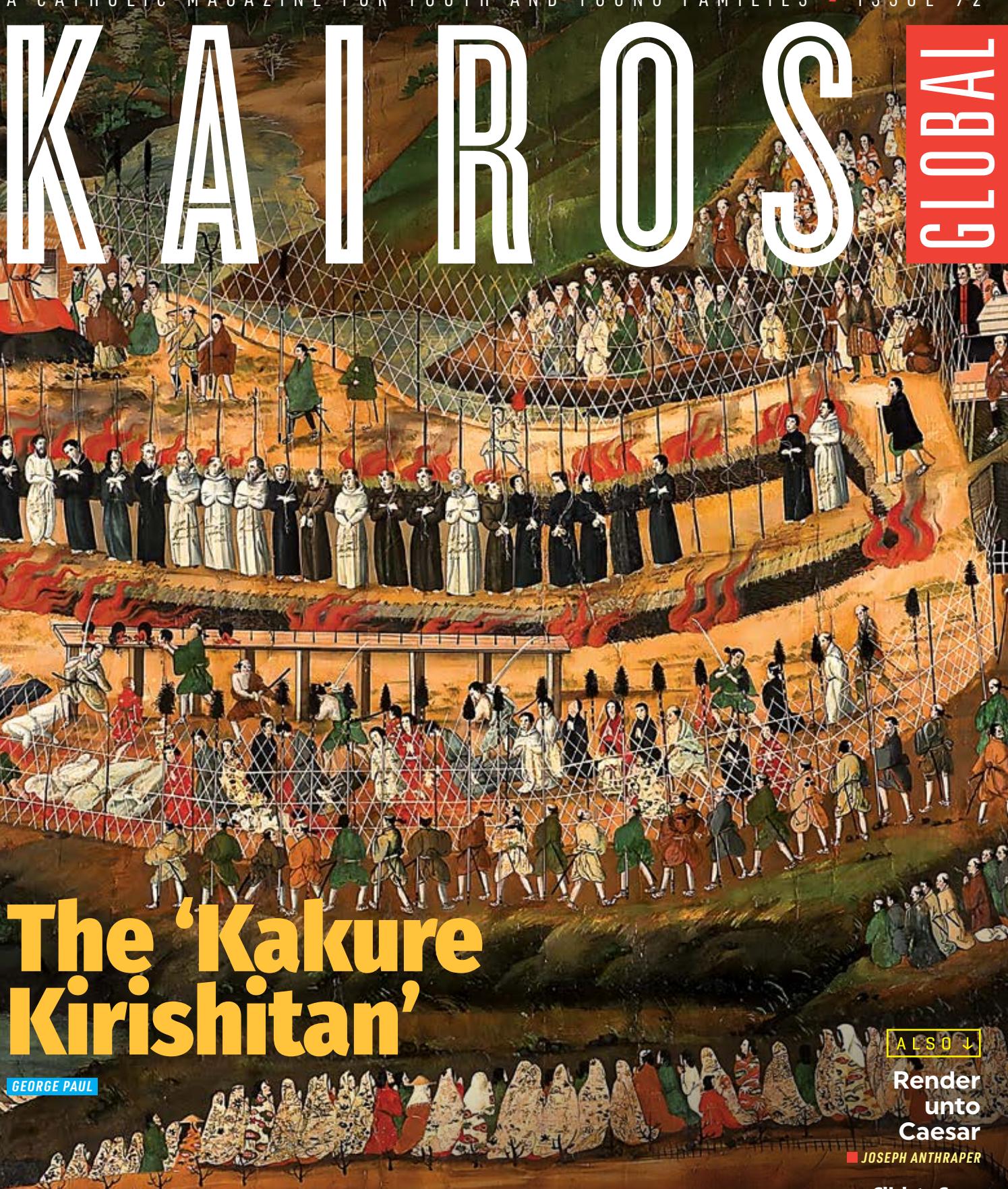


# KAIROS

GLOBAL



## The 'Kakure Kirishitan'

GEORGE PAUL

ALSO ↓

Render unto Caesar

JOSEPH ANTHRAPER

Click to Care,  
Click to Change

FR JIJO JOSE  
MANJACKAL MSFS



Jesus Youth

A Missionary Movement At The Service Of The Church



## MARY, MY MOTHER



Mary, most holy Virgin and Queen of Martyrs, into thy heart, pierced by so many swords, do thou welcome my poor soul. Receive it as the companion of thy sorrows at the foot of the Cross, on which Jesus died for the redemption of the world. With thee, O sorrowful Virgin, I will gladly suffer all the trials, contradictions, and infirmities which it shall please our Lord to send me. I offer them all to thee in memory of thy sorrows, so that every thought of my mind, and every beat of my heart may be an act of compassion and of love for thee. And do thou, sweet Mother, have pity on me, reconcile me to thy divine Son Jesus, keep me in His grace, and assist me in my last agony, so that I may be able to meet thee in heaven and sing thy glories. Amen.

# EDITOR'S ROOM

DR CHACKOCHAN J NJAVALLIL

X @readkairos



ACROSS THE WORLD, COUNTLESS BELIEVERS - MEN, WOMEN, AND EVEN CHILDREN - FACE PERSECUTION, TORTURE, AND MARTYRDOM FOR THEIR FAITH. TIME AND AGAIN, WE HEAR OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO REFUSE TO DENY CHRIST EVEN WHEN THREATENED WITH DEATH.

## Persecuted but Joyful Church

**R**ecently, I had the privilege of listening to a priest serving a key position in a mission diocese in India. His sharing was both moving and inspiring. The bishop, priests, religious, and laity of that diocese undergo severe trials – facing hostility from groups opposed to the Gospel. Arrests and imprisonments have become frequent. Some heads of institutions have even been forced to go underground to safeguard their lives and continue their mission discreetly.

What struck me deeply was not merely his description of these hardships but the spirit with which he spoke about them. There was no trace of fear, defeat, or discouragement in his words. Instead, he radiated a joy, vigour, and unshakable hope. He and his companions in mission have not taken even a single step backward. They are not intimidated but are, in fact, more courageous than ever before. What might have been expected to frighten or silence them has instead become a source of renewed strength. He spoke with such serenity that all the listeners were encouraged, uplifted, and even challenged by his testimony.

This witness immediately brought to mind the experiences of the Apostles and the early Christians as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. Just like those first followers of Christ, these missionaries rejoice in the privilege of suffering for the Gospel. *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name* (Acts 5:41). Their joy is not superficial but deeply rooted in the conviction that they are sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Not only in India are such stories unfolding. Across the world, countless believers – men, women, and even children – face persecution, torture, and martyrdom for their faith. Time and again, we hear of young people who refuse to deny Christ even when threatened with death. Their courage stands as a beacon to the universal Church.

Yet persecution today does not always take the form of physical violence. At times, the challenges are ideological: the subtle erosion of faith through secularism, relativism, and the deliberate confusion sown in the minds of the faithful. In some ways, these hidden attacks are more dangerous, for they are harder to recognise and therefore more difficult to resist. As *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us, 'The Church, nevertheless, guards the heritage of God's word and draws from it moral and religious principles, without always having at hand the solution to particular problems' (GS 33). One of the important tasks of Kairos Media is precisely this: to sensitise, orient, and strengthen the faithful by presenting authentic Catholic teaching in a clear and relevant manner.

In the face of these realities, our call is twofold: to pray and to act. Let us pray fervently for those who suffer for Christ, that they may remain steadfast and joyful. Let us also do what we can – whether by sharing the truth, offering support, or standing in solidarity – to strengthen the persecuted Church. As St Paul reminds us, *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together* (1 Corinthians 12:26).

May our prayer, action, and witness unite us with those who joyfully bear the cross for Christ, so that His light may shine ever brighter in the darkness.

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## Also LOOK OUTFOR

10 From Doubt to Discovery

20 The 'Kakure Kirishitan'

37 On My Mind



You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. Genesis 50:20

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# LOOK

ISSUE 92

# INSIDE

**REGULARS**

- 6** Ask Fr Bitaju
- 7** Pope Talk
- 8** Jesus Youth
- 37** On My Mind
- 42** Our Daily Bread
- 44** Newswatch
- 46** Timeout
- 47** Lukas and Ray

**MISSION TALK**

**10** From Doubt to Discovery | **DR AISHWARYA MARY ANIL**





## CONTENTS

18

ENCOUNTER

## CHARLIE KIRK: A LIFE OF CONVICTION, COURAGE AND FORGIVENESS

BRIAN MUNDACKAL

## ENGAGE

12 Thanking God for Adversity | **JOBIN BABU**

## EXPERIENCE

16 Taken Back to the Garden | **ROSY MATHEW**

## IN FOCUS

20 The 'Kakure Kirishitan' | **GEORGE PAUL**26 Render Unto Caesar | **JOSEPH ANTHRAPER**29 No Greater Love than This | **MARIA TERES SEBASTIAN**31 Click to Care, Click to Change | **FR. JIJO JOSE MANJACKAL MSFS**34 When Faith Carries the Ultimate Cost | **DONY ANTONY**

## PATHFINDERS

38 Malcolm Muggeridge | **NEHA ANTONY AKKARA**

## JUBILEE PAGES

40 A Mixed Bag & Getting Back on Track | **FR. JUSTIN PANACHICKAL MSFS**

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# ASK

## FR. BITAJU



Fr Bitaju Mathew O.SS.T. belongs to the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives (The Trinitarians). He serves as the Associate Pastor at the Pastorate of St Lawrence Martyr Parish, Hanover, and Resurrection of Our Lord Parish, Laurel, Maryland, USA. He is a member of the Jesus Youth International Formation Team.

### ► Why does the Church require confession to a priest?

The requirement of confession to a priest within the Catholic Church is rooted in both theological and sacramental understandings of sin, forgiveness and the nature of the Church. Let us look at some of the key points that elucidate why the Church requires confession to a priest:

**Biblical Foundations:** Jesus instituted the sacrament of reconciliation when He said to His apostles, *Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained* (John 20:22-23). This passage indicates that Christ bestowed upon the apostles, and through them the Church, the authority to forgive sins (CCC 1441).

**The Role of the Priest:** In the sacrament of confession, the priest acts in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*). The *Catechism* explains, 'The priest is the sign and instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner' (CCC 1466). This means that the priest serves as a mediator between the penitent and God, facilitating the encounter with divine mercy.

**Community and Accountability:** Confession to a priest also emphasises the communal aspect of sin and reconciliation. Sin is not merely a private matter, it affects the entire Body of Christ, the Church. The *Catechism* teaches that 'sin damages communion with the Church' (CCC 1469). By confessing to a priest, the penitent acknowledges their sin not only before God but also within the context of the Church community. This fosters a sense of accountability and encourages the faithful

to seek reconciliation with both God and the community.

**Sacramental Grace:** The Church teaches that through confession, the penitent receives the grace necessary to overcome sin and to grow in holiness. The *Catechism* states, 'The sacrament of Penance is a way to obtain forgiveness for sins committed after baptism' (CCC 1446). This grace is vital for spiritual growth and the healing of the soul, reinforcing the importance of the sacrament in the life of the believer.

**Contribution and Conversion:** The sacrament requires the penitent to express genuine contrition and a commitment to conversion (CCC 1451). Confession to a priest provides an opportunity for the penitent to articulate their sins, reflect on their actions, and receive guidance and encouragement toward a renewed commitment to living according to God's will.

**The Assurance of Forgiveness:** The priest, acting in the person of Christ, pronounces the words of absolution, which provide the penitent with certainty that God has forgiven their sins (CCC 1461). This assurance is a source of comfort and peace for the believer.

In summary, the requirement of confession to a priest in the Catholic Church is based on biblical foundations, the role of the priest as a mediator, the communal nature of sin, the reception of sacramental grace, the call to contrition and conversion, and the assurance of forgiveness.



YOUCHAT 288

IS MAN  
RESPONSIBLE  
FOR  
EVERYTHING  
HE DOES?

**Man is responsible for everything he does consciously and voluntarily.**  
[CCC 1734-1737, 1745-1746]

No one can be held (fully) responsible for something he did under coercion, out of fear, ignorance, under the influence of drugs or the power of bad habits. The more a person knows about the good and practices the good, the more he moves away from the slavery of sin [Romans 6:17; 1 Corinthians 7:22]. God desires that such free persons should (be able to) take responsibility for themselves, for their environment, and for the whole earth. But all of God's merciful love is also for those who are not free; every day he offers them an opportunity to allow themselves to be set free for freedom.



## Prayer Intentions November

### For the prevention of suicide

Let us pray that those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts might find the support, care, and love they need in their community, and be open to the beauty of life.



*My priority is the Gospel, not solving the world's problems. I don't see my role as that at all, really, although I think that the Church has a voice, a message that needs to continue to be preached, to be spoken and spoken loudly.*

*The compassion of the Samaritan is loving by bearing the pain of others. It emphasises an essential aspect of love of neighbour, one requiring concrete gestures of closeness while being capable of assuming the fragility and suffering of others, particularly those who experience illness accompanied by poverty, isolation, or loneliness. Today, Christ the 'Good Samaritan,' continues to draw close to wounded humanity and through the sacraments of the Church, pours out the oil of consolation and the wine of hope.*

*It's going to be very difficult to discover the presence of God in artificial intelligence (AI). There is loss of humanity in the digital realm and extremely wealthy people are investing in AI and totally ignoring the value of human beings. The danger is that the digital world will follow its own path and we will become pawns, or be brushed aside.*

*Even today there is a need for generous religious women calling their mission important, through your vigilant and silent presence in places sadly torn apart by hatred and violence. I know how much they do every day in so many parts of the world, good that is often unseen by human eyes but not by God's!*

*Family is 'a gift and a task' for the Church and society. Living synodality in the family requires 'walking together,' sharing sorrows and joys, dialoguing respectfully and sincerely among all its members, learning to listen to one another and to make important family decisions together. It is crucial to foster the co-responsibility and protagonism of families in social, political, and cultural life, promoting their valuable contribution to the community.*

*Where pain is deep, hope in Jesus must be stronger. Redemption is mercy and can make our future better, while we still await the Lord's return. The cross of Christ is the 'greatest discovery' of life, the cross of Christ is a great treasure and source of hope.*

# JESUS YOUTH



**Dr Edward Edezhath**, one of the pioneers of Jesus Youth, gives us a glimpse of the growth of the movement.

## The Art and Joy of Balancing Old with New

→ When my elder son got married many years ago, he wanted a traditional church service. He found a good Latin choir and arranged the liturgy in a quiet church. I glanced through the song sheet, which was filled with Latin hymns. There were a few mistakes, and I began correcting them. My son was mildly surprised that I knew the songs and remarked, 'Oh, you Jesus Youth know Latin songs!'

I was not surprised by his reaction. With my background in Charismatic spirituality, he did not expect me to appreciate the old ways, like Latin hymns. During my college years, most young people then dismissed traditional practices. The Charismatic Renewal came at that time, soon after the Second Vatican Council, when freedom and freshness were in the air. New expressions emerged – spontaneous prayers, friendly Eucharistic celebrations, rejection of printed prayers, even prayer sessions that began with fun and laughter. There were even reports of people taking too much freedom with liturgy and sacraments.

When the pendulum swings to one extreme, it eventually swings back. When one generation rejects tradition, the next often rediscovers it with enthusiasm. Something similar

has happened in spirituality. Today, I see many young people wearing headscarves, carrying rosaries, kneeling for Communion, and joyfully praying the Divine Office. Some want prayer to be 'solemn' and dislike lighter moments. Some even refuse to turn to their neighbours to exchange the sign of peace during Mass.

Recently, while visiting a family, my friend Joseph said, 'It is so exciting to see today's youngsters so serious about their faith. Isn't it nice that they want an undiluted Christianity?' I replied, 'But is it always as simple as that?' and our discussion went on.

