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**COMMENTARY : The Pope's abortion comments have provoked confusion. The Curia could have avoided this By Ed Conton**  
(Catholic Herald via CNUA)

Pope Francis (CNS)

The furore caused by *Misericordia et Misera* is a damning indictment of those surrounding the Pope

Pope Francis is not an expert in canon law. I do not think His Holiness would mind me putting it that bluntly. In fact I rather suspect that, given his personal style, he would happily agree. It is far from heresy to point out that a pope might not be a born canonical expert, anymore than it would be unreasonable to suggest that Donald Trump has no particular natural expertise in American constitutional law.

The Pope wears a number of different hats (three, if you take a look at the papal coat of arms) and he is sometimes speaking as a priest, sometimes a teacher, and sometimes as the head of a coherent legal society. The roles are not distinct in how they are exercised, or at least they shouldn't be, and what he does, or wants to do, as one necessarily has a direct impact on the other two. It is the job of those around the Pope to take his instructions and turn them into a statement that is coherent pastorally, legally, and theologically; that's the proper function of all those well-dressed monsignori gliding around the Vatican. Unfortunately they let the side down badly this week and the results have been totally unnecessary confusion.

Yesterday Pope Francis released the apostolic letter [Misericordia et Misera](#). In it he extended the special provision he made for the Year of Mercy which granted every priest the faculty to lift the censure for the grave crime of abortion. That at least was what it should have said. In fact *Misericordia et Misera* stated, as did the original letter for the Year of Mercy, that the Pope was granting all priests "the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion".

Before trying to dispel the confusion which has, predictably and unnecessarily, grown up around it, I want to make one thing perfectly clear: the language of this statement is wrong – simply, avoidably and basically wrong. And while that is enormously frustrating, it is not the end of the world. It is, however, a damning indictment of those around the Pope who seem either unable or unwilling to ensure even a minimum of theological and canonical coherence in some of what is presented for the papal signature.

The Curia's entire purpose is to assist the Pope in putting what he wants into practice, that means when he says "I want every priest to be able to deal with the situation of abortion for the Year of Mercy and beyond", his minions are supposed to swing into action and prepare the necessary text to reflect what is going to actually happen. This is supposed to go somewhat beyond simply pressing \*copy\*, \*paste\*, \*print\* when they get the original memo from the Pope.

While the meaning of what the Pope wrote is pretty easy to guess if you're a canon lawyer, it's legal nonsense in and of itself. So when secular journalists read it and, absent any context for the subject, take the letter at face value, they can be forgiven for (wrongly) assuming that the Pope has changed something regarding the Church's teaching on the sin of abortion.

Actually, even before the Year of Mercy, 99 per cent of priests already had the power to "absolve" the "sin" of abortion. Any priest who has the power to sacramentally forgive sins has the power to forgive all sins (the one exception to this is a priest cannot absolve his accomplice in a sin against the sixth commandment). The only priests who could not "forgive" the "sin" of abortion already were those who have had their faculty to hear confessions revoked and thus can't forgive any sins, except in danger of death.

How the faculty to hear confessions and forgive sins works, in canon law, is like this: a priest gets the “power” to forgive sins through his ordination, but to validly use this power he needs the faculty to exercise it (c. 966 §1). He gets this faculty from the law itself in some circumstances, like in danger of death for the penitent (c. 976), but the normal process is for him to be given the faculty by his bishop for use in the diocese (c. 969 §1). Once he has the faculty from his bishop to hear confessions and forgive sins in his diocese, the law then extends that faculty to apply anywhere in the world (c. 967 §2). In short: if a priest has the faculty to hear confessions and absolve any sins, he can absolve all sins, and if he has the faculty to do this somewhere he can do it anywhere.

This means that the actual effect of the Pope’s concession of the “faculty” to absolve the “sin” of abortion to all priests is to grant them a faculty which 99 per cent of them already have. The one-percenters who don’t have the faculty are those who have not already been given it by their bishop, or have had it revoked; those suspended from ministry, for example. Now it is pretty obvious that this is not what the Pope meant, even if it is what he technically said. So what did he mean to say?

What was supposed to be announced, and what would have been announced had his curial assistants done their job, was the concession of the “faculty” to “remit the censure” for the “delict/crime” of abortion.

While every canonical crime is a sin, not every sin is also a canonical crime, though some of the most serious are. Abortion is, for sure, a grave sin. It is also a delict (c. 1398) which carries the penalty of excommunication. To be clear: there is no such thing as a “reserved sin”, but there are “reserved crimes”. A reserved crime is one where only a person with particular authority can lift the penalty. In the case of abortion, only the ordinary of the territory (the diocesan bishop, for all intents and purposes) can lift the censure, in this case of excommunication. It is common practice for some bishops to give their priests this faculty by delegation, along with the faculty to hear confessions. But, since the faculty to lift the penalty is not extended by the law, as it is with absolving the sin, to cover everywhere, but is limited to the territory of the ordinary, the power to lift the censure does not travel with the priest, even if he has it at home.

Putting it as simply as possible: every priest has the power to forgive any sin, by virtue of his ordination; almost every priest (excepting those denied it for good reason) gets the faculty to exercise this power from his bishop, once he has this power in his home diocese he can use it anywhere; if the bishop also gives him the faculty to lift censures for certain reserved delicts (like abortion) he can only use this when he is physically in his home diocese.

What the Pope is actually doing, and I hope this will be clarified in the not too distant future, is giving all priests (excluding, let’s hope, the suspended ones) the faculty to lift the excommunication, always and everywhere and on their own. He did this first for the the Year of Mercy and is now making it permanent.

The Pope has in no way downgraded or mitigated the severity of the sin of abortion, and effectively ending the reservation of the delict is hardly the disciplinary earthquake some people are assuming it is.

Conversely, neither does the Pope’s letter imply that women who went to Confession and received absolution for the sin of abortion before the Year of Mercy did so invalidly – a tragically avoidable fear which has touched more than a few women today.

While canon law seems very out of fashion in some quarters at the moment, this situation highlights it’s essential service of clarity and precision for the help of the faithful. Those around the Pope would serve him and the Church better by remembering this.

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**GLOBAL : Self-esteem: Biblical or Distracting? by Juliana Weber** (HPRWEB via CNUA) Self-esteem is a relatively modern concept that has been elevated to the point of an all-important virtue by pop psychology, perhaps the virtue in which all others can be found. Christians need to make sense of the word from their own perspective. Does self-esteem matter? Why or why not? How does self-esteem fit into our traditional lists of virtues or vices?

Part of the confusion, no doubt, begins with the scope of the term. Self-esteem is a valuation of one's own abilities and one's worth, as if those things are inseparably related, necessarily rising and falling together.<sup>1</sup> Professionals in the field of psychology have debated for decades whether self-esteem is a construct that actually exists, and if it exists, whether it is the cause of positive correlations like success, happiness, or health. Not surprisingly, the results of various studies are as mixed as the definitions of success, happiness, and health.

