

KAIROS

GLOBAL

The Age of 'Anything'

GEORGE PAUL

ALSO ↓

Should We
Fear Horror?

■ SHELTON PINHEIRO

The Return of
Paganism

■ FR JERRY VM SDB





ST JOSEPH, PRAY FOR US



St Joseph, Terror of Demons, cast your solemn gaze upon the devil and all his minions, and protect us with your mighty staff. You fled through the night to avoid the devil's wicked designs, now with the power of God, smite the demons as they flee from you. Grant special protection, we pray, for children, fathers, families and the dying. By God's grace, no demon dare approach while you are near. So we beg of you, always be near us. Amen.

EDITOR'S ROOM

SIJO THOMAS

X @readkairos



AS DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, MAY WE LEARN TO RECOGNISE HIS PRESENCE IN EVERY WORKER WE MEET – TO SPEAK KINDLY, TO ACT JUSTLY, TO SUPPORT FAIR SYSTEMS, AND TO CULTIVATE A HEART THAT CHOOSES SOLIDARITY OVER INDIFFERENCE.

When Darkness Becomes Entertaining

Ever taken stock of today's entertainment? What once shocked, disturbed and demanded discernment now entertains, feels normal and arrives wrapped in glamour, humour, and virality. Darkness no longer knocks at the door – it streams into our homes, auto-plays on our screens, and trends on our feeds. Fascination quietly replaces discernment. This is not accidental.

The fascination with darkness is not new. What is new is its scale, speed, and subtlety. Horror franchises, occult themes, morally ambiguous heroes, and immersive storytelling have moved from the margins to the mainstream, especially among the young. Evil is rarely portrayed today as destructive. It is misunderstood, justified, aestheticised, even heroic. Sacred symbols are distorted for shock. Fear is sold as excitement. Repetition dulls the conscience.

Parents sense it. Animators/pastors encounter it. Youth ministers walk daily with its consequences. Anxiety, fear, disturbed sleep, confusion about good and evil, spiritual curiosity without grounding, and a loss of reverence are becoming common experiences. The danger is not that young people encounter evil, but that they are left alone to interpret it. The Church has always been for art, creativity, and recreation, but with discernment, because the senses are gateways to the soul. What we repeatedly consume eventually shapes what we desire.

The rise of dark entertainment, occult curiosity, and alternative spiritualities is not merely rebellion; it is a search – for meaning, power, transcendence, and hope in an anxious world. When faith is reduced to routine, people look elsewhere for mystery. When worship fades, substitutes rise. When the living God is removed from the picture, humanity does not believe in nothing; it begins to believe in anything. But substitutes cannot save.

Christian discernment is not fear-driven withdrawal from culture. It is courageously clear. It asks honest questions: Does this draw me closer to Christ, or quietly distance me from Him? Does this sharpen my conscience, or numb it? Does this leave me peaceful, or restless? Does this honour human dignity, or distort it? Discernment is not the skill of the sheltered; it is the discipline of the free.

As youth and families living in a hyper-mediated world, the call before us is clear. We are called to guard the heart – our own and those entrusted to us. We are called to speak openly about what we watch, follow, and admire, refusing fascination without reflection. We are called to support and create media that reflects truth, beauty, and hope, and to return often to prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, and silence, where clarity is restored. In an age where darkness is marketed as entertainment, choosing discernment is an act

of quiet courage. In a world that profits from confusion, choosing Christ is radical freedom. As Scripture reminds us, *Test everything; hold fast to what is good* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). May we be a generation that learns to see clearly, and chooses the light, on purpose.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

sijo.thomas@jykairosmedia.org



Also LOOK OUTFOR

- 12 Play, Pause, Pray
- 14 Merciful Hands, Hopeful Hearts
- 38 Finding Heaven in Traffic and Toddlers



Test everything;
retain what is good.
1 Thessalonians 5:21

PATRON

Major Archbishop Mar Raphael Thattil
(Ecclesiastical Advisor, Jesus Youth International)

SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Fr Joseph Ezhumayil
(Jesus Youth International Chaplain)

PRINTER AND PUBLISHER

Dr Edward Edezhath

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr Midhun Paul
(Jesus Youth International Coordinator)

DIRECTOR, KAIROS MEDIA

Dr Chackochan J Njavallil

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Sijo Thomas

MANAGING EDITOR

Joshy Joseph, Houston, USA
(joshy.joseph@jykaivosmedia.org)

ISSUE EDITORS

Fr Alvin Mundackal	George Paul
Bro. Anthony	Aleena Joy
Kunnumpurath	Jyothisna DSouza
	Tania Rose Josun

CIRCULATION COORDINATOR

Anto Puthur, Cochin, India +91 96055 11644
(circulations@jykaivosmedia.org)

ASSOCIATE CIRCULATION COORDINATORS

AUSTRALIA: Mintu Vijoy, Melbourne +61 452 538 785

BAHRAIN: Neenu Maria Jibin +973 33715472

BANGLADESH: Tias Victor Palma +880 1717-152023

CAMBODIA: Sophearong Ravy, Phnom Penh +855 96 426 5472

CANADA: Abhilesh Thomas +1 289 952 1785

EAST TIMOR: Noevia Maia Amaral +670 7625 5967

GERMANY: Anna Paul, Berlin +49 176 83495451

INDIA: Austin Michael, Mangalore +91 8277405251

IRELAND: Suresh V Joy +353 87 963 0904

ISRAEL: Darees Augustine +972 52 4415530

ITALY: Anoop P Varghese +39 3884256258

KUWAIT: Rajeev J Chacko, Ahmadi +965 66388310

MALAYSIA: Sweetly Kamala Prasad +60 162568139

NETHERLANDS: Jojo Varghese, Utrecht +31 684974552

NEW ZEALAND: Derick Daniel, Auckland +64 29 127 0650

OMAN: Jiju Paul, Ruwi +968 99467516

PAKISTAN: Asif Emmanuel +92 3022534254

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: Abin Michael +675 7479 4368

QATAR: Sijo C Johny +974 3357 2544

SINGAPORE: Savio Francies +65 9021 9798

SRILANKA: Sonal Fernando +94 77 3818399

SWITZERLAND: Anu Jose +41 799177100

THAILAND: Vineeth Andrew +66 86 372 6601

UAE: Thomas Jose +971 521316868

UGANDA: Mboowa Ronald +256 706844152

UK: Mathachen Maduckakuzhy +44 7969 365686

USA: Denny Joseph +1 (832) 640-3106

FINANCE COORDINATOR

Leena Shaju, Cochin, India +91 62382 79115; finance@jykaivosmedia.org

DESIGN

Mustard Tree, Delhi, India

LOOK INSIDE

ISSUE 96

REGULARS

- 6 Ask Fr Bitaju
- 7 Pope Talk
- 8 Jesus Youth
- 38 Chandeliers
- 40 Our Daily Bread
- 44 Newswatch
- 46 Timeout
- 47 Lukas and Ray



CONTENTS

12

ENGAGE

PLAY, PAUSE,
PRAY: A GUIDE TO
RESPONSIBLE GAMING

MITHUN MATHEW

ENGAGE

10 The Eucharist: A Mystery of Love and of the Law | BR BERTRAND HERBERT O.P.

ENCOUNTER

14 Merciful Hands Hopeful Hearts | SIJO OUSEPH & RICHARD MASCARENHAS

IN FOCUS

18 The Age of Anything | GEORGE PAUL

22 Should We Fear Horror? | SHELTON PINHEIRO

25 When Darkness Starts to feel Normal | JACOB JOSE

28 Choosing the Hallowed | DR ANNILYN SEBASTIAN

30 The Return of Paganism | FR JERRY VM SDB

33 Parenting in an Age of Unlimited Entertainment | NYCIL ROMIS

35 From Darkness to Freedom | FR SHOJI VECHOORKAROTTU

MAILING ADDRESS

Kairos Media USA

3010 Mason Grove Ln
Pearland, TX, USA. 77584

info@jykairosmedia.org
+1 832 592 3675

Kairos Media UK

St Charles Street,
Sheffield S9 3WU,
United Kingdom

infouk@jykairosmedia.org
+ 44 7969365686

Kairos Media India

No 8/174, Navodaya
Studio Complex,
Thengod P.O.,
Cochin, Kerala,
India. Pin: 682030

infoin@jykairosmedia.org
+91 9895711718



Kairos Media is a member of:
Catholic Media Association (USA)
Indian Catholic Press Association

@ReadKairosGlobal @readkairos

To subscribe to this magazine

scan QR code or visit

www.jykairosmedia.org



DISCLAIMER: Kairos Media is the mass media initiative of Jesus Youth, an International Catholic movement approved by the Holy See. Kairos Media considers its sources reliable and verifies as much data as possible. However, reporting inaccuracies can occur. Consequently, readers using this information do so at their own risk. While every effort has been made to ensure that information is correct at the time of print, Kairos Media cannot be held responsible for the outcome of any action or decision based on the information contained in this publication/website. The publishers or authors do not give any warranty for the completeness or accuracy of this publications' content, explanation, or opinion. Although persons and ministries mentioned herein are believed to be reputable, neither Kairos Media nor any of its employees, sales agents, or contributors accept any responsibility whatsoever for such persons and ministries activities. No part of this publications and/ or website may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form without prior written permission from Kairos Media. Permission is only deemed valid if approval is in writing.

ASK



FR. BITAJU

Fr Bitaju Mathew O.S.S.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.

→ Do Catholics worship Mary?

In Catholic theology, the distinction between veneration and worship is crucial to understanding the role of Mary in the life of the Church. Catholics do not worship Mary; rather, they honour and venerate her as the Mother of God and a significant figure in salvation history.

Veneration vs. Worship: Worship, in the Catholic context, is reserved for God alone (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This is known as *latría*, which is the highest form of worship that is due to God. **Veneration**, on the other hand, is a form of honour given to saints, including Mary, which is termed *dulia*. The honour given to Mary is elevated to a special level known as *hyperdulia*, recognising her unique role as the Mother of Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate.

Mary's Role in Salvation History: *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasises Mary's role as the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) and her cooperation in the divine plan of salvation. As stated in the *Catechism*, 'Mary is the mother of the Son of God, who is God Himself' (CCC 495). This unique relationship gives her a special place in the Church and among the faithful.

Intercession: Catholics believe that Mary intercedes for them before God. This belief is based on the understanding that, as the Mother of Jesus, she has a special relationship

with her Son and can intercede on behalf of the faithful. *The Catechism* states, 'The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship' (CCC 971). This devotion includes prayers such as Hail Mary and the Rosary, which are intended to seek her intercession rather than to worship her.

Liturgical Context: The Church celebrates various feasts dedicated to Mary, such as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the Feast of the Assumption. These celebrations reflect the honour given to her and her significance in the life of the Church, but they do not constitute worship.

Theological Foundation: The Second Vatican Council, in its document *Lumen Gentium*, affirms the role of Mary in the Church and her importance as a model of faith and discipleship. It emphasises that while Mary is honoured, the worship of God remains central to Catholic faith and practice.

In conclusion, Catholics do not worship Mary; instead, they venerate her as the Mother of God and a powerful intercessor. This veneration is distinct from worship, which is due to God alone. The Catholic understanding of Mary's role is deeply rooted in Scripture and Tradition, emphasising her unique place in the story of salvation while maintaining the primacy of worship directed to God.



YOUCAT 292

MAY WE DO SOMETHING BAD SO THAT GOOD CAN RESULT FROM IT?

No, we may never deliberately do something evil or tolerate an evil so that good can result from it. Sometimes there is no other course of action but to tolerate a lesser evil in order to prevent a greater evil. [CCC 1755-1756, 1759-1761]

The end does not justify the means. It cannot be right to commit infidelity so as to stabilise one's marriage. It is just as wrong to use embryos for stem cell research, even if one could thereby make medical breakthroughs. It is wrong to try to 'help' a rape victim by aborting her child.



Popetalk

DR. KOCHURANI JOSEPH



Prayer Intentions March

For disarmament and peace

Let us pray that nations move toward effective disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament, and that world leaders choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy instead of violence.



It is always essential to rediscover the beauty of charity and the social dimension of compassion. We need to direct our attention towards the needy and all those who suffer, especially the sick. Compassion and mercy to those in need are not reduced to a merely individual effort, but are realised through relationships: with our brothers and sisters in need, with those who care for them and, ultimately, with God who gives us His love.

Journalism should never succumb to the temptation of the trivial, or to fake news that creates confusion about what's true or false. Today we have new tools and new possibilities for informing ourselves, learning, and interacting. But along with them, new risks have also emerged. In the face of these trends, technological innovations should not lead to the loss of the uniqueness of our humanity.

The protection of the right to life constitutes the indispensable foundation of every other human right. Society truly progresses only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and works actively to promote it. In this regard, I would encourage you, especially young people, to continue striving to ensure that life is respected in all of its stages through appropriate efforts at every level of society, including dialogue with civil and political leaders.

Religious men and women ought to be leavens of peace and witnesses to faith, even in conflict zones. True peace comes from God, and calls for for disarming our hearts. Through your commitment to follow Christ more closely, sharing in His self-emptying and in His life in the Spirit, you can show the world the way to overcome conflict, sowing fraternity through the freedom of those who love and forgive without measure.

The Church strongly rejects any practice that denies or exploits the origin of life and its development. It also considers it deplorable that public resources are allocated to suppress life, rather than being invested to support mothers and families.

JESUS YOUTH



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

Want to follow Francis? It can be so dangerous

→ Pope Leo XIV proclaimed 2026 as the special Jubilee Year of Saint Francis – yet another opportunity to return to the roots of the inspirations of the Jesus Youth movement.