### THE MISSIONARY ATTITUDE

I told Joseph, let's not argue about which is better – traditional or innovative ways. My focus is on what is best for Jesus Youth. As missionary disciples with a truly Catholic outlook, what should our approach be? I would advocate a happy balance. This is not just a theory – Jesus Youth leaders face this challenge every day in community life and ministry.

A good example is how the Jesus Youth community prayer was developed. I was captivated by the chanting of the Divine Office in monastic communities, with its roots in thousands of years of Jewish and

Christian prayer. On the other side was the Charismatic Renewal, with its spontaneity, participative style, and shared reflections that awaken each member and build community. The JY prayer was an attempt to bring these elements together.

Both sides are essential. The traditional ways offer beauty and wisdom tested over time. A younger person needs to be led into this richness and invited to discover its depth. And the result will be as Jesus says: *No one after drinking old wine desires new* (Luke 5:39).

But we also face the challenge of living the ever-new Gospel today. It is not enough to simply repeat what was done long ago, claiming that this is 'the real thing.' Even in prayer, there is a need to unite new expressions with the old. Living today is not just repeating the past. That is what Pope St John XXIII meant by *aggiornamento* – bringing faith up to date for today's needs – or as Jesus put it, *interpret the present time* (Luke 12:56).

### WATCH OUT FOR YOUR BIAS

I have met many who resist using the language and style of today. Years ago, in a cathedral parish, the assistant priest encouraged me to meet young people every first Sunday. I went with



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a few JY leaders to make the sessions lively and inviting, helping them take a step toward a life in Christ. It was bearing fruit. But the vicar, a senior priest, would whisper to me, 'Eddy, I tell you, this young priest has a lot of enthusiasm. But from my years of experience, I say this is useless. These youngsters will never improve.'

A good missionary, I believe, must love what is enduring and beautiful in tradition while being at ease with the language and culture of the place and people they serve. A Jesus Youth missionary should open their eyes, ears, and heart to the depth of Catholic tradition but should not be stuck in outdated ways. They should

be comfortable with the language and style of today, especially that of the young generation. Our call is to be in the world but not worldly. This world is passing away, but we are called to live fully here and now, allowing the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth through us. Jesus himself said: *One who is trained for the kingdom is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old* (Matthew 13:52).

As someone wisely put it: 'Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past while remembering where we are and when we are – and

that it is we who have to decide.' The Holy Spirit renews memories and builds Tradition but also inspires new and beautiful things today. Moved by the Spirit, the Jesus Youth missionary is called to do the same – renew the face of the earth by bringing out the best of both worlds, the old and the new. ■

.....

One of the pioneers of the Jesus Youth movement, an international preacher and author, **Dr Edward Edezhath** is a retired professor from St Albert's College, Ernakulam. He is presently a researcher at Amoris Christi in Florida, USA.

# MISSION TALK

## FROM DOUBT TO DISCOVERY

**Dr Aishwarya Mary Anil** shares about her life-changing and faith-deepening mission experience.

**W**hen I first set out for mission to Shillong, I thought I was going there to give. But in reality, I received much more than I could ever expect – life lessons, deeper faith, and an experience of God's providence that changed me forever.

### A Land Rich in Faith

Shillong, my mission place, was unlike anywhere I had been before. Growing up in a religiously diverse country, I had never seen a place with such a strong Catholic presence. Here, faith wasn't something hidden or occasional, it was vibrant, lived out daily. The number of priests, nuns, and Catholic institutions amazed me. Even more striking was seeing young people fill the church with passion and devotion. Their witness was both

inspiring and, at first, a culture shock for me.

Yet, in the beginning, I struggled to fit in. My diary entries were filled with questions: Why this place? What is my role here? Am I even needed? But as I prepared to leave, God gently revealed the answer: I was placed there not only to serve, but to strengthen my own faith.

### God at Work in My Profession

One of the ways God worked in me during this mission was through my professional journey. Despite being a qualified doctor, I carried insecurity. I never allowed anyone to call me 'Doctor,' feeling unworthy because I had not yet cleared my FMGE (Foreign Medical Graduate Exam).

But God had His own plan. He placed me

Qatar JY Programme during Recommitment Gathering





in a hospital with highly qualified doctors, and they naturally addressed me as 'Doctor.' Slowly, this began to heal my fears. Around the same time, the exam I dreaded approached. I had no time to prepare properly, since I was balancing mission work. Yet, with calmness and prayer, I entered the exam hall differently this time. I found that I was not just praying for myself but also for those around me. To my surprise, I passed.

What touched me most wasn't the result itself but the joy of those around me – the sisters, priests, and my fellow mission team. Their happiness exceeded mine. All through the exam, I had the support of my mission family worldwide, who were in chapels interceding for me. Truly, the Holy Spirit whispered the answers, and my success became a testimony of God's grace, not my effort.

#### An Encounter with Healing and Deliverance

Another unforgettable moment was during the North East Jesus Youth Campus Meet. I went expecting inspiration and fellowship, but what I witnessed went far beyond. During adoration, scenes of deliverance unfolded before me: young people crying, screaming, and even needing prayers of exorcism. Honestly, I was frightened and sceptical. Was this hysteria or true healing?

But God drew me in. When I was asked to assist a girl who couldn't breathe, I was torn – should I respond as a doctor or as a missionary? As fear rose in me, I prayed the Rosary. Then, prompted by a sudden inspiration, I placed my rosary in her hand. Immediately, her fingers relaxed, and she regained consciousness. Later, another girl who could not walk began to move again after holding the same rosary.

I realised then that God didn't need me to choose between being a doctor or His servant.



**Above:** Family in faith: JY International Full-timers 2024, Kandy, Sri Lanka

**Top:** International JY Full-timers batch 2024

I realised then that God didn't need me to choose between being a doctor or His servant. He wanted me to be both – to serve with the gifts I had, but also to rely on Him completely.

He wanted me to be both – to serve with the gifts I had, but also to rely on Him completely.

#### After the Mission: A New Confidence

When I left Meghalaya, I initially felt like my mission wasn't a success. I hadn't done all the things I imagined. But a month later, back in Qatar, the fruits began to show. I was more confident, more open to saying 'yes' to God's calls, and found myself being used in unexpected ways – leading adorations, supporting teens, and even being told that I inspired others.

I realised I had become the person I once looked up to. The mission was never about what I could do, but about what God could do in me.

#### Lessons Carried Home

My mission in Shillong taught me that God often places us where we least expect, not because we are the most needed there, but because He knows what we need for our faith. In my insecurities, doubts, and fears, God revealed Himself as my strength.

From the quiet joy of seeing young Catholics live their faith, to the overwhelming moments of healing, to the simple yet powerful act of saying 'yes,' this mission reshaped me.

Today, I hold on to one truth: when we trust in the Lord, everything becomes possible. ■

**Aishwarya Mary**, a medical doctor settled in Qatar, grew up in a Jesus Youth family where the Teens Ministry shaped her faith journey. In 2024, she joined the International Full-timers Programme in Shillong, an experience that deepened her trust in God's plan.

ENGAGE

# Thanking God for Adversity

**Jobin Babu** shares about going through a dark moment but being able to thank God for it.

**S**hould we thank God during the storms of life? Sounds almost impossible, doesn't it? I sometimes forget to thank Him when things are going well – let alone in the bad. So the idea of thanking God in the middle of pain, loss, or heartbreak felt strange. Unrealistic. Maybe even fake. But then God showed me something.

### The Fight

It started like any other day, but quickly turned into one of the hardest days of my life.

I was overwhelmed. Something had gone terribly wrong, and I just couldn't hold it together. I felt abandoned. Angry. Completely wrecked inside.

And for the first time in my life... I fought with God.

Not with polite words. Not with filtered prayers. I let it all out – **Why me? Why now? Don't You see how much this hurts?**

I was crying, not quietly but from the gut. Tears kept falling as I tried to muffle the sound breaking inside while I hoped no one would hear.

And in that very moment of chaos, God gave me a memory – the Spirit gently bringing back a story I'd once heard in a sermon by Fr Mike Schmitz.

### The Man Who Thanked God in the Ashes

Fr Mike had spoken about *The Bells of Nagasaki*, a book written by Dr Takashi Nagai, a Catholic doctor who survived the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

In the book, Dr Nagai recounts returning to the ruins of his home after the bombing. He finds the remains of his beloved wife, Midori, who had died in the blast, which now were just charred bones. He gathered her bones in his hands. And among them, saw something that froze him – her melted rosary, with the crucifix still somehow visible. And in that moment – standing in the midst of destruction, the most painful moment of his life – he thanked God.

*'Dearest God, thank you for allowing her to die praying.'*

*'Mother of Sorrows, thank you for being with faithful Midori at the hour of her*

**We often think that gratitude is a response to good things. But what if it's something more? What if true gratitude is choosing to thank God not for what He gives, but for who He is – even when He gives us nothing but silence?**

*death...'*

I remember hearing that and thinking: Thank You? How do you thank God when the person you love most dies like that? How do you thank a God who just allowed you to suffer? How do you thank a God when the thing you feared most has actually happened?

Here I was, crying, complaining, yelling – and suddenly this man who found what remained of his wife, still chose to thank God. Not because he was okay. Not because it didn't hurt. But because he believed God was still good, even in the dark.

And in that moment – broken and angry – I whispered a Thank You too.

Not because I felt like it. But because something in me knew... God is still God. He hasn't changed, even if my situation has.

Slowly, I realised something important: God is not a vending machine. He's a Loving Father. And love is not proven by smiles and comfort – it's proven when you can say, **'I love You still,'** even when the world falls apart.

### A Moment of Peace

And inexplicably, something unexpected happened. The moment I said Thank You, a strange peace settled over me. Not the kind that fixes everything. But the kind that reminds you: You're not alone. And then came this realisation, one of the rare times I truly felt I was in a relationship with God. Not just praying to a faraway figure, not just performing devotion. But **being real with Him.**

Because, think about it – you can only fight with someone who's real and present. Someone close.

And I fought. I cried. I questioned. Even accused.

But I didn't walk away. He didn't let me.

And in that wrestle, I felt a strange joy – the kind that comes when you stop pretending and just be real with someone you love.

No, I'm not saying we should deliberately fight with God. But I am saying that in any real, growing relationship, struggle is part of love. Honesty is part of intimacy. And yes – even the fight can be sacred.

I was strangely... happy. At peace. Held. Heard.

We often think that gratitude is a response to good things. But what if it's something more? What if true gratitude is choosing to thank God not for what He gives, but for who He is – even when He gives us nothing but silence?

In sadness and suffering, we are given a unique chance to worship.

Because it's easy to thank God when everything's going well. But in the heartbreak? In the silence? That requires grace.

It takes grace to say 'I love You' when you don't understand what He's doing.

It takes grace to trust that He's still good, even when life isn't.

So let's ask for that grace. And thank Him not just in the sunshine – but in the storm too.

Lord, help me thank You not just when things are good, but even when they break me. Give me the grace to trust Your goodness in the dark. Amen.

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Jobin Babu is married to Rini and blessed with two children. He is part of the Jesus Youth movement, serving as a council member in Mumbai, India, and loves sharing reflections that testify God's presence in daily life.

## EXPERIENCE

# HIS CONTINUAL INCARNATION FOR US

**Madeline McKechnie** shares the quiet and gentle ways her life has been transformed by Franciscan University of Steubenville.



*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father...No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (John 1:14, 1:18).*

The Incarnate Lord has made Himself known to me at Franciscan University. It has been in the humblest of ways. Perhaps this is unsurprising, considering the patronage of the university: St Francis, a man of the Incarnation and a man of humility. However, an encounter with God in the flesh is all but unsurprising. In what follows, I will share parts of my story as a testimony to the love of God...especially on this holy hill of Steubenville. While I have certainly encountered the Lord in powerful ways, I will focus on the ordinary ways in which He moves powerfully. May our Lord reveal Himself to you anew through this article and may our Lady guide your reading.

Two-and-a-half years ago, I transferred to Franciscan University of Steubenville. I came in as a sophomore, studying philosophy and theology, and I was over the moon...but tepid. I had just left religious life with a beautiful community of Dominican sisters, and my heart was still raw from this transition. I was unsure of the Lord's path for me but certain enough that the Lord would continue my human and spiritual formation at Franciscan. Indeed, He has, but it has not looked as I thought it might. Coming into the university, I was set on growing in my faith and discovering my vocation. I wanted to live out the Christian life with joy, walking with those who could bring me closer to Christ. This was blessed abundantly, thanks be to God. I was also set on finding Jesus in the sacraments, and this I did. He is oh so present and accessible in the sacramental life of campus. Not only did I have four Mass times to choose from each day, but I had confession opportunities walking distance from my dorm in addition to perpetual adoration and praise-filled Eucharistic procession every month. *And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace (John 1:16).*

While these sacramental graces



In the streets of Assisi, on pilgrimage with the Austria Study Abroad programme.



On induction day for the Servants of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus household.

soothed, healed, and restored me, the Lord gave Himself to me still more. In my time at Franciscan, I have come to know the Incarnate Lord in a broader way. He breaks through all the boxes I put Him in...even the tabernacle. I mean to say that our Eucharistic Lord, for example, abides at all times in every tabernacle of the world. Still more, He exposes His vulnerable self in Eucharistic adoration, carried by the monstrance. Still more, He gives Himself to be broken in the hands of a priest during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Still more, He dissolves His very self on the tongue of every recipient of communion during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And yet, this is where I thought it ended. Indeed, this is ecstasy. However, the Lord has revealed Himself to me not simply in His sacred and Eucharistic flesh but in the flesh of my brothers and sisters in Christ. *This is the Incarnation which has boggled my mind and struck my heart.*

Jesus Christ humbles Himself in human form (Philippians 2:8). Jesus Christ humbles Himself in the form of bread (John 6:55). At Franciscan University, I have learned that Jesus Christ humbles Himself by abiding undoubtedly in His disciples (Matthew 10:40). I have discovered this in my peers, professors, priests, deep friends, staff, those in the nursing home, outside abortion facilities,

on the streets of Pittsburgh, etc. Indeed, this is the Mystical Body of Christ – mystically broken and yet salvific.

From day one of arriving on campus, I was welcomed incessantly, warmly, and familiarly by fellow students. I remember walking down the hall of my new dorm and quickly striking up conversation with a roommate who immediately felt like family. In the moment I understood it as a close connection as fellow disciples in Christ. We do have the same very close mutual Friend, after all. However, now I see that this connection is more than just being sisters in Christ. In reality, I was encountering Christ Himself in them. Christ was ministering to me. Christ was welcoming me. Christ was hugging me. His power and warmth is not limited to the sacraments or to the chapel, though I can testify that He is there. His power and warmth also radiate tangibly through His ‘little incarnations,’ disciples of Him. This is true in the friends I shared life with in a deep way here on campus and of acquaintances I simply passed on my way to class. When they smiled at me, it was Christ smiling. When they greeted me, it was Christ greeting. This is not simply poetic or symbolic, but ‘truly, truly’ Christ present (John 6:53).

In this reflection, I can’t help but remark on the utter humility of Christ. Of

course, this is present in the sacraments, but I am dumbfounded by His humility to abide in His creation. His humility is His love. He sees beyond divides. In His broken and wounded creation, in His broken and wounded sons and daughters, in His broken and wounded *me*, Christ abides. He chooses to abide. He loves to abide. He prefers to abide.

*Abide in me, and I in you* (John 15:4). He does not wait for perfection, and He is not dissuaded by our failings. In fact, it is our weakness which draws Him in. Praise the Lord for this, and Lord,

give me the eyes to see you (Matthew 13:16)!