However, self-esteem as a concept is not debated outside of academia. It is either revered or mocked with equal flippancy on both sides. As Christians, we stand utterly opposed to valuing persons based on their abilities, so it can be easy for Christians to jettison the whole construct. Nonetheless, I argue that there is value to thinking about self-esteem as it relates to the virtue of charity, though there are also times when talk of self-esteem would merely distract us from faith in God's greatness.

Let's start with a story of an Old Testament man who talks with God about his low self-esteem issue, and we'll listen in as God (very helpfully) scolds him about it. Afterwards, we'll rejoice with a Gospel woman who realizes that focusing on self-esteem, high or low, would merely be a distraction in her situation. Then, we'll examine how and when self-esteem relates to the virtue of charity, making it of deadliest importance. For that last insight, we'll contrast two Gospel stories, one good example and one bad example. Finally, I'll draw out some pastoral implications.

**Low self-esteem gets in the way of doing God's will** - Moses was fairly doubtful about leading the Chosen People out of Egypt. The Lord understood and gave Moses some signs showing that God was speaking to him: a Name for God, a staff that turned into a snake, leprosy and then health restored. Finally, their conversation answered his fears. Moses worried about a lot of things, but he was terrified of public speaking. God promised that He would help Moses speak. Not to worry, God assured him: Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak, and will teach you what to say.<sup>2</sup>

God didn't take my Counseling 101 course. Exasperated, and not even attempting to reflect back Moses' feelings and concerns, God baldly told Moses what to do. That's a big counseling no-no, if you want to help people grow in their sense of mastery over themselves and their lives. In other words, if you have concern for the modern understanding of self-esteem, you don't do what God did.

Feeling like this conversation just needed to end, Moses asked God to send someone else (please). Honestly, he did. I can't believe it either.

God angrily allowed Aaron to do the talking, but Moses had to keep the trick staff to himself.<sup>3</sup>

I retell this for two reasons: 1) God chides Moses for lack of faith in Him, not for lack of self-worth, or lack of confidence in his own abilities, and 2) we can all relate to this story. Moses allowed his low self-esteem to overshadow God's greatness so completely that nothing, not even his faith in God's greatness, could compete. Self-esteem didn't need to be an issue, if only Moses had focused on God. It seems as though Moses had his self-worth tied up in his abilities, a common human experience even outside American culture, which explains why such a broad and confusing term as "self-esteem" is so popular.

This story also seems to illustrate why it's so important in the Christian life to avoid equating one's worth with one's abilities. Abilities may fall short, but it's of paramount importance to keep our self-worth high, right? What good could we do without believing in ourselves? Leaving aside the obvious challenge that narcissism is, the answer is still complicated. We will now witness the great faith of someone who doesn't let self-esteem get in the way, even when her self-worth is directly challenged.

**Self-esteem? What's the big deal?** - Remember the Canaanite woman Jesus likened to a dog?<sup>4</sup> A breath later, Jesus praised the same woman for her great faith, and granted her request because of this reply: "Even dogs eat the scraps that fall from their master's table." Notice that this issue of self-esteem dives directly into the question of whether she's even worth caring about, whether someone, as insignificant as she is, can even approach God with her problems. She responds that it doesn't matter what she's worth, so long as God is great. She implies that what she's asking for is nothing to Jesus, something He won't even miss after nudging it to the floor for her. Following the logic of her response, analysis of her self-esteem would be beside the point. She may or may not be comfortable calling herself a dog—it's left unclear. What matters is that God is the great master of the house, and she's in His "house," otherwise known as "creation."

Imagine how beautiful it would have been had Moses responded with faith like this. Whenever God spoke through Moses, the Israelites could have held Moses' temporarily lucid speech as a sign of the Creator's own words flowing through him. In that way, Moses would have been a more effective speaker. Moses didn't need to esteem his own abilities or worth differently. He needed to fix his attention on God.

We all have faults that embarrass us memorably, sometimes scarring us. It always requires work to accept ourselves, warts and all. Moses' problem is one common to all of humanity. And yet, there are certain situations in which self-esteem may be an obstacle, but not the problem. God doesn't tell Moses to believe in himself. God tells Moses to get past himself, and to believe in the greatness of God, just as this Canaanite woman did.

So, is it possible for Christians merely to forget self-esteem, and to focus on God's greatness at all times in the moral life? Is the search for self-esteem just a modern term for naval-gazing at the expense of loving God and neighbor? I've met Christians who think this is the case. They think self-esteem has no relationship to virtue, and they discredit anyone who uses the word. I think they're making a mistake, too.

Placed in a different situation, the Canaanite woman, who had no problem being called a "dog," might have some problems. It's tough to tell how she really esteemed herself from that quick exchange, but I hope she didn't really judge people as subhuman based on whether they were Jewish, and followed all the Jewish laws and customs from birth.<sup>5</sup> For the sake of argument, though, let's say the Canaanite woman did regard herself as sub-human. How could that be a moral problem for her? Obviously, it wasn't a problem while she was talking to Jesus.

**Esteem: The measuring stick for our love** - Where "esteem" refers to judging a person's value, esteem is about love. For Jesus, each individual person is worth the ultimate sacrifice, the height of love. The fact of being a person determines worth for Him. But there are plenty of less loving ways to judge the worth of a person. We may esteem people based on their usefulness, intelligence, or appearance. And here's the most difficult part to admit: We all have one, and only one, measuring stick that we use on ourselves, our neighbors, and even God.

Many Christians like to think they are hard on themselves, but easy on everyone else. Ultimately, I think that double-standard is incoherent and unstable. (It's usually not true, either, but that's material for another essay.) Even if a double-standard was possible to maintain, it's not allowed by Scripture, so it would hardly be something to brag about. Charitable love for self is at least implied by the commandment that we love others as we love ourselves. Loving ourselves in the proper context—that is, within the context of loving God, above all, and loving His creation for His sake—is a supernatural virtue to cultivate. We will see this through common human experience, as well as two clear Gospel examples, of people who have chosen the rule by which they esteem themselves, and others, as being worthy of love.<sup>6</sup>

**How much are you worth?** At the end of his life, Judas was pretty consistent about how he measured people. He judged people by whether they brought in profit. (I'm guessing that following Jesus was easy money for a while.) If people didn't enrich Judas or, especially, if they might endanger his life, he felt they should go away, or die. When he applied that yardstick to Mary at Bethany, he tried to shame her for her

generosity to Jesus, because he wanted more coins to steal from the money bag.<sup>7</sup> When he applied that rule to Jesus, whose life looked like it would end soon anyway<sup>8</sup>, he literally sold Jesus' life, rather than let anyone else profit from the betrayal. And when he applied the rule to himself, in a rare bout of perspective-taking and regret<sup>9</sup>, he realized that he had cost Jesus His very life, and profited Jesus nothing. This made Judas absolutely unlovable by his own estimation, worse than unforgivable, unworthy of life. The result was a dramatic one, but it was the logical result of his rules.<sup>10</sup>

Compare this profit-centered esteem with the way Jesus esteemed Himself and others. Jesus has a right to our obedience—He's the King—and yet, Jesus doesn't withhold love until we are obedient to Him. He loved the woman at the well while she was still living in sin, and He wanted to give her "living water" right then.<sup>11</sup> Not everyone will appreciate that the "living water" first manifested itself in shedding light on the woman's sins. But that's what she needed in order to live her life to its fullest. She appreciated it so much, she told the whole town about Jesus.