Pete came to me one day for a discussion and to receive some direction. Even before he began speaking, I sensed it would be about Saint Francis; he had been reading him recently. He said to me, *'I'm so shaken. In a way, I have discovered what I really want. Saint Francis challenges me so deeply. I want to give up everything and live life radically. It is so joyful and fulfilling. I know the danger, but my heart is moving in that direction.'*

I knew that terrible feeling, the one you get when you truly encounter Francis. At first, I did not know how to bring Pete down to earth or help him face reality. The real Francis shakes you up, as he did Dante, Chesterton, Kazantzakis, Clare, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, and many others. He died in 1226, yet for the past 800 years he has continued to shake people, and still does.

With Francis, a pious approach is acceptable, no problem. You can have a picture or statue of the saint and offer flowers. You can believe in his powerful intercession and pray a novena. Even a procession with his statue is fine.

But once you begin to see the *real* Francis, he becomes deeply unsettling. While he was alive, many parents and even wise people in the Church were frightened by the dangerous influence of this crazy man on young people. He drove people to an unbelievable kind of madness.

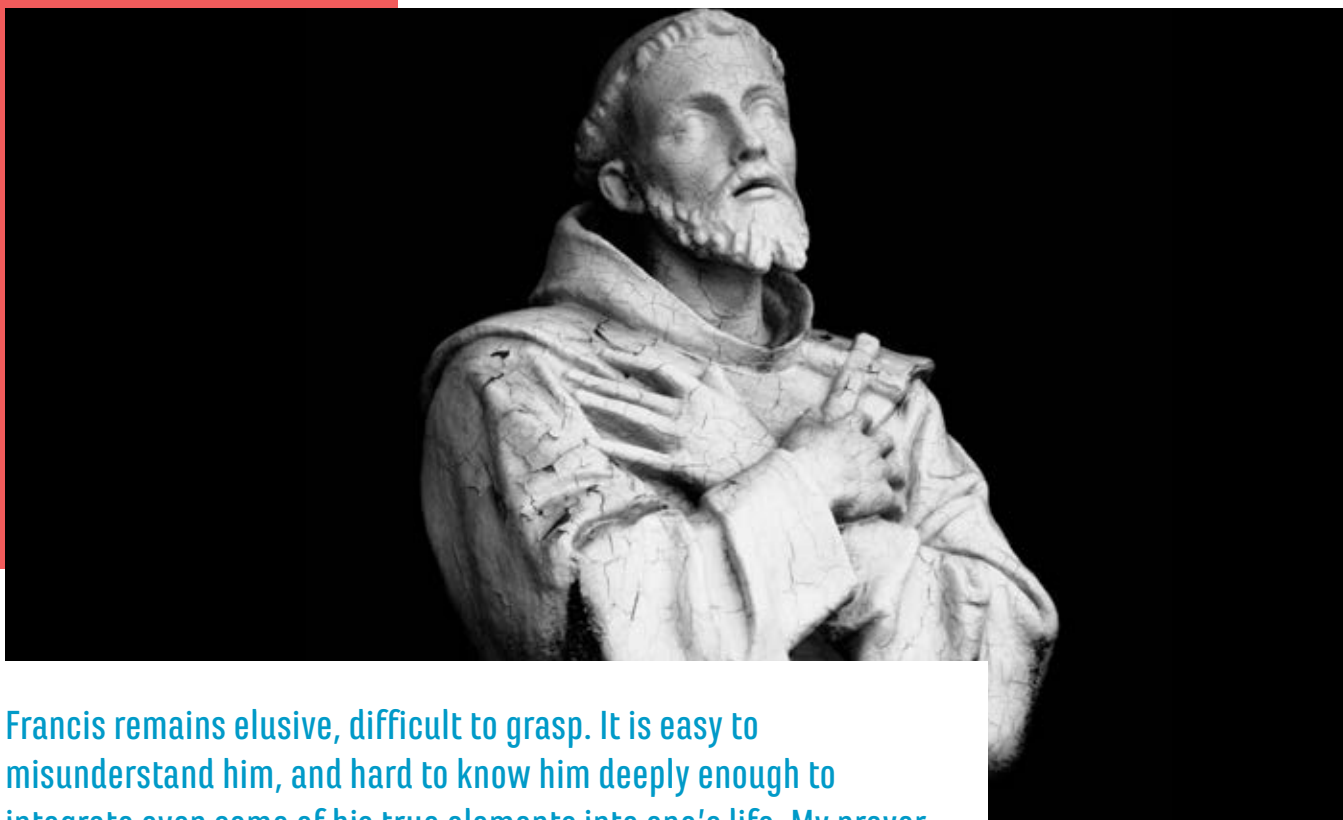
It is worth asking what made Francis so dangerous to so many.

1. He lived a dangerously irresponsible life with regard to money, time, and material security.
2. He did not obey his parents or conventional authority; he followed his raw inspirations rather than mature or cautious guidance.
3. He had no proper education, no real mentor, and virtually no formal spiritual formation.
4. He was unfit for family life and could not fit into a monastery, a parish, or any existing structure. He refused to conform to the customs and systems around him.
5. He gathered a community, but he made them just as crazy as he was – doing what felt beautiful and joyful, clothed, of course, in spiritual language.
6. He never planned for the future or built anything with future generations in mind.
7. He focused excessively on living a radically creative life of joy, love,

and beauty in their purest form, with little regard for common sense or social norms.

The result was that in his dress, lifestyle, eating habits, and even his forms of prayer, Francis appeared shabby, disruptive, and disorganised. More shocking still was the discovery that one *could* actually live this way, and live on. Many left everything and followed him. His father, Bernardone, saw the danger, tried to discipline and reason with him, and finally threw him out of the house. Others ridiculed him; some urged him to be more reasonable. No one could convince or guide him. Later, even his own followers realised they could not live the life Francis wanted. Though they claimed to follow him, they largely rejected his most radical ways. None of this dissuaded Francis. Almost casually, he lived and died a life radically different from the rest – and remained a rude shock to all.

I did not explain all this to Pete. When someone falls in love, resistance only deepens blindness. Instead, we spoke at length. For better or worse, I have seen many people deeply inspired by Francis. Some even take concrete steps to change their lives but later settle into mere piety – praying to him, admiring him, or eventually forgetting the initial radical shock. Most simply



Francis remains elusive, difficult to grasp. It is easy to misunderstand him, and hard to know him deeply enough to integrate even some of his true elements into one's life. My prayer is that this Year of Francis will challenge at least a few to know him deeply and allow their lives to be transformed.

continue life as before.

I told Pete: you cannot imitate Francis. His life is *his* life; your life is *your* life. But you can allow Francis to inspire you to live radically *where you are*, with the challenges you face, and with the time, money, and talents you have. Do not imitate Francis, be radically inspired by him and live *your* life.

Yet the question remains: what is the real challenge Francis poses, and why is he so dangerously attractive and inspiring?

Francis is the patron saint of the Jesus Youth movement. Many take this for granted; others find it strange and ask what it truly implies. Francis remains elusive, difficult to grasp. It is easy to misunderstand him, and hard to know him deeply enough to integrate even some of his true elements into one's life. My prayer is that this Year of Francis will challenge at least a few to know him deeply and allow their lives to be transformed.

So where do Francis and Jesus

Youth intersect?

- His romanticism – his focus on love, joy, and beauty
- A Christ-centred life rooted in encounter, ongoing conversion, and no turning back
- Christ as the foundation and reference point
- Fidelity to the Word of God
- Youthful spontaneity and unpredictability in the Spirit
- The joy of community and exuberant spiritual celebration
- Love for the Church and a joyful response to its authority
- Readiness for a relevant and spontaneous mission
- A commitment to simplicity, humility, and ordinariness

Pope Leo – following the inspiration of his predecessor, Francis – has given us an entire year to contemplate, step by step, this man who lived in imitation of another, even more radically dangerous man, Jesus. It is no surprise that many later called Francis the *Second Christ*.

Knowing someone intimately is the first step toward friendship and discipleship. What follows is the slow work of translating that knowledge into one's own life, its challenges, possibilities, and concrete realities. This requires personal reflection, honest struggle, and meaningful conversation with God and others. Mere knowledge can be deceptive and even dangerous. What bears fruit is the willingness to take steps, wrestle, work things out, and allow real change.

Pete did not leave his job. He remains a Jesus Youth. Recently, he married Lilian. I wait to see how he will allow himself to be transformed through his encounter with Francis. ■■

.....

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.

ENGAGE

The Eucharist:

A MYSTERY OF LOVE AND OF THE LAW



Canon laws are meant to safeguard sacred mystery and what is truly precious to the Church, writes **Fr Bertrand Herbert O.P.**, as he takes the Eucharist as his point of reference.

As a student of canon law – the body of law that governs the Catholic Church – I often hear about people's frustration with the Church's laws. They can feel overburdened by the rules that are imposed on them. As a result, many dismiss these laws. They may justify their complaints by thinking, 'After all, how can the Church and the profound mysteries of our faith be governed by man-made laws?'

A significant mystery of our faith governed by canon law is the Most Holy Eucharist (see *CIC* cann. 897–958). So, if we want to better understand canon law's role in the Church, the Eucharist can be a helpful point of reference. But perhaps we should first try to understand more about the Eucharistic mystery. I take this cue from a wise priest. When I asked him why he loves the Church he simply responded, 'Because I love Christ.' If we can appreciate the mystery of love in the Eucharist, we can appreciate why the Church's laws want to safeguard this precious mystery.

MYSTERY OF LOVE

The Most Holy Eucharist is the *fontem et culmen*, the source and summit of the Christian life (*Lumen Gentium* 11). It is at the heart of all we do as followers of Christ because it is Christ Himself. The mystery of the Eucharist, then, has as its foundation the mystery of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.

The inner life of the Trinity was, is, and always will be the most perfect reality imaginable. The three persons of the Trinity give of themselves and receive each other in an eternal bond of love. Out of sheer goodness on His part, God wanted to share this inner life with humanity. This life was bestowed upon us through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We share in the life of God through our union with Christ who possesses this life most fully. Our union with Christ begins with the sacrament of Baptism when we are made members of His Mystical Body. But this union is made stronger and more perfect when we are

united to Him in the Eucharist. As Christ descends into our mouths and our souls at Holy Communion, we ascend with Him to that eternal bond of love He has with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Before we were born, God ordered all things that we might be with Him. The Eucharist leads us to this goal because it unites us with God Himself. Being fed by the Eucharist, we will one day be united with all the saints and angels who dwell in perfect happiness with the God who loves us beyond our wildest dreams, and we will forever glorify Him for this gift.

MYSTERY OF THE LAW

From what we have just said, the Eucharist is clearly a mystery that is precious to the Church. But how do the Church's laws relate to this mystery? The language we used above to describe the Eucharist can seem so different from stale, legal language. But canon law has a role in safeguarding this precious gift because canon law is different from other laws.

Every law is meant to bring about justice in a society. In the context of the Church, canon law is meant to bring about what is just in the life of the Church. Canon law is meant to ensure that we render to God what is owed to Him and that the members of the Church render what is owed to each other. Justice for the Church is something sacred because the Church is sacred. The life of the Church and her members is derived from and oriented to the very life of God. The laws of the Church, therefore, are the means by which she visibly manifests and perpetuates her sacred and invisible life.

Canon law, therefore, is far more than an arbitrary system of rules. It protects and promotes the life and holiness of the Church. The laws governing the Most Holy Eucharist are no exception. Perhaps these laws seem like a burden, especially when we consider the tangled web of details within them: What kind of bread and wine are to be used? Who is considered a minister of the Most Holy Eucharist? When and where can a priest celebrate Mass? What are the rules for

receiving Holy Communion? But the dense laws that answer these questions are not meant to be a burden. They are dense because they are meant to be a secure foundation on which the Church can uphold this precious mystery.

To conclude, the laws of the Church do not disregard mystery. No, canon law acknowledges and preserves the profound mystery of love in the Eucharist. To this end, I will let the law speak for itself and conclude with the very first canon in the *Code of Canon Law*'s section on the Most Holy Eucharist: 'The most venerable sacrament is the blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord Himself is

Every law is meant to bring about justice in a society. In the context of the Church, canon law is meant to bring about what is just in the life of the Church. Canon law is meant to ensure that we render to God what is owed to Him and that the members of the Church

contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, in which the Sacrifice of the cross is forever perpetuated, is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life. By means of it, the unity of God's people is signified and brought about, and the building up of the body of Christ is perfected. The other sacraments and all the apostolic works of Christ are bound up with, and directed to, the blessed Eucharist' (*CIC* can. 897). ■

Fr Bertrand Herbert OP is a Dominican priest of the Province of St Joseph. He was ordained a priest in June 2025, and is currently assigned in Washington, DC, where he is completing a degree in canon law. He has also earned degrees in philosophy and theology.

PLAY, PAUSE, PRAY

A Guide to Responsible Gaming

Gamer and Tech professional, **Mithun Mathew** highlights the positives and negatives of gaming, and how Catholics can change that digital landscape.



Gaming on mobile apps or the internet are no longer just entertainment, they integrate our finances, social identity, and personal information. Mobile gaming has become a ‘virtual home’ where we socialise and compete with other players around the world.

Church & Saints’ advice to Gen Z

Pope Leo XIV warns that ‘subliminal manipulation’ in app design is a grave ethical violation. We must approach gaming with *prudence*, treating our digital privacy as a facet of our human dignity. We aren’t just ‘users’; we are Temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), even in the middle of a battle royale.

‘Technology must remain our servant, not our master; it should enhance our humanity, not diminish it’ – Inspired from the life of St Carlo Acutis.

‘Technology must remain our servant, not our master; it should enhance our humanity, not diminish it’ – Inspired from the life of St Carlo Acutis.