Thus, I do not have a lofty or radical story which I wish to share here. Instead, I give testimony to the humble and ordinary workings of the Lord, which abound at Franciscan and have changed my life. I have been changed by soft words of the Spirit, spoken through my peers (1 Kings 19:12). I have been changed by gentle encounters with joyful strangers who’ve become friends. I have been changed by deep friendships which build me up and reveal the Father’s love. Here at Franciscan University, I have encountered my Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who loves me in and through the people I encounter. Jesus has opened my eyes to see Him in all things (1 Corinthians 9:22). May Jesus give you this grace too, and may we praise Him endlessly through all the ages (Psalm 136). Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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Madeline McKechnie is a daughter of God. She is a graduate of Franciscan University of Steubenville and currently student at JPII Institute in Washington DC. She hopes to serve the Lord in her studies and beyond.

# *Taken Back to the Garden*



After moving to a new city, **Rosy Mathew** 'rediscovered' Eucharistic adoration, which stirred up her faith and whispered a calling God had for her life.

Three years ago, I packed up life in my hometown of North Carolina and moved to Philadelphia, a city full of noise and strangers. I remember my parents helping me load up all my belongings into our SUV the day before the big move. Being the only girl, my family was hesitant to let me move to a new city alone. However, I had been anticipating this change for I craved independence, a fresh start, and to leave my comfort zone.

During my first week in Philadelphia, I tried to get adjusted to and build a new routine in the city with evening runs. One evening, while jogging back to my apartment, I noticed the church I had visited for Sunday Mass still open. Curious to know what was happening, I entered through the side door which led me into the main church, lit only by soft glows near the altar. There were people sitting across different parts of the church, practicing silence. At the centre of the altar was something I remember seeing my mom back home kneel before, many times in the past. The Eucharistic adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was being exposed in a golden monstrance. It was so beautiful, radiant, and resting still on the altar that I couldn't stop gazing. From the choir loft, I heard a girl softly singing a worship song that echoed through the silence. Feeling out of place in my workout clothes, I hesitated to walk and sit near the front of the altar. Instead, I took a seat at the rear corner and simply observed the magnificent silence. A while later, the priest walked to the altar, knelt down, and joined the crowd in singing what sounded like a Medieval Latin hymn. I later learned it was the *Tantum Ergo*, written by St Thomas Aquinas, which translates to *So Great Therefore*. As the priest sang, he swung an incense burner, releasing fragrant smoke as a symbol of prayers rising to God. Afterward, he walked to the centre of the altar and with his cloak lifted the Holy Eucharist,

But that moment in the church stirred something deep within me. It felt familiar to what I had seen during my childhood, but completely new. I returned the following week, and each time I felt drawn to my Heavenly Father, as though He was calling me by my name to sit with Him. Over time, adoration became a place of healing and stillness where I felt seen and heard by God. It reminded me of how Jesus also sought that closeness, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane in the midst of darkness right before His arrest.

made the Sign of the Cross over the congregation giving the final blessing.

Growing up, I watched my mom attend adoration with a deep love and reverence for the Holy Eucharist. She often encouraged my siblings and I to join her, but it wasn't until much later in college that I started to long for an intimate relationship with Jesus. But that moment in the church stirred something deep within me. It felt familiar to what I had seen during my childhood, but completely new. I returned the following week, and each time I felt drawn to my Heavenly Father, as though He was calling me by my name to sit with Him. Over time, adoration became a place of healing and stillness where I felt seen and heard by God. It reminded me of how Jesus also sought that closeness, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane in the midst of darkness right before His arrest. Similarly, when I sit before the Blessed Sacrament that represents the Body and Blood of Christ, I am 'taken back to the garden' longing to let the Lord into every hidden corner of my life. Even now, I continue to go to adoration, longing to embrace Him

and be held by Him. It was within this same sacred space that I felt His calling to write and to pour my heart out for His glory. Even though I have been writing for ten years, it was through Scripture, prayer and my growing love for the Holy Eucharist that I began to let Him be the author and for myself to be His pen.

While these past few years in Philly have been liberating and exhilarating, it would be a lie to say that I never felt lonely, exhausted, and full of self-doubt. I moved to Philly seeking a new kind of freedom, but I found something far greater. I found my way back home to my Father. In the stillness of every adoration, I encountered the One who had been waiting for me all along. The same God who welcomes His prodigal son home. The same God who calls me by my name. ■

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For **Rosy Mathew**, based in Philadelphia, PA, writing has always been a passion since she was young! She works in healthcare, and finds joy in nature, literature and the local JY small group. Through her reflective blog, *With Abba*, she weaves together stories of faith, identity and community, drawing inspiration from her Indian roots.

ENCOUNTER

# CHARLIE

## A Life of Conviction, Courage,



**Brian Mundackal**  
writes about why  
Charlie Kirk was able  
to influence people of  
all ages towards the  
truth, especially since  
his untimely death.

# CHARLIE KIRK: and Forgiveness

**C**harlie Kirk was a well-known American conservative activist and public thinker whose life, and even his final days, made a deep impression on modern culture. He emerged as one of the most recognisable voices in America – not merely because of his political positions, but because of his willingness to engage in open dialogue. Many who met him believed he had the potential for even greater leadership, perhaps as a major political figure, because of his charisma, clarity, and passion.

### Choosing a Different Path

At 18, Charlie made an unusual choice. Instead of going to college like most of his peers, he devoted himself fully to starting Turning Point USA. Beginning from a small garage in Illinois, he built it into a nationwide movement that reached thousands of students across schools and universities.

What set Charlie apart was his commitment to dialogue. He often travelled to universities where his ideas were unpopular, facing protests and difficult questions. Yet, he did not see these events as battlefields but as opportunities. For him, these were places to sow seeds of truth, even if the soil was hard. While many disagreed with him, very few doubted his respect for those he debated. He created spaces where people could differ without hatred, where arguments could clash without destroying dignity.

### A Message of Forgiveness

On 10 September 2025, Charlie's life was cut short during a Turning Point USA event at Utah Valley University. A young man opposed to his worldview targeted him from a rooftop and shot him as he spoke before thousands. The attack shocked the nation and was condemned by leaders across political lines.

But what moved people even more was the response of his wife, Erika. In front of 250,000 people and millions online, she chose not anger but forgiveness. She recalled the words of Christ on the Cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' With extraordinary grace, she said, 'That young man I... forgive him. I forgive him because it is what Christ did. And it is what Charlie would do.'

Her witness was powerful. Bishop Robert Barron reflected: 'Jesus speaks of loving and forgiving our enemies, but this is one of the hardest teachings to live. That Erika Kirk could forgive her husband's assassin was breathtaking.' In a time of division, her decision reminded people everywhere of the strength that comes from mercy and faith.

### Growing Respect for Catholic Faith

As someone who recently came across Charlie Kirk through his YouTube videos, I was immediately fascinated by his ability to engage in thoughtful dialogue with people who opposed him. He articulated his views clearly while showing genuine respect to those he spoke with. At a time when our world

is so polarised and our YouTube feeds are often filled with videos of people fighting, arguing, and expressing anger, Charlie stood out as someone who consistently welcomed opposing ideas. Personally, he helped me realise that we shouldn't be afraid to have difficult conversations, as long as they are approached with a healthy degree of respect.

### His Enduring Legacy

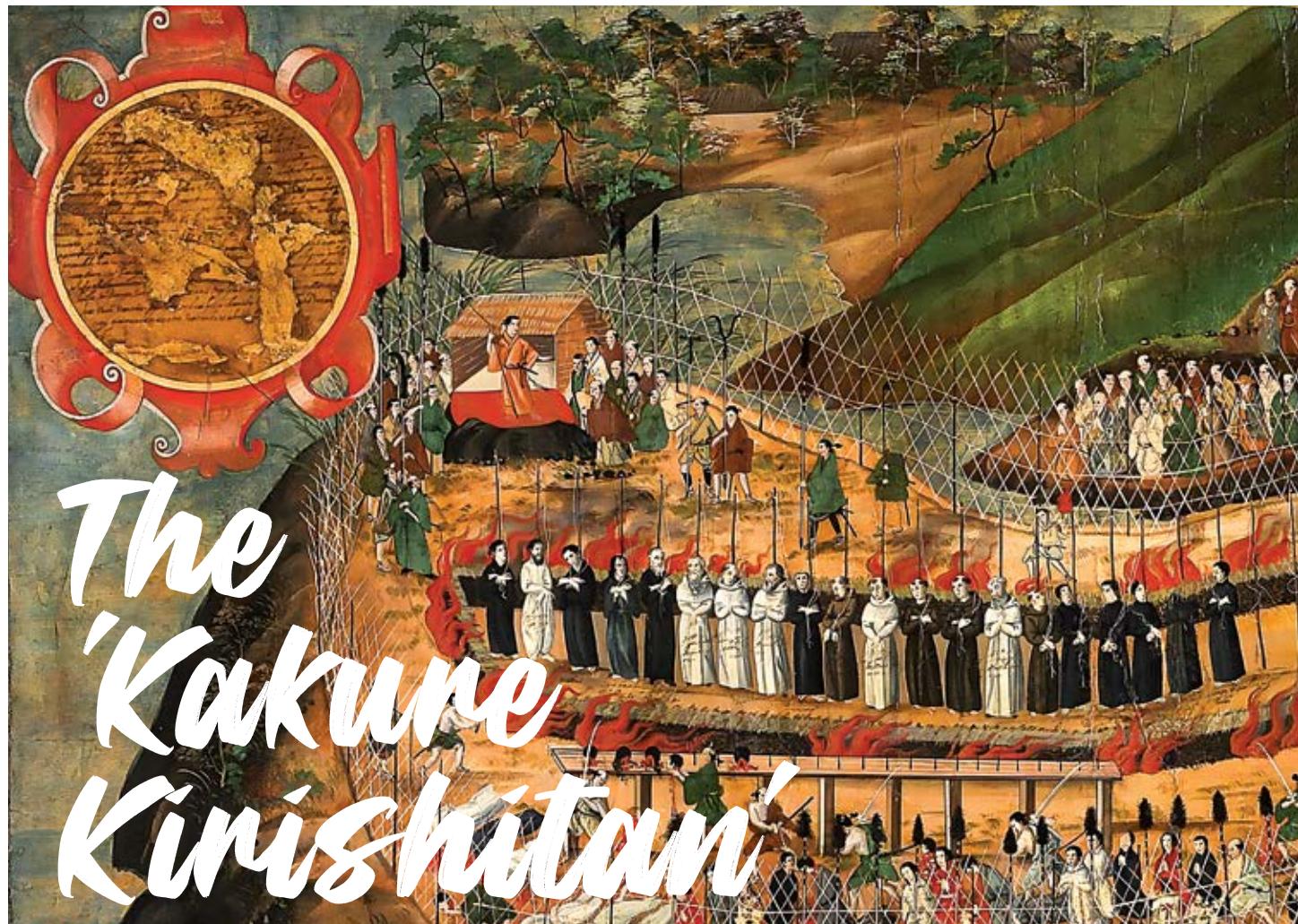
Charlie Kirk's life teaches us that faith should not remain hidden. If one truly desires to shape society, then belief must be lived publicly, even when it is uncomfortable or opposed. Charlie entered spaces where his views were unwelcome, yet he remained calm, respectful, and courageous.

His example reminds us that a better future requires conviction translated into action. For Catholic youth especially – and for all young believers – his life is a call to live faith with courage and compassion, to let belief guide public and private life alike, and to remain steadfast in engaging the world, no matter how difficult it may seem. ■

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Brian's heart beats for faith, family, and mission. Brian co-founded and serves as the Executive Director of Lumen Vitae, a Catholic humanitarian organisation dedicated to empowering children and young adults through education in marginalised communities in Haiti. Additionally, he brings his passion for fatherhood to his role as Associate Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Palm Beach. He has a deep love for his family – his wife Swapna, and their four children: Ephrem, Marie, Caleb and Francis.

IN FOCUS



# The 'Kakure Kirishitan'

George Paul first takes us to 16th century Japan, where the newly introduced Christianity began to face horrific persecution; then to our present times, to countries that still remain hostile places for Christians.





**I**n the heart of every Christian lies a seed of faith, a gift from God that is meant to be nurtured, grown, and shared. But what happens when that seed is planted in hostile soil? What happens when the world seeks to uproot it, to extinguish its light, and to silence its voice? The history of Christianity is filled with stories of men and women who faced this very challenge, who were forced to choose between their faith and their lives.

One of the most compelling and often overlooked chapters in this history is the story of the Japanese Christians. For over two centuries, they endured some of the most systematic and brutal persecution in the history of Christianity. They were hunted, tortured, and executed for their faith. Yet, in the face of unimaginable suffering, they held fast to the hope of the Resurrection, passing on their beliefs in secret from generation to generation.

### **The Dawn of Christianity in Japan**

The story of Christianity in Japan begins with the arrival of Saint Francis Xavier, a Spanish Jesuit priest and one of the co-founders of the Society of Jesus. In 1549, guided by a Japanese fugitive named Anjirō, Xavier and his companions landed on the shores of Kagoshima in southern Japan. They arrived in a land of profound cultural and religious traditions, a nation embroiled in the final years of its tumultuous Warring States period (Sengoku jidai). Despite the challenges of language and culture, his mission met with surprising success.

He discovered that the Japanese were a highly intelligent and inquisitive people. By finding common ground between Christian teachings and certain Buddhist concepts, he was able to communicate the Gospel in a way that resonated with them. In his first year in Kagoshima, he converted around 100 people. His work truly flourished when he moved to the island of Hirado in 1550, where he is said to have won more converts in just twenty days than he had in an entire year in Kagoshima. By January 1551, the first Christian church in Japan was constructed in Hirado, a testament to the fertile

ground the faith had found.

At its zenith, the Christian community in Japan grew to an estimated 500,000 believers. This rapid growth was fuelled by a combination of factors. For the oppressed peasantry, the Christian message of salvation and universal love offered a profound hope that transcended the rigid social structures of feudal Japan. For some of the warring feudal lords, or daimyō, aligning with the missionaries offered strategic advantages, particularly access to Portuguese trade and military technology. This period saw the conversion of several influential figures and the establishment of vibrant Christian communities, particularly in the regions around Nagasaki.

### The Turning of the Tide

The promising dawn of Japanese Christianity was not to last. The very success that the missionaries and their converts enjoyed soon became a source of suspicion and fear for Japan's rulers. The close association between the Christian faith and the foreign powers of Portugal and Spain was seen as a potential threat to the nation's sovereignty. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the great unifier of Japan, grew increasingly wary of this foreign influence. He feared that the loyalty of Christian converts, particularly the powerful daimyō, might lie more with the Pope in Rome than with the rulers of Japan.

This suspicion culminated in 1587 with the issuance of the Edict of Expulsion, which ordered all Christian missionaries to leave the country. Hideyoshi accused them of the 'illegal act of destroying the teachings of Buddha,' the dominant faith in Japan at the time. While the edict was not immediately enforced with full rigour, it marked a dramatic and ominous shift in the official stance towards Christianity. The first major act of martyrdom followed a decade later. In 1597, twenty-six Catholics – including six Franciscan missionaries, three Japanese Jesuits, and seventeen Japanese laypeople – were arrested, publicly marched over 600 miles, and crucified on Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki. Among them was a twelve-year-old boy, Luis Ibaraki, who reportedly refused an offer to save his life by renouncing his faith, declaring, 'I do

not want to live on that condition, for it is not reasonable to exchange a life that has no end for one that soon finishes.'

### The Great Genna Martyrdom and the Escalation of Cruelty

The persecution reached its zenith under the Tokugawa shogunate, which solidified its rule over Japan in the early 17th century. The shogunate viewed Christianity as a destabilising force and was determined to eradicate it completely. This led to one of the most infamous events in the history of Japanese Christianity: the Great Genna Martyrdom of 1622. On 10th September of that year, on the same Nishizaka Hill where the first martyrs had died, 55 Christians were executed in a horrifying public spectacle. Thirty were beheaded, and their severed heads were placed before the remaining twenty-five, who were tied to stakes and burned alive. A contemporary account described the scene, noting that the officials' intent was 'for the purpose of frightening the confessors of Christ, and thus disheartening them for the torture of burning.' Yet, the martyrs remained steadfast, enduring their agony with a serenity that stunned the onlookers, standing 'of marble, so calm and motionless they stood.'