If Jesus is preferential in how He shows His esteem, He does tend to show it toward the most needy—hungry people who might faint if he sends them away to get food; people who have suffered a long time with illnesses or handicaps; people with no friends, and lots of enemies; and sinners drowning in their debt. Why does He favor them? They love Him the most,<sup>12</sup> so He's most welcome there.

Jesus doesn't demand that we be self-sufficient, happy-go-lucky, popular, or even particularly obedient before He offers His love. (Of course, we owe Him obedience and love.) I defy you to find a single criterion for Jesus' esteem or love besides simply encountering Him, and being human, dependent, and needy. As Christians, we can bravely embrace the fact that we're needy, because our neediness brings us signs of God's love.<sup>13</sup>

**Pastoral Implications** - We need to place a "Do Not Enter" sign at the door of our tendency to esteem people based on their abilities. As Christians, we cultivate our abilities because we love God, and His creation. We want to work for the good of all. Love comes before abilities. Abilities are great at helping us show love for one another, but they aren't even a fair measure of how much we love others, much less is it a measure of how well we are loved. It's probably helpful for all Christians to remind themselves of this, since there is a powerful cultural influence to the contrary.

Nonetheless, it's not always in the best interests of the troubled soul crying on your shoulder, the sinner in your confessional, or the congregation hearing your homily, to hear about how loved they are. Similarly, it may not be the best idea to give others encouragement to focus on God's greatness, which isn't always the most needed response in a given situation. We need to hear about both—the way we measure out love, and the faith we place in God. How do you know what this person in this situation calls for? Try to draw out the source of the anxiety, and bear in mind that it might be a confused combination of both problems.

If I fear someone might not be worth the effort to love him/her, then help me ask some hard questions about how I consider as worthy of my love myself, others, and God.

Is Jesus worth dying for? Am I worth forgiving? Judas came up negative on both counts, and I think choosing Jesus' standard consistently is the struggle of a lifetime. It would be wise to find out what standard or measuring stick is in play for this soul, or this congregation, so that the measuring stick being used can be intentionally challenged, and replaced. Jesus loves everyone, without condition, so what condition is this person holding onto?

If my anxiety is about whether or not I can do something, then help me place my focus on God.

**Can I do public speaking? Can I, a mere Canaanite, ask for a miracle?** The Canaanite woman was moved by love for her daughter to beg like a dog for a miracle from Jesus, so I would guess that she had no reservations about whether her daughter was worth the effort. Jesus' challenge comes after she has travelled, and sought Him out publicly. She might have been worried about her ability to persuade Jesus,

so she played the big trump card—flattery. Praising God kept the focus where it belonged in the context of an impossible situation requiring a miracle.

By contrast, Moses's anxiety wouldn't be pacified with the explicit promise of miraculously flowing speech. God wasn't happy with Moses, and wasn't interested in propping up Moses' self-esteem, understood in either sense. God wanted Moses to recognize Him as the Creator.

There is a pastoral distinction between esteeming correctly, and focusing on God's greatness, but the two actions are ultimately inseparable. While different situations may call for different pastoral emphases, remember that it is because we believe in God's greatness that we love. We either affirm both sides of the coin, or we don't really have a grasp of it at all. It is because we want to be Christ-like that we esteem every person as worthy of the ultimate sacrifice. God is great, and God asks us to love. To this end, we need to esteem ourselves and others as beloved creatures, worthy of love without condition.

## REFERENCES :

- Rosenberg, M. (1965) constructed one of the most widely used self-esteem questionnaires, which is available here: [www.norton.com/college/psych/psychsci/media/rosenberg.htm](http://www.norton.com/college/psych/psychsci/media/rosenberg.htm). It was originally published in *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Exodus 4: 11-12.
- Exodus 4: 14.
- Matthew 15: 21 ff.
- Jesus was, it seems, just testing the Canaanite woman's faith, not passing a proclamation about the need to become Jewish before following Him. Otherwise, the Acts of the Apostles is an incoherent follow-up to the Gospels.
- Disclaimer: Most examples aren't clear, so hunt for them at your own peril. Most of the time, we humans don't know what we want, or how we're judging others (and ourselves) to be lovable, and we switch measuring sticks in and out of play based on circumstances like mood, personal triggers, current company, and situational goals. For example, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny Him three times, and then repent. Peter thought he was ready to lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:37), and eventually, he would be. But Peter hadn't come to his definitive crossroads at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. We know he was still having trouble standing up to peer pressure when the argument about Gentiles' circumcision broke out (Gal. 2: 11-14). Peter's definitive crossroads probably came around the time of his own martyrdom. It takes a lot of little decisions and experience to settle us one, final, coherent measuring stick by which we judge ourselves and others worthy of love (or not).
- John 12: 5-6.
- John 11: 53-56.
- Matthew 27: 3 ff.
- The story of raising Lazarus from the dead, just prior to this, makes me wonder how consistent Judas was and how he came to his final decision. The apostles thought Jesus would be killed at Bethany, when Jesus told them that was the next group trip and that Lazarus was dead. Doubting Thomas encouraged his fellow apostles to go along and die with Jesus (John 11:15). Judas was silent.
- Was Judas still undecided about how to esteem people? Or did he have a plan to run with the bag of money, if things got out of hand? It's tough to imagine profit from returning to Bethany, risky as the other apostles saw the trip, but just one chapter later, Judas was loudly concerned with the price of the oil used to anoint Jesus' feet.
- I have a theory that watching Jesus miraculously resuscitate Lazarus made the apostles think no one has to die, dislodging their better intentions. For Judas, perhaps watching Lazarus rise suggested that life following Jesus should be easy and profitable. Perhaps Lazarus was the final wrinkle in the parchment, drawing out the stark contrast between the messiah Judas wanted and the hunted Jesus he followed. All I can say with certainty is that no apostle had made a firm commitment to die alongside Jesus, even if he thought he had.

- John 4: 10.
- E.g. Luke 7: 47.
- 2 Cor. 12: 9-10.