Gaming to Gathering

Gaming can be a great tool to invite like-minded Catholic teens and youth for real life gatherings, to unleash their energy for events where faith and friendship matter more than high scores, and the best victories are the ones shared together

in Christ. With over 3 billion people on the digital landscape, games to build Christian values and wisdom are scant. Let us hope for more Tech professionals to respond to the call to be the footprints of Christ in the digital world. ■

Mithun Mathew is a Network Security professional, is passionate about gaming, and is newly married.

GAMING CATEGORIES: Strengths VS Threats

CATEGORIES & LANDSCAPE

STRENGTHS

THREATS

Casual & Mobile Games

~35%

Easy access, quick fun, instant rewards; fills boredom

Personal information getting leaked; Leads to gaming addiction

Competitive eSports

~20%

Builds mastery, discipline, teamwork; global recognition

Toxic chat, harassment; monetisation traps; burnout from participating aggressively

Role-Playing & Adventure Games (RPGs)

~25%

Deep immersion, rich storytelling; creativity and problem-solving

Predatory gambling mechanics; Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD)

Real Money Gaming & Gambling

~15%

Thrill of real cash rewards; appeals to competitive instincts

High addiction risk; difficult withdrawals; lifelong gambling issues

Faith-based / Values Games

<5%

Moral development, safe community; character-building focus

Competes with other categories of games and risk of being overlooked

ENCOUNTER



Merciful Hands, Hopeful Hearts

How can we include differently-abled people? Taking the biblical healing of the paralytic as an example, **Sijo Ouseph** writes about ministering to people with special needs.

Christian ministry to persons with special needs is a concrete witness to the Gospel's mercy, not a sideline programme but a core expression of Christlike compassion. Special needs include sensory processing differences, intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism spectrum conditions, learning differences, physical impairments, chronic medical conditions,

and mental-health or behavioural challenges.

The incident in Mark 2:1-12 of four friends carrying a paralytic, refusing to be stopped by a crowd, and lowering him through a roof to reach Jesus is more than a miracle story. It is a living blueprint for how Christian communities, especially young people, should blend compassion with inclusion

THE FOUR PILLARS OF INCLUSION

To follow the example of the four friends, we must build our communities upon four essential pillars. These elements make way to bring healing of Christ to individual and society with its systems

1. Belonging

Belonging is the first fruit of Gospel compassion. In the story mentioned

above, the man is not left outside to watch; his friends insist he be present where healing happens. Belonging means being seen, wanted, and valued as a peer rather than a 'charity project.'

An action plan would be to create spaces where persons with disabilities can belong without having to 'perform' or 'fit in.'

2. Participation

Participation moves people from the sidelines to the heart of the community. True participation requires intentionally designing activities, liturgies, and programmes so that persons with disabilities can engage intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually with ease.

3. Collaboration

'Compassion in our hands' was literal: four people, one mission. No single person could carry the weight alone. Collaboration recognises that inclusion is a shared responsibility. It values the gifts of each person and distributes the work of care and advocacy so that no one bears the burden alone. This is the strength of a collective mission.

4. Accessibility

The friends *removed the roof* (Mark 2:4) to bring their friend to Jesus, symbolising bold changes to barriers. Jesus also heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6), defying critics who prioritise rules over compassion and choosing human dignity above administrative laws. Thus, affirming that the greatest law exists to serve life which comes from Love of God.

A question for us to ponder is, while our churches and communities open arms to accept people, does it also offer belongingness? While many may come in, the real question is, how many will stay?

THE HARVEST OF HEALING: BEYOND THE PHYSICAL

While the man's ability to walk was the visible miracle, the Gospel points to a deeper, 'social' healing that reshapes the world.

Social & Spiritual Healing: Restored relationships and a renewed sense of dignity

Fostering Belongingness

Marwin [name changed] was my colleague who had 100% loss of vision and hearing. He could neither see nor hear. He was trained in tactile sign language and communicated with the world around him through the use of touch and smell.

He worked among us and had a workspace just like ours. He followed the same personnel policy and benefits as us. He belonged in all senses, to the team. He participated in all of our activities, including events, team lunches, meetings and outings.

In fact all of our team members began learning sign-language to adapt to the inclusive environment. So when he participated in our activities, we would take turns in being his mobility escort as well as his sign-language interpreter. Our team collaborated and stood in the gap for him.

Can you believe that he operates a smart phone as well as a laptop? He had a braille reader that could be connected via Bluetooth to his smart-phone and laptop. This enabled him to send WhatsApp chats, emails, as well as operate a bank account.

Our layout was designed to be accessible to him. He knew the pantry well enough to use the microwave, stir his own coffee and do his own dishes.

I often wondered if he could ever belong and participate in church the same way as he did at work.

Over the years I've treasured the use of sign-language. Once during a transit in Singapore, as I completed my meal, a service personnel came to clean my table. I quickly realised that she communicated in signs and began using sign-language to communicate with her. Believe me, she lit up and felt a sense of belonging. Among thousands of travellers, there could have been few who would notice her and hardly anyone who could communicate with her in signs. She may not have been lonely, but perhaps didn't belong fully either.

RICHARD MASCARENHAS, INDONESIA

Social and spiritual healing finds its deepest expression when persons with special needs are welcomed fully into the fabric of society. Restored relationships emerge as communities move beyond pity or exclusion, choosing instead to embrace difference as a gift. In this embrace, dignity is renewed – each individual is affirmed as a child of God whose presence enriches the whole community.

Healing in the community which would translate to Witnessing mercy in Christ

Effective ministry to special needs includes collaboration with families and professionals, safeguarding and confidentiality policies, regular evaluation of accommodations, and provision of respite and support for caregivers. In doing so the Church not only welcomes vulnerability but learns new rhythms of patience and creativity, embodying a kingdom where difference is celebrated

and true strength is measured by inclusion.

In the Book of Acts, we see Peter and John at the Temple gate. They didn't have gold to give the man who couldn't walk, but they gave him something better. Let us be the generation that stops seeing 'disability' and starts seeing 'possibility', reflecting deeper meaning to the words echoed by Jesus in the Gospels to *love your neighbour as yourself*. 

Sijo Ouseph worked in the UAE for several years before returning to Thrissur, India, where he is engaged in business. He is active in Jesus Youth formation programmes, and in initiatives in the field of disability.

EXPERIENCE

WHEN THE PILL FELT LIKE A KNIFE

Aleesha W Karerakkattil
shares how a baby was
saved from abortion
through the efforts and
prayers of a pro-life doctor.



God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. I give you dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves on the earth' (Genesis 1:28).

This beautiful verse from the Book of Genesis shows God blessing our first parents with the gift of children and entrusting them with stewardship over all creation. All they had to do was say *Amen* to receive this divine gift with faith and gratitude.

Yet, in today's world, we encounter many conflicting attitudes toward this gift of life. On one side, there are families who joyfully welcome children, trusting completely in God's providence and selflessly embracing the responsibility of raising them. On the other, we see a growing resistance to life, where abortion is justified under arguments such as '*my life, my choice*,' career concerns, social pressure, or even labelling it as *accidental*.

Amidst this reality, there are courageous men and women who boldly stand for life, raising their voices against the injustice done to unborn children. Many selflessly support expectant families – emotionally, spiritually, and materially – helping them choose life without counting the cost.

Listening to Dr Reju Varghese Kallely, a paediatrician by profession, was deeply touching and inspiring. An active pro-lifer since 1998, Dr Reju was strongly influenced by Pope St John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), which powerfully reaffirms the value and inviolability of every human life and appeals to all people to respect, protect, love, and serve life. Further strengthened by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Church teachings, he developed a profound conviction to defend life from the moment of conception.

One experience he recently shared led to many deep realisations – especially about learning to say *no* to worldly thinking and *yes* to God. Though saying *yes* is often difficult, the transformation it brings far surpasses the struggles endured.

One day, Dr Reju received a call from a pregnant mother who, along with her husband, was part of a large-family WhatsApp group where she regularly read his messages. She revealed that this was her sixth pregnancy, and she was overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty, particularly about what others would think and the upbringing of their kids. Her first four deliveries were normal, while the fifth was a Caesarean. They had already approached three government hospitals seeking an abortion, but doctors refused due to high-risk factors.

Dr Reju gently consoled her, assuring her that there would be many people to support them and that they need not fear the future. His wife, Dr Sonia Joseph, also a paediatrician, spoke with her and offered encouragement. Prayer support was immediately requested from several pro-life WhatsApp groups.

A few days later, the lady informed them that she had been admitted to a government medical college for abortion. Dr Reju then spoke to her husband, offering prayers and support, urging him to return home, meet their parish priest, make a good confession, and seek a blessing. Though Dr Reju even sent him financial assistance, the husband returned the money and asked not to be contacted again.

Without losing hope, Dr Reju requested several priests to offer Holy Masses and pray fervently for the unborn child and the family. By God's grace, the very next afternoon, the husband unexpectedly called back. He said that the doctor had handed him an abortion pill to give to his wife. Holding the pill, he felt as though he were holding a knife. In distress, he called and asked Dr Reju for advice.

Dr Reju immediately advised him to refuse the pill, get discharged, and return home. The following day, the couple left the hospital and went home. Soon after, they met Dr Finto, another pro-life doctor, who reassured them and promised full support. The couple later attended a retreat for pregnant women and their husbands. Today, they are joyfully continuing the pregnancy.

All Glory to God! Those who trust in His providence will never be put to shame.

This testimony powerfully shatters

worldly conventions. The world may ridicule or question us, but the Lord stands with open arms, offering the most precious gift – life itself. He longs for us to receive it joyfully and wholeheartedly.

To those who are joyfully expecting, conflicting thoughts may arise, but remember: the God who blessed you with this gift is greater than every fear. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.* Your journey will be more graceful than you ever imagined!

To those praying for the gift of a child, God's timing is perfect. The Lord who blessed Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Elkanah and Hannah is mighty enough to bless you in His perfect time. Continue thanking Him, even in waiting, for giving you the deep desire to become parents and for shaping you into holy parents.

To those delaying parenthood solely for career or comfort: life does not always wait for our plans. Seek God's grace and align your choices with His will.

Children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward... Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them (Psalm 127:3–5).

Dr Reju Varghese Kallely is a paediatrician at Dhanya Mission Hospital, Thrissur, India. His wife, Dr Sonia Joseph, serves as a paediatrician at the Government Taluk Hospital, Thrissur. They are blessed with six children: Maria Alphonsa, John Vianney, Joseph George, Francis Antony, Theresa Maria, and Catherine Maria.

Dr Reju has been active in the **Jesus Youth Movement** since 1996 and played a key role in establishing a Pro-Life Ministry in 1998. He was part of the Kerala Jesus Youth Pro-Life Central Team in 1998, coordinator of the Marian Pro-Life Movement in the Diocese of Thamarassery, India, and continues as a pro-life resource person and Pre-Cana faculty member since 1998. ■

Aleesha W Karerakkattil works in Christ University, Bangalore, India, as a trainer and support staff in the Centre for Education Beyond Curriculum (CEBEC). She is married to Job Jose.

IN FOCUS

The Age of 'Anything'





When we take the one true God out of the picture, what remains to fill the deepest longing of our souls is darkness and evil, writes **George Paul**.

Scroll. A 15-second video shows a pair of hands shuffling a deck of ornate tarot cards. The caption reads, 'Collective Reading: What you need to hear today.' Scroll. A crystal enthusiast explains how to use rose quartz to 'manifest love'. Scroll. A user with dark lipstick and a pentagram necklace shares a simple 'money spell'. This is #WitchTok, a corner of TikTok with billions of views, where ancient occult practices are repackaged as bite-sized life hacks for a new generation.

Meanwhile, on Netflix, a new season of a show featuring a teenage witch navigating high school, romance, and demonic forces is trending in the Top 10. On Instagram, astrology meme accounts have millions of followers, and dating apps now let you filter matches by their zodiac sign. Across the world, anxious young people are turning to online fortune-tellers and astrology apps to cope with uncertainty about their careers and relationships.

In Germany, a young man walks into a building with soaring Gothic arches and stained-glass windows. But this is no longer a church. The former St Rochus Catholic Church is now a high-end bicycle shop. Across Europe, over 600 Catholic churches have been closed and decommissioned in Germany alone since 2000. They've been turned into apartments, hotels, pubs, and even a boxing arena. The bells have fallen silent.

This isn't just a niche subculture anymore. It's mainstream. And it's a symptom of a much deeper spiritual shift. As the historic churches of the West stand increasingly empty, something else is rushing in to fill the void. It's a chaotic, glittering, and sometimes dark mix of new beliefs, ancient superstitions, and digital spirituality. It proves the prescient words of GK Chesterton, who famously said that

when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing – they'll believe in anything.

We are living in the age of 'anything'. And it's time to ask: what are these new gods we're building, and what happens when we invite them into our lives?

The Numbers Don't Lie

The statistics paint a stark picture. In the United States, those identifying as Christian have dropped from 78% to 62% in less than two decades. The religiously unaffiliated, the so-called 'nones,' now make up 29% of the population. Among young adults aged 18-24, only 46% identify as Christian. In Europe, the trend is even more dramatic. A majority of young people in 12 out of 21 European countries identify as non-religious, with the Czech Republic (91%), Estonia (80%), and the UK (70%) leading the way.

And yet, the spiritual impulse hasn't died. Nearly a quarter of Americans aged 18-29 consult tarot cards annually. Thirty percent of all Americans engage with astrology, tarot, or fortune-tellers. In India, 62% of Gen Z believe spirituality helps them gain clarity, and 80% of young Indians engage with spiritual content online. Nearly 60% of astrology app users in India are Gen Z.

People are still searching. They're just searching in different places. And what they're finding is often a dangerous substitute for the real thing.