This event was not an isolated incident but part of a systematic campaign of terror. The authorities employed a horrifying array of tortures designed not just to kill, but to break the spirit of the

believers and force them to apostatise. Christians were hung upside down in pits filled with excrement, a torture designed to prolong agony by preventing a quick death. They were subjected to the *anatsurushi* (pit-hanging), where slits were cut into their temples to relieve blood pressure and keep them conscious longer. In some cases, doctors were even present to revive those who were near death, only so the torture could continue.

### The Test of the Fumie

Perhaps the most insidious tool of the persecution was the fumie (literally, 'stepping-on picture'). These were images of Christ or the Virgin Mary, often cast in bronze or carved into wooden blocks. Beginning in the 17th century, every person in Nagasaki and the surrounding areas was required to trample on a fumie to prove they were not Christian. This became an annual ritual, a public test of faith that was impossible to avoid. For the Japanese Christians, who held a deep reverence for sacred images, this was a profound act of desecration, a spiritual and psychological torment.

Many refused and were martyred. Others, in a desperate act of survival, would step on the image, their hearts filled with anguish. Professor Simon Hull, an expert in Japanese Catholicism, notes that these believers would 'return home, begging God to forgive them. In one community, they would even burn the sandals they had worn, mixing the ashes with water before drinking it as an expression of their profound penitence.' The face of Christ on the surviving fumie is often worn smooth, a silent testament to the countless feet that were forced to tread upon it, and the immense weight of the choice those feet had to make.

### The Kakure Kirishitan

Faced with an ultimatum – apostasy or death – a third path emerged, one of quiet, tenacious survival. As the shogunate's persecution drove the Church from public view, a remnant of the faithful went underground, becoming known as the *Kakure Kirishitan*, or 'Hidden Christians'. For more than two centuries, cut off from the global Catholic Church, without priests, Bibles, or sacraments, they kept the flame of faith alive in the





**Then, in 1865, shortly after Japan was forced to reopen its ports to the West, a French priest named Father Bernard Petitjean built a church in Nagasaki. One day, a group of timid Japanese approached him. After confirming that he was a priest of the Roman Pope and that he honoured the Virgin Mary, they whispered a confession that sent shockwaves through the Christian world: 'We have the same heart as you.' They were the descendants of the Kakure Kirishitan.**

shadows.

To avoid detection, they disguised their faith in plain sight. Statues of the Buddhist deity Kannon, the goddess of mercy, were secretly used to represent the Virgin Mary, often holding a child in a way that resembled a traditional Madonna and Child. Christian prayers were altered to sound like Buddhist chants. The Eucharist, the source and summit of our Catholic life, was impossible to celebrate without a priest. In its place, some communities shared rice and fish, remembering the Last Supper and the miracle of the loaves and fishes. They created a unique, syncretic form of Christianity, blending Catholic traditions with Japanese folk religion and ancestor worship, all while preserving the core tenets of their faith: the belief in one God,

the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the hope of eternal life.

Leadership fell to lay elders, known as *chokata* or *mizukata*, who were responsible for maintaining the religious calendar, performing baptisms, and passing down the sacred stories and prayers – the *orasho* – from memory. These prayers, originally taught by the Jesuit missionaries, became a precious inheritance, passed from parent to child in secret gatherings held in hidden rooms or remote valleys.

This period of isolation raises a profound and challenging theological question, encapsulated by the paradox of the *fumie*. As Professor Simon Hull observes, 'If all Japanese Catholics had refused to trample on the *fumie* and instead chosen to die as martyrs, Christianity in Japan would also have died. It is only because some made an existential decision to trample on the *fumie*, despite their belief that this action was gravely sinful, that Christianity in Japan was able to survive.' This difficult choice highlights the tension between the call to martyrdom and the instinct for survival, a struggle that these hidden communities wrestled with for generations.

### The Rediscovery

For over 200 years, the world believed Christianity had been extinguished in Japan. Then, in 1865, shortly after Japan was forced to reopen its ports to the West, a French priest named Father Bernard Petitjean built a church in Nagasaki. One day, a group of timid Japanese approached him. After confirming that he was a priest of the Roman Pope and that he honoured the Virgin Mary, they whispered a confession that sent shockwaves through the Christian world: 'We have the same heart as you.' They were the descendants of the *Kakure Kirishitan*. An estimated 20,000 hidden Christians emerged from the shadows, revealing a faith that had been preserved against all odds.

### The Echoes of Persecution: The Underground Church Today

The story of the Japanese martyrs and the *Kakure Kirishitan* is not merely a relic of the past. It is a living, breathing reality for millions of Christians around the

world today. The same courage, the same suffering, and the same unwavering hope that defined the Church in feudal Japan can be seen in the underground churches of our own time. In countries where faith is outlawed and believers are hunted, the spirit of the Japanese martyrs endures.

### North Korea

Nowhere is this parallel more stark than in North Korea, consistently ranked as the most dangerous country in the world to be a Christian. The totalitarian regime, centred on the absolute deification of the Kim dynasty, mirrors the absolute authority demanded by the Tokugawa shogunate. Any allegiance to a higher power, especially Jesus Christ, is seen as the ultimate act of treason. If a Christian is discovered, they face not just imprisonment, but often immediate execution or a sentence to a brutal labour camp from which few survive. This punishment extends to their entire family, often for three generations, regardless of their own beliefs.

Like the *Kakure Kirishitan*, North Korean Christians are forced into the deepest of underground existences. There are no church buildings; faith is lived out in secret, primarily within trusted family units. Worship is conducted in whispers, and Bibles are a forbidden treasure, often shared page by page. The constant threat of surveillance from official spies and even neighbours creates an atmosphere of fear identical to that faced by Japanese believers who were betrayed for their faith. Yet, an estimated 400,000 Christians persevere in this hostile land, their faith a silent act of defiance against one of the world's most oppressive regimes.

### China

In China, the persecution is more systematic and technologically advanced, but its goal is the same: to control and ultimately co-opt the Church for the purposes of the state. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under President Xi Jinping has intensified its crackdown on all forms of independent religious expression. While the government maintains state-sanctioned churches, these are heavily monitored, with sermons vetted for ideological purity and pro-Communist propaganda often



displayed prominently. Children under 18 are forbidden from attending church services, a policy designed to sever the generational transmission of faith.

This forces millions of believers into unregistered 'house churches,' which are deemed illegal and subject to raids, closure, and the arrest of their leaders. Pastors are often charged with fabricated economic crimes and given long prison sentences. This strategy of control and suppression is reminiscent of the Tokugawa government's attempts to regulate and ultimately eliminate any form of Christianity that did not submit to its authority. The estimated 96.7 million Christians in China navigate a complex landscape of surveillance and restriction, their faith a constant challenge to the CCP's demand for absolute loyalty.

### Nigeria

In Nigeria, the persecution takes a different but equally devastating form. Unlike the hidden, secretive persecution of North Korea or China, the violence against Nigerian Christians is often



brutally public and systematic. Nigeria has become known as the world's centre of Christian martyrs, with more believers killed for their faith there than anywhere else in the world. In 2024 alone, 3,100 Christians were killed and 2,830 were kidnapped in Nigeria.

The persecution comes primarily from Islamist militant groups, including Boko Haram, ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), and Fulani fighters. These groups have escalated their attacks on Christian communities, particularly in the Muslim-majority northern states, though the violence continues to spread southward into the Middle Belt and beyond. The attacks are shockingly brutal: men are often killed outright, while women are frequently kidnapped and subjected to sexual violence. Entire villages are destroyed, churches burned, and livelihoods obliterated.

What makes the Nigerian situation particularly tragic is the government's failure to protect Christians and punish perpetrators, which has only emboldened the militants. Christians living in

northern states under Sharia law face additional discrimination as second-class citizens, while converts from Islam often experience rejection from their families and must flee their homes for fear of being killed. More than 16.2 million Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, including high numbers from Nigeria, have been driven from their homes by violence and now live in displacement camps.

### The Middle East

In many parts of the Middle East, the birthplace of Christianity, ancient Christian communities and new converts alike face intense persecution. In countries like Iran, the situation is particularly dire for those who convert from Islam. The theocratic government views such conversions as an act of apostasy and a threat to the Islamic regime, often equating it with collusion with Western powers. Leaders and members of house churches are arrested and charged with 'crimes against national security,' facing long prison sentences in

horrific conditions.

These believers, like the *Kakure Kirishitan*, are forced to live a dual life. They gather in secret, in living rooms and hidden spaces, sharing their faith in hushed tones. The fear of a knock on the door, of a police raid that will tear their community apart, is a constant reality. Yet, despite this immense pressure, the underground church in Iran is one of the fastest-growing in the world. Their zealous evangelism is a direct result of a faith that's been through the absolute worst and came out stronger.

Today, as we look at the suffering of our brothers and sisters in North Korea, China, Nigeria, Iran, and so many other places, we see the story of Christian persecution being written in our own time. They are the modern-day *Kakure Kirishitan*, the hidden faithful who carry the cross of Christ in the darkest corners of the world. Their witness is a powerful rebuke to a world that seeks to marginalise and silence the Christian faith, reminding us that the Church's lifeblood is not earthly power, but the blood of the martyrs and the unwavering testimony of the faithful.

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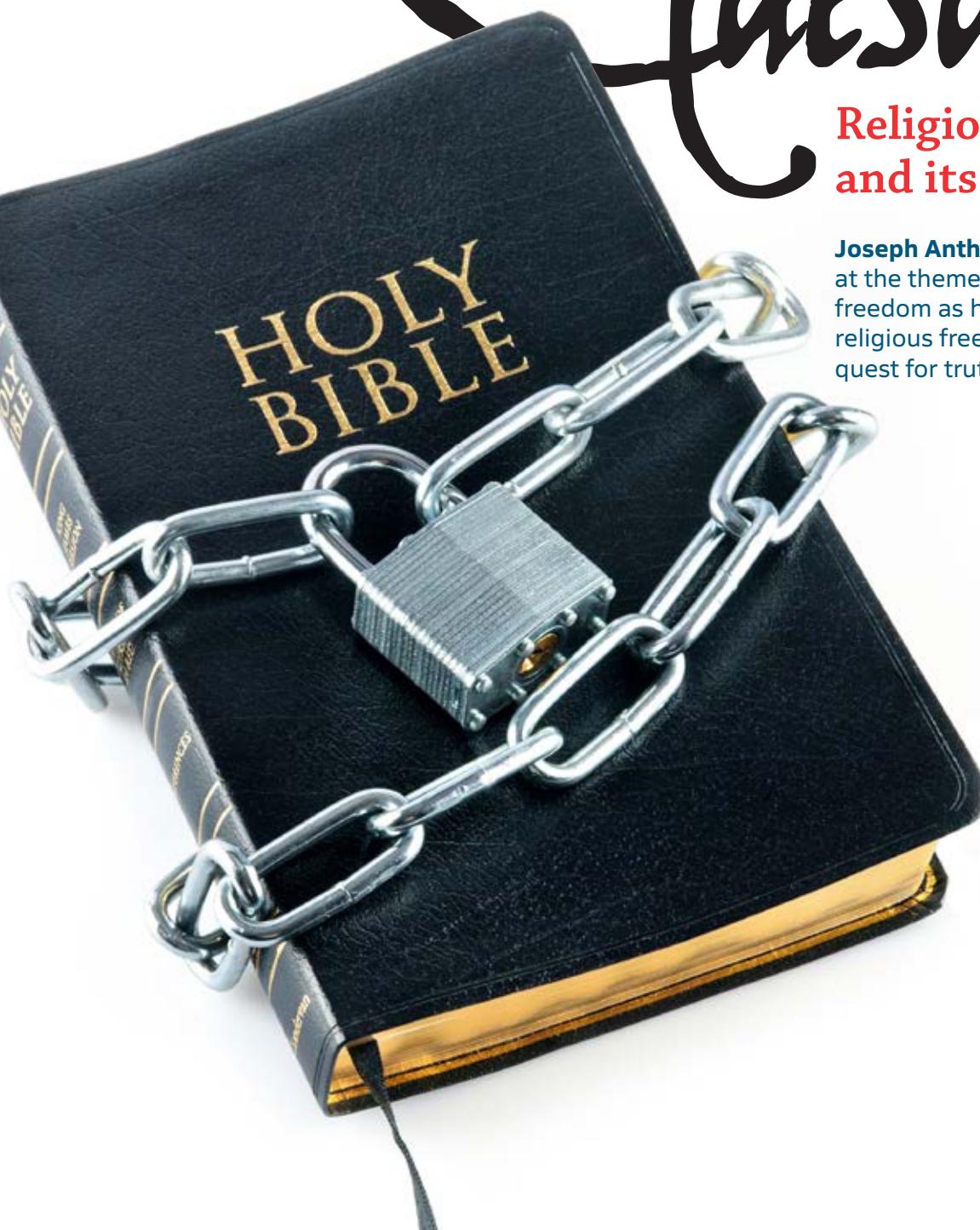
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George Paul is a Communication Designer currently working with the Catholic Health Association of India. An avid student of Theology, Philosophy and History, George is still active in JY, helping youngsters connect with the Catholic intellectual tradition.

# Render unto Caesar

Religious Freedom  
and its Challenges

**Joseph Anthraper** takes a look  
at the themes justice, law, and  
freedom as he writes about  
religious freedom and man's  
quest for truth.



**O**n a typical English autumnal day, cloudy and windy, we reached London to take part in the annual March for Life, UK – marching for the rights of the unborn and the most vulnerable, hoping to make our voices heard in the administrative heart of the capital city. However, unlike other times in the past, this year was very different. For one, London has been witnessing ongoing protests by pro-Palestinian groups for well over a year, and secondly – there was a protest to the protest! Usually, we have around ten thousand people marching under the pro-life banner, and about a hundred-odd pro-choice activists shouting abuse at us at Parliament Square, where our march ends. This year, probably to break the monotony, or because they did not have any space at Parliament Square as it was already occupied by the pro-Palestinian groups, or maybe just to spice things up, there were about a couple of hundred pro-choice activists at the beginning station of the march, and oh boy, did they come prepared!

Although they were massively outnumbered (as usual), they had sound systems, drums, banners and slogans and made sure that they were boisterous and threatening enough to warrant a continuous police presence ensuring enough room between them and us. A couple of hours passed and as the march was about to start, a large group of Franciscan friars, who apparently were leading an even larger group, began with the hymn Ave Maria, and all the people around them joined in; all of us deeply and profoundly aware of the spiritual battle being waged in the heart of the financial capital of Europe, for a conversion of minds, hearts, lives and law! A deeply spiritual moment, which was abruptly interrupted by an angry scream – (At the moment I guessed it wrong, it was not from the pro-choice group), ‘Blasphemy! Idolatry! What can Mary do for you, you idol worshippers; she is just a human’ – and the tirade of abuse against Mary, Catholics and the Catholic Church continued for some time. The protagonist was an octogenarian who was donning a ‘Protestant Truth Society’ t-shirt, which

to be fair, also professed the sanctity of the unborn child.

Here I felt, on that crowded street in central London, with tempers flaring and theologies clashing on a microcosmic scale, is the philosophical impasse facing us with regard to religious law. To be clear, in one corner of this impasse is the secular Western government that has passed the abortion law, which they consider sacrosanct, aiding and helping women (ideological battlegrounds notwithstanding), on another is the Christian, who cannot in good conscience, acquiesce with this moral evil; in the third corner is the adherents of Islam, who truly and firmly believe that they have been tasked by Allah to usher in an era of Islamic theocracy by hook or by crook; and in the forth, the old man who sincerely believes (and has probably believed all his life) that the Catholic Church is indeed the whore of Babylon and it is necessary and desirable to have a law that prevents people from being able to choose damnation for themselves. Four sets of people; four deeply seated, mostly unshakeable viewpoints and beliefs on religion & law – what it means and its ultimate destiny. As Pilate once asked Jesus, the believer too sometimes in a haze of confusion would want to ask Jesus, ‘Lord, what is the truth? And how do I find it?’