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> > <http://www.hprweb.com/2016/11/self-esteem-biblical-or-distracting/>

**HOMILY : Be Alert and Watchful By Fr. Anthony Kadavil**

(1st Sunday of Advent – November 27, 2016 Is 2:1-5; Rom 13:11-14; Mt 24:37-44 - Vatican Radio via CNUA)



The First Sunday of Advent - RV

President John F. Kennedy was very fond of a particular story which he often used to close his speeches during his 1960 presidential campaign. It is the story of Colonel Davenport, Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives back in the year 1789. One day, while the House was in session, the sky of Hartford suddenly grew dark and gloomy. Some of the Evangelical House representatives looked out the windows and thought this was a sign that the end of the world had come. Uproar ensued, with the representatives calling for immediate adjournment. But Davenport rose and said, "Gentlemen, the Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought." Candles were brought and the session continued. Today's readings contain the same message: we always need to be prepared to

receive Jesus at his second coming by accepting him now as our personal savior and doing now what he has commanded us to do.

**Introduction:** The readings in the early Sundays of Advent always carry forward the "end of the world" theme from the last Sundays of the previous year, the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time and the Feast of Christ the King, the 34th and final Sunday of the Liturgical year. This links each ending year with the one following it. Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the "Sunday of Hope" in God and His Son, Jesus Christ, through whom God has promised to save and redeem His people. Today we begin our yearly re-enactment of the drama of our salvation, starting with the mystery of the Incarnation (Christmas) and culminating in the celebration of Christ's ultimate victory (Christ the King). It is our yearly pilgrimage through the scenes and events of our history of salvation. Advent is a time for looking both backward and forward. We look backward as we prepare to celebrate the historical birth of Jesus. At the same time, we look forward to his Second Coming, as we prepare ourselves to welcome him into all areas of our lives during the Advent season. In the Eucharistic Acclamation we profess our faith in Jesus' Second Coming: "We proclaim Your Death, O Lord, and profess Your Resurrection until You come again"; and in the Creed we proclaim our belief that "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." One Bible scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament and 318 references in the New Testament. We see the traditional signs of Advent in our Church: violet vestments and hangings, dried flowers on the altar, and the Advent wreath. We light a candle on this wreath each Sunday until all four are lit. These signs remind us that we are waiting for the rebirth of Jesus in our hearts and lives in love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

**In the first reading,** Isaiah (2:1-5) reports his vision of all nations gathering on Mount Zion, as described also by Micah (4: 1-3), using the image of pilgrimage. The prophet looks forward to the time when the Covenant between God and His people will be extended to all people, and the Temple in Jerusalem will be the worshipping place for all mankind, so that all may live in peace and harmony with God and their fellow-humans. In the late eighth century BC, God's people were already divided into a northern kingdom called Israel, and a southern kingdom known as Judah. Israel had fallen under Assyrian rule, while Judah and its capital Jerusalem were in danger of being conquered by Babylon. In the vision of Isaiah, however, Judah is shown as the place to which all nations will come for "instructions in righteous living." (Zion in Jerusalem was the holy mountain where Solomon's Temple had stood). The result will be universal peace. The Lord will mediate all disputes among nations, and "they shall beat their swords into plowshares." The prophet reveals to his audience the radical notion that God might love other nations in addition to Judah. The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 122) is a joyous hymn originally meant to be sung as pilgrims journeyed to Jerusalem, the site of the Temple, the dwelling place of God on earth. As we sing the Psalm today, it invites us to look longingly toward Christmas, the feast that celebrates the Incarnation of God among us.

**The second reading** (Romans 13:11-14) is Paul's exhortation to the Roman Christians showing them how to bring about Isaiah's vision of peace. Because of its concentration on the Parousia, or the Second Coming of Jesus, the Christian community was neglecting its actual day-to-day duties. The Jewish Christians among them lived according to the Law of Moses, a moral code which even pagans admired. But the Gentile Christians were not yet fully free from the "orgies, drunkenness, promiscuity and lust" of their pagan days. Hence, Paul advises them: "Conduct yourselves properly." He warns them against "orgies and drunkenness...promiscuity and lust." He condemns their "rivalry and jealousy" and advises them to get ready to meet Jesus at his Second Coming. Paul believes that Jesus' Second Coming will be a day of salvation only for those who are already acting in a proper manner. We, too, must act as pilgrims, entering wholeheartedly into our yearly pilgrimage through salvation history, leaving behind whatever might hinder our progress, and accepting whatever hardships our journey might entail.

**Exegesis:** The context: Matthew's audience was mostly made up of Jewish converts to Christianity. These Christians were ridiculed and ostracized by their Jewish friends who had not accepted Christ as the Messiah, and they wondered why some Jews were selected to become Christians and others not. To clear their doubts, Matthew quotes Jesus in today's Gospel, suggesting the apparently arbitrary nature of the election on the last day. Just as at the time of the Deluge, Noah and his small family were spared

while others perished, so shall it be at "the end." The emphasis on the unpredictability of election may have helped Matthew's Jewish Christian audience to deal with the fact that many of their fellow-Christians were recently despised Gentiles. This apocalyptic section of Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple, and goes on to Christ's Second Coming, and the signs preceding both. Jesus answers the disciples by giving them signs of the end of the age (24:3-8), foretelling persecutions (24:9-14), and recalling the sacrilege prophesied by Daniel (24:15-28). Jesus also tells the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (24:32-35), in which he warns his disciples to be alert and prepared.

**The need for preparedness:** The consistent warning in today's Gospel text is that we should be prepared for the coming of the master. Our text indicates that the end will seem to be a peaceful and normal time, with people eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and working in their homes or businesses. In this routine normal life, it might be easy to forget the "coming of the Son of Man." In a reference to the story of Noah, Jesus says that the sin of the people was placing too much emphasis on the normal cares and necessities of life. They were too concerned with eating and drinking – just as we are during the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's holidays. Jesus reminds us that there is something more important than feasts or weddings: the Son of Man will come to us unexpectedly, either at our death or at the end of the world, and that could be at any moment. Since God will show up without an appointment, we must be prepared at all times.

**The "Rapture."** The reading from Romans contains a disputed reference to the so-called "rapture," an event in which, it is supposed, some people will be taken up from life on earth directly into the air to meet the returning Christ. This concept of "dispensationalism," proposed by Rev. Nelson Darby an Irish Anglican lawyer -pastor in A.D. 1800, is a misinterpretation, however. The belief in the Rapture is rooted in the fourth and fifth chapters of 1 Thessalonians, which are placed into an elaborate chronology of "end-time" events based on other passages from Revelation, Daniel, and Matthew 24. In this scheme, the Rapture was called the "day of the Lord" which would come like "a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2). After this secret removal of believers would come the rise of the Antichrist and the placement of the "Mark of the Beast" on his followers during seven years of Tribulation. At the end of those seven years, the second coming of Christ and Armageddon, the final battle between good and evil, would take place. The passage in Matthew (24:40-41), does, indeed, talk about some people being "taken" and some being "left behind," but the word for "taken" (paralambanomai) means, not "to go up" but rather "to go along with." It isn't a magical word about the "born again and saved" people floating up in the air as many of our Protestant brothers believe. It is much more like Jesus' words to the apostles by the Sea of Galilee: "follow me" or "come along with me."

