Her friend Sediqa also testified that, "the programme was very helpful and joyful for me and I felt unity and peace within me."

The reason we are engaging with art is that we are individuals with creative potentials. It is our human nature to be creative. Creative process itself is healing and life-enhancing. Art is what we do with our heart. The workshop focussed on the process rather than on making products of art. The participants were facilitated to explore the possibilities of building relationship with one's own self,

with nature and with others through creative activities. It was the process of experiencing being friendly with everything. Each creative activity was an interior journey, delving deep into one's own personal identity in relation to his/her psycho-social and environmental context.

Cathy A. Malchiodi, author of 'The Art Therapy Sourcebook' says that "Process of making art is therapeutic. Art making is seen as an opportunity to express oneself imaginatively, authentically and spontaneously, an experience that over time can lead to personal fulfillment, emotional reparation , and transformation. In this view, the creative process in and of itself can be a health -enhancing and growth-producing experience".

Since at least 20,000 BC, humans have been making marks and images not only to decorate but also to make magic. The Stone Age humans had a magic purpose in art and was used in rituals rather than merely for decoration. Human beings have consistently created art for purposes of magic to protect themselves from evil and harm, to express and control powerful emotions such as fear and anxiety.

Whatever activity the participants engage in becomes their personal experience. True creativity is playful, spontaneous and imaginative which inevitably involves taking risks, breaking boundaries, pushing limits and inventing new ideas. Such experience is affective and transformative. Every activity was invariably followed by a process of self-reflection and internalization. The participants were continuously reminded to be playful like children and enjoy the process, so that they could be free from the preoccupation about the end results.

The exercise 'drawing with your heart' enabled the participants to get rid of their inhibitions and prejudices about art that art is meant only for special kind of persons called artists. Playing with colours and lines enabled them to be confident to be artistically expressive. One of the participants commented that "it was, in fact, a wonderful activity playing with colours that we were all painting with our hearts and enjoyed ourselves very much. It was amazing how without knowing one another we became so close that we could feel each other's joy and love".

Whatever be the activity during the sessions, it had a therapeutic effect. Sitting together and working together in a group was also therapeutic. Every artistic expression was a way of self-knowledge, getting in touch with one's own true identity. It was both an inward journey and outward journey. "Art and

colours gave me the space to express the unexpressed feelings and emotions. Today, after the session, I got back my hope and the 'real me' which I had lost years back", one participant said.

One of the exercises was 'painting with strong colours' representing one's dominant negative feelings and later transforming it into a positive feeling with bright colours which was a liberating process of freeing oneself from his/her own inner psychic prison. "These sessions helped me remove the wrong and sad feelings which I had carried, from long back." said Sarifa, a participant.

Dancing with the Elements

Dancing with the five elements was a dynamic painting exercise in groups. They painted on large sheets of papers to depict the elements, fire, earth, air and water. There was a lot of group interaction and gradually and spontaneously they started painting on faces of each other. The fact is that while doing the painting of the elements in a group they were energised and filled with happiness and playfulness. The barriers of language, culture, ethnic differences vanished away. They could experience belongingness to one another and they felt that they belonged to one human family. Nazim, an Afghan JRS organiser shared her experience thus, "I really danced with colours and felt amazing. We worked together forgetting that we came from different places." Another one said, "The drawings we have made represent us and our feelings, I discovered that no matter who we are and from where we come but at the end it is we who do things and bring peace."