### Religious Freedom

In one of the most remarkable (and sometimes deemed controversial) documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the council fathers argued that ‘*the human person has a right to religious freedom, which has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person.*’ From this fundamental premise, the council calls on the governments of the world to ‘*safeguard the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means.*’ As beings endowed with reason and free-will, man is impelled by nature as well as bound by a moral obligation to seek truth, above all to seek religious truth. ‘*They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with*

*the demands of truth.*’ Hence the council argues that man ought to be free from all sorts of ‘*external and psychological coercion*’ in all matters religious. Since the right to religious freedom has its foundation in his very nature/humanity, the council even goes as far as to extend the right of exercising religious freedom ‘*even to those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it.*’ This is pretty remarkable, and this is the ideal, yet this has also been quite controversial – the question naturally would be, is it really possible or even desirable? When the Catholic Church believes that ‘The Truth’ subsists within her, shouldn’t she make it mandatory for all to follow this truth? Or in other words, should not the Church work towards making the revealed truth the law?

### Law and its Nature

Whatever our political, religious, or philosophical affiliation may be, all of us would agree that some kind of law is absolutely imperative for society, or for social order to function and blossom – whether in the case of a small family, or in the case of the biggest nation in the world. Since there are laws governing most part of our lives, all through our lives – laws on movement, laws on settlement, laws concerning action, laws concerning inaction – sometimes we get too accustomed to the concept of law itself, and can lose focus on the bigger picture, the nature of law. Many times, law becomes a tool to punish, and enactment of laws become a matter of knee-jerk reactions and popular sentiments. In that context, it is good to step back and remember that jurisprudence or the juridical process always ought to have justice as its aim. When this aspect of justice (both towards God, towards oneself and towards our fellow beings) is missing from our laws (even within the Church), law quickly disintegrates into totalitarianism – it fails in its function to build the society up by providing the framework for social order and personal wellbeing to prosper. Instead of common good, we end up with extremes – either on one extreme, a society where the fear of law reigns supreme or on the other



**Four sets of people; four deeply seated, mostly unshakeable viewpoints and beliefs on religion & law – what it means and its ultimate destiny. As Pilate once asked Jesus, the believer too sometimes in a haze of confusion would want to ask Jesus, 'Lord, what is the truth? And how do I find it?'**

extreme, a society where each person himself becomes the law.

#### **Freedom to be Free**

At a General Audience in 2019, Pope Francis said, *'there are more martyrs today than there were at the beginning of the life of the Church... Martyrs are everywhere.'* In his 2013 book titled, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution*, the respected journalist John Allen Jr also paints a similar, distressing picture – with detailed reports of anti-Christian oppression, harassment, and violence, especially in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Of course, this is a far cry from the mostly cultural wars that we have here in the West – I am not in any way trying to undermine the gravity of the problem in the West whatsoever, but it seems that at least on some occasions, we get so worked up within the bubble of our first world problems, that we lose

focus of the bigger picture of reality in the wider world. Even in the East, some of the long running fights on the rubrics of Mass, seem a bit trivial when reading John Allen's book on persecution in the 21st century. Here, we can at least choose a stand, and we have things to lose for standing up against the 'dictatorship of relativism' – spare a thought and prayer for the millions of Christians elsewhere in the world, who do not have that choice.

Yet, the truth remains that in the West we have well and truly entered into the era of dictatorship of relativism that Pope Benedict predicted decades back, where *'having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism.'* In this current social strata that one finds stuck in the West, one can only hope that the dream of St John Newman would come true, of a laity *'who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they*

*do not, who know their creed so well, that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it – an intelligent, well-instructed laity.'* For populist movements, conservative pushbacks and the so-called messianic politicians are going to achieve precious little, at best they are reactionary and short-lived, because as Pope St JP2 used to remind us, *'Darkness can only be scattered by light, and hatred can only be conquered by love.'*

As a Christian living in today's hyper-secularised, yet increasingly polarised Western societies, it is important that one realises he/she has a moral responsibility to stand up to laws that are inherently against the dignity of the human person – and that includes above everything else those laws against man's quest for truth. But that entails a mature faith, the faith envisaged by John Henry Newman; which Pope Benedict calls *'adult faith'*, a faith based on *'friendship with Christ that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth.'* And I pray for that faith for all of us, *for the spirit to be poured out on all flesh...*



# No Greater Love than This

**Maria Teres Sebastian**  
writes about the martyrs – those heroic people who unflinchingly chose Christ, often at pain of a violent death.

*To this, you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).*

## What would you give for your faith?

For every person who dedicated their lives to the truth of the Gospel in the first few centuries, this was not a philosophical question but a stark, often brutal, reality. The embers of a fire, the flash of a sword, the roar of a coliseum crowd – these are the haunting images that the followers of a young faith so bold, transformed into a lasting prize. A witness so astounding that it left their torturers speechless!

The early Church, against all odds, proved that the more they were persecuted, the more their faith deepened, spreading to newer souls faster than wildfire. As Early Church Father

Tertullian famously declared, 'The blood of Christians is seed, and ensures the growth and fruitfulness of the People of God.' Surely, the spilled blood of martyrs has woven a thread of shared sacrifice and courage that fuels the faith of Christians even today.

## Ecumenism of Blood

The ecumenical Church, disregarding denominational differences and transcending the doctrinal disputes that so often separate them, has come together to honour and remember all martyrs with reverence. This unity, often referred to as the 'ecumenism of blood,' unites Christians of different backgrounds in their shared witness to Christ. As Saint John Paul II frequently stressed: 'Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the Saints and of the

Martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us.<sup>1</sup>

### A Legacy Forged in Love

Christian martyrdom cannot be neatly stacked into a linear timeline or a specific niche. From Saint Stephen, Christ's own disciples and their disciples, this unending list was heavily populated under Nero in the first century and stretched on until Diocletian's reign in the fourth century.

These persecutions were not standalone individual declarations of faith. In a society that was heavily stratified by class ideologies, the blood spilled by the noble and the slave spoke of the same love that shone on the mount of Calvary. These followers of Christ built a new kind of family where slave and noble, man and woman, could stand as equals in their faith. In prison and in the arena, they prayed together, supported one another, and faced death with a shared hope. Their faith thus proclaimed a new gospel – a loving Creator who loved and saved beyond the divisions of society.

And so, the legacy of these heroic souls who were willing to put their life on the line for 'the truth of the Gospel' did not end with the persecution era. The fire flamed on, even after the age of the mass persecutions passed. Christian faith continued to face resistance, but the zeal to stand up in the face of this resistance flared up even more. The reasons for the executions were diverse, but the witness was unrelentingly the same – a refusal to renounce Christ and the love He professed.

Saint Thomas Becket (d. 1170) and Saint Thomas More (d. 1535) would be top on the list of courageous witnesses who were brave enough to defy and question even those in power for the sake of upholding their faith. To personally and secretly live their lives was never enough; the fire inside them, the love they experienced in Christ, could not be contained. Across centuries, their blood still cries out to us with Saint Paul: *woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Virgin-martyrs like Saint Maria Goretti, St Lucy of Syracuse, and Saint Agnes of Rome continue to be powerful

## WHO IS A MARTYR?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines martyrdom as 'the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death' [CCC 2473].

The Church recognises three essential elements:

A martyr must accept a violent and premature death rather than renounce their faith

A martyr is killed by a persecutor motivated by hatred of the faith or another virtue associated with it, such as the defence of 'justice, the truth, peace [or] human dignity.'

A martyr assumes an unexpected attitude of charity, patience, meekness, in imitation of the crucified Jesus

[Pope Francis, *Conference on the Causes of Saints*, 14 Nov 2024]

The Catholic Church declares a person as a martyr when he or she is killed *odium fidei* [means that the persecutor's motive is hostility toward the Christian faith itself—*Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II, 1995]. The official judgment on whether a death meets this requirement is carried out by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints; after its investigation, the Pope gives the definitive approval for the declaration of martyrdom.

witnesses even in the modern world, encouraging young men and women alike to grow in and uphold the Christian virtue of chastity. They had to choose between life and the tenets of their faith, and they chose Christ without a doubt. *For to me living is Christ and dying is gain* (Philippians 1:21).

In Roman Martyrology lies even lesser-known stories of souls of charity, who were brave enough to raise their voices for the poorest in the spirit of the Gospel. Efforts to silence them in turn led to their cause and their faith, becoming louder than ever. Saint Maximilian Kolbe is one of the well-known stories... Have you heard of Blessed Rani Maria Vattalil from India who was knifed to death for speaking up and working for the poorest of the poor she was ministering to? Even in death, she left an opportunity for sanctity – her family forgave her killer, who eventually embraced the Catholic faith himself. John 15:13 reminds us: *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*. Blessed Leonella Sgorbati in Somalia, Blessed Rutilio Grande García and his lay companions in El Salvador, Blessed John de Britto in India... They all remind us that our neighbour-in-need is our Christian responsibility.

### Daily Martyrdom

The martyrs' search for truth, and love for their Saviour that far surpassed self-love, earned them eternal life. And we have received the same call, the same Holy Spirit! Like the 21 Coptic martyrs in Syria, or the six Evangelicals killed in Burkina Faso in 2019, the 21st century also provides us with ample inspiration.

Saint John Paul II teaches that every Christian must be ready to bear witness, 'even at the cost of suffering or grave sacrifice.' In an age that's becoming increasingly secular, when the line between truth and deception is blurrier than ever, the lines from the *Lumen Gentium* reminds us that: 'Each layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord.'

Christ Himself assures us to hold fast to His love and not fear the sting of death: *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* (Revelation 2:10). So what have we to fear?

**Maria Teres** is a social worker by education, and writer by passion and profession. In her spare time, you may find her curled up on a couch crocheting, reading, or sketching.

# CLICK TO CARE, CLICK TO CHANGE!

Digital Witness and Faithful  
Solidarity with the Persecuted



**Fr Jijo Jose Manjackal MSFS urges us towards solidarity with those persecuted, giving us twenty ways we can employ.**

#### **Expressing Solidarity: What Can I Do?**

In every age, persecution has marked the followers of God. From the prophets to the apostles, from the martyrs of the early Church to the believers silenced in our time, Faith has always demanded courage. Today, however, the arena of struggle has widened. While persecution continues in many areas of our society, a new battlefield of conscience and solidarity has emerged: the digital world.

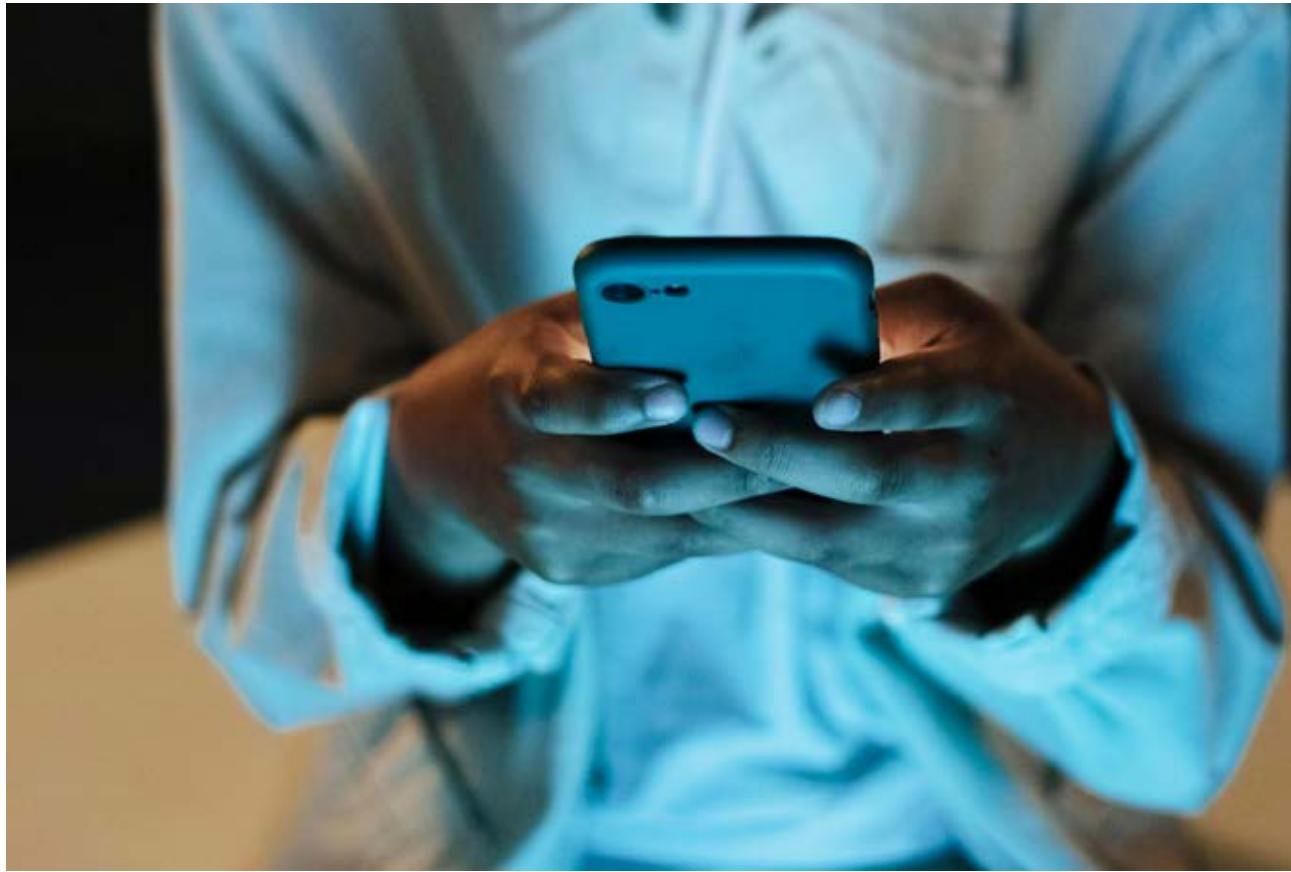
The screen in our hands can be a weapon of indifference or an instrument of justice. Used well, it can give voice to the silenced, preserve memory against erasure, mobilise support across borders and ignite compassion in those who might otherwise never know. The question is not whether we *can* act, but whether we *will*.

#### **Why Solidarity Cannot Wait**

The Second Vatican Council proclaimed in *Dignitatis Humanae* that 'every man has the right... to be immune from coercion in matters religious' (*DH* 2). Yet reports of hate crimes, persecutions and discriminations from across the world, echo the naked truth that this right is daily trampled.

Our Blessed Lord assures: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:10). To recognise the blessedness of the persecuted is not only to honour them; it is to share in their struggle. Pope Benedict XVI urged in his Message for the 44th World Day of Peace (2011): *I ask all those in authority to act promptly to end every injustice against Christians living in those lands.*

In the digital age, all of us, as believers – families, youth, priests, consecrated, educators – are 'in authority, and are responsible.' We are no longer powerless. Each of us can become a witness, a defender, a builder of solidarity.



## From Awareness to Action: Twenty Digital Pathways of Solidarity

In the digital age, online platforms have the power to transform knowledge into compassion and compassion into meaningful action. Here are *twenty concrete pathways* to live out solidarity with persecuted communities:

### AWARENESS

► **01. Stream Voices of the Persecuted:** Share heartfelt testimonies through podcasts, short videos, or interviews that allow individuals to express their own experiences. Always ensure safety by protecting identities, using anonymisation, translation and subtitles to make sure voices are both heard and safe. Avoid sensationalism!