**We need to be alert even while we work:** The man working in the field and the woman working at the mill will be "left", because they won't leave their work. True enough – work is important. We need to provide food and shelter for ourselves and our families. But there is something more important than our work: the coming of the Son of Man. God will arrive unexpectedly. We don't know when a thief might break into our house, so we are prepared for him at all times. We lock our doors and windows. We leave a light on when we're gone. We put in an alarm system. We insure our possessions. We do these things now because a thief could come at some unknown time. Hence, even during this busy Christmas season we must keep our daily life centered on Christ.

**How do we prepare for the unexpected coming of the Son of Man?** In Jesus' parable, we have an example of the proper and improper methods of waiting. The faithful slave who, with sincerity and good management, has faithfully carried out his master's instructions to ensure the welfare of his fellow-slaves (20:26-27), is always ready for his master's coming. In contrast, the wicked servant is primarily concerned with power, food and drink. The master is the image for Jesus. To be prepared for his coming (Matt. 24:3, 36-43), we must be obedient to the Divine will, which means that our actions must serve the community. The question we might ask is: "Am I being faithful and wise in caring for others while waiting for Christ's return?" The text reminds us that our preparation for the Incarnation of our Lord is only one aspect of our Advent preparation, and not necessarily the most important. Let us remind ourselves of our

need to be prepared for our Lord's return in judgment without "doomsday paranoia" on the one hand or complacency on the other.

### **Life messages:**

**1) An Advent project: How to be alert and watchful in the spirit of today's Gospel.** Every morning when we get up, let us pray, "Lord, show me someone today with whom I may share your love, mercy and forgiveness." St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa), once said, "Whatever you do in your family, for your children, for your husband, for your wife, you do for Jesus." Every night when we go to bed, let us ask ourselves, "Where have I found Christ today?" The answer will be God's Advent gift to us that day. By being alert and watchful, we'll be getting an extra gift: Christ himself. There is a saying about being saved which goes back to St. Thomas Aquinas: "Without God, I can't. Without me, He won't."

**2) We need to be wakeful and watchful:** We are so future-oriented that we frequently forget the present entirely. We spend too much time trying to protect ourselves against future misfortunes. We save for a rainy day, to get married, to buy a home, to send the children to college, to retire in comfort and to protect ourselves against future misfortunes with varieties of insurance. But we need to be more spiritually wakeful to prepare for our eternal life. Let us make this Advent season the time of such preparation.

There was this very strong woodcutter who asked for a job with a timber merchant and got it. The wages the timber merchant paid were really good and so were the work conditions. For that reason the woodcutter was determined to do his best. His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he was supposed to work. The first day the woodcutter brought 18 trees. "Congratulations! the boss said "go on that way." Very motivated by the words of the boss, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but he could only bring 15 trees. The third day he tried even harder but brought only 10 trees. Day after day he was bringing less and less trees. "I must be losing my strength," the woodcutter thought. He went to the boss and apologized, saying he could not understand what was going on. "When was the last time you sharpened your axe? The boss asked. "Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees.." - We may have been busy with so many things, we may have neglected our spiritual life. Like the axe that needs sharpening, we also need to sharpen our spirit. Let us sharpen our spirit this Advent by becoming more loving, more prayerful, more compassionate, more generous and more faithful. Life is not about finding yourself! Life is about recreating yourself! Advent is God's marvelous gift to all of us. Let this season unfold slowly and nicely. (John Pichappilly in The Table of the Lord; quoted by Fr. Botelho).

**Source: Homilies of Fr. Anthony Kadavil**

[http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/11/22/1st\\_sunday\\_of\\_advent\\_%E2%80%93\\_november\\_27,\\_2016/273970](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/11/22/1st_sunday_of_advent_%E2%80%93_november_27,_2016/273970)

**HOMILY : To build peace on earth By Deacon Mike Ellerbrock (CNS via CNUA)**

First Sunday of Advent Cycle A. Readings: 1) Isaiah 2:1-5 Psalm 122:1-9 2) Romans 13:11-14 Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44

Noah's neighbors were so engrossed in celebrating their good fortune that they were caught unprepared for the calamity of the Flood. Had they invited the less-fortunate villagers, perhaps the party may have ended in joy. Historically, lack of economic opportunity has led to civil wars and international conflicts, including terrorism. Hence, our economic choices involve ethical dimensions, moral issues and global challenges. Let us beware: Poverty remains a scourge invoking God's wrath. Today, 3 billion people (about one-third of humanity) live in "poverty," on less than \$2.50 per person per day. Half of those people are perpetually stuck in "extreme poverty," living on less than \$1.25 per person per day. The dollar distinction reflects the desperate reality that extremely poor people cannot save any money at all and thus are unable to invest in their children's future. The amount of money necessary to lift those 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty equals only 0.7 percent of world gross domestic product, an amount equivalent to only four days of military spending by all nations! To build peace on earth, converting a few swords into plowshares appears to be a no-brainer.

For another frame of reference, consider the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations in September 2000. Signed by the U.S. and 190 other nations, the goals commit each nation to allocate 0.7 percent of their annual income for official development aid to the poorest countries. Note that's 0.7 percent -- not 70 percent or 7 percent of our nation's annual wealth. It is only seven-tenths of 1 percent! So, is America a generous country? Yes and no. In absolute dollars, we donate more money in development aid than any other nation, yet we are also the biggest laggard in meeting our millennium goals commitment. In 2015, the U.S. has contributed only 0.17 percent of our national income in development aid. That is about one-fourth of our official pledge. Though generous, we could do a lot better.

Advent is a time of spiritual reckoning. If the Christ child was welcomed by Magi from the East with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, is it not time to reverse the flow of wealth to feed his hungriest children? QUESTION: For the sake of our poorest neighbors, can we not reduce military spending by four days to welcome our infant Creator and Savior into his kingdom? SCRIPTURE TO BE ILLUSTRATED: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares." -- Isaiah 2:4. > > > <http://www.catholicnews.com/>

**INDIA : Remembering Sister Valsa: 'Now we feel orphaned' By Saji Thomas** (Global Sisters Report via CNUA)

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Kavalakatt, left, with Sonia Dehri and Suraj Muni Hembrom in Pachuwara, eastern India, remember Sister Valsa John. (GSR photo / Saji Thomas)

Five years ago Sr. Valsa John Malamel was killed in a remote eastern Indian village. The tribal people among whom she had worked say they feel orphaned even now. "We are in a miserable condition as there is no one now to help us," says Sonia Dehri, who was associated with the slain nun's efforts to protect the land and rights of tribal people in Jharkhand state from heavy coal-mining interests. Malamel, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary congregation, was hacked to death by a throng of men at about 11 p.m. on November 15, 2011, inside her small hut in Pachwara village in the center of the Santhali tribal region. She was 53. Malamel had drawn anger for spearheading a public movement against the PANEM Coal Mines Ltd. project, which displaced thousands of Santhal tribal families in Pachwara and its surrounding villages, Dehri says. The nun had worked to restore the rights and dignity of illiterate villagers in 15 years of struggle, he adds. Malamel's struggle and murder drew worldwide media attention. Her story has become a touchstone for the [impact of mining in eastern India](#) where illiterate tribal people without means join the "mining mafia" that takes payments from mining companies to counter protests and engages in a black market for coal. Left bereft are the villagers, who routinely, whenever they faced disease or family problems, went to Malamel first before going to the hospital or the police, Dehri recalls. "Now, we feel orphaned," he says. In October 2015, a trial court sentenced 16 young tribal men accused of murdering Malamel to life imprisonment. However, an appellate court granted bail to all but one, allowing them to move freely in the villages. The appeal disputes the murder convictions because the men's names were not included in the original police report, although they were later added after witnesses came forward.