The Rise of the Occult

Let's be clear. The renewed interest in witchcraft, astrology, and the occult is not a harmless fad. It's a spiritual search, but it's a search in a world that has lost its compass. When a society turns its back on the one true God, it doesn't become a rational, secular utopia. It becomes haunted. The spiritual vacuum pulls

in other forces, and not all of them are friendly.

The Bible is unequivocal about the dangers of dabbling in the occult. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 gives a stark warning against anyone who practices *divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead*. These practices are called ‘detestable’ because God, as a loving Father, knows they open doors to spiritual realities that are deceptive and destructive. They promise power and knowledge but often lead to fear, anxiety, and bondage.

Today’s pop culture often presents witchcraft as a tool of empowerment, a way to reclaim personal power, especially for women. Shows like *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* portray the occult as edgy, glamorous, and even heroic. Celebrities consult psychics and tarot readers, and fashion brands now incorporate spiritual themes into their marketing. Dior’s own creative director was recently photographed having his tarot cards read. But this glosses over a darker truth. By seeking power from sources other than God, we place ourselves under the influence of forces that do not have our best interests at heart. We trade the loving authority of our Creator for the fickle and often malevolent whims of lesser spirits.

This isn’t just about candles and crystals. When we reject the true God, we don’t create a spiritual vacuum. We create an invitation. And darker forces are always ready to RSVP.

For many young people this spiritual search doesn’t lead to a formal new religion, but to a kind of personalised, digital spirituality. It’s a spirituality that fits into a busy, noisy, and anxious modern life. Anxious about the future, struggling with mental health, young people are turning to astrology apps and online tarot readers as a form of therapy.

While some are turning to the supernatural, others are pouring their religious impulses into secular causes that have taken on the shape of a faith. These new ‘religions’ have their own dogmas, priests, and punishments.

One of the most powerful is a hyper-politicised ideology that sees the world as

a battle between oppressor and oppressed. It has its own version of original sin (privilege), a need for public confession, and a form of excommunication (cancel culture) that offers no forgiveness. As one analyst put it, ‘The Last Judgment of political correctness knows no forgiveness.’ It’s a religion of law without grace, a system of rigid moral accounting that judges people based on their group identity rather than their character.

Another is a form of radical environmentalism that worships a wrathful Mother Earth, or ‘Gaia.’ In this faith, humanity is a virus, and salvation comes through a strict asceticism of consuming less and sacrificing modern comforts. It has a powerful sense of impending doom and a call for collective repentance, a secular apocalypse story for an age that has forgotten the real one.

A third is what we might call ‘Technicism,’ the belief that humanity can, through its own ingenuity, overcome its limitations and achieve a form of godhood. This is the dream of Silicon Valley, the promise that artificial intelligence and biotechnology will conquer death and suffering. It’s the ancient Tower of Babel rebuilt with code and algorithms. It is the ultimate expression of human pride.

These secular faiths may seem noble, but they fall short. They locate evil in systems or in other people, but never in the human heart itself. They offer no real solution for the fundamental problem of sin and no hope for personal transformation.

How We Lost the Enchanted World

To understand how we got here, we have to understand what we lost. For a thousand years, the West lived in what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls an ‘enchanted’ world. This wasn’t a world of fairy tales, but a world where the spiritual and material were deeply intertwined. For the medieval Catholic, the world was charged with the grandeur of God. Heaven was not a distant, abstract place; it was a reality that constantly broke into the earthly realm.

The Eucharist was the centre of this world – not a symbol, but the true Body and Blood of Christ, a miracle happening on the altar of every church. The saints

were not just historical figures; they were friends and intercessors in heaven, part of the great family of the Church. Angels were messengers and guardians, a constant, unseen presence. The sacraments were not mere rituals, but powerful channels of grace that marked every stage of life, from birth to death. Relics, holy water, and blessed objects were points of contact with the divine. The cosmos itself was a great cathedral, filled with meaning, purpose, and signs that pointed back to the Creator.

This enchanted worldview began to crumble centuries ago. The process was slow, a gradual draining of the world’s spiritual colour. The Protestant Reformation, as one writer put it, was an ‘engine of disenchantment’. By rejecting the sacraments, the intercession of the saints, and the Real Presence in the Eucharist, it pushed God further away, making Him a distant sovereign who ruled from afar rather than a loving Father intimately present in His creation. The world became less a place of mystery and more a collection of objects.

Then came the Enlightenment, which championed a cold, mechanical reason that had no room for mystery or revelation. Science became the only path to truth, and anything that couldn’t be measured or quantified – like angels, miracles, or the soul – was dismissed as superstition. The world was no longer a cathedral. It was a clock, a machine that could be understood and controlled without any reference to a Creator.

By the time Nietzsche declared ‘God is dead’ in the 19th century, he was simply stating the logical conclusion of this long process of disenchantment. The West had built a world that no longer had any need for God. But in doing so, it had created a profound spiritual vacuum.

Nietzsche wasn’t celebrating. He was terrified. He knew that killing God meant killing the very foundation of Western morality. ‘When one gives up the Christian faith,’ he wrote, ‘one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one’s feet. This morality is by no means self-evident... By breaking one main concept out of Christianity, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one’s hands.’

Values like compassion, human

dignity, and equality are not 'self-evident.' They are the inheritance of a civilisation built on the belief that God became a man, lived among us, and died for our sins. Without that foundation, Nietzsche predicted, our values would eventually crumble, leaving a 'void' and a 'monstrous logic' in their place.

We are living in that void. The new spiritualities, from #WitchTok to political fanaticism, are humanity's desperate attempt to find meaning, morality, and hope in a world where the ultimate source of all three has been abandoned.

The Only Thing That Fills the Void

The answer is to recognise the genuine spiritual hunger that drives people to these things. A 2003 Vatican document (Pontifical Council for Culture & Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. *Jesus Christ The Bearer Of The Water Of Life - A Christian reflection on the 'New Age'*) put it perfectly, acknowledging that the attraction of New Age ideas is often due to a failure within our own communities to address the deepest needs of the human heart: 'the search for life's meaning, the link between human beings and the rest of creation, the desire for personal and social transformation'.

The document further states: 'New Age is attractive mainly because so much of what it offers meets hungers often left unsatisfied by the established institutions.' Pope John Paul II posed the crucial question: 'Pastors must honestly ask whether they have paid sufficient attention to the thirst of the human heart for the true "living water" which only Christ our Redeemer can give.'

People are looking for an experience of the transcendent. They are looking for a sense of mystery and power. They are looking for a way to make sense of their lives. We cannot counter a religion of self-help with a faith that is just about self-improvement. We must present Christianity for what it truly is: a radical, life-changing encounter with the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the answer to every one of these misguided searches. Do you want to feel empowered? The Holy Spirit offers a power greater than any spell, a power to love, to heal, and to overcome sin and death. Do you want to know the future?

Jesus offers something better: the promise of eternal life and a relationship with the One who holds the future in His hands. Do you want to connect with nature? The Christian faith teaches that the world was lovingly crafted by a Creator who invites us to be its stewards. Do you want to find your true self? Jesus says you must lose yourself for His sake, and in doing so, you will find a self more real and whole than you could ever 'manifest' on your own.

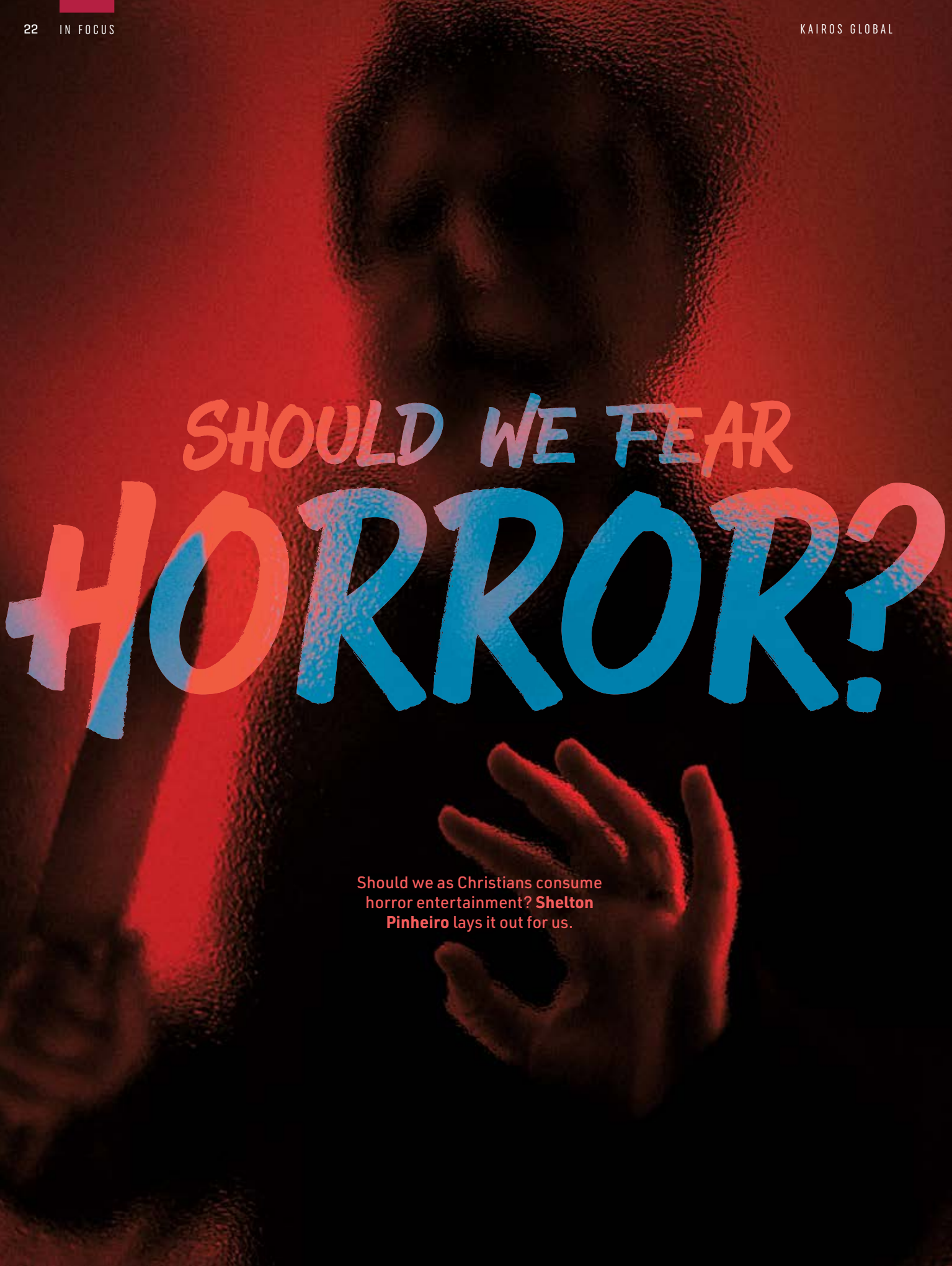
The void in the heart of our generation was made for God, and only He can fill it. Crystals, tarot cards, political ideologies, and even our own best efforts are like broken cisterns that can hold no water. They will always leave us thirsty.

The task for us is clear. We must stop cursing the darkness and start shining a

light. We must offer the world not another product in the spiritual supermarket, but the 'living water' that alone can quench the deepest thirst of the human heart. Because when people finally get tired of believing in anything, it is the perfect moment for them to encounter the one thing that is everything. ■■

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 active in JY, helping youngsters connect with the Catholic intellectual tradition.





SHOULD WE FEAR HORROR?

Should we as Christians consume
horror entertainment? **Shelton
Pinheiro** lays it out for us.

Having been brought up in a middle class family in the 80s, barely any exposure or understanding of what was happening around the world, my teen encounters with horror and mystery happened mostly through clandestinely read books – often picked up from friends or the nether regions of libraries, surreptitiously smuggled home to be read secretly. Looking back, I mostly began with Gothic horror, which also had a literary element to its writing – with stories like *Fall of the House of Usher* by Poe – and quickly descended into a miasma of trashy writers and kitschy horror novels. At one point in college, I got involved with the Jesus Youth movement and among other things, gradually lost interest in horror and moved past the phase. Yet, I remember the time and the febrile excitement that horror triggered, while exorcists, vampires and zombies swirled around my mind.

FORAYS INTO FEAR

For teenagers at the threshold of growing up, all flush with adrenaline, their forays into fear are about testing their limits and checking out the intriguing world of grownups. On another level, according to psychologists, it allows people to explore the excitement of vicariously encountering fear of death, fear of injury and fear of the unknown in a controlled way and within a 'protective frame' by which we are aware that the scenario is an 'act' and that we are 'detached' from the situation.

According to Associate Prof. Haiyang Yang, Johns Hopkins Research University, 'Our sense of control can serve as a form of psychological protective frame, a prerequisite to experiencing pleasure from horror consumption.'

In recent times, the arrival of new visual technology, devices and platforms have led to almost lifelike recreations of fearful scenarios, all in the control and comfort of one's room. From very primitive horror flicks a few decades ago, this sudden mushrooming of options is leading us and our young ones down a very addictive and dangerous slope.

Perhaps mystery and fear had a legitimate role in shaping our growth

during adolescence and teenage years. For some, these narratives even opened up a symbolic way to confront their deeper fears around mortality and the meaning of existence, and for others it might have been cathartic.

But today, there is a need to be more alert. The line between understanding what is real and 'construct' is fast disappearing. With generative AI and immersive graphics at play, the ability, time or reason to distinguish is slowly deteriorating. With fake mysterious worlds playing around, how does one surprise or instil a sense of wonder once they are grown up? Is it even surprising that a set of cynical, sarcastic, 'seen it all' people are growing in number?

