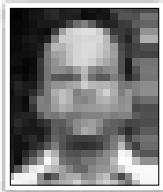


REKINDLE GANDHI'S MESSAGE



BY GEORGE PLATHOTTAM SDB

On 30th January we will be commemorating the 64th anniversary of the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our nation. On hearing of Gandhi's assassination George Bernard Shaw remarked: "It is dangerous to be good." More than six decades after his death, how far have we as a nation tried to live up to the ideals of Gandhi? How much have we strove to realise his dreams for India? We as a nation seem to have scant regard for Gandhiji's values and principles. Those who follow Gandhian ideals are even looked at with contempt and at least frowned upon. Gandhi's talisman about the poor is largely forgotten.

Gandhi's ideals are being increasingly tossed aside and we seem to be little bothered about the serious erosion of values in society. His call to eschew politics without principle has been disregarded. Every year when anniversaries come we convert them into occasions for mere lip service, a time to offer floral tributes and make speeches. Many of our 'netas' do not forget to don khadi dress in his honour. That too is a mere tokenism with little conviction or even desire to follow his ideals. How many efforts do we make to inculcate Gandhian values in the

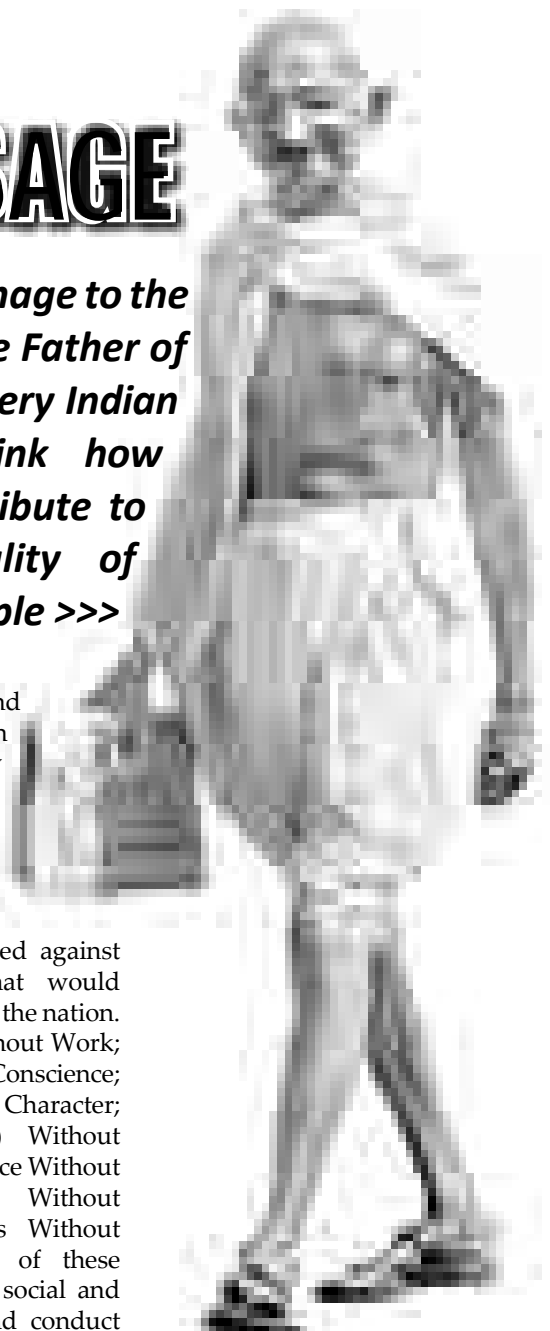
As we pay homage to the memory of the Father of the nation, every Indian needs to think how one can contribute to enhance quality of life of the people >>>

minds of children and youth today? Children remember him in fancy dress competitions and drawing contests but there is need for a more serious study of Gandhian ideals.

Gandhi had cautioned against seven social sins that would destroy the society and the nation. They are: "Wealth Without Work; Pleasure Without Conscience; Knowledge Without Character; Commerce (Business) Without Morality (Ethics); Science Without Humanity; Religion Without Sacrifice; and Politics Without Principle. Every one of these ideals has to do with social and political conditions and conduct and not mere individual morality. For Gandhi it was essential that leaders eschewed this deep social malaise. He knew that these values are part of the natural principles and laws that govern any human society.

But today our politics is mired in malpractices; our social conduct has become more and more rooted in selfishness; our business transactions are mired in corrupt practices, our governance

is not founded on the desire to serve the people; our leaders do not seem to be concerned with the well being of the poor and those on the margins of society. Our policies are more suited to satisfy the needs of the affluent and the well heeled who enjoy proximity to those who wield power. It is unfortunate that in spite of loud prostrations about economic development in the country,



India is among the poorest, most corrupt nations of the world.

We have one of the worst records with regard to violence and crime, illiteracy, infant mortality, gender discrimination, dowry deaths, farmer suicides and to cap it all corruption. Yet we comfort ourselves with the thought that we are the largest democracy in the world; that we are better than many other nations of south Asia which have gone through bouts of dictatorship and political turmoil.

A trumped up, and fabricated vision of a shining India once used by the BJP to garner votes and capture power, came cropper as it did not match the reality. In some sense for many multinationals and those with keen business and commercial interests, India is still a minefield of riches that can be looted and plundered. Many of them are sensing a good opportunity to exploit the natural resources of the country -- minerals, water, forests. We have also drawn the attention and admiration of the multinationals because we have a large middle class which provides a ready market.

But one of the major issues that have drawn limelight in recent times has been that of corruption. Every citizen of the country has come face to face with corruption. A few days ago the auto driver I accosted in Kolkata told me he was charging five rupees extra because he had to pay it to the police for illegally entering and parking in a particular place near the Sealdah station. True enough I saw it with my own eyes the driver dutifully paying Rs. 5 to a lathi-wielding policeman in khaki. Corruption has become so endemic that one doubts whether a thousand Anna Hazares and many days of hunger strikes would ever purge the country of this scourge.

Today most of our political leaders do not enjoy much credibility. There was a time in India when union ministers were

Gandhi's ideals are being increasingly tossed aside and we seem to be little bothered about the serious erosion of values in society. His call to eschew politics without principle has been disregarded >>>

held in esteem; school kids could say from memory their names and portfolios. Not so today. There is a widespread revulsion against politicians, though not all are corrupt. Political parties and their leaders have lowered the standard



of their profession so much that anyone with criminal background can join it. Party hoppers seeking power can find a place in the system. Some have stayed on in positions of power or got elected by continuously changing party affiliations. While there might have been some reduction in muscle power in politics, today money power has become a serious issue. People are willing to resort to all sorts of tactics and malpractices to get elected. Recently the media exposed how liquor was distributed in Punjab to woo voters in the Assembly elections.

Those who take on the system boldly are branded as anti-socials and enemies of the nation. Whistle blowers are eliminated; those who attempt to challenge corruption and malpractices are branded as corrupt themselves. There is a systematic attempt to malign civil society movements that challenge the system or call for transparency. The few political leaders arrested and jailed in the recent past are only a tip of the iceberg of corruption. The government must do more to prove its intention to root out corruption from every stratum of society. This must be done urgently and with determination, whatever it may cost.

The country is now going through a phase of strong internal turmoil. The Maoist movement is active and growing across several states in the country. The movement has large following among the masses, and the efforts of the governments to curb it do not seem to succeed. More than looking at the movement as an internal conflict or law and order problem, the government must look into the grievances of the masses that feed the movement. Even in other parts of the country not affected by Maoist insurgency, there are other factions waging a war against the government, society and its people. These may be smaller but need to be addressed.