Sr. Valsa John Malamel talking to villagers. (Courtesy of Thomas Kavalakatt)

But Malamel's associates, villagers and Jesuit Fr. Thomas Kavalakatt, who helped procure witnesses for the trial, expressed certainty that the young men were bribed by company operatives with money and liquor to eliminate the sister. No official PANEM employees were arrested. The company did not respond to an email request for comment. But the motives for Malamel's murder overlap. PANEM filed suits against her when she organized public protests of mining on tribal lands. She later negotiated that the villagers get a share of the mine's profits, a rarity among extraction operations on indigenous lands. During an expansion of mining in the area in 2011, when Malamel was tending her dying brother out of

state, word among the locals was that the company was going to bar her return to the village. She came back despite the warning; she was murdered a week later. Today the mines are closed. The company wound up its operation following a Supreme Court order in September 2014 after it was found the mining license was obtained through illegal means. The immediate reason for Malamel's death, however, may have pertained to her insistence on getting a rape case registered with police. The victim was Malamel's friend, who was attacked during the sister's absence. The victim and her family were denied the right to file a police report. When Malamel returned, she and the victim tried again, to no avail. She then contacted the highest authority in the district, who agreed to meet with her and the victim on November 16, 2011. Malamel was murdered the night before the appointment. The accused rapist was among the 16 convicted in her slaying and remains in prison. The sister's tragic death ended all welfare activities in the villages "as no one was willing to take her place, fearing backlash from those who got her eliminated," Dehri told *Global Sisters Report*. He and other villagers say they are frightened by the presence of Malamel's assassins among them. Her closest supporters, in particular, fear a backlash if they openly speak about the case. An attempt to photograph the mine for this story was abandoned as one of the convicted murderers out on bail watched and drank with a group at the roadside. A few villagers, such as Dehri, mustered courage to talk about the nun they call "Didi" (pronounced DEEdee, meaning "elder sister"). Munshi Hembrom, owner of the house where Malamel lived, said that immediately after the murder the killers made threats of dire consequences "if we had told their names to the police." His house is just a few meters from Malamel's small house, which they now preserve as a monument in her memory.

The house in Pachuwara where Sr. Valsa John Malamel lived. (GSR photo / Saji Thomas)

**The night of the murder** - Suraj Muni Hembrom (Hembrom is a common surname in the village), one of Malamel's aides and an eyewitness to her murder, recalls how some 40 men armed with axes, knives and bows forced their way into the nun's home in the middle of the night. "They searched for Didi and found her standing in the corner helplessly. They tried to pull her out but she resisted. They then slashed her with a long knife. She died on the spot," Suraj Muni Hembrom, 26, recalls. Munshi Hembrom says that the villagers were worried about the nun's life and had deputized three young men to keep guard outside her home at night and accompany her wherever she went, even in a group of 25. (In the past, Malamel had sought and been denied police protection after regularly receiving death threats.) "On the fateful day, the culprits took away the youths at gunpoint," he recounts, adding that the young guards were let go after the incident. After murdering Malamel, the attackers left some flyers in her room to give the impression that anti-government Maoist rebels had killed her. He says his family has not overcome the shock of the murder. Kavalakatt, the local priest, has noticed a "perceived threat to everyone who had defied the culprits' warning and gave witness in the court." Even the 66-year-old Catholic priest is on the killers' radar since it was he who had encouraged the villagers to testify in court. "The witnesses had initially refused to cooperate with the police investigation, fearing for their lives," he told *GSR*. Kavalakatt's efforts to ensure justice to Malamel led to the court verdict.

PANEM coal mine before it was closed, seen in 2011. (Matters India photo / John Mathew)

**'A special love' for the people** - Kavalakatt worked with Malamel since 1993. He recalls that the nun had "a special love" for those at the bottom of Indian society. "They live a primitive life in the remote hilly terrains and forest villages with little connectivity to the world outside." Modernity started making inroads after it was discovered the area has huge reserves of coal, bauxite, iron ore and other minerals, he said. The government encourages mining operations and has set a national target of doubling coal production to 1.5 billion metric tons by 2020. Protests at sites in India, [some leading to fatalities](#), are not uncommon. The mines began displacing tribal people who had survived by seasonal farming in the forest. Malamel knew the villagers would not make it once they were removed from their usual environment, and she tried to protect their lives and livelihood. She had quit a teaching job in Kerala, southern India, to join the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary in 1984 because she wanted to serve the poor. She was born on February 19, 1958, as the youngest of six children in a Kerala Catholic family. Kavalakatt says the real

turning point in Malamel's life came in 1998, when she accidentally met a Geological Survey of India team during one of her village visits. She was then teaching in a school managed by her congregation and used to visit villages after school hours. When the geological team told her that they had come to acquire land for a coal mine, she sensed a great threat to the indigenous people, Kavalakatt recalls. She mobilized people against the proposed mining project. She requested that her congregation free her to work fully for the tribal people. The superiors agreed and she moved to Pachwara in 1998.

Sr. Valsa John Malamel talking to villagers in Pachwara. (Courtesy of Thomas Kavalakatt)

However, the congregation seemed to forget her after she moved out of the convent and did not support her until her death, Kavalakatt says. Even after her death, the congregation has done little to preserve her memorial, her supporters say. Munshi Hembrom, owner of Malamel's house, says nobody from the congregation has visited the villagers since Malamel died. The congregation's Ranchi provincial Sr. Lilly Pallipurathu told GSR that they did appreciate Malamel's work. "It was a special call, and she did so much for the poor, which nobody would have done." However, Pallipurathu admits that there was some disconnect with the congregation, and Malamel "worked independently without consulting the superiors." The congregation "had given her the option to leave it but she did not leave and, hence, she will continue to be a member of our congregation," the provincial says, adding they remember Malamel and pray for her. Malamel found acceptance among the tribal people. In her quest to become one with them, Kavalakatt says, Malamel gave up the comforts of a convent life and moved into a small hut with no toilet, "which is unimaginable for a nun today." "We never felt she was any different from us," says the landlord. "She lived a very humble life with no possession other than one pair of clothes," he recalls. She survived on the grains and vegetables the villagers provided. She dressed like tribal women, wearing a dhoti (loin cloth), blouse and a shawl that covered her from neck to knees.