► **02. Launch Story Chains/Relay Campaigns:** Encourage people to share powerful testimonies, tag friends and pass them on. These chains multiply reach organically, creating a personal connection. Keep each story authentic and include a clear call to action.

► **03. Engage Artists and Influencers:** Art has the unique ability to reach the heart in ways that statistics cannot. Collaborate with Christian (and interfaith) influencers, YouTubers,

podcasters, artists to create content (songs, documentaries, artworks, short films, poetic sketches, etc.) that not only highlight persecution, but also resilience. Involve (whenever possible and safe) persecuted communities or their diaspora as co-creators, ensuring they are not just subjects but active participants.

► **04. Leverage Immersive Tools:** Experiment with VR, AR or digital filters to simulate what it is like to be silenced – to develop empathy. AR apps might reconstruct destroyed sacred places to show visually what has been lost, allowing others to ‘walk in their shoes.’ Provide simpler alternatives, like short videos or story posts, so everyone can get involved.

### PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL SOLIDARITY

► **05. Broadcast Global Prayer Vigils:** Organise livestreamed vigils, Rosaries, or worship moments dedicated to persecuted believers. Let the universal Church pray together, visibly, uniting people from diverse corners of the world in a powerful fellowship. Record sessions or create rolling 24-hour prayer chains for different time zones to maximise participation.

► **06. Build Interactive Prayer Walls:** Create websites (‘online walls’) where

individuals can post prayers, intentions or light virtual candles. These digital walls evolve into living memorials of hope and solidarity. Engage users by encouraging them to return and share updates or prayers continuously.

► **07. Organise Digital Fasts & Challenges:** Invite individuals to dedicate a day without posting selfies or consumer content. Always connect the digital abstinence to prayer, donations, or specific actions for solidarity.

► **08. Use Solidarity Badges & Profile Frames:** Design simple, eye-catching digital symbols (profile photo frames, badges, icons) that people can add to their online profiles. These badges create a visible identity of compassion and a sense of ‘belonging to a cause.’ Ensure each badge links to resources and actions, encouraging engagement beyond mere symbolism.

### EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

► **09. Educate with Digital Modules:** Develop engaging e-courses, video lessons or infographics that explore the history and theology of persecution.

► **10. Document with Digital Maps:** Use innovative online mapping tools to track and visualise incidents of persecution –

making them visible to a global audience. Be diligent in verifying entries, clearly marking what is confirmed and what remains uncertain.

#### ► 11. Preserve Memory Digitally:

Archive stories, 3D scans, and cultural artefacts from persecuted communities. This ensures that their rich heritage endures, even in the face of destruction.

### ADVOCACY AND ACTION

#### ► 12. Launch Localised Hashtags:

Create impactful campaign hashtags focused on specific individuals, places, or events. Pair hashtags with practical steps – like petitions, donations, or vigils – so they resonate beyond mere slogans.

#### ► 13. Mobilise Legal Petitions Online:

Harness the power of digital petitions to hold institutions and governments accountable. Digital petitions amplify the voices of everyday individuals in the public sphere. Connect these efforts with actionable follow-up steps, such as contacting decision-makers or joining advocacy networks.

#### ► 14. CrowdFund with Transparency:

Raise funds online to support rebuilding churches, legal defences, or urgent aid efforts. Even small contributions can create a significant impact when shared widely. Keep supporters informed with updates, receipts and testimonies about how their donations are making a difference. Ensure great care in complying with the financial regulations of the society and having professional legal and financial caretakers in the entire process.

#### ► 15. Foster Interfaith Digital

**Dialogues:** Persecution affects us all – it is a shared human tragedy. Organise online panels or discussions with leaders from diverse faiths.

### SAFETY AND EMPOWERMENT

#### ► 16. Create Virtual Solidarity Circles:

Form dedicated online groups (if needed, time-bound or purpose-bound) for prayer, support or information-sharing on platforms (WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Discord, Facebook, etc.). Such circles transcend geographical distances. Keep these groups moderated, confidential and respectful, ensuring only trusted members are included.

#### ► 17. Develop Alert Networks:

Establish secure channels for reporting threats

in real time. These alerts can mobilise rapid responses from Church leaders and NGOs. Utilise encrypted tools and trusted intermediaries to safeguard sources and maintain confidentiality.

#### ► 18. Train in Digital Safety:

Knowledge about digital safety becomes a vital shield for vulnerable communities. Offer accessible workshops and guides on secure communication and anonymity online. Equip local trainers and tailor materials to various languages and literacy levels to maximise reach.

#### ► 19. Ensure Empowerment, Not

**Exploitation:** Allow persecuted individuals to share their own stories in their own words. This shifts the narrative from one of pity to one of dignity and empowerment. Avoid 'aid tourism/charity tourism' and victimising.

#### ► 20. Mentorship & Skill-Sharing

**Online:** Use digital platforms to connect with persecuted youth with global mentors in education, language learning, upskilling and pastoral training. Practise solidarity that not only empathises but also equips!

### What Has Not Yet Been Tried

The vision of love must never lag the guile of hate. If persecutors innovate, why should defenders not innovate more boldly? Digital technology opens new paths of solidarity that we are only beginning to glimpse.

Imagine VR pilgrimages that let believers 'walk' through destroyed churches and pray in virtual silence, where the real stones were scattered. Picture holographic exhibitions of sacred art, carried into schools and homes where young people can encounter beauty that cannot be bombed away. Consider AI tools that instantly translate testimonies of persecuted communities so that their cry is heard across languages. Envision predictive systems that detect rising hate speech before it erupts in violence, or encrypted alert networks that warn threatened families in time to find safety. Think of blockchain archives preserving evidence that courts will one day need, or global prayer grids uniting believers across time zones into one unbroken vigil.

### Beyond technology: The Power of Grace and Holiness!

Yet, let us never forget: there are many 'non-negotiables of solidarity' that cannot be digitised. No screen can replace the Most Holy Eucharist. No livestream can take the place of kneeling together in a parish church. No algorithm can substitute the Rosary whispered at home, or the holiness of a family gathered in prayer. What sustains the persecuted most, is real faith, real prayer, real sacraments, real growth in virtue.

Offer Holy Masses. Pray the Rosary and the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy. Attend Eucharistic adoration. Receive confession regularly. Engage in family prayer at home. Make pilgrimages to shrines or holy places. Study Sacred Scripture and Church teachings deeply. Grow in virtues. Witness your faith through corporal and spiritual works of mercy in daily life. These are the foundations of true solidarity – the 'unseen strength' that *cannot be replicated* by screens or social media, but which empowers the faithful to stand with the persecuted in love, prayer, and holiness.

We therefore need to dream boldly of what technology can do for justice and solidarity; at the same time, without any compromise, remain unshakably rooted in what only Grace can give and do! St Augustine reminds us: *Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you!*

### Conclusion: From Screens to Sacrifice

The persecuted do not ask us to feel sorry for them. They ask us to remember, to listen, to amplify, to act. Our digital platforms are no longer neutral; they are canvases where we either leave blankness or paint compassion. Our 'merciful gestures of solidarity' may appear small; but woven together, they form a global mantle of protection. Let us be 'the Church that is awake, the society that is vigilant and a humanity that refuses to let faith be silenced!' ■



# WHEN *Faith* CARRIES THE ULTIMATE *Cost*

A Look at the Global  
Persecution of Christians

We live in times that have produced more martyrs than any other age, writes **Dony Antony**, as he dwells upon Christian persecution, suffering and hope rooted in the Cross.

The Apostle Paul's warning to Timothy, *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted* (2 Timothy 3:12), continues to echo through the centuries with sobering relevance. For many Christians worldwide, faith still carries a cost, sometimes even the ultimate one. Today, more than **380 million Christians** endure high levels of persecution and discrimination, meaning that **one in seven believers globally** faces hostility for their faith.<sup>1</sup> The situation is even graver in certain regions: nearly **two in five Christians in Asia** and **one in five in Africa** experience persecution, with violence especially severe in places like Nigeria, where deadly attacks on churches and communities are frequent.<sup>2</sup> On average, **12 to 13 Christians are killed every day** simply for following Christ.<sup>3</sup>

This reality was brought into sharp focus in France, where believers mourned the brutal murder of Ashur Sarnaya, a 45-year-old disabled Iraqi Chaldean Catholic. A refugee who had fled persecution in the Middle East, Sarnaya was stabbed to death outside his Lyon apartment while livestreaming about his faith on TikTok. His story embodies both the courage and resilience of Christian witness, and the sobering reality of ongoing persecution.<sup>4</sup>

### Christian Suffering and the Witness of Martyrs

Christian suffering has always been bound to the mystery of the Cross. Persecution is not an accident of history but part of the cost of discipleship. Jesus himself declared, *If they persecuted me, they will persecute you* (John 15:20). Across the centuries, the Church has taught that such suffering, while painful, can also be redemptive when united with Christ.

The very word *martyr* comes from the Greek *μάρτυς* (*martus*), meaning simply 'witness.' In the earliest Christian communities, it referred to anyone who bore witness to Christ by word and deed.

Over time, however, the term came to signify those who gave the **ultimate witness** – sealing their testimony with their blood and laying down their lives in fidelity to the Gospel.

The first to bear this title was **St Stephen**, the Church's protomartyr, whose stoning is described in Acts 7. His witness of faith, even as he forgave his executioners, set the pattern for generations to come. In the decades that followed, countless believers in the Roman Empire chose death over denial of Christ – men and women like **St Ignatius of Antioch**, who longed to be united with Christ in martyrdom, and **Sts Perpetua and Felicity**, whose courage in the arena inspired fellow Christians to persevere. Their sacrifice revealed that the blood of martyrs is truly the 'seed of Christians,' as Tertullian famously declared.

That seed continues to bear fruit in our own time. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have produced more martyrs than any previous age. In **Nigeria**, Christians are regularly targeted by extremist violence; entire villages have been attacked and churches burned, with thousands killed in recent years. In the **Middle East**, believers who survived the genocidal campaigns of ISIS still live under threat, while others – like Ashur Sarnaya in France – are murdered even after fleeing persecution. Their lives and deaths echo the witness of the early martyrs: ordinary men and women who testify to the truth of Christ, even at the cost of everything.

Pope Francis reminds us that fidelity to the Gospel will inevitably bring resistance: 'There is a cost to remain faithful to what counts. The cost is going against the tide, freeing oneself from being conditioned by popular opinion, being separated from those who "follow the current."<sup>5</sup> His words highlight the courage required to live one's faith authentically in the face of cultural hostility.

Pope John Paul II offered a profound

theological lens in his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*. He taught that 'In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed. Christ has raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus, each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.'<sup>6</sup> This perspective helps believers view persecution not as a tragedy, but as a participation in Christ's saving work, offering hope and reassurance in the face of suffering.

### The Church's Response: Prayer, Intercession, and the Redemptive Meaning of Suffering

The Church teaches that suffering, while painful and often unjust, is never meaningless when united to Christ. This union with Christ has a transformative power, turning anguish into grace. Through prayer, the body of believers enters into the mystery of Christ's own suffering, encountering the One who willingly took upon Himself the weight of human pain. Christians are not left to face persecution in isolation; they are drawn into communion with a Suffering Christ, who transforms their suffering into a source of grace and strength.

The Church also emphasises the power of **intercessory prayer**, which unites the suffering of individual believers to that of the entire body of Christians worldwide, and ultimately to Christ Himself. By lifting the persecuted in prayer, Christians participate in the redemptive work of Christ, ensuring that no suffering is wasted. This powerful act of intercession empowers believers, connecting them to the global body of Christ and to His redemptive work.

Suffering is also a revelation of the glory of God. In the midst of persecution and trials, the faithful witness the manifestation of divine love: God is revealed not only in triumph or ease, but in endurance, mercy, and steadfastness. The Cross makes visible that God's love is intimately present in human suffering, turning even death into a means of redemption.

The Church recognises that suffering can bear profound spiritual fruits, leading

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to the conversion of persecutors, a deepening of faith, greater unity among Christians, and a fuller participation in Christ's mission. Prayer and intercession allow believers to actively join in Christ's Passion, experiencing first-hand how suffering can become a source of sanctification and witness.

As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Salvifici Doloris*, human suffering united to Christ 'can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ,' demonstrating that even the darkest trials are a means through which God's love is made manifest.<sup>7</sup> Through prayer, intercession, and participation in Christ's suffering, the Church embraces the paradox that in suffering, God's glory is revealed, His mercy is poured out, and His love is fully disclosed to the world.

### **Hope amid Persecution**

From the first martyr, St Stephen, to modern witnesses like Ashur Sarnaya, the Church has travelled a path marked by suffering and sealed with courage. The blood of martyrs – both ancient and modern – continues to water the seed of faith, reminding believers that persecution is not the end but a gateway to resurrection. Although the statistics of persecution are staggering and the stories heartbreaking, the Church responds not with despair but with hope rooted in the Cross. In Christ, suffering is no longer meaningless; it is redeemed and transformed into an instrument of grace and love. Through prayer and intercession, the entire body of believers participates in the suffering of Christ, and in doing so, encounters His glory.

Persecution will remain a reality for all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:12). Yet, this reality is not a cause for fear but for deeper faith. In every act of endurance, every prayer lifted for the persecuted, and every martyr's final witness, the Church witnesses anew the love of God fully revealed. In this mystery, Christians find both strength and purpose: to stand firm in Christ, to intercede for the suffering, and to testify that even in the darkest trials, the light of the Gospel cannot be overcome. ■

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## ON MY MIND

GIVE ALL OF  
*yourself*  
AND GOD WILL  
GIVE YOU ALL OF  
*Himself*

ST ANTHONY OF PADUA

Benita Elisa Benny  
Kerala, India



Joffin Chowdallor  
Doha, Qatar

Anil Israel  
Mannheim, Germany

**A**uthentic love leads us outside ourselves to affirming others: devoting oneself to the cause of man, to people, and, above all, to God. Marriage makes sense... if it gives one the opportunity for such love, if it evokes the ability and necessity of such loving, if it draws one out of the shell of individualism (various kinds) and egocentrism. It is not enough simply to want to accept such love. One must know how to give it, and it's often not ready to be received. Many times it's necessary to help it to be formed...