Besides, the clear loss of a religious underpinning to mystery turns most awe-inducing experiences or imagery (horror, violence and gore included) into a congregational experience – in short, a pseudo religion. Most of the popular horror narratives today are not standalone projects but million dollar franchises and cinematic universes designed to attract followers for life. These grow and intersect with each other. They prolifically spawn spin offs, merchandises, crossovers drawing literally 'religious' fans from around the world. The followers choose their kind of 'world' and faithfully perform a set of intricate and meticulous rituals that differentiate them from the 'believers' of other franchises. They congregate in social media platforms and chat rooms, inspired by the high priests of horror.

Moreover, indications of the impact of watching horror shows and movies on physical and emotional health are also fast emerging. Exposure to intense horror imagery, whether in movies, shows, games or books has resulted in sleep disorders and nightmares. Content that arouses fear is seen to be carried over to dream content and sleep quality. In fact, 60% of male and 44% of female teen viewers reported nightmares after watching horror films. 1 in 4 still experienced long term effects (nightmares, disturbances, obsessive thoughts) years later.

Sources: *Klarity Health Overview*, *Humanity Publications*, *Harrison & Cantor (University of Wisconsin)*

THE MAINSTREAMING OF HORROR AND GORE

These days, when teenagers talk about their horror viewing habits, I notice a difference – there is nothing furtive about horror anymore. Unlike earlier generations, they are animated, excited and eager to talk about it. Witchcraft and the black arts have moved into the realm of something as legitimate and normal as sport. Even the younger ones who are not up to viewing such horror shows, still claim to have watched these shows, because of the 'cool' factor among their peers. Horror has moved from niche to mainstream, from exclusive cult to blockbuster cool.

In a sense, this rise is also linked to the spirit of our times. Experts say the rise of horror as a prominent theme of our times is often linked to the upheavals, and societal unrest. This generation has experienced distress linked to the pandemic, political volatility, climate disturbances, armed conflicts and uprisings. Horror, thus could be an outlet or a mirror for their lived experience.

More importantly, as always, big business is playing a significant role behind this cultural shift. The recent explosion of the *Stranger Things* in conversations, reels, memes and trends was quite smartly engineered. Though it had elements of fear and darkness, it was also cleverly layered with ideas of friendship, loyalty, identity, self-discovery, adventure and risk, all very relevant for younger audiences.

And not for no reason. The show has, according to recent estimates, already reeled in around \$1 billion in global streaming revenues for Netflix and has attracted 2 million new subscribers to the platform over the life of the series. Last year the horror flick *Conjuring (Last Rites)* alone grossed \$494.7 million globally. Even in a market like India, the movie opened to ₹180 million on its first day and went on to close at ₹740 million in revenues, revealing the global hunger for horror. All put together, horror as a genre grossed over 1 billion by September 2025 – clearly signalling that it has entered the commercial, blockbuster segment.

SHINING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

These words of Jesus do not come from a simplistic negation of fear, but from a clear assurance of the presence of Jesus in the midst of darkness. So the ultimate answer to the questions that the popularity of horror raises is ultimately an encounter with God.

As teenagers seek answers to fear of death, darkness, rejection and meaninglessness in the rising tide of horror, these narratives offer symbolic answers. The horror stories do so by trying to erase God from the human experience or by distorting the true picture of God, adding elements of rebelliousness and corruption into divine imagery.

Subversion and corruption of positive or Christian imagery is at the heart of most horror franchises. Since the early age of horror movies, the profaning of sacred imagery – crosses, cathedrals, vestments, chalices, priests and religious – has been a device through which shock and awe were evoked. This is still the cheapest trick in the book for horror script writers. As of now, horror franchises have set their eyes on corrupting some of the most beautiful human expressions. Two recent franchises, *Smile* and *Pluribus* have subverted the idea of a smile, which is the expression of a genuine, loving human connection. In both these narratives the smile is shown as a sign of mindless evil or that of an infectious societal malaise.

MAKING A MOVE

As Christians, as parents, those working with youth or even as people attracted to the dynamics of the horror series or movies playing around us, we are not called to just sit on it, but to act on it.

1. Understand

It takes the empathy of Christ to understand that there are deeper factors that draw people into these worlds. Understanding in this case, also means looking at the rise of horror from our faith perspective and having observers who draw out the nuances and implications of the damage of horror and gore. So we

The line between understanding what is real and ‘construct’ is fast disappearing. With generative AI and immersive graphics at play, the ability, time or reason to distinguish is slowly deteriorating. With fake mysterious worlds playing around, how does one surprise or instil a sense of wonder once they are grown up? Is it even surprising that a set of cynical, sarcastic, ‘seen it all’ people are growing in number?

need even more articles, podcasts and YouTube videos that deal with the issue. Above all, understanding means praying with likeminded people and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in responding to the dark narratives of our times.

2. Converse

When young people are into horror and gore, it is important to open up genuine conversations with them. We must approach them with the knowledge that they are trying to seek meaning and understand death and evil. Usually, if approached genuinely and without condemnation, young people are ready and sometimes even excited to tell us about the details and nuances of the franchises they follow. We need to create safe spaces where young people who are deeply into such shows can question, share, talk and be listened to.

3. Engage

Horror franchises and movies thrive through communities. And usually friends are one of the important factors in influencing young people to watch a particular horror flick. This calls for positive Christian communities that are cool, yet involved in media, theatre and games that are faith-based. We need to see the rise of faith centric sports, media

and creative storytelling forums – both physical and online.

4. Guard

Above all else guard your heart, as everything you do flow from it (Proverbs 4:23). As people immersed in a culture at odds with our faith, living in a post-Christian age, it is important to guard ourselves, our families and friends from the dark influences of horror, violence and gore. We are called to constantly examine what we and our loved ones see and imbibe.

5. Create

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:18). Today, we are also called to think about these things from the perspective of Scripture and create stories that go against the grain, change the game and flip the algorithm. ■

An Executive Creative Director of an advertising agency, **Shelton Pinheiro** is also the coordinator of Rexband. He lives in Cochin, India, with his wife Anu and their two daughters.

WHEN DARKNESS STARTS TO FEEL NORMAL

'Recreation should refresh the soul not consume it,' writes **Jacob Jose** regarding the need to discern in entertainment options available today.

Scroll long enough and you feel it. A series rolls into the next episode. A clip slips into your feed. A game trailer promises immersion and escape. Somewhere between the visuals, the music, and the story, something shifts. Evil no longer looks frightening. Sin no longer looks destructive. Darkness feels understandable, even attractive.

This is not because young adults today are morally worse than those before them. It is because the world of entertainment has changed how stories are told, how often we encounter them, and how deeply they settle into our imagination.

We no longer just watch stories. We live inside them. And stories form us.

ENTERTAINMENT IS NOT THE ENEMY

The Church has never been against joy, creativity, or recreation. We need rest. We need beauty. We need moments that refresh the soul and remind us that life is more than productivity and pressure.

Art and entertainment flow from something deeply human. They express our God given creativity and our longing to go beyond ourselves, toward something greater than the ordinary. Good art enlarges the heart. It awakens compassion. It points, sometimes quietly, toward truth.

GK Chesterton once noted that worldly things disappoint us only when we ask them to give what only God can give. When entertainment is received as a gift rather than a substitute for meaning, it can be enjoyed rightly.

The problem is not entertainment. The problem is formation without discernment. **Passive consumption is not freedom. It is surrender. The truly free person chooses what forms them.**

WHEN THE MORAL COMPASS GETS REWRITTEN

Something subtle has changed in modern storytelling.

Good and evil are no longer presented as moral realities. They are framed as personal preferences. Villains are wounded, misunderstood, or heroic in their rebellion. Sin is rebranded as authenticity. Virtue is portrayed as naive, oppressive, or outdated.

This does not happen all at once. It happens through repetition.

Over time, viewers are trained



to sympathise with cruelty, admire manipulation, and feel bored by goodness. The result is rarely open rebellion. More often, it is confusion. A quiet erosion of moral clarity.

When everything becomes grey, nothing feels worth resisting.

WHY DARKNESS FASCINATES

The fascination with evil itself is not new. Christianity has always taken evil seriously because it is real. What is new is how often darkness is sanitised, aestheticised, and sold as harmless entertainment.

Violence, sexual immorality, and even occult themes are frequently presented without consequence. Fantasy and irony are used as shields. It is just a story. It is just a game. It is not real.

But imagination matters. What we repeatedly dwell on reshapes desire. What once disturbed us begins to entertain us. What once repelled us slowly attracts.

This is how desensitisation works. Not through shock, but through familiarity. **In a culture engineered to shape desire, the ability to resist being passively formed is no small achievement. It requires awareness, courage, and discipline.**

WHY THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN CAUTIOUS

For centuries, the Church has insisted that what we see, hear, and internalise matter. This was not fear of culture, nor outdated scrupulosity. It was spiritual realism.

Catholic moral theology has long taught that the senses are gateways to the soul. St Thomas Aquinas warned that immoderate pleasure in the senses weakens the intellect and clouds moral judgment. The imagination shapes desire, and desire shapes action.

Earlier generations understood that entertainment is formative. Like education, it forms the heart quietly and gradually. That is why pastors and theologians warned against content that glorified vice or mocked truth. They were not trying to control culture. They were trying to protect something fragile.

Modern culture dismissed this caution as excessive. Yet the consequences of that dismissal are now visible.



A MEDIA WORLD THAT NEVER SWITCHES OFF

Entertainment today is constant, personalised, and engineered for maximum engagement.

Streaming platforms suggest what will keep you watching. Social media rewards outrage and intensity. Games are immersive and endless. News cycles are driven by emotion rather than reflection.

This is not accidental. We live in an attention economy. Media systems are designed to shape behaviour, reinforce narratives, and normalise certain values through repetition.

This does not require a secret plot to derail faith. Economic incentives, ideological assumptions, and algorithmic logic are enough. Over time, they create a moral climate. And climates shape people.

As Pope Benedict XVI warned, a culture that loses the ability to distinguish good from evil ultimately loses its freedom. **No algorithm should have more influence over your imagination than you do.**

STORIES THAT BYPASS THE MIND

Narratives are powerful because they do not argue. They invite identification. They shape feelings before thought.

When evil is consistently portrayed as justified or exciting, the heart slowly accepts what the mind once questioned. When faith is shown as irrelevant or oppressive, it loses credibility without ever being debated. When virtue is mocked, it becomes lonely.

We are not just consuming content. We are being formed by it. **Choosing clarity in such a landscape is not passive. It is an act of strength.**

DISCERNMENT WITHOUT FEAR

Catholic discernment is often misunderstood as rejection of culture. In reality, it is an act of freedom.

- Discernment asks simple, honest questions:
- Does this draw me closer to Christ or make prayer harder?
- Does this sharpen my conscience or dull it?
- Does this stir virtue or normalise sin?
- Does this leave me peaceful or restless?

Not everything popular is poisonous. But not everything entertaining is harmless.

Balance matters. Moderation matters. Silence matters.



Discernment is not the skill of the sheltered. It is the discipline of those strong enough to decide what deserves their attention and what does not.

Recreation should refresh the soul, not slowly consume it.

GUARDING THE HEART AND THE HOME

The Church speaks of the home as a domestic church. That includes what enters through screens.

Guarding the senses is not about withdrawal from the world. It is about intention. Christ calls the eye the lamp of the body. Feeding it darkness, even casually, has consequences we often notice only later.

Young adults today are not called to hide from culture. They are called to live awake within it. **That wakefulness is a form of leadership.**

A QUIET SIGN OF HOPE

What is often missed in cultural commentary is this. Many young adults are not satisfied with endless irony, moral emptiness, or curated outrage. Beneath the noise, there is a growing hunger for meaning, reverence, and truth.

In recent years, there has been

a quiet return among many young adults toward faith, prayer, and the sacraments. This movement has not been driven primarily by institutions, but by encounter. Thoughtful preaching. Honest conversations. And media that does not insult intelligence or flatten the human person.

Digital evangelisation, long form conversations, and serious Christian storytelling have played a real role in this shift. Not through fear or pressure, but by naming the ache that modern entertainment often cannot satisfy.

THE POWER OF GOOD MEDIA

The story does not end with critique.

Across the United States and beyond, faithful Christians are writing, filming, editing, and producing content that reflects truth, beauty, and goodness. They do so often without applause and sometimes under open hostility. For them, media is not merely a career. It is a mission field.

Good Christian art does not avoid complexity or suffering. It simply refuses to lie about sin. It insists that redemption is possible, that human dignity matters,

and that goodness is not naive.

As Pope John Paul II reminded artists, the Church needs beauty because the world needs truth that can be seen.

Supporting good media is not passive consumption. It is choosing to invest in the kind of world you want to live in.

NEWS, NARRATIVES, AND MORAL VISION

Entertainment is not the only place where discernment is required. News media also shapes imagination.

The Church has repeatedly called for a journalism of peace, one that serves truth rather than ideology, and dialogue rather than division. Pope Francis has warned that algorithm driven narratives can trap people in echo chambers, distorting reality and hardening hearts.

When outrage becomes the currency of attention, truth suffers, and so does human dignity.

CHOOSING THE LIGHT ON PURPOSE

Darkness will always exist. Christianity has never denied that. But fascination with darkness is not the same as understanding it.

Young adults are not asked to fear the world. They are asked to see clearly within it. **In a culture that profits from confusion, choosing clarity is an act of quiet rebellion.**

Discernment is not about rejecting culture. It is about refusing to let culture decide who we become.

It is not about playing it safe. It is about becoming the kind of person who can be trusted with freedom.

Prayer, the sacraments, silence, and the steady presence of Christ restore clarity where confusion settles. They remind us that light still captivates when we give it space.

In an age where good and evil blur, choosing the light must be intentional. That choice, made quietly and repeatedly, is where freedom must begin. ■

Jacob Jose is a design professional leading campaigns at Shalom World, and part of the Jesus Youth international formation team. He writes regularly at myarticulateheart.com, and lives in Kochi, India, with his wife and four children.