A government that tries to suppress internal strife and protest movements does not seem to be doing enough to look into the issues these groups bring to the limelight. While their methods are condemnable, the

causes they expose cannot be ignored. It is important to engage non-governmental and other civil society organisations in the process of addressing these issues.

There are the NGOs and religious organisations that render a lot of service to the masses. These services include education, health care and social and developmental services. It is the primary duty of the government to deliver services like education, health care and other essential needs of the citizens. But in a large country with so much development needs to be met, it is sensible for the government to approve and support the good work rendered by various religious and other organisations.

But the experiences of non-governmental agencies that are on the forefront of delivering such services do not seem to corroborate support and appreciation from the government authorities.

Instead of recognising them as key players and collaborators in what the government is trying to do, they are seen with suspicion. Their motives are suspected; their freedom is restricted or curtailed.

There seems to be, for instance, a disconnect between the church-run institutions and the government. Union Minister Jairam Ramesh's recent comment at the golden jubilee celebrations of Caritas India, in New Delhi, where he sought help for dealing with Maoist insurgency but asked to refrain from religious mobilisation is a clear proof of this. The minister had remarked that social organisations quite often tend to overstep the dividing line by taking positions detrimental to the state. While inviting the church to engage in development work he wanted it to practice

Corruption has become so endemic that one doubt whether a thousand Anna Hazares and many days of hunger strikes would ever purge the country of this scourge >>>

restraint in religious activities -- to maintain the Lakshman Rekha. Michel Roy, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, responded to the comment by saying that the church takes a position only when circumstances are damaging to the poor in particular and people in general. The Church takes



positions to carry the voices of the poor and not to create rebellion of any kind, he emphasised.

It is a fact that the church run institutions, be they schools, colleges or medical services, are today coming under increasing pressure due to the arbitrary imposition of laws and regulations enacted by the government. Though these laws may be intended to safeguard the wellbeing of the citizens, often they turn out to slow down or obstruct the delivery of the services. While the government cannot do without the services of the voluntary sector, it should be more welcoming and proactive. Instead of assisting it in doing effectively what it does, the government and its many agencies try to burden it with unnecessary laws and conditions. One clear instance is that of the much hyped Right to Education Act. The Act

aims at making primary education a right, but the many clauses regarding its implementation such as the constitution of the managing committee, the admission procedures, the mode of examination, the system of discipline and a host of other issues raise serious problems for the minorities to run them effectively.

The church-run institutions have a long history of service to education, health care and social development, but often the services rendered by these and the contribution of large number of dedicated missionaries are ignored by the government. Quite often they receive

no support in terms of financial assistance, appreciation or recognition. Instead, those who manage these institutions are subjected to hardships; they are made to run from office to office to get even the smallest work done. Much of their energy and resources are depleted in the process of complying with regulations. They are made to obey laws and guidelines issued by the authorities and their arbitrary interpretations. What is the logic, for instance, in asking a publically known Christian school or college which is more than a hundred years old, to prove that it is a minority institution.

The very notion of what a minority institution is also being so liberally and subjectively interpreted to imply that the said institution must have majority of beneficiaries belonging to that

particular minority community. If this kind of arguments is put forward, a Christian minority school can cease to be one if there is an increase or decrease of a few students on its rolls. A minority institution is not like a government hanging on a wafer thin majority. It is an institution established and run by the minority community. The Constitution of India guarantees Christian minority community, like other religious or linguistic minorities, the right to establish and run institutions of its choice. Sometimes arbitrarily enacted laws infringe not only on the institutions but on the very Constitution and the spirit it embodies.

In spite of the fact that the Christian community has rendered its services to all categories of people irrespective of their religious or other affiliations, there is an effort to malign them as institutions intended to convert people to Christianity. Jairam Ramesh's comment implied such a nuance when he used the expression 'religious mobilisation'. A cursory look at the population data will show that converting people to their religion is not the primary intention of the Christian missionary educational institutions or hospitals. Or else how could one explain the low percentage of Christian population in States like West Bengal, where missionaries pioneered modern education as well as mother tongue education? If religious conversion or 'mobilization' to use Ramesh's words, was the motive of Christian educational institutions or social work, where are the fruits of such effort? Why is there only 2.5 per cent Christians in this country, though the community is the largest provider, after the government, of education, health care and social development?

Even though the intention of the Constitution is to safeguard the interests of the minorities by permitting them to establish

"Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest person whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him." >>>

schools and other institutions primarily for the welfare of their own members, the Christian community has shown magnanimity and selflessness in educating members of all communities and religions. It has



never restricted its services to the members of their own community -- a fact which many of the leaders know but pretend to forget. In fact, any serious study of the history of education, language development, literacy projects, social or health care programmes across the country would clearly show that the Christian community has been on the forefront of rendering service to all citizens without any distinctions.

It is therefore unfortunate that authorities often undermine the yeomen services of these institutions, and whenever occasions come make snide remarks. They also try to unduly interfere in the effective functioning of these institutions

instead of supporting the need for promoting good education, health care and social service. Unfortunately the many laws and by-laws related to the services of NGOs today are not helping to enhance their services. Sometimes loopholes and lapses as well as lack of clarity in the legislation or its interpretation are used to harass them. There is also an effort to pit these institutions against the many modern day service facilities in the sectors of education and health care which are highly commercial and profit oriented.

The Christian community has a record of service which is far beyond its numerical strength. The church-run institutions span a vast arena of high quality centres in the cities to basic services in remote villages. They deserve to be treated with greater sense of respect and understanding. Burdening their services with a lot of unreasonable and impractical laws and regulations would only contribute to restrain and slow down the process of achieving the goals the government has set.

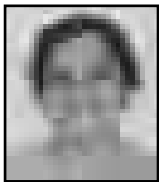
As we pay homage to the memory of Gandhi's life and sacrifice every Indian need to think how we can contribute to enhance quality of life for the citizens of this country. The best way to strive for an India of Gandhi's dream would be to imbibe his values and to remind ourselves of his talisman: "Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest person whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him."

(The writer is Secretary, Social Communications, CBI)



RESURRECT GANDHISM REMOVE CORRUPTION

If India ever stood in need of re-capturing the spirit of Gandhiji, it is now. It's therefore imperative that we help resurrect Gandhism to purge the evils that assail our nation >>>



BY TISY JOSE, UMI

It's that time of the year when 'we the people' of India annually commemorate the martyrdom of Gandhiji, the Father of our nation on the 30th January. For how can we deprive the younger generation the poignancy of the Tees January moment when time stood still in front of the Birla House?

The term Gandhism stands for the collection of inspirations, principles, beliefs, vision, philosophy, life and work of Mahatma Gandhi. It also denotes the power of Gandhiji's ideas, utterances and actions that influenced people across the world collectively and individually in shaping their own

individual, social and political philosophies. Although Gandhiji in his deep humility refused to approve "Gandhism" as a sect, the ripples of what he stood for and taught humanity have spanned across the world under the term Gandhism.

Gandhism presents a sublime 'Samanvaya' (conjunction) of opposites. It's a philosophy that blends the traditional and modern, simple and complex, political and religious to be at the service of truth. A truth-loving Mohandas who was incapable of telling a lie as young boy would later on declare, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills."

Gandhism or Gandhi legacy can never grow irrelevant. However, in the course and kick of our times, we have turned Gandhiji into a mascot to suit our pet agenda, to hoodwink the naïve, to pull the crowd and gain political mileage. The name

Gandhiji sells world over. Like the restaurant-owner in London who has interestingly named his enterprise 'Gandhi Streak House' and his sale that streaks tells it all.

Here at home, don't we find a Gandhi lithograph almost obligatory even for our films in every court-scene? Of course the 'benign, bespectacled image right above His Lordship serves to heighten the credibility of the judicial proceedings. Contemporary India certainly is passing through a grave moral crisis. Hardly any sphere in our national life is free from corruption. If India ever stood in need of re-capturing the spirit of Gandhiji, it is now. It's therefore imperative that we help resurrect Gandhism to purge the evils that assail our nation.