Suraj Muni Hembrom, one of Malamel's aides and an eye witness to her murder, stands inside the nun's room where there is a small memorial. (GSR photo / Saji Thomas)

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Kavalakatt was a long term associate of Sr. Valsa John Malamel. (GSR photo / Saji Thomas)

**Activist for the indigenous** - Malamel's main struggle was against PANEM, a [joint venture](#) of Eastern Minerals & Trading Agency in Kolkata and the Punjab State Electricity Board, [to extract coal to make electricity](#) in Punjab in northern India, explains Kavalakatt. Kavalakatt says he had witnessed Malamel's fighting spirit in 1993 when she fought to protect a hill tribe at Kodarma, Sahibganj district. "Although she did not know the Santhali language, she mingled with the women from day one," the priest recalls. In Pachwara, she began organizing women and sending children to school as she opposed the coal mine. Her efforts took on an air of civil disobedience. In one instance, she organized a village blockade against PANEM and government officials. Kavalakatt says the mining officials tried to break her hold over the people by enticing some village youth with jobs and money. "The firm, with the help of police, began to arrest and send people to jail on fake charges. The police registered seven criminal cases against Malamel," the priest recalls. She lost a case against the mine officials in appellate court, prompting her to seek a compromise with them. Malamel entered into an agreement with the mining firm in 2006, ending an eight-year impasse. The firm agreed to compensate villagers, resettle them in the area, build new houses and facilities, offer free education and medical care, and return the land as farmable after they mined it. The mining started in the same year, but locals say the company did not fulfill its promises. As she set her mind on getting the agreement implemented, her efforts further irritated the company agents, who looked for a chance to get rid of her, say Kavalakatt and villagers who were interviewed and asked not to be identified. She went to Kerala for three months in July 2011 to nurse her elder brother who was dying from cancer. During that time, to turn the villagers against her, the mine officials "spread false stories that she had left for good and would never return. They also accused her of decamping with public money," the priest explains, rumors that were never substantiated.

Sr. Valsa John Malamel with village girls. (Courtesy of Thomas Kavalakatt)

When Kavalakatt heard talk at the market that mine officials planned to bar Malamel from re-entering the village, he notified her. Malamel, missing her people, defied the threat and returned on November 7, 2011. The nun herself knew what might await her. [She said in an interview](#) with *The Globe and Mail* in Toronto that summer, "If I go home, most probably they will kill me. But her decision at the same time to take on a group of men involved in the rape may have hastened her death. The accused rapist, his family and associates pressured police not to act on the case and resolve it outside the law to avoid prosecution, the priest, Dehri and Munshi Hembrom say. But when Malamel persisted in pursuing it, and the November 16 appointment with the high-level authority was set, the flames were fanned. She was slain the night before. Hundreds, including 30 or 40 from her congregation, attended her funeral at St. Paul Cathedral, in Dumka diocese, about 40 miles from where she was killed. She is buried in the cathedral cemetery.

**Missing Didi** - Suraj Muni Hembrom remains inconsolable that their "protective shield" has gone. "If Didi were alive, she would have found solutions for all our problems," she says. One of the problems is lack of education for children. "More than 350 children have left school as no one is there to teach them," she laments. The village school does not function because it lacks staff and other facilities. "Didi used to teach our children," says a village woman who did not want to be named. Suraj Muni Hembrom says the village women had drawn inspiration from Malamel, who "motivated us to stand on our feet whenever attempts were made to take away our rights." The nun had even slept under trees in the forest, tired after conducting awareness camps around the clock. "Now we have no one to speak for us," she bemoans. Dehri says they want to keep Malamel's memory alive by developing her hut as a martyr's memorial. "But it is not possible as there is no one to support us," he says. The sister's impact on those in Pachwara is palpable and lasting. Says her landlord: "We cannot forget our Didi in this life."

The room where Sister Valsa slept. (GSR photo / Saji Thomas)

**Saji Thomas** is a freelance journalist based in Bhopal, a central Indian city. He has worked for several mainstream newspapers such as *The Times of India*. This article is part of a collaboration between GSR and [Matters India](#), a news portal started in March 2013 to focus on religious and social issues in India. > > <http://globalsistersreport.org/news/equality/remembering-sister-valsa-now-we-feel-orphaned-43381>

**THAILAND : King Bhumibol was a defender of human rights and religions** By Weena Kowitwanij Bangkok (AsiaNews via CNUA)

Photo Courtesy - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2016/oct/14/thailand-mourns-death-king-bhumibol-adulyadej-in-pictures#img-2>

His Majesty led a life in accordance with democracy, a model that reflects the teachings of Jesus Christ about love and mercy, justice and the commitment of everyone to the common good," writes Mgr Philip Banchong Chaiyara, president of the Committee for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand (CBCT), in a message issued on Human Rights Day, celebrated on 20 November by the local Church. The bishop mentioned King Bhumibol Adulyadej who died on 3 October, who in his 70 years of reign "stressed the importance of the public good, regardless of differences in race, religion, political belief and social status." The king, the message goes on to say, "was concerned with social problems and appealed to political parties to be honest in conducting their business, in governance, and in doing their duty for the good of all." Human development carried out by giving priority to the person, based on a self-sufficient economy, on the principle of seeking useful innovations for all, writes Mgr

Chaiyara, "is the centerpiece of the encyclical of Blessed Pope Paul VI, who wrote about how to develop the nation by placing each person at the centre, whilst respecting their dignity." The bishop noted that King Bhumibol was always a champion of religious freedom, "the patron saint of all faiths." "He extended education opportunities to the disadvantaged and realised that everyone has the right to earn a living and be safe," the message reads. "For this reason, he supported agriculture, the stability of food prices, and public health." On the day the Catholic Church celebrates human rights, "I am without words for the great loss of the beloved king of all Thai and Thai Catholics," Mgr Chaiyara writes. Thailand will mark Human Rights Day on 10 December, Constitution Day. Also on that date, in 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

> > > <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/For-Thai-Bishops.-King-Bhumibol-was-a-defender-of-human-rights-and-religions-39207.html>

**ROME : Francis did not renew terms of Burke, Pell on worship congregation** By Joshua McElwee (NCR Online via CNUA)

Cardinal Raymond Burke talks with Cardinal George Pell, before Pope Francis' celebration of Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican June 29.  
(CNS/Paul Haring)

The Vatican office that handles affairs relating to the Catholic church's liturgical practices has confirmed that Pope Francis has decided not to renew the terms of several of its bishop-members, many of whom are known for preferring a more traditionalist practice of liturgy. Francis had appointed 27 new bishops to serve as members of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on Oct. 28. But the announcement of the appointments did not make clear whether the previous members' terms had been renewed. The congregation has now posted a full list of its current membership [on its website](#). The list makes clear the pope did not renew the terms of 16 congregation members, including those of U.S. Cardinal Raymond Burke, Australian Cardinal George Pell, and the head of the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet. Each of the Vatican congregations is made up of cardinal and bishop members, who frequently travel to Rome to help the offices in their work.