CHOOSING THE HALLOWEEN

As she notes how Halloween has shifted gears towards a more evil and occult practice, **Dr Annilyn Sebastian** shares how Catholics can respond to what was once a celebration of All Hallows' Eve.

I remember celebrating Halloween during my elementary school days here in the US. I looked forward to wearing simple costumes and going trick-or-treating in the evening, and seeing it also as a great opportunity to meet and greet neighbours. I remember dressing up as a television set to school one year, which I made with a cardboard box, by colouring the knobs and controls on it, and cutting out the area that would show my face. The following year, I made a US

Postal Box, taking the same idea; simple homemade costumes without spending much money. My mom would take us out for trick-or-treating and we would be happy with the small amount of candy we'd get, which would last us for the next few weeks or months. This was my idea of Halloween – costumes and candy, though I do remember several spooky houses and decor even back then in the 1980s. There was obviously evil lurking behind the scenes, though it was not as obvious as we see today.

Fast forward a few decades, and one can easily see a cultural shift where evil is glorified, and becomes 'amusing'.

Let's try to understand a little about the history of Halloween, and its evolution. Historically, Halloween (All Hallows' Eve) precedes the great feasts of All Saints' Day on 1 November and All Souls' Day on 2 November. These days remind us of the communion of saints, the reality of death, and the hope of

resurrection. Today also, we celebrate Halloween on All Hallows' Eve. But today, the Christian roots are often forgotten, and replaced with mockery of death, and a fascination for the occult.

In the early Christian era of Halloween, before the 1800s, death was acknowledged with hope, and evil was resisted with prayer and faith. But things started changing with the influx of Irish and Scottish immigrants in the 1800s. During this time, mischiefs, pranks, disguises and superstitions started taking centre-stage, thus slowly pushing aside the religious focus. In the 1900-1960s, candy companies and costume manufacturers came into play, thus commercialising the holiday, and standardising trick-or-treating. Costumes shifted from being homemade and neutral, to largely scary (ghosts, witches, monsters) or even sensational. Though fear was suggested, it was not yet glorified. It was in the late 1960s to 1980s that Halloween started shifting its major emphasis to darkness. Today, Halloween presents evil no longer as something to fear, but something 'cool' and amusing. Also horror entertainment, occult fascination, and celebration of evil has become mainstream.

What used to be All Hallows' Eve, is now a month-long immersion in darkness, as we can see stores starting to promote spooky Halloween decor as early as end of September! Lots of families also start 'decorating' for Halloween with scary figures even as tall as their houses!

Scripture reminds us: *Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil* (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

Not everything labelled 'fun' is spiritually neutral. Entertainment forms the imagination, especially in children. What we normalise, we eventually accept. What we repeatedly expose ourselves to, we begin to find amusing, or worse, attractive.

The *Catechism* warns clearly against occult practices: 'All forms of divination are to be rejected... They contradict the honour, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.' (CCC 2116). This includes not only active participation in occult practices, but also casualising them; turning witches, demons, and darkness into harmless playthings. So

is it right for Catholics to celebrate Halloween?

The Church does not issue a blanket prohibition on Halloween, yet she calls the faithful to wisdom, prudence, and a clear rejection of anything that glorifies evil, trivialises sin, or dulls our sensitivity to spiritual realities. When evil is portrayed as amusing, harmless and stylish, it can weaken a child's natural aversion to sin. Evil is real, but is neither fascinating nor victorious. Because Christ has conquered sin and death, we as Catholics should not react defensively, but we should respond thoughtfully, by choosing what forms the soul towards goodness and quietly refusing what distorts it.

Catholic discernment does not require withdrawal from society, but intentional engagement. Families may choose to participate focusing on what is morally neutral or good: Innocent and neutral costumes that can be creative or homemade; community and neighbourly interaction that teaches courtesy, generosity and gratitude; daytime or parish-based events such as trunk-or-treat, or fall festivals. In addition, Catholic families can choose All Saints' costume parties, acts of charity or prayer for the dead, family nights with sacred stories or saint biographies and the like. If kids are into carving pumpkins, they can choose to carve Catholic or Christian themes, by reciting the 'pumpkin prayer', and placing a light inside, as a way to evangelise.

Whether families may choose careful participation, only saint-centred or parish celebrations, or abstention altogether, we should hold fast to shared principles: evil should never be celebrated, innocence should be protected, and Christ should remain at the centre.

The following are things we as Catholics should definitely not do:

1. We should not celebrate or glorify evil, even playfully, in areas of costumes, decorations, activities.
2. We should not trivialise the occult.
3. We should not seek fear provoking entertainment, eg: gore based attractions, etc.
4. We should not mock death or the sacred.

What we as Catholics should do instead:

1. We should exercise discernment in choosing activities.
2. We should prioritise innocence and beauty – costumes, activities, decorations that are joyful, creative, and wholesome.
3. We should use this season as a teaching moment, helping children understand the difference between fantasy and spiritual reality, giving due seriousness to evil and the occult, while also having them understand Christ's victory.
4. We should celebrate All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, highlighting the joy of heaven, heroism of the saints, and the hope of resurrection.
5. We should choose peaceful participation or peaceful abstention, depending on circumstances and discernment.
6. We should witness quietly to hope, by showing that joy does not require darkness, and evil does not deserve fascination.

By choosing prudence over fear, and not reacting defensively, we Catholics model a mature faith, one that engages the world, without being shaped by it, and that forms hearts firmly anchored in peace, hope and trust in God.

In a world fascinated by darkness, we as Catholic families are called to be quietly radiant with light. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (John 1:5). ■

In 2022, Kairos Buds introduced Holy Habits (*Keeping the Hallow in Halloween*) – a unique initiative encouraging children to dress up as their favourite saint in honour of All Saints' Day. What began as a small initiative has now become a beautiful movement of love, learning, and holiness.

Dr Annilyn Sebastian, an MD Pathologist by profession, and wife of Dr Anup Skaria, is currently a stay-at-home home-schooling mother of their nine children. They reside in Houston, USA.

THE RETURN OF PAGANISM

In an age when the occult is pervading media and entertainment, Fr Jerry VM SDB asks us to be aware of this danger that can weaken our faith and put us in harm.

Thirty years ago, things were different. If you wanted to explore the occult, you had to go looking for it. You had to find dusty books in the back of a strange store. You had to call late-night hotlines. It was hidden. It was considered fringe. It was something people whispered about.

Today, the occult is not hidden. It is vibrating in your pocket.

Our culture is undergoing a massive shift. The modern world feels empty to many people, who seek something spiritual. But their quest to fill that empty space does not turn to the light of Christ. Instead, Western culture is turning back to ancient paganism.

But this isn't the paganism of the past. It has been repackaged. It looks sleek and modern. Witchcraft is now a fashion statement. Predicting the future is sold as a 'self-care' app. Contacting the spirit world is just another viral internet challenge.

For Christians, this is not just a trend to watch. It is a spiritual crisis. Practices that the Bible explicitly forbids are now marketed as toys to our children. They are sold as helpful tools for adults. The line between innocent fantasy and dangerous reality is disappearing.

To handle this new world with wisdom, we must understand what is happening. We need to see how deep these roots have grown in our digital lives. We must also recognise how this affects our faith.

I. WITCHCRAFT AS A GAME: THE DANGER OF PHONE APPS

The first place this change is happening is on our smartphones. A quick look through the Apple or Google app stores shows thousands of apps about magic and spirits. These are not rare downloads. They often have millions of users. They look friendly and easy to use.

We aren't talking about fantasy games where wizards shoot fireballs. We are

talking about apps that simulate real rituals.

There are tarot card apps that send 'daily messages' to your phone. They offer advice on love, jobs, and the future. This replaces the need for daily prayer. There are astrology apps that use complex math to predict your personality based on the stars. They encourage you to rely on the stars rather than the God who made them. There are even 'spell book' apps. These offer rituals to obtain money or hurt one's enemies.

The danger here is that it turns spirituality into a game. A tarot reading app uses the same bright colours and auditory experience as a game like *Candy Crush*. This tricks our defences. It feels small. It feels like just another way to pass the time.

This makes users numb to the danger, especially teenagers and young adults. It teaches them that fortune-telling is not a sin but rather just a tool to learn about yourself. By using these apps, users are opening doors that Scripture warns must stay shut. They are inviting spiritual influence from sources that are not the Holy Spirit. And they are doing it under the mask of digital fun.

II. SELLING SPIRITS AS TOYS: BOARDS AND GAMES

If apps handle the digital side, the toy aisle handles the physical side. The most famous example is the spirit board, often called the Ouija board.

You can often find these in the board game aisle. They sit right next to Monopoly and Scrabble. They have been a staple of American sleepovers for decades. Major toy companies sell them. The box often says it is a 'mystifying oracle' for ages 8 and up.

Let us be clear. A spirit board has one purpose. It is designed to talk to spirits. It is a tool created to communicate with the dead or other entities.

People often defend the Ouija board with science. They talk about the 'ideomotor effect,' a psychological theory that your subconscious muscles move the pointer, not a ghost. To the sceptic, it is just plastic and cardboard. They believe the 'spirits' are just the players' fears coming out.

From a Christian view, this defence is



not enough. Let's say 90% of the time, the board moves because of shaky hands or teenagers playing tricks. That does not change the *intent*. The goal of the game is to invite a spirit to speak. That spirit is not God.

In Deuteronomy 18:10-12, the Bible is very clear. It says: *There shall not be found among you anyone who... practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.*

When we put a tool for talking to the dead in a colourful box, we have a problem. When we sell it to children, we are making a terrible sin look normal. We are teaching children that the spiritual world is a playground. We teach them they have the authority to summon whatever they want for fun. It is a deep deception. It treats spiritual dynamite like a firecracker.

III. VIRAL TRENDS: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SPREADS RITUALS

The normalisation process moves even faster on social media.

Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Reddit are huge drivers of this.

On TikTok, there is a community called #WitchTok. It has billions of views. In these short 60-second videos, young influencers teach witchcraft to other kids. They show how to draw magical symbols. They show how to set up altars to pagan gods. They teach how to cast spells on ex-boyfriends. They even teach 'reality shifting,' a meditation used to try and enter other universes.

The internet also loves a challenge. We have seen viral trends like the 'Charlie

Charlie challenge.' In this game, players balance pencils on a grid. They try to summon a demon to answer 'yes'

or 'no' questions. Participants film their reactions when gravity moves the pencils. Then, they share it. The ritual spreads to millions of screens instantly.

The danger of social media occultism comes from two places:

1. The Illusion of Control

The world feels scary right now. Young people worry about anxiety, the climate, and politics. The occult promises power. It says you can control things. Why pray and wait on God's timing? The occult says you can get what you want right now with a candle and a chant. It is the original temptation from the Garden of Eden: 'You will be like God.'

2. The Computer Algorithm

Social media is built on algorithms. These are computer programs that decide what you see. They are designed to show you more of what you look at. If a curious teenager watches one video about tarot cards, the computer notices. Suddenly, their entire feed is full of readings and spell tutorials. The algorithm acts like a preacher for the occult. It surrounds the user with a specific world. In this world, magic seems normal, popular, and real.

IV. THE BIG PICTURE: WHY OLD BELIEFS ARE RETURNING

Why is this happening now? We must realise that humans are spiritual beings. We were created to worship. If we do not worship the Creator, we will worship something else.

As the West has moved away from God and the Church, it hasn't become purely logical. It has become spiritual but lost.

This is why paganism is returning. Modern paganism rarely involves wearing togas. It looks like self-worship. It looks like treating nature (Mother Earth) as a god. It elevates 'my truth' over the Bible's Truth.

Occult apps and spirit boards are just symptoms. They are signs of a deeper shift. They provide rituals for a generation that has rejected the traditional Church. These people still crave a connection to something bigger. They want a supernatural power. We are seeing Romans 1:25 happen in real life: *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*

Occult apps and spirit boards are just symptoms. They are signs of a deeper shift. They provide rituals for a generation that has rejected the traditional Church. These people still crave a connection to something bigger. They want a supernatural power. We are seeing Romans 1:25 happen in real life: *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*

V. HOW THIS HURTS OUR FAITH

For the believing Christian, this is serious. It is not just annoying. It damages our faith life. It affects us in several key ways:

1. Weakening Our Guard

Occult themes are constantly presented as fun entertainment. Because of this, our spiritual defences get weak. We begin to tolerate things that sadden the Holy Spirit. We forget that there is a real enemy. The Bible says he disguises himself as an angel of light. In this case, he disguises himself as a fun iPhone app.

2. Anxiety and Spiritual Attacks

Engaging with these things is dangerous. Even if we do it 'ironically' or as a joke, it opens a door to the enemy. Christians who play with horoscopes or spirit boards often report problems. They feel increased anxiety. They have nightmares. They feel a sense of heaviness. They feel a distance in their relationship with God. We cannot drink from the cup of demons and the cup of the Lord.

3. Losing Trust in God's Plan

The main draw of fortune-telling is knowledge. People want to know a future that God has not revealed yet. It is an attempt to bypass trusting Him. The more we rely on 'signs' from the universe, the less we rely on prayer. We stop looking to Scripture. We stop listening to the Holy Spirit. It shifts our trust from the solid Rock of Jesus to shifting sand.

VI. CONCLUSION: WALKING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

How do we respond to this? We should not panic. We should not hide in a bubble. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we should *expose the unfruitful works of darkness*. We do this by walking as children of light.

We must know our Bible. We need to know the difference between fantasy fiction (like Narnia) and real occult practice. We must have open conversations with our children. We need to explain *why* God forbids these practices. He is not trying to ruin our fun. He is a loving Father. He is protecting us from spiritual realities that want to hurt us.