How can we re-generate Gandhi legacy? Certainly not by debating on Gandhiji's relevance or by holding seminars on Gandhism. Not even by enactments of Gandhi-

fast and marches. Donning Gandhi-like attire externally and aping his gestures while the heart camouflages an agenda antithetical to Gandhism can only make a mockery of the Mahatma. But it's by spotting injustice, iniquity and un-truth wherever they are found and resisting them on war-footing with no personal or partisan agenda that we can help resurrect Gandhism.

Gandhism needs to be resurrected from the pit of our power-politics and consumerist-life-style. Gandhism is to be retrieved from our political studio and be given to the 'people' of India who are its rightful heirs. And we can't do it unless Gandhiji be taken down from the pedestals, free him from his encased existence from museums and be placed amidst the people for whom he poured out his heart's blood.

Gandhiji was a true karma yogi who fell in love with Truth (God) and transformed all his actions into acts of worship. He longed to see God face to face and saw him as 'Daridranarayana' -- the God of the poor and the oppressed. His encounter with the humble and hospitable peasants of Champaran in Bihar was nothing less than a God-experience for him: "It is no exaggeration but the literal truth to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsa and Truth" (Autobiography, P.344).

Gandhiji was a man of action and did not hesitate to confess it. "I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain", he wrote in Harijan (March, 1946). He believed in action born out of devotion to God and loving compassion towards all human beings. For contemporary India steeped in corruption, Gandhi's philosophy is the only beacon of hope to purge it from the malaise. A return to Gandhism is the only available and effective method to

Whenever you are in doubt or self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it?



arrest corruption in India.

In a corruption-soaked India it's urgent that we re-establish the electrifying link that Gandhiji once had among the common people of India to free the country from corruption. There is no dearth of initiatives being set up by champions of human rights, social activists, ambassadors of peace and harmony, advocates of communal harmony in India where Gandhism is vibrant. Gandhiji was the apostle 'Truth' and non-violence. He developed a way of life by his constant "experiment with truth". He didn't shy away from learning through trial and error, often admitting to mistakes and changing his behaviour accordingly.

Gandhism can never be outdated no matter what people may say and believe. Gandhiji was a contemplative in action. His deeds sprang out of his prayer, meditation, silence and in obedience to the 'Inner Voice' that spoke to him there from. For Gandhiji, the one who does not make use of all his/her physical, mental and spiritual gifts for the common good of the people is a robber unworthy of freedom: "Unless man uses all his physical,

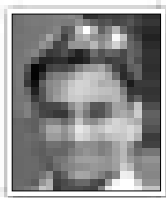
mental and spiritual gifts in the service of mankind, he is a thief unfit for freedom" (Anasaktiyoga, p.113). The spiritual weapons of "non-violence and sathyagraha, mute prayer and fasting etc, that Gandhiji wielded in his struggle to win the political freedom of India was not outside the gamut of his desire-less action".

Let the immortal words of Gandhiji be the litmus test of all our actions: "Whenever you are in doubt or self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj (self rule) for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away".

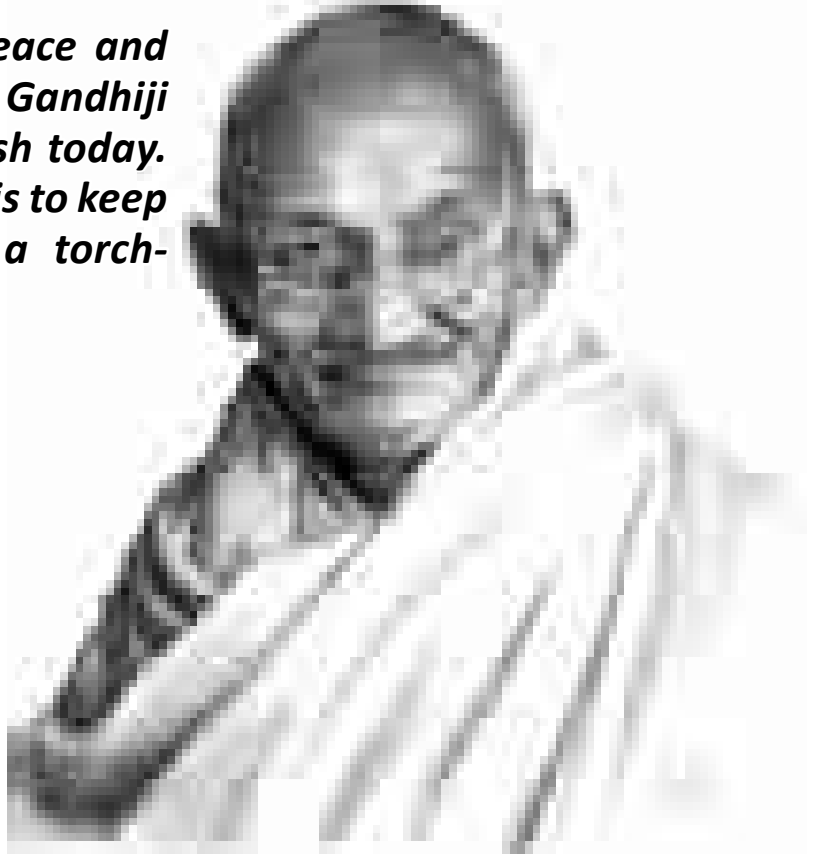
Come, let's get back to 'Gandhism -- the Truth-Force' which the Father of our nation wielded to oust our colonial enemy from India today to root out even more pernicious an enemy that is destroying us: corruption. ■

A 'NISHKAMA DHARMA YOGI'

The torch of love, peace and humanity that once Gandhiji lit must not extinguish today. The need of the hour is to keep it burning, and be a torch-bearer >>>



BY SUMIT DHANRAJ SVD



The father of our nation, Mohandas Karmchand Gandhi, was a great revolutionary of his era. When the citizens of India were struggling under British colonials, the patriotic zeal and cry of motherland shook Mohandas's heart to fight against injustices of colonialists. The self realization, voice of conscience and self awareness evoked in him a courage of standing against Britishers' policy of divide and rule to the extent of bringing freedom for our country. Thus Mohandas not only changed the odd times but also became Mahatma for times to come.

Today, we are caught up in the socio-religio-political turmoil of power play in our own country by our own people. We need to ask ourselves at this juncture whether we are free. Are we not caught up in the bondage and slavery because of our distorted ideologies, corruption, immorality, injustice, possessive nature for power? How long will this take place in the country where once upon a time Gandhiji brought freedom?

A cry of hope was heard on October 2nd 1869, at Porbander in Rajkot, when Mohandas was born to Putalibai and Karmchand Gandhi. In 1883, he was married to Kasturba. He went to England in 1888 to study law. He desired to practice law in South Africa when Indians were indented labour over there.

The transforming experience of his life happened on May 31st 1893, when he was traveling by train in a first class compartment; he was thrown out of train due to racial discrimination and prejudices. In spite of having appropriate ticket injustice was done to him. He became the victim of violence when pushed out of train. Having had the terrible experience of apartheid, he shook the foundations of British Empire.

In 1894, Natal Congress was established by him in order to work for less-privileged ones.

Satyagraha Andolan was started in 1919, as a resistance to unjust treatment, non-violent protest, and weapon of the weak holding on to truth. Gandhiji sat on fast in Mumbai for five days in 1921 against communal violence; was imprisoned first time for non-cooperation in 1922 for six years. Dandy March took place under his leadership in 1930 followed by Quit India Movement in 1942. At last he became the central figure of independence on 15th of August 1947 – a revolutionary of 1947, 'Mahatma Gandhi'. He was assassinated on 30th January 1948, at Birla House by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu fundamentalist. The entire nation pays homage

to the great soul of our country – Mahatma Gandhi on his 64th death anniversary.