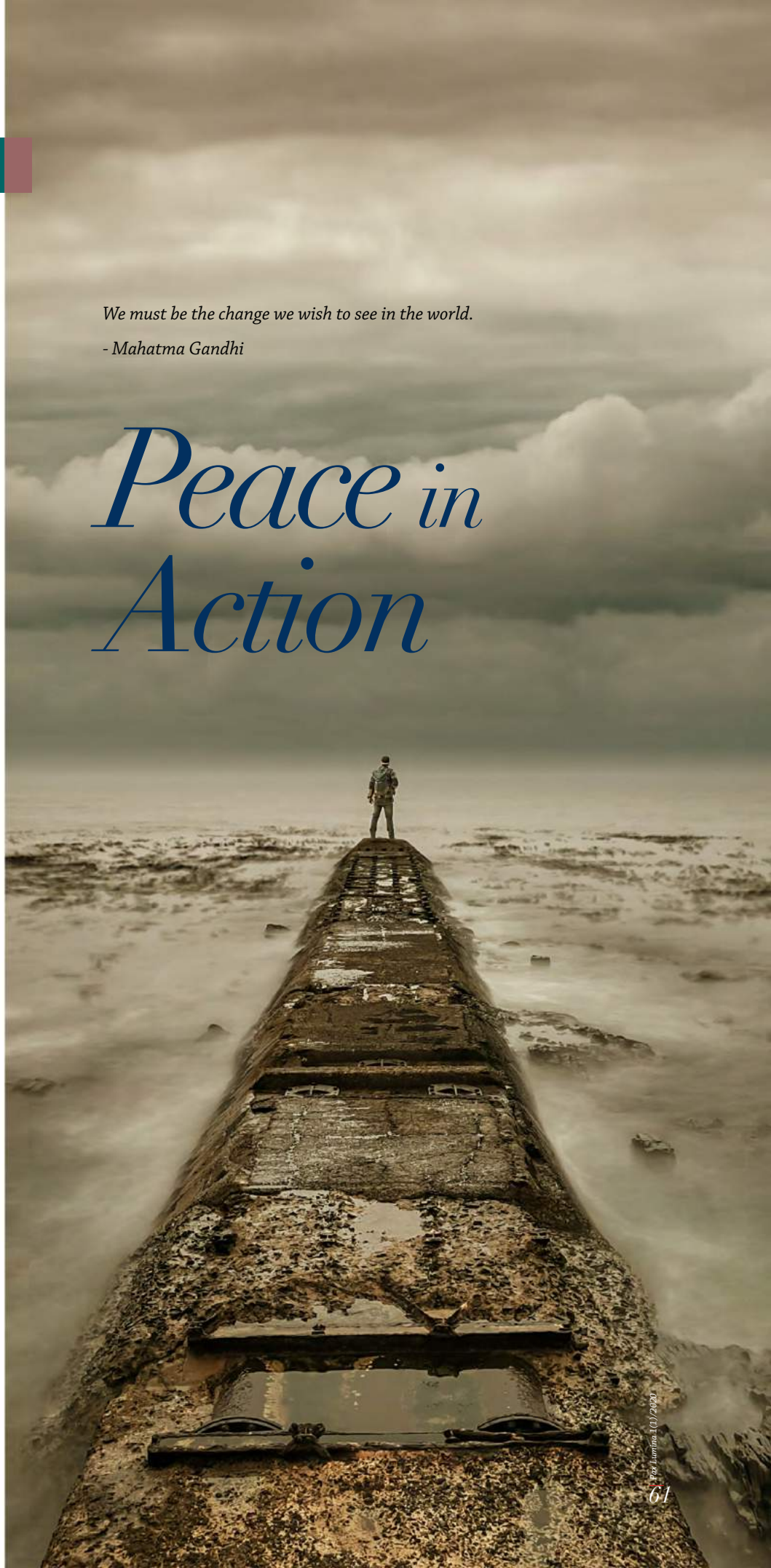
The participants of the art workshop were the young Sri Lankan Tamil and Afghan refugee volunteers who are in India, either pursuing their studies or working. The Sri Lankan boys and girls live in the camps in Tamil Nadu. They are a large and diverse group, in terms of their citizenship status and forced displacement history. They include Sri Lankan nationals and stateless 'plantation Tamils'. The Afghan youngsters represent the refugees who were forcibly displaced in a context of insecurity marked by endemic tribal and regional conflicts and a Taliban resurgence.

JRS organised this workshop with the objective of training young leaders in the community working towards building peace within the communities. The workshop had a substantial effect on the participants who are refugees but became confident and energised to become agents of peace and reconciliation and work for a 'world without boundaries'.

We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Peace in Action



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Dayabhai: Woman of Peace

Dayabhai is an Indian social activist. She was born in Pala, South India in 1940. At the young age of 16 she joined a religious congregation to become a nun and later left it to work for the upliftment of the poorest of the poor. She has been working among the tribal people in Central India for well over 50 years. At present she is engaged in the rehabilitation of the victims of Endosulphan pesticide in northern part of Kerala.

Dayabai practices the life style of Jesus Christ, the simplicity of Mahatma Gandhi and the bravery of Jhancy Rani, the famous freedom fighter of India. She was involved in relief works in Bangaldesh during the war (1971). She had been associated with the famous 'Save Narmada Campaign' along with Medha Patkar, another social activist. Dayabai has given leadership in organizing several Self Help Groups (SHG) in the late 90s to make the downtrodden financially independent inviting the wrath of the moneylenders and middlemen. Other areas of her works are water conservation, organic farming, legal literacy and adult education programs. P.N. Bagwati, the former Chief Justice of India (1985-86), invited her as an associate of the para-legal training program.