FR KAROL WOJTYLA  
(POPE ST JOHN PAUL II)  
*Witness to Hope*

ALL THE  
STRENGTH OF  
SATAN'S REIGN  
IS DUE TO THE  
**EASY-GOING  
WEAKNESS OF  
CATHOLICS**

ST PIUS X

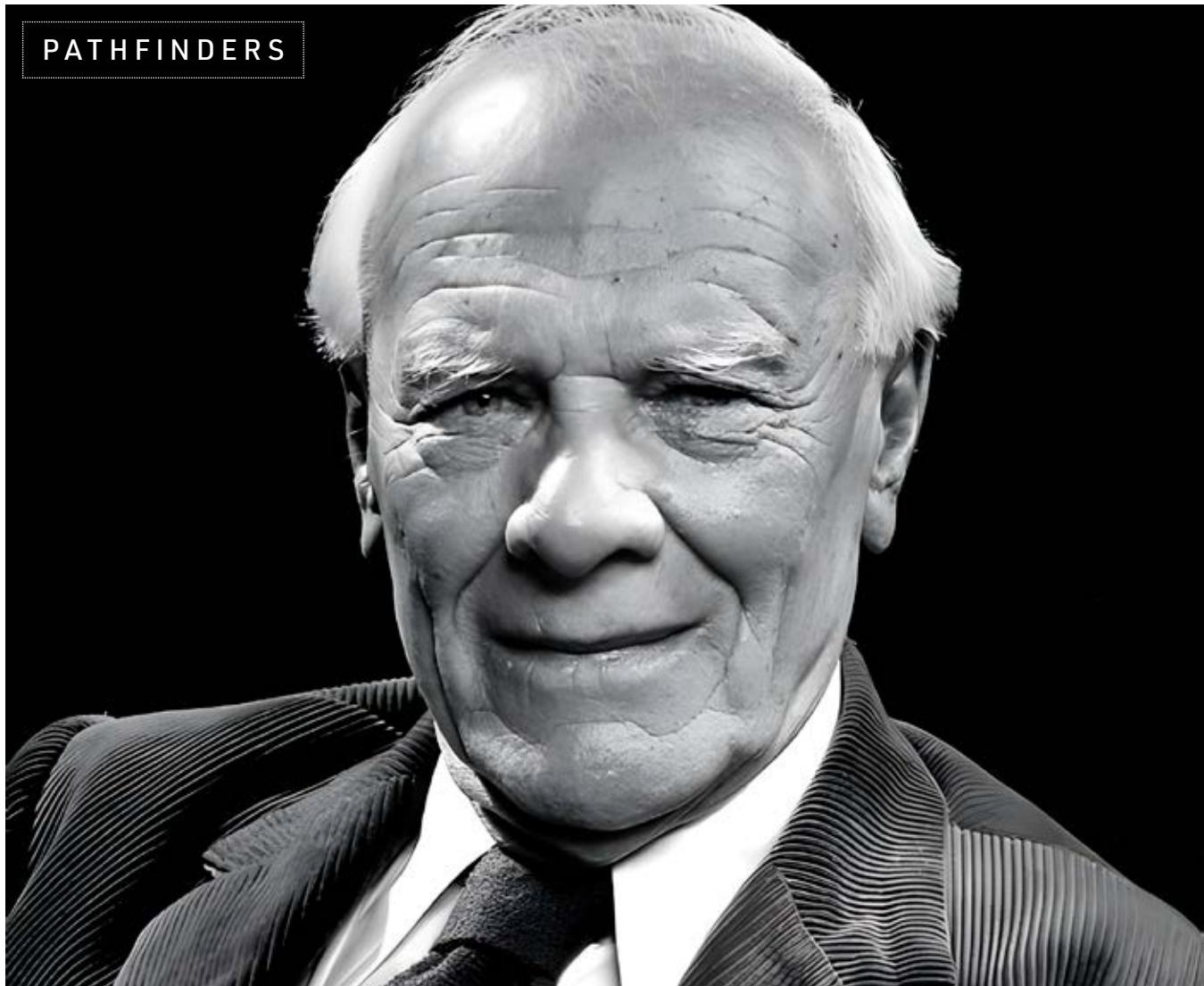


Tania Rose Josun  
Kottayam, India

Have you been  
touched in a  
profound way by  
something you read  
recently (spiritual)?  
Scan the QR code  
and share it with us.



PATHFINDERS



# Malcolm Muggeridge

**Neha Antony Akkara** writes about the Catholic conversion of the British journalist and writer.

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).*

This article of the Pathfinder series explores the story of British journalist and ardent atheist Malcolm Muggeridge, and how it is our duty to shine bright that people see Christ through our deeds. Malcolm's conversion story shows us how the Father's table always has a place kept for the prodigal,

and the one who finds his path back to the Father rejoices at the banquet.

Malcolm Muggeridge lived much of his life as an avowed atheist. He initially compared his faith to that of a gargoyle who looks down at the absurd behaviour of man. Malcolm was born in 1903 in England, and was brought up in an atheist environment. His father was a socialist and an atheist who imparted his views to his son. Malcolm grew up to be an agnostic communist sympathiser. In

his youth he had been taught Christian values, however he treated them as man-made and felt that they were subjective to each person. When he was given a job at a Christian college in British India, Malcolm realised he had to choose between power and love. Caesar had chosen power, he thought, but Caesar remains forgotten. Jesus, however, had chosen love – and the world has never been the same because of Him. Malcolm never saw his Catholic conversion as a single event, he chose to call it a living drama. In one of his letters to his father he wrote, 'I want God to play tunes through me. He plays, but I, the reed, am out of tune.'

Returning to Britain in 1927, Malcolm married Katherine Dobbs, a writer and translator. The birth of their first son awakened in him a new reverence for the value of human life. Malcolm's next job was as a journalist correspondent from Cairo. It was here that hidden teachings as well as his sleeping faith began to awaken. However as the profession demanded a less holy and more worldly approach, he buried whatever faith that had tried to emerge. For his next assignment, Malcolm was sent to the Russian Cathedral of St Basil. There he was shocked at what he saw, the church was turned into an anti-God museum. In his book, *Conversion*, he describes seeing the fossilised remains of the saints buried at the cathedral on display in all their corruption, while the body of Lenin perfectly preserved in an airtight coffin, a few steps away.

Malcolm's first great moment of conversion happened when he decided to go to the Holy Land – to see and witness the truth if there was any. When Malcolm stood in front of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, he thought to himself, how could someone be so sure that this was where Jesus was born. He also saw people flocking to the church like sheep coming to their shepherd. Malcolm mockingly thought of Bethlehem as a religious Disneyland. But there was something that stirred his heart, something he couldn't quite place his finger upon.

In 1969, he met Mother Teresa as part of a work trip. He later referred to Mother Teresa as a 'light which could never be extinguished' and told her story in his 1971 book *Something Beautiful for God*. It

He later referred to Mother Teresa as a 'light which could never be extinguished' and told her story in his 1971 book *Something Beautiful for God*. It is said that Mother Teresa inspired him to embrace Catholicism.

is said that Mother Teresa inspired him to embrace Catholicism. During his time in India he received first-hand experience on how she served the poorest of the poor. Malcolm was fascinated at how someone could selflessly love the people around her in the name of Christ. In his book, he writes, 'One cannot work with the Mother, without being converted to a certain degree.' As time passed, Malcolm also found himself pondering over the works of Saint Augustine for a BBC show. He was deeply inspired by these writings.

Malcolm Muggeridge was deeply convinced about the sanctity of every human life. He drew a bold line at abortion and the use of contraceptives. Malcolm is well known for resigning from his position as the rector of Edinburgh University as a response to the protest of the students demanding contraceptive pills be made available in the university health clinic. He strongly believed that life was valuable, and that contraception would lead to strong scars in personal relationships. Malcolm was surprised at the release of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirmed his convictions about the sacredness of life. He began to feel that he and the Church had a lot of things in common. This realisation brought him closer to the Catholic Church.

After the assignment Malcolm came back home. Little did he know that God had specially prepared a friend for him, a priest who would bring Malcolm back to God's table. Fr Bidone, an Italian priest, was a wonderful man who had a home for mentally challenged children. He took care of them just as a father cares for his children. It was not just what he did that influenced Malcolm and his wife, it was how he did it. The priest was holiness, compassion and consistency personified.

It was through Fr Bidone's life that Malcolm understood that Catholicism could be practiced not just preached. Fr Bidone played a major role in making Catholicism seem more approachable for Malcolm. Through his life Fr Bidone served as an inspiration for Malcolm and Kitty's Catholic conversion. Malcolm was also close with the Bishop of Arundel, who Malcolm felt was a good man. These priests presided over the baptism of Malcolm and his wife Kitty. The ceremony was held as a private function in the church of Our Lady Help of Christians. Malcolm was 79 years-old at the time of his conversion.

After his conversion he wrote *Conversion: The Spiritual Journey of a Twentieth Century Pilgrim*. In its introduction Malcolm recalls the day of his baptism and confirmation, he describes it as a day filled with 'a sense of homecoming, of picking up the threads of a lost life, of responding to a bell that had long been ringing, of taking a place at a table that had long been vacant.'

Going through Malcolm's conversion story, we realise that it was the life of both Mother Teresa and Father Bidone that inspired him towards Catholicism and played an integral part in Malcolm's conversion. It was their light that shone so brightly before Malcolm and inspired him to glorify the Almighty. This month let us pledge to follow the path of Mother Teresa and Father Bidone, may our good deeds lead those around us to the table of the Father's banquet.

# A MIXED BAG & GETTING BACK ON TRACK



Summer vacations are over and Rome is trying to get back to normal routines. Schools and universities have reopened. All those who were on vacation are returning. There is a wane in the volume of tourists. Yet, we have three more months of Jubilee left.

On 6th September, Pope Leo resumed the special Jubilee audiences on Saturdays (began by Pope Francis). These special

audiences provide a platform for the Pope to offer profound reflections on the Christian faith and the meaning of the Jubilee to specific groups from around the world. He stated that the treasure that ignites our hope is Jesus and that we must set out in search for his traces like St Helena did.

The biggest highlight of this month was the canonisation of Carlo Acutis

and Giorgio Frassati on 7th September, the first saints canonised by Pope Leo. Over 80,000 people were present for the liturgical ceremony including the family of Carlo Acutis. The younger brother of Carlo Acutis, Michele, did one of the readings for the Mass. The Vatican had issued special stamps in honour of them as well. A new animated movie depicting the life of Carlo Acutis was released the same day – *Carlo Acutis, God's Influencer* – which brings to life the story of the Church's first millennial saint who used his passion for technology and the internet to spread his love for the Eucharist and the Catholic faith to people around the world.

There was a month-long gap on major jubilee events after the Jubilee of Youth. Thereafter, the Jubilee of Consolation took place on 15th September, on the feast day of Our Lady of Sorrows. This was dedicated to all those experiencing, or who have experienced, moments of particular difficulty, grief, suffering, or poverty in their lives.

Many associations, foundations, and religious organisations dedicated to helping those in need offer programmes for families who have experienced the premature loss of a child or loved one; the Paolo VI Family Home, which welcomes families moving to Rome for their children's cancer treatment free of charge; the Villa Maraini Association,



which provides treatment for those suffering from drug addiction, alcohol abuse, gambling, and new addictions such as technology, and also offers prison rehabilitation services; the Italian Association of Road Accident Victims and Injuries – Onlus, which offers psychological and administrative support to the families of victims; and the Scintille di Speranza Association, located at Rome's Laurentino Cemetery, which supports those who have lost a family member.

The Jubilee of Catechists was held from 26 to 28 September, bringing over 20,000 pilgrims from 115 countries to Rome. This was dedicated to those who daily engage in catechesis, will see the involvement of diocesan and national catechetical offices, and the Episcopal Conferences of various countries. Pope Leo stated that a catechist is a person of the word that they proclaim with their life, whether they are our parents or a minister on behalf of the Church.

14th September, the feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross was also the birthday of Pope Leo. Pilgrims who gathered for the audience sang in loud voices, 'Happy Birthday' to the Pope with music from the square.

An unprecedented spectacle caught people off-guard on the night of 13 September as tens of thousands gathered for 'Grace for the World,' a massive concert closing the third World Meeting on Human Fraternity, the event opened with breathtaking symbolism. More than 3,000 drones illuminated the night sky above the basilica, tracing the image of Pope Francis. The display was the first of



its kind in the Vatican, and brought loud ovations from the audience. The drones depicted the hands from Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, followed by a monumental dove of peace and finally a striking image of the *Pietà*, Michelangelo's famous marble sculpture housed in St Peter's Basilica. Also projected was the icon of *Salus Populi Romani*, venerated in the Basilica of St Mary Major and cherished by Pope Francis.

There was a huge hubbub regarding various fake accounts, especially those made with AI on Pope Leo. The Vatican's communications team said it has reported hundreds of accounts, mostly on YouTube, posting fake, AI-created videos – called deep fakes – of Pope Leo since the start of his pontificate. I, myself have received many calls asking if the Pope said this or that, regarding various topics. Many are being led astray by a huge number of fake images, talks, sermons, and deep fake

videos. The Pope's choice of theme for the 60th World Day of Social Communications 2026, is 'Preserving Human Voices and Faces.' Here, Pope Leo has highlighted the risks of AI, leading people astray and manipulating them.

With things getting back on track in Rome, the weather is changing as well. It's getting slightly colder during the night and in the early mornings and it has started to get darker quickly. The explosion of tourism in the wake of the Jubilee year too has stopped. But there has been a lot of collateral damage to the public system that the city has to get over as soon as possible.

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Fr Justin Panachickal MSFS is currently doing his licentiate in social communications at the Pontifical University of Santa Croce, and will share with us throughout the Jubilee year ground reports from Rome.



# Righteous Branch

Are we willing to shed our pride and selfishness and take on the 'persecution' of selflessness, asks **Anil Israel**.

We live in a world of influence. Numerous are the influencers out there trying to grab our attention. Every piece of new information has the potential to make us pause and think if we ought to bring about a change in our attitude and lifestyle. Every evolving trend demands our response: are you willing to join the bandwagon and stay up-to-date or just remain outdated? How do I respond to the ripple effects caused by the winds of change? Am I a *reed shaken with the wind* (Matthew 11:7)? Or do I prefer to cling on to timeless principles based on conviction and opt to stand tall and erect unshaken by the waves of distraction?

Standing for the truth is not easy. Letting everyone know that you live by godly standards requires a lot of courage that comes with grace. *If you think you are standing firm you had better be careful that you do not fall* (1 Corinthians 10:12). He who does not stand for something, will fall for anything. *Anyone who is not*

*for me is really against me; anyone who does not help me gather is really scattering* (Matthew 12:30).

Whose side am I leaning on? If I am not part of the solution, then I am part of the problem. Do I see myself among those labouring in the Lord's vineyard? *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels* (Luke 9:26).

Many have opted to be people of integrity for the salvation of their soul and have embraced the martyr's crown. The meaning of the word 'martyr' is to bear witness. To bear witness to Christ, I need to embrace martyrdom in some sense. I need to let something in me die, to radiate the light and love of Christ.

We have many examples from the Bible. *Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God* (Genesis 6:9). When God asked him to build an ark on dry land, he willingly obeyed. Noah's unwavering belief teaches us to trust in God's will.

Joseph was thrown in a dry well, sold as a slave and wrongly imprisoned. He had all the reasons to despair and complain. He trusted in God's permitting will that could bring good out of evil. *You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good* (Genesis 50:20).

Abraham was willing to give up everything including the son born to his old age, Isaac. *Abraham reasoned that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again* (Hebrews 11:19). Willingness to embrace the loss of life comes from profound faith in the *author of life* (Acts 3:15).

Job was another champion of faith, who endured enormous suffering. *Satan afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head* (Job 2:7). *Though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him* (Job 13:15). Job stands tall as a man

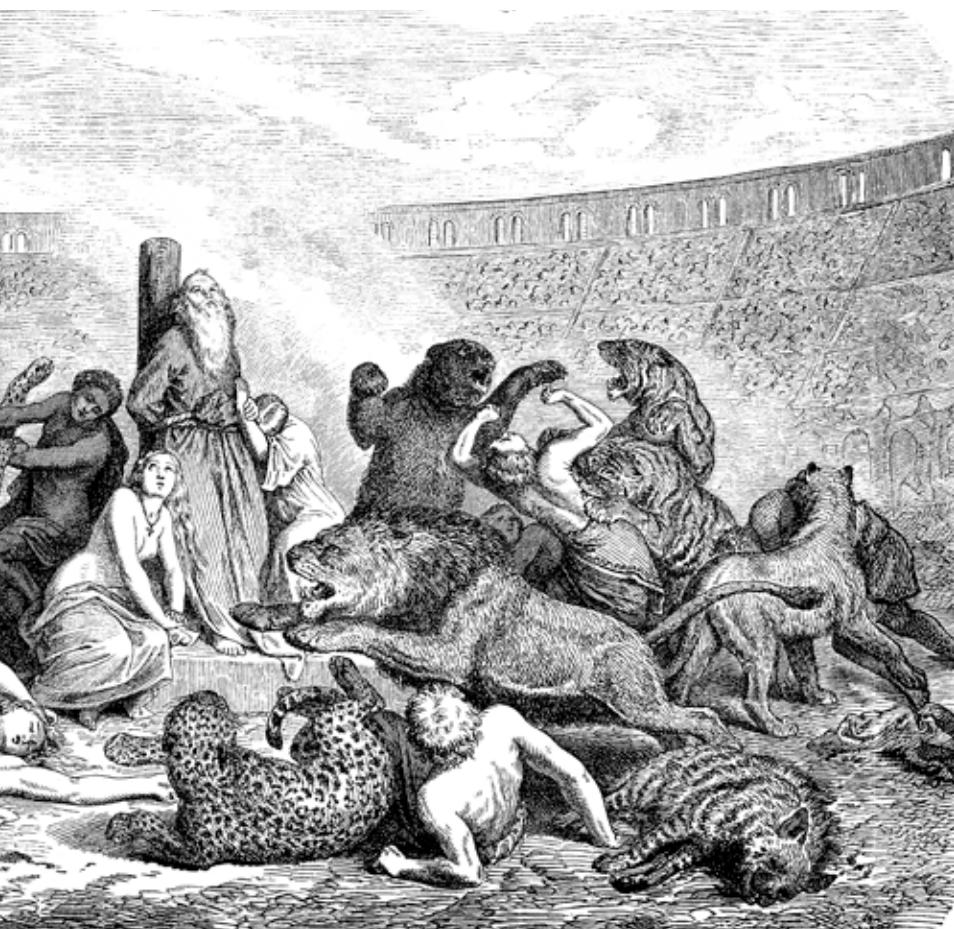


of unwavering faith. Even Daniel was *thrown into the pit filled with lions* (Daniel 6:16) for choosing to worship the one true God. Only strong trees can endure strong breeze.