Viceroy Mountbatten said, “Gandhi will go down in history like Buddha and Christ.” Today, it is almost true of him. Gandhi’s life is an open book for everybody. He share’s most of his insights in his autobiographical book, ‘*The story of my experiment with truth*’. He was influenced by the ideas of Bhagavad Gita. He wrote commentary on the Gita. His spiritual and intuitive life was touched by this sacred book.

He was a *nishkama dharma yogi*. He expressed it saying, “When doubts haunt me, when disappointment stares on my face and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to Bhagavad Gita and find a verse to comfort me.” Non-violence of Jainism and Buddhism touched him very much. Love of Christianity played a vital role all through his life. The true fellow-feeling of Islam moved his heart with brotherhood of humanity. The concept of “civil disobedience” as propounded through H. D. Thoreau, ‘*The kingdom of God is within you*’; the famous work of Leo Tolstoy, and ‘*Unto this last*’ the book of John Ruskin motivated him in the struggle for freedom.

The core Gandhian thoughts were: *Satya* (truthfulness) – truth as a moral obligation and as *moksha* i.e. final goal of our life, *Ahimsa* (universal love) – it is not mere non-killing or injury but love for whole creation, and finally *Satyagraha* (transcendental or empirical) – it is a practical ideal that makes one to hold on to truth. The two vital organs of Satyagraha are non-cooperation and civil disobedience. He followed the Hindu practice of *tapasya* so as to check the ulterior motives through fasting in obedience to the inner voice of soul.

Gandhiji was tremendously touched by Jesus Christ and Christianity (but not by Christians).



As per him, Jesus was the world religious teacher, a teacher of morality. Gandhiji adopted the teachings of Christ in respect to “love” that shares and sacrifices oneself for the sake of others. He said, “Love was like walking on the edge of the sword. I am trying to give you what I, you and many others lack. If one has it, give it”.

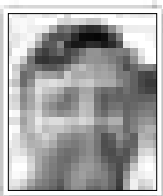
Bapuji tried his level best to transform human life and bring harmony among communities through peaceful means of right to protest, love, fast, non-violence, truth, Satyagraha, and many other andolans. Gandhi’s philosophy was to eradicate seven social sins: politics without principle, pleasure without conscience, wealth without work, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice. He was really a person of authenticity, open-mindedness, peace and love.

**V i c e r o y
Mountbatten said,
“Gandhi will go
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The words spoken by Albert Einstein years ago of this great leader of morality have come true today. Einstein said: “A leader of his people, unsupported by any outside authority, a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor the mastery of technical devices but simply on the convincing power of his personality, a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force, a resolve and inflexible consistency who has devoted all his strength to the upholding of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human beings, and thus at all times risen superior. Generations to come it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

As we remember *bapuji* on “Shahid Diwas”, let’s not forget his great sacrifice and contribution for our motherland. Let’s follow his footsteps to transform Bharat (India) into a free land by liberating her from the clutches of terrorism, communal and religious violence, riots, lootings, killings, rapes, ideological power plays, exploitation of poor, out-casting of humans as inhuman beings from the society on the basis of caste, colour and creed, so on and so forth. The torch of love, peace and humanity that once Gandhiji lit must not extinguish today. The need of the hour is to keep it burning, and be a torch-bearer. ■

PRIESTS in POLITICS



BY DR. DOMINIC EMMANUEL SVD

The law of the Church, known as the Code of Canon Law, forbids priests from entering politics and participating in the exercise of civil power >>>

Prince of Bismarck (1815-1898), simply known as Otto von Bismarck, was a German statesman who is known in the world of politics for different things and most readers familiar with history would have come across the name of Bismarck.

Now with a slightly different spelling to that name but with approximately the same pronunciation another Bismarque with a surname Dias has kicked up a storm in the Church circles in India. The reason for the storm is that he has jumped into the political arena

by entering the Goa Assembly elections as a candidate from one of the constituencies.

The problem with Bismarque Dias's action is that he is a Catholic priest. Before his name he carries a prefix, a title, of Father, a label reserved and used only in the Catholic Church very specifically for those men who are supposed to take care of souls and the spiritual needs of all. It is true that priests and their counter-parts, the religious nuns, use different means to take care of the diverse needs of people and assist them to better look after their souls. Such

tasks include active social work, human rights activism, working in health sector, teaching in schools and colleges, scientific research, farming, broadcasting and film making among many other ministries.

Canon Laws and Elections

The main reason why the issue of a priest taking a plunge into politics is creating a problem for the Church or for the priest is because the law of the Church, known as the Code of Canon Law, forbids priests to participate in the exercise of civil power.

Canon Law # 285 with its three different clauses states the

following:

- Canon # 285 §1, Clerics are to refrain completely from all those things which are unbecoming to their state, according to the precepts of particular law.

- §2. Clerics are to avoid those things which, although not unbecoming, are nevertheless foreign to the clerical state.

- §3. Clerics are forbidden to assume public offices which entail a participation in the exercise of civil power.

Canon Laws are not just guidelines. They are laws which bind all those who profess to be members of the Catholic Church, regardless of their state. For instance, there are a lot of Catholic couples whose marriages, for one reason or the other, are on the rocks but who, if they wish to continue to be members of the Church, cannot and do not take a unilateral decision to divorce their partners, which the Canon Law forbids. The Canon Law applies to all, including 47-year-old Fr. Dias, who is also a social activist himself.

Fr. Dias is being supported by Zagruti Goenkaracho Ekvott (ZGE), a forum of socio-political organisations, though he claims that his plan to plunge into the election fray would be as an independent candidate. While making the announcement to enter politics, he seems to have said, as reported in the *Deccan Herald*, that Canon Law did not allow a priest to contest an election and that he would be waiting for the Church's reaction.

One wonders as to what kind of reaction from the Church he is awaiting, knowing full well and admitting to the fact that the Church does not allow priests to contest elections. Being an intelligent man, I am sure he does not think that he is bigger

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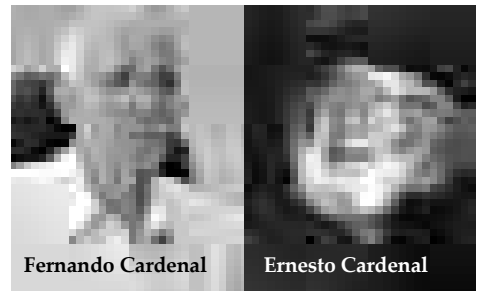
than the Canon Law and that his misplaced enthusiasm which is goading him to enter into politics will be considered more important by the Church authorities than the Canon Law? There are many other such questions that arise by his move to contest elections, including those related to the reasons given by Fr. Dias for his current decision and we will have a look at them in a while.

History of priests in politics

Catholic priests and even bishops, wishing to enter politics, either because of the lure of power or with a sincere desire to serve the public, is nothing new. Though there are quite a few, I will just highlight a few important priests and a bishop who participated in the elections but had to sever their ties with the Church as it went against the Canon Law.

The first ones that come to mind are the Cardenal brothers in Nicaragua (Central America). Both Fernando Cardenal and Ernesto Cardenal were priests. Fernando was a Jesuit priest and Ernesto a diocesan. The latter was a Minister of Education in the Sandinista government in mid 1980s. Their bishop, Archbishop Obandoy Bravo of Managua, though a social activist himself, had asked them not to join politics but they did not heed to his advice.