Besides her masters in social work, Dayabai also holds a degree in law. She is an actor, writer, and poet, all rolled into one. She uses all the media including film and theatre for the promotion of peace and justice. 'Ottayal' is an hour-long documentary on her life directed by Shiny Jacob Benjamin. In the movie titled 'Kanthan-The Lover of Colour' directed by Sherif Easa (2018) Daya Bai appeares in the lead role. The 77-year-old portrays the role of Ithyamma, the grandmother of Kanthan, a twelve-year-old orphan. The film is based on the real life of Adivasis in Wayanad. It revolves around the tribals and the discrimination they face because of their race, colour and creed. Another movie on her own life will be released soon. Besides, there are two books on her life and work. Pachaviral (Green Finger-2010) and Murivetta Chuvadukal (woonded feet-2018) is her autobiography.

She is a recipient of many national and international awards like 'Vanitha' Women of the Year award (2007) and Good Samaritan International Award (2012).

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Peace Activities at LIPI

Pax Lumina 1(1) / 2020 / 63-65

We live in a world of growing violence. Peace-building and reconciliation have become the need of the hour. The Kerala Jesuit Province of the Society of Jesus established an Institute for promoting peace and international relations on 1 November 2015. In the contemporary context of consumerism, materialism, violence against women, ethnic conflict and religious fundamentalism, the institute namely Loyola Institute of Peace and International Relations (LIPI), aims to foster an atmosphere of peace with a multi-pronged approach. It explores various conceptual resources such as scientific, religious, academic, and cultural. LIPI envisages new strategies and concrete steps for conflict resolution. Networking with similar institutes and other organizations sharing a common vision is another major dimension of the Institute. The vision and mission of the Peace Institute is strongly rooted in the eminent Jesuit tradition.

The following are some of the major activities which LIPI has undertaken:

1. *Ezhuthu* Magazine

Ezhuthu means script in Malayalam. It is a literary-cultural-scientific magazine published monthly in the regional language (Malayalam). *Ezhuthu* has been making waves of impact on the secular fabric irrespective of caste, creed and religion ever since

Inauguration of LIPI & Its ActivitiesNov. 1, 2015: Town Hall Ernakulam

its launch. The intellectual, cultural and ethical intervention through *Ezhuthu* is a prophetic witnessing in the contemporary times.

2. Peace Clubs

The Schools and Universities in India have several forums to enhance the student life. However, a specific forum to promote peace and harmony is lacking. LIPI sets up peace clubs in schools and peace forums in colleges to help students engage themselves in peace promoting activities. The various activities of the clubs conscientize and orient young minds in their commitment to justice and peace.

3. Seminars and Conferences

Various seminars, conferences and workshops on peace related topics are a regular feature of our institute. They are national and international in nature. We are able to engage in critical and constructive interactions with various groups through these events and make some headway in peace building activities.

National Peace Workshop for Teachers
15-16 February 2020, Bangalore

4. Centre for Art and Peace (CAP)

Art is a very effective means for alleviating suffering and curtailing violence, and promoting peace. Realizing this immense potential of art for peace we have launched a Centre for Art and Peace with Roy Mathew, SJ, Dr Jacob Thomas and Sheise Thomas SJ as resource persons. The centre already conducts art workshops for children and youth, and organizes exhibitions at different venues.

5. Centre for Science and Religion for Peace (CSR)

Drawing inspiration from the complementarity of Science and Religion, we have a centre that makes use of the advancements in both science and religion for promoting peace. Cosmic retreats, seminars and publications are major tools for this venture. Dr. K. Babu Joseph and Binoy Jacob, S. J, are heading this centre.

6. Certificate Programme in Peace Studies

The certificate programme enables the candidates to be ambassadors of peace.