We need to build a strong Christian community. We must offer a true, powerful spiritual reality. It must be better than the cheap imitation offered by the occult. The Holy Spirit is not a force to be used like magic. He is a Person to be in a relationship with. The power of prayer is stronger than any spell. The peace of Christ is better than any comfort from a horoscope.

The occult has come out of the shadows. It is on our screens. It is time for the Church to see it. We must name it. And we must counter it with the true light of the Gospel. ■

Fr Jerry VM SDB is a Salesian priest from Dimapur, India. He is also the chaplain of the JY India pro-life team.



Parenting in an age of Unlimited Entertainment

Nycil Romis writes about parental focus needed with regards to the entertainment their children are exposed to.

The world of entertainment brings together the raw and the refined, blending goodness and evil in ways that strongly capture attention. It not only conveys the values of a civilised society, but also explores rebellion, emerging themes, and socially forbidden ideas. People have always been fascinated by evil themes in entertainment – whether it is portrayed through villains or the so-called badass heroes. This fascination explains the massive fan base of characters like the Joker, John Wick or James Bond who blur the lines between good and bad.

Meanwhile, some themes explicitly

deal with dark magic, occult, and other disturbing content, often presenting them as attractive or normal. Curiosity further compels us to explore what is forbidden, hidden, or morally ambiguous. Also, entertainment media often hides darker ideas within humour, glamour, and heroism, making them seem acceptable or ordinary to viewers. All of this in an age of unrestricted access to entertainment, intensifies both its influence and its reach.

In a world driven by multi-million box office successes and viral content, protecting children from the influence of evil in entertainment is not an easy task.

Shutting down entertainment media is neither practical nor effective and may even backfire. This raises an important question: What can parents do to safeguard their children?

The parental role, therefore, lies largely in helping children engage with media thoughtfully and safely, rather than passively absorbing it. This role progressively changes as children grow older, gradually equipping them with the ability to discern what is healthy and beneficial. This means that parents are on this journey together with their children. Just as children are not left alone to figure out games, rules, or boundaries by themselves, they should not be left alone to navigate the complex world of entertainment.

By being actively present, parents help children understand limits, make sense of experiences, and gradually develop the confidence to make wise choices on their own.

Guiding young children – Defining values with structured access

For younger children, parents function primarily as gatekeepers of media exposure, carefully regulating access and



limiting exposure to dark or disturbing themes. During this stage, children should be actively exposed to goodness through media, like stories of kindness, courage, empathy, cooperation, forgiveness and moral repair.

Age ratings, content warnings, and review websites can serve as useful guides, though they are not sufficient on their own. Phone locks, parental controls, and clear screen-time limits are essential in preventing unguarded and excessive media use, as unsupervised access can easily lead children to inappropriate content.

Since children are still developing the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality, it is better to expose them to stories/games with symbolic villains depicting good and bad clearly, and with immediate consequences. As they progress in age, exposures can also widen, but with the active presence of adults, where they can emphasise accountability and consequences. This helps in shaping values and moral understanding, probably more powerfully than any other modes of education.

Guiding Adolescents – Setting limits and active reasoning

Adolescence is an age of strong peer influence. Here, one cannot continue solely the role of a restrictive parent. ‘Why not me?’ would be a frequent question parents face during this stage.

Rather than rigid rules, parents need to set reasonable limits and support through conversations on what they watch, play or follow. These conversations encourage reflection, shaping their internal moral compass, eventually helping them to make healthy choices.

Limits must be clearly explained, especially why certain content is unacceptable. Here, rather than blind rules, it is always better to use logic and reasoning. The labels of ‘bad’ and ‘dangerous’ often push children to explore them.

Along with these, parents should keep an open eye on the media exposure of their children, without making children feel constantly watched. Monitoring from a respectful distance allows parents to notice patterns, preferences, and possible concerns.

Importance of watching/playing together

In the case of both children and adolescents, one of the most effective strategies is co-watching or co-playing, though not always possible. In fact, if parents are able to set such a pattern right from childhood, children find it easier to discuss their concerns with them.

From my own experience, watching/playing together with children and discussing the characters opens up natural conversations where it is easier for the parent to point out problematic elements. Children also learn to see things from multiple viewpoints.

Selecting entertainment together and discussing both its strengths and concerns helps children develop critical thinking, rather than passive consumption. Over time, when they are given the freedom to choose, they will use these experiences to guide their decisions. Even when adolescents select content based on peer influence, watching it together with parents, followed by reflective conversations, often helps recalibrate their understanding. Such follow-up

discussions restore perspective, enabling them to critically evaluate their choices and see beyond what is ‘viral’.

Addressing the subtle normalisation of evil

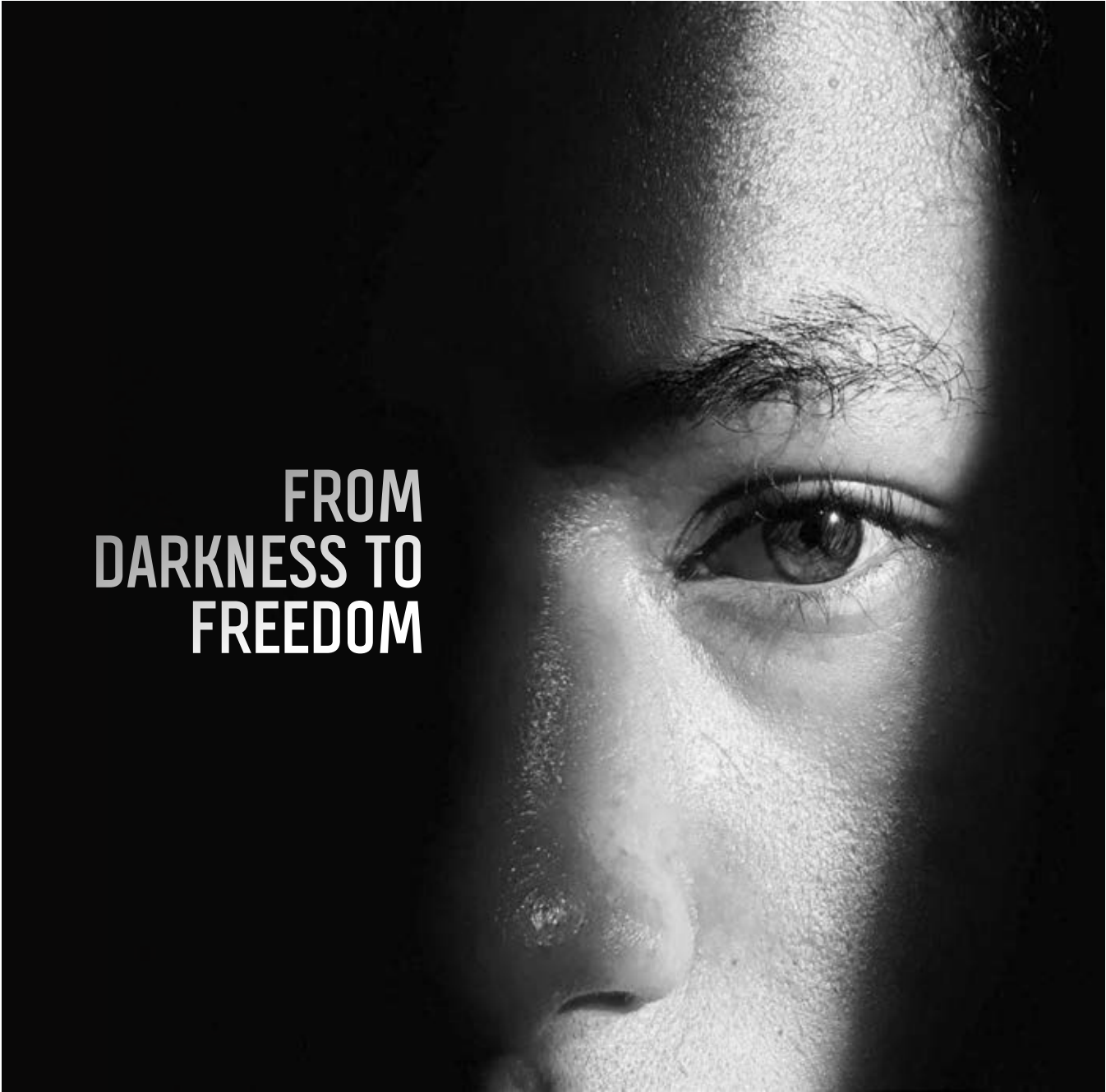
One of the major challenges in dealing with entertainment media today is the issue of the subtle communication of evil. Manipulation, revenge, cruelty, and moral compromise are often portrayed as normal, justified and even admirable.

Here also, open discussions with children are crucial in gaining the right perspective. We never discuss the subtle messages communicated through entertainment media on a variety of ‘normal and cool’ themes, and children absorb them without being aware of them.

I remember discussing a moral reasoning situation in a Gen Z classroom where majority found it difficult to understand the idea of not taking revenge when wronged. If that is the case, where do we even discuss the application of the concepts of holiness, love, hope, forgiveness and friendship in day-to-day life? Moral lessons and catechism lessons happen without immersing into the day-to-day reality, while media at fingertips attracts our children with submerged cool, normalised ideas portrayed in normal daily lives, which are never questioned/reflected. Therefore, parents need to help children question and reflect on these subtle ideas, making them less vulnerable to fascination without judgment.

In a world where dark content is increasingly admired as viral, popular, and unavoidable, the task of parenting is not to eliminate exposure, but to shape understanding. Children do not lose their way because they see evil; they struggle when they are left alone to interpret it. With a combination of reasonable limits, co-watching and open, reflective conversations, parents can guide children to discern rather than go by blind fascination.





FROM DARKNESS TO FREEDOM

Fr Shoji Vechoorkarottu, a priest serving the youth through the Unbound ministry, writes about the two lies that deceive young people today, and two ways of freeing oneself from such bondage.

Imagine a baby born into a war-torn land, amidst bombings and gunfire, hunger and strife. Knowing no other reality, the child grows up in dread of everything around; so rooted is the little one in this brutality that it is almost impossible to convince them that peace is even possible. Growing up, the child is in awe of the power of their suppressor that they either follow them or live in constant fear of them.

Think of another baby, born in a peaceful region, welcomed into love, raised with facilities and amenities that every child truly deserves... To

them, the first child's pain and hate-filled experiences would seem like an impossible reality.

In spiritual warfare too we see these extremes, two dangerous lies that are common among young people today:

Denying the Reality of Spiritual Warfare. The presumption that there is no spiritual world, and no Satan.

Glorifying Evil as Attractive. The idea that Satan is powerful and glorious, and he can offer unlimited pleasure.

Both lies are dangerous, and lead many young people into spiritual bondage.

Unlike the babies, a regulated adult,

who has seen and experienced both sides – love and hatred, joy and sorrow – can look at these two worlds with wisdom; wary of the hatred and violence but also hopeful of peace and harmony. A spiritually wise man sees spiritual warfare as an inevitable part of life, and being prudent and wary of evil's schemes, clothes himself with the grace and power of God.

THE FIRST LIE: SATAN DOES NOT EXIST

The first lie denies the reality of spiritual warfare. It presumes that there is no spiritual world. When people believe Satan is unreal, they begin to treat all related activities as harmless or fun, approaching them without caution or boundaries.

Many of today's youth engage with evil out of curiosity, peer pressure, or influence from entertainment. The lie, 'there is no Satan,' becomes the entry for young people to 'innocent' experimentation – tarot cards, horoscopes, fortune-telling, visiting mediums, and Ouija boards.

Take the case of a third-grade student and her friends who planned to use a Ouija board because they saw it in a movie. The eight-year-old, not even mature enough to understand what she was about to do, told her mother, 'Tonight at 12:00, I need to invoke a good spirit. All my friends in class are doing this.' Even in the safety of classrooms, teachers have started presenting Ouija boards as games. The sheer normalisation of the act and the use of terms like 'good spirit' point towards a blatant ignorance of the spiritual world. Just as movies have made spells and occult practices seem harmless, many lives have been deeply affected by the darkness behind them.

The danger is that people often treat these encounters as one-time experiments, without realising the spiritual consequences. These ignorant practices, even when done out of curiosity or as harmless fun, opens a space for dark forces to take control of their lives, and can result in serious bondages.

These open doors become more of a threat especially in times of anxiety, trauma, or confusion, when they begin searching for consolation anywhere.

In these times, they forget the warning God gave us: *You shall have no other gods beside me* (Exodus 20:3) and reach for any straw that can help them out of that momentary misery. Evil utilises this vulnerability in our spiritual realm and creates a stronghold, the same pattern seen in addictions such as drug dependency, alcoholism, and uncontrolled sexual exploration.

When we believe there is nothing to fear or be cautious about, we begin to explore anything. Satan is like a dog on a chain. If we enter his territory, we open an entry door, and it can become a stronghold for him to attack. **Do not forget that we are spiritual beings, and that God has given boundaries for our protection.**

THE SECOND LIE: SATAN IS GLORIOUS AND FEARSOME

The second lie propagates Satan as powerful, one who can offer unlimited pleasure. This is equally dangerous as the first.

Over the past decades, popular culture, and entertainment, including cartoons for children have been portraying evil as good and appealing. As a result impressionable children begin to admire devilish characters or normalise what is evil and dangerous.

Venerable Fulton J Sheen once shared a story: After his death, a man reached heaven and wished to visit hell. St Peter allowed him to go. In hell, he was treated with great hospitality. So he asked permission for another visit, and again he was welcomed royally. The third time, St Peter warned him, 'If you go this time, you cannot return.' But the man insisted. When he entered hell again, everything had changed. He was treated cruelly and harshly. He asked, 'You treated me so well before, why are you treating me like this now?' Satan replied: 'Earlier you came as a tourist. Now you belong here.'