Then comes Jean-Bertrand Aristide from Haiti, a Catholic priest and politician, who served



as Haiti's first democratically elected President. He won the Haitian general election in 1990-1991. He was expelled from the Salesian Order in 1988 but left the priesthood only in 1994.

Similarly a Catholic priest, Eddie Panililio in the Philippines who became Governor of Pampanga province was suspended from priesthood during his three-year term. Panlilio also contested the Presidential elections in 2010 there. Before the elections, he had said that he found it hard to completely give up the priesthood and if he lost the elections, he would like to return to his priesthood. There were other priests in the Philippines who had joined the underground anti-government rebel groups but they never stood for political



Fernando Lugo

elections.

Another case is that of a former Roman Catholic bishop Fernando Lugo. He is the President of Paraguay since April 2008 after contesting elections on the pledge of removing corruption. But four years before entering politics, he had sent in his resignation to the Pope which was accepted.

In India too this is not the first time that a Catholic priest has expressed his desire to contest elections. In Karnataka, back in 1980s, Fr. Jacob P.J. had won Assembly elections as an independent candidate.

Why should priests shun Politics?

It has been established earlier that the Canon Law forbids it. The laws of the Church are not made on an *ad hoc* basis or to address just one odd case here or there. The laws come into effect as a result of both the long held tradition and experience of hundreds of years of the Church as well as after much deliberation and thought put into it. The space here does not permit me to go into those details.

Before we go into the reasons as to why a priest should not take part in elections and what he can do instead, I would like

The laws of the Church are not made on an ad hoc basis or to address just one odd case here or there. The laws come into effect as a result of both the long held tradition and experience of hundreds of years of the Church

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to relate here a TV debate that I had participated. I was asked whether it was right for Baba Ramdev to start his own political party and contest elections. I said that Baba Ramdev, if he claims to be a religious person, should keep away from politics.

The main reason I gave was that entering politics through elections is ultimately all about gaining power. Now anyone who contests an election in a democratic set-up should expect at least one opponent (normally there are several candidates). As a candidate one must deposit certain amount of money before elections. Though it is true that often candidates lose even their deposit, no candidate contests to lose his election. He contests it to win. The candidate has to prove to the public that he is better than the other candidate and that is why he should be elected.

The whole dynamics of dirty politics begins here. I am not at all speaking about money laundering, booth capturing, malicious campaigning and

so on which take place during the elections. The process of election campaign involves that the candidate must show himself/herself in better light than others. In order to do that one gets necessarily embroiled in the game of one upmanship, sometimes not being even aware of what means one might use to put the other person down so as to prove that his/her candidature is better than that of others.

Secondly, elections in India are all played around with by the power of money. Though the Election Commission places limit, it is known to everyone that an election costs much more than the permissible amount. Where does a priest get so much money to contest an election from?

Thirdly, if as a priest one has created a constituency through one's vocation to priesthood which gives one an access to render pastoral services to people, would it be fair to use that platform to contest elections and ask people to vote for him? People have a completely

different kind of perception and therefore a relationship with a priest. No politician, however honest he/she may be, will ever be held in awe and respect by the parishioners as much as a priest. Though politics is all about luring people to vote for oneself so as to win the seat (unless a candidate is contesting for the sake of being a nuisance value to the opponent), would it be right for a priest to try and lure people to vote for him because he exercises another role in their lives from the altar where he represents Christ?

Fourthly, politics is also about taking sides. Even though someone may claim to stand as an independent candidate, the fact of the matter is that the moment one thinks of opposing another candidate, one is taking sides. Can a priest, therefore, involve himself in a role that divides

people in groups? Not that there are no cases of priests who end up dividing people, sometimes unconsciously and sometimes consciously in a parish. Such priests are criticized left, right and centre for playing such a role. Thus if he is criticized in a parish which is much smaller than a constituency, how much more will he be criticized if he divides people because he is interested in contesting elections?

Zeal to serve people?

Fr. Dias, as also other priests and Bishop Lugo, who have contested elections and even

Fr. Dias should first of all look at the servant model of his Lord and if that is still not convincing because of his personal interpretation, he should look up the Canon Law to help him decide which path he must follow >>>



won them, all did so with the sole aim of serving the people (country) and to fight either corruption and evil in society or to serve people better. That's what a priest is normally found doing or what he is supposed to do, albeit more often than not, in religious and spiritual matters.

Before I proceed further to say how a priest could convert his zeal to serve people into service without directly entering into politics, let me cite the examples of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan of the past and to a

lesser degree may be Teesta Setalvad, Fr. Tom Kocchery, Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, to name a few.

Readers will notice that I have not mentioned the names such as Mother Teresa, an epitome of service to the poorest of the poor, and hundreds and thousands of other priests and nuns involved in social service of one kind or another, but those famous names who were able to make huge political difference to the nation and the people without being in politics of

the electoral type.

Mahatma Gandhi certainly deserves the first place among all the names, who in a manner of speaking, single handed, not only shook the well established British Empire to the roots but even got rid of them without taking recourse to violence. But he kept completely away from politics. He could have been the first Prime Minister or the President of India. Gandhi achieved great things without being in politics or hankering after power.

The same can be said about

Jayaprakash Narayan or of more recent fame, Anna Hazare and others who have been making tremendous impact on society without being lured to the politics of power. The examples given above should suffice to gauge the range of possibilities available to Fr. Dias to engage in with civil society to gather a momentum for social and political change rather than plunging into power politics.

The Power of Love

As a Catholic priest, the one tool available to him is the one His Master Jesus Christ used at various occasions to deal with different people and situations. He was another one who gathered a great momentum by sheer power of his teachings which, in a nutshell, was all about God's love for us which should then get translated in our love for one another. "You call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13: 14). That was the supreme example set by the Lord of humble and



loving service.

Most saints of the Catholic Church as well as many missionaries of the Church down the ages have used the power of love to bring about change in individual lives and in whole societies. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great

among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10: 42-45).

Fr. Dias should first of all look at the servant model of his Lord and if that is still not convincing because of his personal interpretation, he should look up the Canon Law to help him decide which path he must follow.

*(The writer is Spokesperson,
Delhi Catholic Archdiocese)*

PRIEST-CANDIDATE RECEIVES THREATS

Father Bismarque Dias contesting state legislative assembly elections in Goa said he has received threats from unidentified persons ahead of polls in March.

The Blessed Sacrament priest said he awoke early morning (Jan. 27) to the sound of banging on his front door.

Voices from several individuals shouted that they would teach him a lesson for standing in the elections. The crowd then dispersed, he said.

"I was surprised, as I do not have enemies," the priest said.

Fr Dias, who is running as an independent candidate from Cumbarjua constituency near Old Goa, said he would write to the Election Commission to get his constituency declared "sensitive."

The priest declined to elaborate on whether he had received permission to contest the elections.

"The issue of permission is not important at the moment because at the end of the day,

religion is there to support the cause I am here for," he said.

He added that members of the public had promoted his candidacy in the absence of state leadership.

Fr Dias has previously led people's movements against illegal mining, land use and other issues and said his participation in the election aimed to help the ailing land, trees and children of the state.

Goa goes to the polls on March 3. *(Bosco Eremita, UCAN)*

Fr. Bismarque Dias

Is it necessary for a Catholic priest to enter politics to fight corruption? Can he not do so by spending more time in the church and with parishioners rather than contesting elections? >>>

FIGHT FROM OUTSIDE POLITICS



BY ALAN NAZARETH

Fr. Bismarque Dias's decision to enter the political arena to fight widespread corruption among Goa politicians has led to a debate over the pros and cons of a priest joining the electoral politics. He has received fairly considerable support for his decision to fight the Assembly elections in the State. He could find support in some Catholic priests and numerous laity, as political and other corruption now reached intolerable proportions. Some of this support is based on the argument that a priest, on being ordained, does not lose his civic rights or the freedom to exercise them.