Even Jesus endured ultimate humiliation. *I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting.* (Isaiah 50:6). *And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head* (Matthew 27:30). Embracing the Father's will comprises an unperturbed 'Yes' to the *cup of suffering* (Matthew 26:39).

The way to eternal life is through the

THOUGH HE SLAY ME, YET WILL I HOPE IN HIM → JOB 13:15



**Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God's wheat and shall be ground by their teeth so that I may become Christ's pure bread (St Ignatius of Antioch). St Lawrence endured grilling during the Roman persecutions. St Sebastian endured Diocletian persecution.**

narrow way of suffering. *In this world you will have trouble* (John 16:33). *We must endure many hardships to enter the kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22). Stephen was stoned. Paul was beheaded. *Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it* (Luke 9:24). These words of our Blessed Saviour, encouraged many Christians to embrace martyrdom. *The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church* (Tertullian).

*Let me be food for the wild beasts, for they are my way to God. I am God's wheat and shall be ground by their teeth so that I may become Christ's pure bread (St Ignatius of Antioch). St Lawrence endured grilling during the Roman persecutions. St*

Sebastian endured Diocletian persecution. The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste were a group of Christian soldiers who were exposed naked on a frozen pond in Armenia to force them to renounce their faith. St Margaret Clitherow was pressed to death. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. Paul Miki and companions were martyred in Japan. Sts Andrew Kim Taegon and Paul Chong Hasan are among the 103 Korean martyrs.

Australian Christian missionary Graham Stuart Staines and his two sons Philip and Timothy were burnt to death in India by members of the Hindutva national group, Bajrang Dal. Sr Rani Maria was stabbed to death by Samundar Singh, a hired assassin. Innumerable Christians have undergone persecutions of different kinds. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:10).

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing* (John 15:5). To be a fruit-bearing branch, we need to abide in the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9).

May our willingness to grow in humility, by letting some selfishness come to an end and allowing some fruit of selflessness blossom, by bearing wrongs patiently, by letting endurance produce character (Romans 5:4), by embracing truth and shunning empty deceit (Colossians 2:8), be the assuring sign that we are in the process of transforming ourselves into a righteous branch (Jeremiah 33:15). May the pruning of our pride, the rejection of our rebellion, the shedding of our sloth be the persecutions (martyrdom) we joyfully embrace.

Anil Israel lives in Mannheim, Germany, with his wife Sunitha and their 6 children.

# Newswatch

## Pope Leo XIV addresses exorcists worldwide in Rome

From 15 to 20 September, around 300 exorcist priests gathered at the Fraterra Domus House of Spirituality in Sacrofano, near Rome, for the 15th International Meeting of the International Association of Exorcists (IAE). Pope Leo XIV sent a message of encouragement, thanking the priests for their commitment to what he called the 'delicate and essential ministry of the exorcist.' He urged them to carry out their mission not only as a work of liberation but also as a source of consolation for the faithful.

The papal message, conveyed through Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, also encouraged pastors to strengthen their support for



those who suffer spiritually. The Pope stressed that those truly afflicted by demonic possession should be sustained through prayer and the invocation of Christ's presence, reminding the priests that it is ultimately through the sacramental rite of exorcism that victory over Satan is granted.

At the opening session, Father Francesco Bamonte, vice president of the IAE, read the Pope's message. Monsignor Karel Orlita, IAE president

and exorcist from Brno in the Czech Republic, spoke about the importance of ecclesial communion and the Gospel roots of exorcism. He emphasised the association's role in providing ongoing formation worldwide, noting that the Dicastery for the Clergy recently approved new statutes, a milestone as the IAE membership surpassed 1,000 priests.

The conference explored key theological and pastoral themes. Bishop Aurelio García Macías, undersecretary of the Dicastery for Divine Worship, reviewed the Rite of Exorcisms, explaining the types of extraordinary demonic influence, the exorcist's responsibilities, and the significance of Christ at the centre of the rite. Cardinal Arthur Roche presided over the opening Mass, reaffirming the Church's pastoral care for those tormented by evil. The gathering also honoured Father Gabriele Amorth, IAE's founder, who passed away nine years ago.

## March for Life in Germany draws thousands of supporters



On 20th September, thousands of pro-life supporters gathered peacefully in Berlin and Cologne for Germany's annual March for Life. According to CNA Deutsch, police successfully prevented disruptions attempted by left-wing counter-protesters. This year marked the

third occasion that simultaneous marches were held in both cities, with participants carrying balloons and banners affirming the dignity of human life from conception to natural death.

The events received strong support from Catholic leaders. In Berlin, Bishop Rudolf Voderholzer of Regensburg and Auxiliary Bishop Matthias Heinrich joined marchers, who set off from Washingtonplatz near the Brandenburg Gate carrying red and green balloons as symbols of life. Meanwhile, in Cologne, Auxiliary Bishop Dominik Schwaderlapp celebrated Mass before the procession began at Neumarkt. Bishop Georg Bätzing, head of the German Bishops' Conference, sent a written statement reminding participants that life is a gift entrusted to humanity by God.

The march also reflected international solidarity. Alexandra Linder, chairwoman of the Federal Association for the Right to Life, noted the growth of global activism, pointing to recent marches in Vilnius and Zurich as well as an upcoming event

in Vienna. Speakers shared testimonies from abroad, including Johanna Durairaj from India, who highlighted the tragic scale of abortion in her country. Calls for conscience protections were central, with pharmacist Andreas Kersten advocating the right to refuse dispensing the morning-after pill. Felix Böllmann of ADF International underscored that such protections are guaranteed by constitutional freedoms.

Professor Holm Schneider, a paediatrician, shared a moving case in which quadruplets were carried to term despite advice for selective abortion, stressing the value of every life. The Federal Association for the Right to Life also presented policy demands: more complete abortion data, evaluation of pregnancy counselling, recognition of life from conception, and strengthened hospice care over assisted suicide.

At the same time, Zurich's march drew 2,000 participants, highlighting Europe's growing pro-life momentum.

## Tower in Basilica of the Sagrada Familia in Spain to be the world's tallest Catholic Church

After more than 140 years of construction, the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona is nearing one of its most historic milestones. The Tower of Jesus Christ, designed by renowned architect Antoni Gaudí, is almost complete and will soon be crowned with a massive cross, making the basilica the tallest Catholic church in the world.

In a 23 September statement to OSV News, chief architect Jordi Faulí explained that the central spire and its upper structure have already been finished. Current work is centred on the installation of the crowning cross, which is made up of seven separate sections that will be assembled and then hoisted into place by crane. Faulí said he expects this stage to be completed within the next few months.

Construction of the basilica began in 1882 and has endured wars, pandemics, and economic challenges. Despite these obstacles, the project is widely recognised as Gaudí's architectural masterpiece and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. While the main body of the church is

scheduled to be finished in 2026 – marking the centenary of Gaudí's death – other artistic details, such as sculptures, will continue to be added until

approximately 2034.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Xavier Martínez, general director of the basilica, noted that the tower could be fully completed by late this year or early 2026. He emphasised the importance of this achievement, calling it extraordinary that in the 21st century a cathedral of such scale is still being built.

The Tower of Jesus Christ holds special significance in Gaudí's vision. Standing at over 564 feet, it will surpass both the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace in Ivory Coast (518 feet) and the Ulmer Münster in Germany (530 feet), becoming not only the tallest Catholic church but the tallest church in the world.

Once the tower is complete, construction efforts will shift to the Chapel of the Assumption, located behind the basilica's apse. This chapel will feature a striking hyperbolic dome topped with a cross and will be adorned with sculptures of saints and angels. Among them will be St Joseph Oriol, a local priest canonised in 1909, and St Roch, revered in Spain as a protector against plagues.

The completion of the Tower of Jesus Christ marks a defining chapter in Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece, bringing his ambitious vision closer to its long-awaited fulfilment.



## TEACHERS OF ST CARLO ACUTIS SHARE MEMORIES



Before his reputation as a soon-to-be saint spread worldwide, Carlo Acutis was simply a student in a school uniform, carrying his backpack through the halls of the Tommaseo Institute in Milan. Teachers there recall him as cheerful, mischievous at times, and deeply committed to his Catholic faith.

Sister Monica Ceroni, who taught him religion in middle school, described him as an inquisitive boy who wanted to understand things fully. While he was not flawless – sometimes forgetting assignments or arriving late – he was determined and enthusiastic whenever something captured his interest. 'He wasn't a perfect student,' she noted, 'but when he cared about something, he pursued it with persistence.'

Carlo spent nearly eight years at the Tommaseo Institute, a Catholic school operated by the Marcelline Sisters. Situated directly across from his parish, Santa Maria Segreta, the school became central to his daily life, combining studies, games of soccer in the courtyard, and frequent visits to the chapel for prayer. His report cards consistently showed that religion was his strongest subject, reflecting his eagerness to engage in classroom discussions on faith.

Though devout, Carlo also enjoyed humour. Teachers fondly remembered his playful side and the jokes he shared with classmates. At home, his parents arranged tutoring to help him with schoolwork. Carlo's tutor, Elisa, later testified that her time with him – especially when he invited her to Mass – strengthened her own faith.

Teachers also noticed Carlo's compassion toward peers who felt isolated. He befriended a boy abandoned by his mother, offering him support and companionship. On another occasion, he defended a classmate with disabilities who was being bullied, later explaining that he valued the boy's friendship and wanted to stand by him. His ability to include and uplift others was considered remarkable for someone his age.

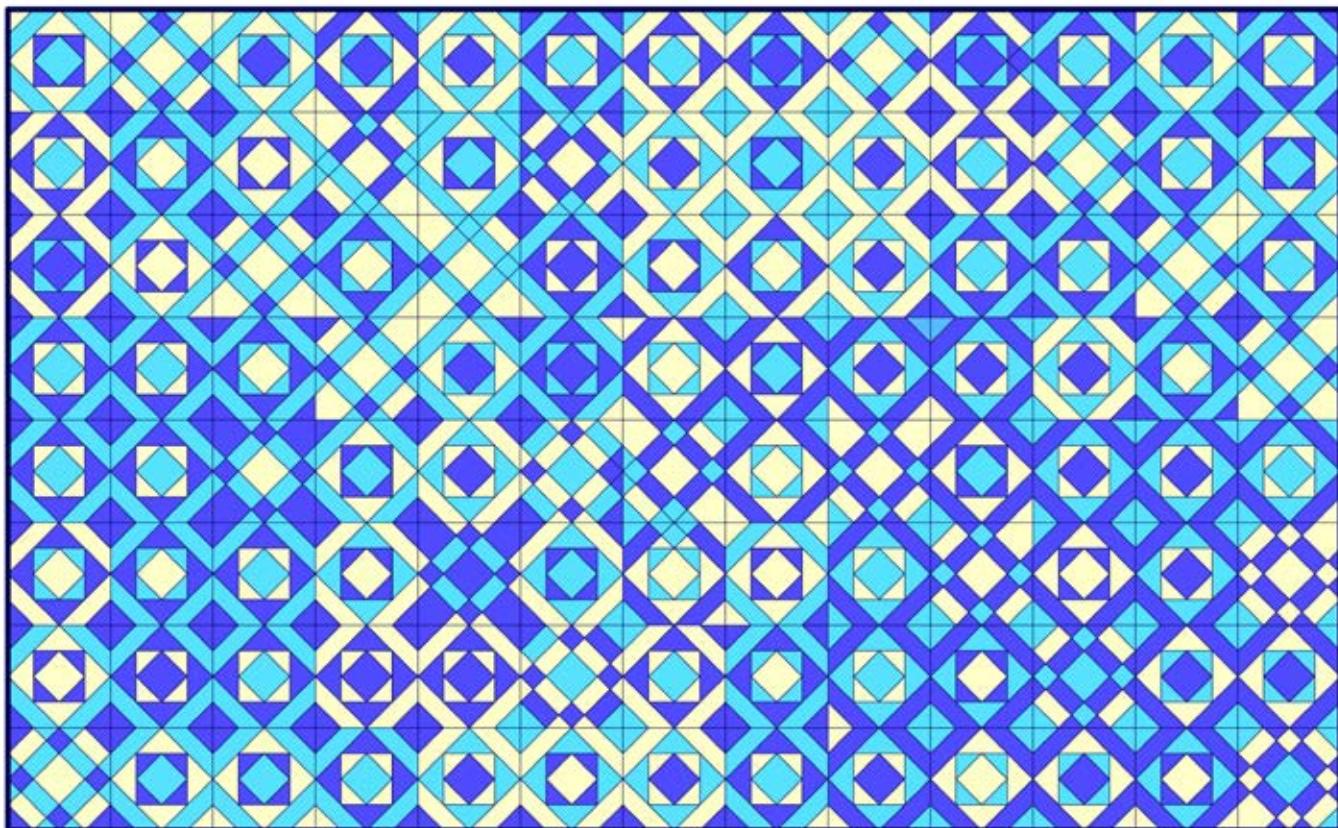
Sister Ceroni summed him up as a 'cheerful, lively boy' with dreams, energy, and a genuine love for people. His inclusiveness, she said, was a natural gift.

After graduating, Carlo attended Milan's Jesuit-run Leo XIII Institute. There, his faith became even more visible. Father Roberto Gazzaniga, the school's chaplain, remembered Carlo slipping into the chapel each morning before class and during breaks to pray – something none of his peers did.



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**FIND FIVE OF THIS  
TILE, HIDDEN IN  
THE PICTURE**



# LUKAS and RAY



Scripture  
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What's with the weights, Lukas?

Training to be Batman?

Nope. Carrying  
history.

That's like extra  
homework from  
2000 years ago

Christians faced lions,  
prisons, fire — yet they  
kept the faith



And my  
persecution is...  
when Wi-Fi dies  
during Netflix

Exactly. Different scale, same test: what do you do  
when comfort gets ripped away?

Guess it shows what  
you're really holding  
onto

ST. LAWRENCE



So... if St. Lawrence could  
joke while being grilled alive,  
I guess I can handle life  
without shortcuts

Now that's faith on fire.

And in fire. OUCH!

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ZINE FOR CHILDREN  
VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 57

त्यू 01 ► पंजिका अंक 01

KAIROS

# बड़स

इस अंक में  
रोम गंगे आरीष  
द द्विविद्या गेम

तेरी  
विश्वासयोग्यता  
महान है

A Missionary Magazine

Jesus Youth

**'PUT OUT  
INTO THE DEEP.'  
HE SAID.**

The beloved Catholic  
magazine for children is –  
**Now in Hindi!**