The worship congregation's confirmation of its current membership was first reported [by The Tablet](#). According to the online list, the congregation now has 40 members. It had previously had 31.

Among the new members of the congregation appointed by Francis are:

- Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin;
- Abuja, Nigeria Cardinal John Onaiyekan;
- Quebec, Canada Cardinal Gerald Lacroix;
- Melbourne, Australia Archbishop Denis Hart;
- Paterson, N.J., Bishop Arthur Serratelli;
- Archbishop Piero Marini, president of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses and who previously for twenty years as the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments is led by Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah. Its second-in-command is English Archbishop Arthur Roche.

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> > > <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/vatican-confirms-removal-burke-pell-worship-congregation>

**SRI LANKA : Hundreds of displaced people still without a home** By Melani Manel Perera Colombo (AsiaNews via CNUA) Hundreds of the families took to the streets in Colombo to reiterate their right to a home. They were affected by a huge fire in June that swept the Salawa army base, east of the capital, damaging more than 2,000 houses and shops. The so-called Salawa victims gathered in front of Fort Railway Station and demanded that their situation be solved soon. Protesters complain that after five months and many promises, many of those affected by the fire are still forced to live in houses rented by the government and have not received adequate compensation for their losses. On 5 June, fire broke out on the army base and spread to the munitions depot, causing explosions felt within a radius of several kilometres. The debris caused extensive damage. So far the military have repaired about a thousand homes that suffer minor damage. "Compensation is handed by the district administration," said military spokesman Brigadier Roshan Senevirathna. "The government has not paid what they promised us," replied Hemantha Priyankara Rodrigo, head of the victims' group. "Some people have received some money for homes, but no compensation for tools and furniture that were completely destroyed. " Senarathne, another resident, complains that his home structure "had 17 pillars and I will never be able to rebuild it as it was." According to the owners of other businesses, the damage assessments by the authorities do not reflect the true market value of the properties but are lower by "at least 30 per cent". Athula Parana Yapa, a local businessman, reports that more than 250 local workers have lost their jobs. What is more, "I paid millions of rupees in taxes and insurance," he noted, "and so far I have not had any compensation." > > > <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Hundreds-of-displaced-people-still-without-a-home-after-blasts-rocketed-the-Salawa-army-base-39211.html>

**U. S. : Church must reconcile divisions post-Trump** By Christopher Lamb, Vatican city (Vatican Insider via CNUA)

Joseph W. Tobin (Photo source: Archdiocese of Indianapolis)

**Cardinal-elect Tobin also says Pope's teaching on family cannot be reduced to "yes or no" answers**

The Church has an important role in helping to heal the divides of Trump's United States, according to new American cardinal-elect Joseph Tobin. He also believes that Amoris Laetitia, Pope Francis's document on the family cannot be reduced to black and white answers, but is instead designed to help Catholics in their real-life difficulties. In [an interview with The Tablet](#) the Archbishop of Indianapolis - who the Pope has recently appointed to lead the Archdiocese of Newark - says the Church to promote reconciliation and welcome migrants. The cardinal also gave his reaction to a letter to the Pope from US Cardinal Raymond Burke and three other cardinals criticising Francis for spreading confusion with Amoris Laetitia, which opens the possibility of giving communion to divorced and remarried Catholics. The text, written following two gatherings of the world's bishops held in 2014 and 2015, urges a less rigid but more understanding approach from the Church to those in relationships that fall short of traditional Catholic teaching. It has, however, been fiercely resisted by some conservatives with Cardinal Burke accusing the Pope of "teaching error" and threatening to make a "formal act of correction." In their letter to Francis the cardinals - including Joachim Meisner, retired leader of Cologne, Carlo Caffarra, retired leader of Bologna, and Walter Brandmüller, formerly in charge of the Vatican's historical sciences committee - are calling on the Pope to answer a series of questions, known in Latin as dubia. These require a "yes or no" answer and Francis so far has not replied. Below is an excerpt of the interview with Cardinal-elect Tobin.

**The election of Donald Trump as president was a big shock to some people. What should the role of the Church be in the United States post-Trump?** "I was out of the country for 20 years, and I came back and found a much greater degree of polarisation within American society, and a polarisation that always risks seeping into the Church as well. And I found that shocking and distressing. I think one of the principal missions of the Church in the United States is to be an agent of healing that promotes the common good, and unity in diversity. That's always been a hallmark of the American Church, because

American Catholics all came from some place else. If we forgot that as American Catholics, on the day of judgment it will not be Jesus who condemns us, it will be our grandparents, because we forgot. This election enhanced the sense of polarisation - pitting groups against each other. In the wake of that election I feel the mission of the Church is even more crucial, not simply to be faithful to the Gospel but to help our nation preserve the best of its traditions.

**We saw this week four cardinals - one from the United States - challenge the Pope with a letter concerning Amoris Laetitia. To them it is a break with Church teaching. How do you**

**see AmorisLaetitia and how do you see those concerns?** Amoris Laetitia cannot simply be reduced to a question of 'yes or no' in a specific pastoral situation. First, the Holy Father is capturing the work of two synods so if four cardinals say that two synods were wrong, or that somehow the Holy Father didn't reflect what was said in two synods I think that should be questioned. Because he believes what he published is rooted deeply in that reflection which was not an easy reflection. I was not a member of that synod but reading the documents and knowing a little about the participants, I realise it was not an easy reflection, but you are dealing with difficult pastoral questions. But just to simply reduce it to a "dubium" I think is at best naive.

**How do you see Francis' vision for the Church?** Francis' vision for the Church is a Church that goes beyond itself, that looks out of itself. And he had that very graphic image that he proposed here before the conclave in 2013 when he said 'the Church that becomes self-referential, becomes sick,' and I think that's entirely true. I suppose it's analogous to the trivia question: what is the deadest place on earth? And the deadest place on earth is arguably the Dead Sea. And it isn't that it doesn't get a lot of nice water from the highlands of Galilee but the water doesn't go anywhere, it stays contained and it becomes fetid and dies. I think what Francis wants to make sure is that all the wonderful gifts that the Word of God and the Catholic tradition gives to the Church, goes some place. And where he wants it to go is to some of the deadest places on earth, which are the margins of society. It's that vision of Ezekiel, 'I saw water and it was flowing' and that water, it flowed to the east. Not for the reason that orient folk sometimes use but because it was going to the Dead Sea, that's where it ends up. And it turns the Dead Sea fresh. I think Francis dreams with Ezekiel of a Church that does that.

> > > <http://www.lastampa.it/2016/11/18/vaticaninsider/eng/inquiries-and-interviews/church-in-the-united-states-must-reconcile-divisions-posttrump-Pv1J1kRAQQD1HXJ8mndnAM/pagina.html>

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