How does one assess the validity of this argument? It is of course true that a priest, on becoming a priest, does not lose his civic rights or the freedom to exercise them. As a citizen Fr. Dias has not only the right and freedom to combat corruption but also the duty to do so. But this duty needs to be weighed against the spiritual duties he has pledged himself to when ordained as a Catholic priest. Which is higher priority? His spiritual duties and the vows he has taken or the duty to fight the widespread corruption by entering the political arena?

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all else will be added on to you," Christ had stated. At a time when vocations to the priesthood have dropped substantially and there is already a dearth of priests to cater to the spiritual needs/guidance of the faithful, is it appropriate for an ordained priest to enter

the political arena, which once entered, becomes a full time job leaving little time for spiritual duties? Fr. Bismarque needs to ponder over this question and answer it.

The reality of politics in all democratic countries is that considerable sums of money are needed to win elections. Only substantial personal wealth or financial support from political parties, generally a combination of both, can garner such "political war chests". To enter the political arena as an independent, without adequate financial resources, is to "chase the will of the wisp".

Corruption can be effectively fought only from outside the political arena (where most of the corruption is gestated) and not from within it. Martin Luther King was an ordained Baptist Minister who stood up boldly against the most virulent racial oppression in the world and

inspired and mobilized millions of his fellow blacks to join him in his Gandhi type non-violent struggle for racial equality and social justice. He declared that in his struggle Christ had provided the inspiration and Gandhi the method. He paid with his life for undertaking this noble mission yet succeeded in ending racism in the US, and within fifty years of his death, in putting a black President in the White House. He achieved all this without joining the political arena and contesting an election.

Mahatma Gandhi, though a member of the Congress party during the 1916-'34 period, achieved much success before and after this period, without belonging to any political party. He never contested an election yet became India's national liberator, social emancipator and 'Father of the nation'. Mother Theresa, a penniless 37-year-old nun, deeply inspired by Christ's message "Love one another as I have loved you", left the comfortable confines of Loretto convent in Calcutta where she was teaching, to care for the homeless and dying on Calcutta's streets. Within fifty years thereafter she had put India on the social service map of the world and won the Nobel prize -- without ever entering the political arena.

Anna Hazare, a retired Indian army truck driver, deeply inspired by Gandhi, has spent his retired life in ameliorating the deplorable economic and social conditions in his village and subsequently in fighting corruption at the village and state levels, and in 2011 at the national level. He has created a great groundswell of support nationwide and forced politicians of every hue

Mahatma Gandhi, though a member of the Congress party during the 1916-'34 period, achieved much success before and after this period, without belonging to any political party >>>



to pay heed to him. He has neither aspired nor held a single political office.

All the above lives contain a potent message for every ardent anti-corruption campaigner and social activist.

In conclusion, whereas it is widely believed that most politicians in Goa, many of whom are Catholic, are grossly corrupt, the question that arises is why is this so? Is it because they have hitherto not been confronted by a Catholic priest from within the political arena

or because the foundations of their religious and ethical values have been poorly laid. In the answer to this vital question lies the root cause of corruption and the locus where it needs to be tackled.

For this, Catholic priests need to spend more time in their churches and with their parishioners rather than contesting elections in the mistaken belief that the plague of corruption is best fought thus.

(The writer is Ambassador of India (Retd), Managing Trustee, Sarvodaya International Trust)

A DIVINE OATH THROUGH POLITICS

By Antony Melvin Paul

A priest is ordained not just to be a mediator between souls and God but also ordained to care for the careless, to represent the oppressed and bring liberty

I am a firm believer that society deserves better, from what it is receiving presently. It is a duty of every individual who is part of this society to always think for the better of his fellow beings and himself. A priest is indeed an integral part of the society; it is just that he has a vocation to serve God through people, like any one of us who have vocations of different profession that we choose.

If there is an individual who thinks he can make a difference and bring to the society what it deserves, that is a better today and a better tomorrow. Should this individual not be a Priest?

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.” (Luke 4:18)

A priest is ordained not just to be a mediator between souls and God but also ordained to care for the careless, to represent the oppressed and bring liberty. We all believe that our politicians who we vote for would provide us with better infrastructure, amenities and eradicate corruption. Does it happen or has it happened? But we still believe. From what I am informed, it is that religious personnel should not part take in political agendas, as politics is not what the church or any religion actually sites in any of its writings, except may be a reference from Mahabharata.

However, I really appreciate the initiative that Fr. Bismarque Dias has taken. We need more such individuals to come forward to lead as this is what we have been taught from the scriptures. If a priest can take a divine oath to protect the people of God through the Church, then why not do it also through politics?

(The writer is former Lecturer of St. Joseph's College of Arts and Science, Bangalore)

GREATER CALLING TO SERVE THE PEOPLE

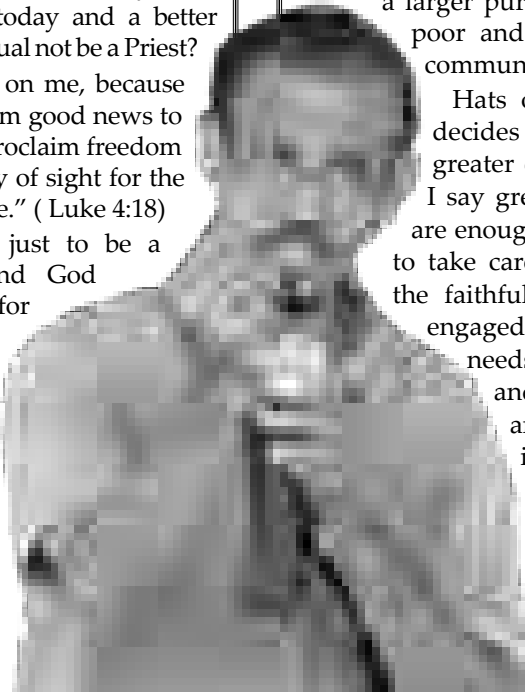
By Tony D'Silva

There are enough and more priests in India to take care of the spiritual needs of the faithful while very few are really involved in the area of politics and public policy which affects the majority of the population of all faiths

Fr. Bismarque Dias, or for that matter any Catholic priest, should make his own decision based on his thinking, analysis and deeper/inner spiritual guidance/calling. The fact that he made a vow to the Catholic church (perhaps when he was in his 20's?) should not stand on the way of his inner calling to serve a larger purpose, especially that of the poor and the disadvantaged in his community and polity.

Hats off to Fr. Bismarque if he decides to go ahead and follow a greater calling to serve the people. I say greater, because I think there are enough and more priests in India to take care of the spiritual needs of the faithful (while many are rightly engaged in taking care of the earthly needs - education, healthcare and economic development) and very few are really involved in the area of politics and public policy which affects the majority of the population (of all faiths). We need persons like Fr. Bismarque to make a difference in this area.

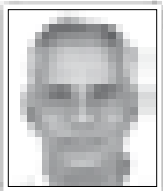
I would rephrase the question, “Should a priest be in politics?” to “Should a priest answer the call to serve his people?” The answer to this question will put aside the sectarian and, or may I call a narrow view, of serving the Roman Catholic church and help Fr. Bismarque in his decision to do what he has to as a true follower of Jesus. The real question is: if the priests are supposedly the followers of Christ, what would have Christ done if he were to walk the streets and neighborhoods of Cumbarjua constituency?





Fr. Bismarque Dias

A POLITICAL ROLE FOR PRIESTS



BY DR. M. K. GEORGE S J

Fr. Bismarque Dias in Goa is making news. His plan to contest the State elections has raised crucial questions on Catholic Priesthood and involvement in politics. The immediate response of most people would be to fall in line with the Canonical Law which forbids any priest from contesting elections. However, when Fr. Dias claims that he is supported by over hundred citizens' groups and is contesting as an independent candidate, with no political party affiliations, the

issue needs to be looked at more closely and carefully.