The Certificate program organized by LIPI in collaboration with XLRI- Jamshedpur (26 October 2019 to 11 January 2020)

The programme equips the candidates with practical skills on risk analysis, negotiation, mediation, conference diplomacy, peace-making etc. Over and above the candidates will be enhanced with improved interpersonal relations, better teamwork, deepened social and self awareness, and increased gender sensitivity resulting in all round harmony, peace and justice. The objectives of peace studies are the following:

- To make the participants aware of the dynamics of self and social transformation;
- To create in the participants a keen awareness of the importance of caring for one's inner self.)
- To impart an in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of socio-cultural change;
- To facilitate in acquiring necessary skills to engage in social action for conflict resolution and peace building;

Interview with eminent social activist Medha Patkar

Panel Discussion on Communal Harmony

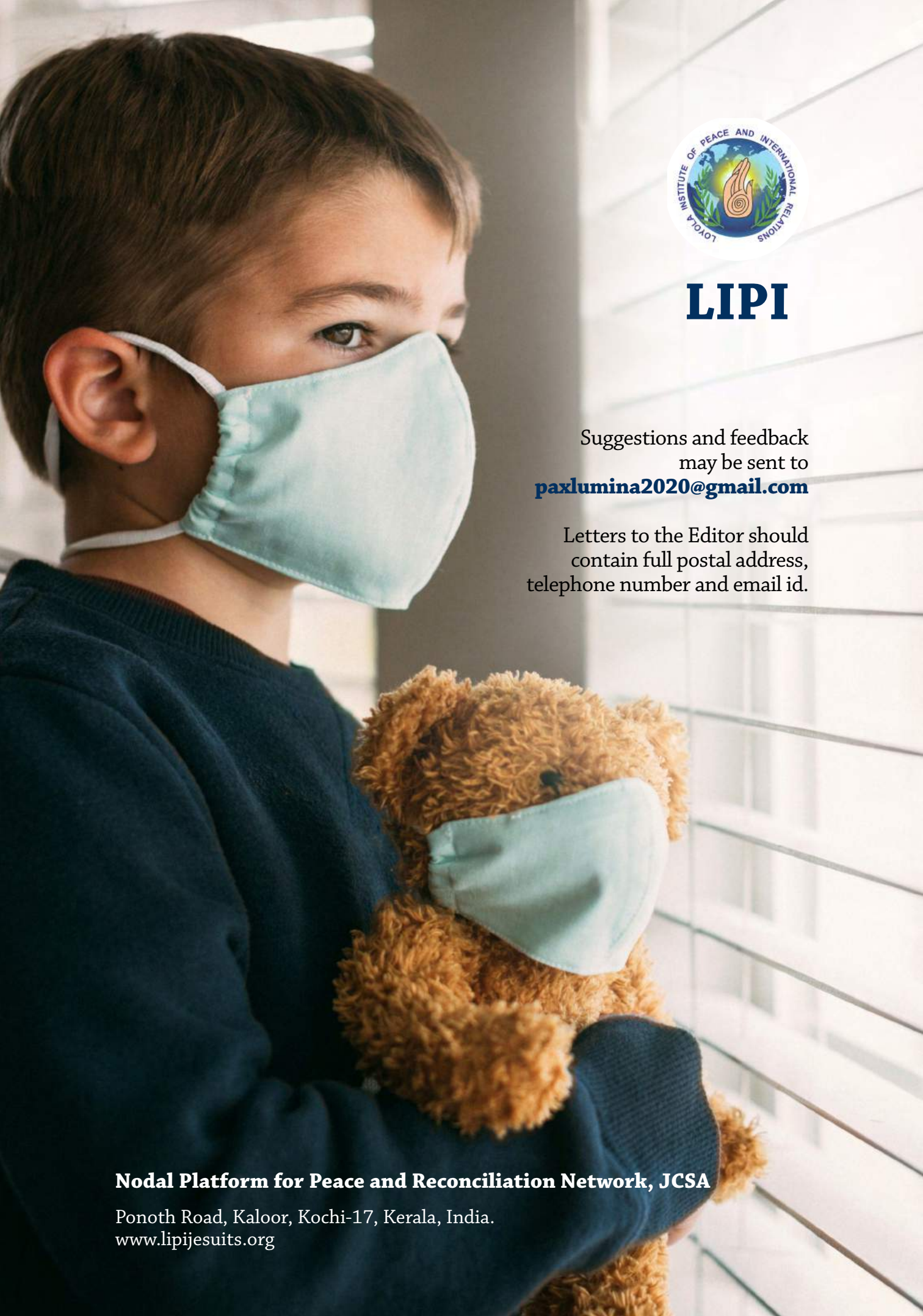
Peace Literary Workshop

7. Interview

LIPI organizes interviews with eminent persons on a regular base to communicate the message of peace.

8. Documentary

LIPI produces documentaries on peace related topics. For example, the documentary titled "Kanjoor: A Living Testimonial of Communal Harmony," (2017) highlights the rich tradition of peaceful coexistence of the multi-religious people in Kerala.



LIPI

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Letters to the Editor should
contain full postal address,
telephone number and email id.

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