Fr. Dias' arguments are interesting. He justifies his decision against the traditions of the Catholic Church by pointing out the large civil society support he is getting. He points out that he has no power ambitions other than fighting the rampant corruption and the callous inaction of the government in power. His own experience of working for the marginalized and fighting the powers-that-be including Ministers and the Catholic Church for its inaction vis-à-vis the huge corruption in society makes him take this bold and controversial step.

Fr. Dias has led a large number of civil society agitations against illegal mining and State-sponsored abusive land use

Time to take a relook at the Church's position and Canon Laws >>>

policies. After having fought the battle for quite some time now, he feels justified in looking for a more politically powerful position to fight corruption and influence policies. He said, "I worked for people staying in Narva and St. Estevam. My Constituency is the place where I was born and grew up. We want to give a new political culture to Goa".

Position of Canon Law

The Canon Law expressly forbids clerics from running for political office. According to the Canon Law, "the clerics are not

to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions unless, in the judgment of the competent ecclesiastical authority, this is required for the defense of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good". The rationale, it is argued, behind this prohibition is to avoid any semblance of dogmatism and clericalism.

The fear is that when a priest enters politics and speaks out his political preferences, it is difficult for the faithful to distinguish between the proclamation of the Gospel truth and his own political preferences. Even if a priest speaks as a private citizen the danger remains that the Catholic faithful will perceive it as an authoritative moral determination. Pope John Paul II pointed out that the Priestly

ministry should “respect the maturity of the laity, and should strive to assist them to achieve this, through the formation of conscience”.

The stand of the Catholic Church, thus, is clear: “The priest will remember that it does not fall on the shoulders of the pastors of the Church to intervene directly in political activities and in social organization. This task forms part of the laymen’s vocation, in which they work by their own initiative together with their fellow citizens. Nevertheless, he will not be absent in the effort to form in them an upright conscience”.

Priests entering politics and controversies surrounding it are nothing new. One of the most known cases is that of Fr. Ernesto Cardenal who served as Culture Minister in Nicaragua’s leftist government from 1979 to 1987. Pope John Paul II did not take the step kindly and it was reported that during the Papal visit to the Latin American country in 1983, the Pope repeatedly admonished him with the words, “You must make good your dealings with the Church”.

At about the same time in our own country, Fr. P.J. Jacob represented Kalghatgi in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly as an independent candidate from 1983-1985. He has, prior to his political career and after that too, an illustrious history of serving the poor and marginalized.

In 2011, a Spanish priest Fr. Antonio Fernandez Blanco was elected as a Spanish Socialist Party member in the Galician town of Gudina. After a suspension from priestly duties and a warning from his local bishop, Fr. Blanco resigned as a local councilor.

Time to re-consider positions

There are three reasons why we should re-consider the Church position: the change in the context of the Church position, the unique context of India and the

Canonical prohibition of clerics from standing in election, created in a foregone age and alien situation is an institutional requirement to protect its own vested interest. Hence, innate human right should dispense with institutional requirement >>>



understanding of politics itself.

The context of Catholic priests not being allowed to take part in politics is indeed historically conditioned. The Western world and its peculiar politics made the Priests to be kept away from politics. The Church was already a powerful institution, able to dictate to secular powers. What was then needed was a priesthood which would unite the various power centres and promote the common good.

But look at the Indian context today. Various reports show that nearly “a fourth of the Indian Parliament members faced criminal charges including human trafficking, immigration rackets, embezzlement, rape and even murder”. Then look at the rampant corruption and the increasing civil society movements against corruption. The massive support a man like Anna Hazare was able to garner is indicative of the popular aspiration for clean leaders. Then why should not a priest leader, who represents the civils society organizations and movements

and who vouches by the values of the Kingdom of God contest elections and reach positions of influence.

How does one understand politics? If politics is understood as to do with citizenship, then a priest has

every right to engage in politics. Obviously, what is prohibited is partisan or party politics. In this case, Fr. Dias claims to represent civil society organizations which in today’s Indian context is a hopeful trend towards a more just and participative democracy. A priest in this context will have more credibility and effectiveness in building a corruption free society.

Perhaps the following e-mail from a veteran priest social activist will summarize best the argument of this article: “To contest an election on behalf of the poor and marginalized who otherwise do not have a chance of being heard, to stand up for the defence and protection of nature which is being systematically disfigured and destroyed, is an innate and inalienable human right. Canonical prohibition of clerics from standing in election, created in a foregone age and alien situation is an institutional requirement to protect its own vested interest. Hence, innate human right should dispense with institutional requirement”.

(The writer is Head, Human Rights and Training Unit, Indian Social Institute, Bangalore)



POLITICAL POWER, NEED OF THE HOUR



BY DR. FRANCIS K.M., CST

The Church should extend support and cooperation to Fr. Bismarque Dias to take the leadership in the empowerment of the poor and this support will result in better participatory decision making processes >>>

The power for decision-making is one of the hallmarks of empowerment. When it comes to matters of common interest, affecting many stakeholders, participatory decision making is the most appreciated process. The participation will be effective and meaningful, without any tokenism, when the participants are influential and powerful. Political power is that intangible resource which can be used and invested to get the works done in favour of the participants.

It is common experience that people with political clout become highly influential and

effective in the management of the affairs in any field. Associational strength, networks, embeddedness, mutual trust, common norms and cooperation which are generally understood as the most common ingredients of *Social Capital*, by which people can get the necessary bargaining power and influence in the society, will be blunt and faded and thus less effective without *'Political Capital'*.

Political Capital is based on the public figure's favourable image, among the other important factors, in or out of the

Government. Edward J. Lopez, an Economist at the University of North Texas, delineated two types of *Political Capital* in a 2002 paper for the *Review of Austrian Economics*. 'Reputational' Capital, a politician's standing with voters and other unorganized interests and 'Representative' Capital which includes the powers that stem from politician's office. The *Political Capital* shall be the influence and the locus in the power structures and equations in a particular community.

All these aspects are particularly valid for the excluded and the

marginalized sections in the society. The poor can become a power to be reckoned with only when they have accumulated the social capital and political capital so as to become effective, countable and influential in power equations in the society. As such, the poor are voiceless, powerless and least influential in the society unless they garner the necessary capacities to bargain for their rights and entitlements. Somebody has to enable them and empower them to gain their power and rights, so that they can have access to resources, institutions and information and control over them. There is the need for strong and committed leaders as facilitators and enablers who can work as catalysts and companions.

From this perspective, the efforts of Fr. Bismarque Dias are praiseworthy as a candidate of the Civil Society, contesting the Assembly Election in Goa, from the Cumbharjua constituency. His contest and political involvement (without any affiliation to party politics) will definitely amplify the voice of the voiceless and enhance the power of the powerless in favour of their rights, entitlements, social justice and equity -- the Gospel Values, the priest is upholding. He is also fulfilling the duties of a responsible Indian citizen with all the rights and responsibilities, enshrined in the Constitution of India. He will be the herald of Good News for the downtrodden; a messiah incarnated in our times and *a light to the people living in the valley of death and darkness*. He can stand for the values and be the voice of justice without any compromise.

Good Governance and good sense should prevail when the country is encircled with the gloom of scams and various

Fr. Bismarque, along with his supporters, shows the way with his political capital to capture power and become influential in favour of the excluded and the marginalized >>>



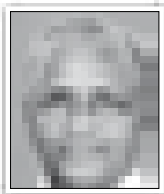
corruptions at the core. Even the voice of thousands of Anna Hazares can get eclipsed and unheard in the cacophony of the corrupt people and their systems due to petty selfish motives and lack of strong democratic parliamentary processes. Fr. Bismarque, along with his supporters, shows the way with his political capital to capture power and become influential in favour of the excluded and the marginalized. The Church should extend all possible support and cooperation to him to take the leadership in the empowerment of the poor and this support will result in better participatory decision making processes and political capital.

This will also ensure the practice of the Gospel values and the preaching of Good News to the poor and prove that the *praying hearts* are supported by *doing hands* for a more credible witnessing, for they will preach not with their words, but with their deeds and actions for more inclusive and just society with values. The burden of the past and the shyness of the Church shall not stand in the way of political capital and political involvement because the need is greater than ever today and the cry of the poor for their rights is louder than ever.

(The writer is Programme Director, DISA, involved in development activities and empowerment processes)



Fr. P.J Jacob (Ex. MLA) was awarded Honorary Doctorate by the Karnataka University on 22-02-2011 at the hands of Governor HansRaj Bharadwaj, and Prof H. B. Walikar, the Vice Chancellor



BY FR. P. J. JACOB (EX. MLA)

CLERICS CAN CLEANSE POLITICS

Political election of a priest is his second ordination as a shepherd, as servant of the people elected to bring Good News to the poor. Needs of the time and needs of the people alone decide the mission of the priest.

Today politics is identified with corruption; priesthood in every religion too is identified with power, pelf and prestige.

Priesthood is no less corrupt except for the one who choose to be otherwise. An ordained priest elected to politics can continue to preside over the "breaking of bread" from which he can exempt himself if he wishes. But

More the corruption in politics, ever more is the need for priests to move into electoral politics and purify it >>>

he would have no excuse if he frees himself from his ministry of "foot-washing" and all it stands for.

Even as a Legislator, I valued the ministerial role of my priesthood. I offered Eucharist in the Vidhana Soudha and Legislators' Home. I consecrated the Vidhana Soudha and Legislators' Home to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary united in a circle of my religious and laity friends. But when lights

were on till 11p.m. in Chamber No: 257 of the Vidhana Soudha, I was not offering Eucharist, but, with drowsy eyes and heavy heart, attending to the prayers and petitions of the poor and forlorn. My P.S. or P.A. kept me company patiently. This I considered the culmination and consecration of my Eucharist.

After seven years in electoral politics, I live in a rented room and use a 1998 model jeep not

belonging to me, posses nothing except vestments, books and essential stationery. This is to say that politics need not always be corrupt. More the corruption in politics, ever more is the need for priests to move into electoral politics and purify it.

I was fortunate not to have

Etymologically politics means science of the service of the people. This involves announcing Good News and denouncing injustice and oppression. In both senses Christ was a politician >>>



Fr. P.J Jacob (Ex. MLA) was awarded the “Excellence in Ministry” National Award by Catholic Priest Conference of India at the hands of Justice (Rtd.) Santhosh Hegde in the presence of Archbishop Andrews Thazhath, and Archbishop Jacob Thoomkuzhi, Emeritus of Thrissur, on 30 November 2011

been ousted from my ministerial priesthood or parish and continued as priest, Taluka President and MLA.

On the other hand, Fr. Anthony Murmu was elected to the Lok Sabha and declared disqualified for the service of the Altar and expelled by his religious Superiors. But even after his term in the Lok Sabha was over, he undauntedly continued his priestly ministry of service to the oppressed. He paid the supreme price when politically backed goondas shot him dead, dismembered his body and gave him a dog’s burial. Only then some priest friends felt compassion, exhumed the body and gave him a Christian burial, although “he died outside the Church”. It is odious enough to mention individual names in a discussion of this intent. But it

serves to drive home a point.

What does a politician like A.K. Anthony miss of priesthood except the privilege to preside over “breaking of bread”? What did elected politicians like Kamaraj Nadar, Morarji Desai or A.K. Gopalan miss of priesthood or even Christian discipleship except the privilege of presiding over “breaking of bread”? Pages of Vatican II have invitations to all of us to study the topics of unbaptized Christians and non-ordained priests.

In popular jargon, politics means elected politics. This is an error. Etymologically politics means science of the service of the people. This involves announcing Good News and denouncing injustice and oppression. In both senses Christ was a politician.

Albert Nolan, in “Jesus before Christianity”, opines that

had Christ lived longer and opportunity lent itself, He would not have declined taking up political leadership of the Jewish nation to accomplish liberation from the slavery of Roman colonization. However, His time had not come and he did not stretch his political activities as to be convicted of treason as to be “deserving death” (LK 23:14).

Could there be a sterner political statement than this: “I have seen the affliction of my people and I have heard their cry..... I know their suffering and I have come down to deliver them” (Exod. 3:7). This is the same God, same Christ, who calls upon priests to act on what they have seen, and heard and urges them to go down to the rescue of those struggling and wriggling under political corruption.

(The writer was an elected MLA of Karnataka Assembly)

A DIVINE OATH THROUGH POLITICS

By ANTONY MELVIN PAUL

A priest is ordained not just to be a mediator between souls and God but also ordained to care for the careless, to represent the oppressed and bring liberty

I am a firm believer that society deserves better, from what it is receiving presently. It is a duty of every individual who is part of this society to always think for the better of his fellow beings and himself. A priest is indeed an integral part of the society; it is just that he has a vocation to serve God through people, like any one of us who have vocations of different profession that we choose.

If there is an individual who thinks he can make a difference and bring to the society what it deserves, that is a better today and a better tomorrow. Should this individual not be a Priest?

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.” (Luke 4:18)

A priest is ordained not just to be a mediator between souls and God but also ordained to care for the careless, to represent the oppressed and bring liberty. We all believe that our politicians who we vote for would provide us with better infrastructure, amenities and eradicate corruption. Does it happen or has it happened? But we still believe. From what I am informed, it is that religious personnel should not part take in political agendas, as politics is not what the church or any religion actually sites in any of its writings, except may be a reference from Mahabharata.

However, I really appreciate the initiative that Fr. Bismarque Dias has taken. We need more such individuals to come forward to lead as this is what we have been taught from the scriptures. If a priest can take a divine oath to protect the people of God through the Church, then why not do it also through politics?

(The writer is former Lecturer of St. Joseph's College of Arts and Science, Bangalore)

GREATER CALLING TO SERVE THE PEOPLE

By TONY D'SILVA

There are enough and more priests in India to take care of the spiritual needs of the faithful while very few are really involved in the area of politics and public policy which affects the majority of the population of all faiths

Fr. Bismarque Dias, or for that matter any Catholic priest, should make his own decision based on his thinking, analysis and deeper/inner spiritual guidance/calling. The fact that he made a vow to the Catholic church (perhaps when he was in his 20's?) should not stand on the way of his inner calling to serve a larger purpose, especially that of the poor and the disadvantaged in his community and polity.

Hats off to Fr. Bismarque if he decides to go ahead and follow a greater calling to serve the people. I say greater, because I think there are enough and more priests in India to take care of the spiritual needs of the faithful (while many are rightly engaged in taking care of the earthly needs - education, healthcare and economic development) and very few are really involved in the area of politics and public policy which affects the majority of the population (of all faiths). We need persons like Fr. Bismarque to make a difference in this area.

I would rephrase the question, “Should a priest be in politics?” to “Should a priest answer the call to serve his people?” The answer to this question will put aside the sectarian and, or may I call a narrow view, of serving the Roman Catholic church and help Fr. Bismarque in his decision to do what he has to as a true follower of Jesus. The real question is: if the priests are supposedly the followers of Christ, what would have Christ done if he were to walk the streets and neighborhoods of Cumberjhuwa constituency?