This reveals a spiritual truth: entry points may seem pleasurable at first, but the consequences are bitter. As Jesus warns in John 10:10, *A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy.*

Subsequently, there is also increased fear of the 'power' that Satan wields. Media and the occult use horror films and viral social media content to

present evil as hyper-powerful entities granting wishes or cursing foes, fostering anxiety in the viewer, especially among children and teenagers. Even after casual engagement, youth often exhibit issues like nightmares, compulsions, or 'curses'. This also leads to an obsessive fear of sin/demons, leading to despair or false security (for example, relying on amulets over sacraments). Same as in the case of the first lie, vulnerable individuals going through emotional struggles may sink deeper into isolation, self-harm, or deeper occultism, mistaking it for 'demonic oppression.'

Let us not forget that Satan barks fiercely but strains at God's leash. Fearing the bark ignores the Master's command: *Get behind me, Satan* (Matthew 16:23). The Church teaches that Satan's might is creaturely and is crushed by Christ (CCC 395).

TWO EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR HEALING AND FREEDOM

Many people trapped through these two entry doors desperately want to return to freedom. Some even blame God as the cause of their troubles, when in fact the enemy has deceived them. As Christians, we have the responsibility to support such individuals with compassion and truth. At present, there are two effective spiritual tools that support people in these situations:

1. The Unbound Model
2. The Living Waters Model

UNBOUND

The Unbound model recognises that every individual has a will and the power to choose God. It does not reject medical or psychological approaches, but it emphasises a normal path of deliverance. It is like natural childbirth: the mother does what is needed, and the midwife assists in the process.

The most important part of the Unbound ministry is **compassionate listening**. The person is listened to without judgment or prejudice, just as Jesus listened to the Samaritan woman. He did not condemn her repeated failures but led her into true worship.

Similarly, in the Unbound ministry, the minister helps the person walk through five key steps:

- Repentance and faith
- Unconditional forgiveness
- Renouncing evil
- Praying with authority
- Experiencing the love of the Father

Here, we acknowledge the existence of Satan and his plan of destruction, but the focus is on proclaiming the power of Jesus to deliver us from all evil. When we repent from areas where we have given space to Satan and place our trust in Jesus, He brings freedom.

As a priest serving in the Unbound ministry, I have seen numerous young people delivered from anxiety, fear, addictions, depression, orphanhood, and spiritual bondage. Helping them through this process, I have seen them suffering from low self-esteem, fear, anxiety, pride, and confusion rediscover their identity as sons and daughters of God, experiencing the love of the Father and growing daily in freedom.

To those who think that Gen Z is not open to spiritual encounters, I would say

To those who think that Gen Z is not open to spiritual encounters, I would say that our young people genuinely seek compassionate, trustworthy, and non-judgmental listeners, and once we offer them the space and show them the light of Christ, they are more than willing to take the path.

that our young people genuinely seek compassionate, trustworthy, and non-judgmental listeners, and once we offer them the space and show them the light of Christ, they are more than willing to take the path.

LIVING WATERS

Unbound exposes the first lie's ignorance; Living Waters heals the second's wounds.

It addresses a major pit that many young people fall into today concerning sexual identity, guilt, pornography addiction, and the loss of faith in marriage and family as God's institution. Through vulnerable and open group sharings, worship, and open testimonials, Living Waters offers young people an opportunity to rebuild lives ruined by the lies of the modern world.

OUR HOPE IN CHRIST

St Paul reminds us: *He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son* (Colossians 1:13). Christ is the one who rescues, heals, and restores.

The Church is called to walk with young people, helping them recognise the lies of the enemy and experience the abundant life Jesus came to give. And she does this primarily through the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation, restoring us to grace and intimate friendship with the Father. The sacramental absolution objectively forgives sins, closes demonic doors, and casts out fear through the priest's invocation of Christ's mercy. And the Body and Blood of Christ nourishes our soul and continues the healing every day.

■



Fr Shoji Vechoorkarottu works as Assistant Professor of Commerce at St John's College, Kollam, India. He is the current chaplain of Jesus Youth International Council.

Chandeliers

✧ *Finding Heaven in Traffic and Toddlers*



Imagine sitting in deadlock traffic. Your knuckles are white on the steering wheel, your blood pressure is rising, and you are already mentally composing the apology email for being late to work *again*.

If I told you that this was one of those moments where you could make a significant choice – a step towards heaven, or away from it – would you believe it? This is exactly what Saint Josemaría Escrivá taught.

Consider an exhausted evening in a chaotic home with screaming toddlers, toys littered across the floor like landmines. You are dangerously close to just breaking down, and feel a pang of guilt because you haven't set aside a single moment for formal prayer today. You may even be blaming the surrounding discord on your lack of prayer. But Saint Josemaría insists: *that chaos itself can be your prayer*.

For centuries, common perception was that to become a saint, you needed to withdraw from the world, enter a monastery, or perform extraordinary miracles. St Josemaría Escrivá blew that notion apart. His revolutionary message was that God is not found merely in the incense of a cathedral on Sunday, but amid the dust, noise, and stress of Monday morning.

SANCTIFYING THE ORDINARY

Escrivá's teaching wasn't just a comforting thought for busy people; it was a demanding theological framework. He taught that something divine lay hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each individual to discover it.

The mechanism for this discovery was work. Escrivá argued that any honest human occupation, be it brain surgery, farming, accounting, or sweeping floors, could be sanctified.

How? It was not just about adding a

prayer before or after a task. It is about *how* the task itself is performed. To turn any ordinary work into prayer, Escrivá taught that it must be done with both human perfection and supernatural intent.

You cannot offer God shoddy workmanship. Therefore, the first step to holiness in the workplace is professional competence, honesty, and integrity. A 'holy' doctor who misdiagnoses patients, or a 'pious' businessman who cuts corners, is a contradiction in terms. By doing our specific duties to the very best of our abilities, out of love for God and a desire to serve our neighbour, work itself becomes an altar.

THE SEED OF DIVINE FILIATION

What provides the fuel for this kind of sustained, high-quality effort, especially when the work is boring, the boss is ungrateful, or the traffic is jammed?

It comes from Escrivá's deepest spiritual insight: **Divine Filiation**.

This is the profound, bone-deep awareness that you are a cherished child of God. For Escrivá, this wasn't just a pleasant theological metaphor to visit occasionally; it was an incessant reminder, the 'foundation' of the spiritual life that should govern every waking hour.

When a person truly grasps that their life is held by a loving Father, it changes their perspective on life. A child doesn't fear a loving father; they trust him. When grounded in divine filiation, traffic jams stop being just pointless annoyances and become opportunities for patience sent by Someone who knows exactly what you need to grow. A ruined dinner isn't a disaster, but a chance to offer up a small sacrifice with a smile. The never-fading realisation of a Father's embrace brings a sense of security and joy that external circumstances cannot shake.

Escrivá's teaching wasn't just a comforting thought for busy people; it was a demanding theological framework. He taught that something divine lay hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each individual to discover it.

A PRECURSOR TO VATICAN II

Today, the idea that laypeople – the vast majority of Catholics who are not priests or nuns – are called to sanctity sounds like standard Church teaching. But when Escrivá began preaching this in the 1930s and 40s, it was radical, sometimes viewed with suspicion.

Holiness was largely seen as the exclusive domain of those wearing habits behind cloistered walls. Escrivá was preaching the 'universal call to holiness' decades before the Second Vatican Council officially enshrined it as central Church doctrine.

To enshrine this message globally, Escrivá founded **Opus Dei** (Latin for 'Work of God') in 1928. He visualised it not as another religious order withdrawing from the world, but as a mobilised force of ordinary lay people remaining fully immersed in secular society. Opus Dei became the vehicle to provide laypeople with the spiritual formation necessary to turn their professions into paths to God.

The impact of this vision has been profound. Long before Dan Brown wrote *The Da Vinci Code* and vilified the organisation, Opus Dei was already changing the interior spiritual lives of thousands. The work has continued to spread light in the secular sphere as well.

It has inspired countless individuals to integrate their faith and reason (with over 90,000 members in 68 countries), leading to the creation of universities, high-ranked business schools, and vocational training centres in developing nations, all driven by the belief that secular work matters intensely to God.

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

1902: Born in Barbastro, Spain.

Experienced family financial trouble and the death of three younger sisters.

1925: Ordained a Catholic priest. Moved to Madrid to pursue a law doctorate and minister to the poor.

1928: On 2 October, experienced the vision of Opus Dei during a retreat.

1946: Moved to Rome to seek papal approval for Opus Dei and direct its global expansion.

1975: Died suddenly in Rome.

2002: Canonised by Pope John Paul II on October 6. The Pope referred to him as 'the saint of ordinary life.'



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.



Turbid Water

Only Jesus, the source of living water can satisfy the thirst of our souls, writes **Anil Israel**.

God is absolute goodness. *No one is good except God alone* (Mark 10:18). Everything God created is good. After creating man, God described this creation 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). We are created in the image and likeness of absolute goodness. However, because of our fallen nature, we are weighed down by concupiscence – the inclination to sin – and consequently are left with an unrestricted appetite for the enemy of good, i.e. evil.

Man in his eternal craving for all that is good, blinded by the darkness of untruth and weakened by *hardness of heart* (Matthew 19:8), gives in to something less than the good. Eve accepted the forbidden fruit, seeing that it was *good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desired to make one wise* (Genesis 3:6).

Before the first fall, man was at harmony with his maker. Everything cooperated with divine design. All of man's faculties, his intellect and will, were well aligned to His will. The intellect and the will are the faculties of the soul. Why did God bless us with an intellect and a will? To know Him and to love Him. The object of the intellect is to know God and the object of the will is to love God. Unfortunately, after the fall, harmony got destroyed. The intellect was darkened and the will was subsequently weakened. The will was no more under the influence of the intellect. *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Matthew 26:41).

Man's inherent longing for happiness urges him to pursue it in every possible way. One's thoughts are strongly shaped by this unquenchable thirst. The world bombards us with suggestions of all that can make us happy. We tend to buy the precept that obtaining all that money can buy will yield proportional happiness. We end up spending on good food, clothing, shelter and enjoyment. We seek enjoyment in vacation, recreation, and entertainment. The undying demand for entertainment sharply fuels the unending supply of entertainment in the crazy world of media.

The production of media content is endless. Even with a basic smartphone one can add to the dump of seemingly attractive content appealing to the eye. The problem with things being appealing to the eye is that even evil is presented as good – even darkness comes clothed in light. Those who mint money off media

intentionally infuse content unhealthy for the soul, for their selfish monetary gains.

Anything that can sway the soul away from God becomes a trap for the weak soul's false delight. No wonder the average screen time of young people is of alarming magnitude. In the hope of finding something more satisfying, one ends up indulging in media habits which adversely affect the sanity of the soul.

There is indeed a lot of filth out there in the dark world of media. But we are not created to drown ourselves in the pit of pitch. *Whoever touches pitch will be contaminated by it* (Sirach 13:1). 'If you pursue evil with pleasure, the pleasure passes away and the evil remains' (Cicero).

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness (Matthew 6:22-23). So, we need to control what we choose to see and what we choose to ignore. Do I have a 'not to see' list? The more we let ourselves be deceived by the evil world of darkness, the more we let the light diminish in our souls. The more we let darkness engulf us, the less clearly we see. The more diminished our clarity of vision, the more our souls succumb and stumble.

If there is dirt on the windscreen of a car, the driver's vision of what lies ahead is obstructed. One then needs to apply the wipers to clean the windscreen to be able to see clearly. When we watch a lot of filth on the incessant downpour of media, our souls accumulate dirt and with a blurred vision we struggle to *live as children of light* (Ephesians 5:8).

We all long to satisfy the unquenchable thirst of the soul. In feeble attempts to quench our thirst we might have given in to accepting unhealthy water. We tend to forget the giver of life, who can give us *living water* (John 4:10).

LORD, IF YOU ARE WILLING, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN › MATTHEW 8:2



There is indeed a lot of filth out there in the dark world of media. But we are not created to drown ourselves in the pit of pitch. *Whoever touches pitch will be contaminated by it* (Sirach 13:1). 'If you pursue evil with pleasure, the pleasure passes away and the evil remains' (Cicero).

To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life (Revelation 21:6).

Adding mud makes water muddy; what was once clear becomes blurred. To restore our blurred vision, we need to heed Jesus' invitation, *Come to me* (Matthew 11:28). Let us draw ourselves close to the *fountain of life* (Psalm 36:9). Let us be fruit-bearing trees, *planted by streams of water* (Psalm 1:3). Let us try to refrain from *turbid water* (Jeremiah 2:18) offered by the wicked ways of the world. May we approach the divine wiper to cleanse our blurred lives: *Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean* (Matthew 8:2). Amen! ■

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

PsalmMeet:

THE VIRTUE OF TRUST



Fr Jijo Jose Manjackal MSFS leads us through three specific Psalms into the virtue of trust.

‘Lord, I trust in You!’

Do not fear what may happen tomorrow. The same loving Father who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.

These comforting words of the Gentleman Saint, Francis de Sales, are a beautiful reminder of the need to have our hearts anchored in the Lord. Trust is a faithful and consistent confidence in God, even when circumstances are uncertain.

The Psalms teach us that trust grows not from control, but from surrender. In a world marred by anxiety, insecurity and constant self-reliance, the Psalms

gently lead us back to the safety of God’s Presence.

Psalm 62 – Rest in God alone, my soul!

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken (Psalm 62:1-2).

Psalm 62 is a profound confession of interior trust. The Psalmist is surrounded by instability, opposition and human unreliability, yet repeatedly declares that God alone is his refuge, rock and salvation. The repeated emphasis on ‘alone’ reveals a purified trust – one no longer divided between God and human securities. This Psalm invites us to examine where we truly place our

We are taught that trust is not 'part-time'; it is a dwelling, a constant abiding in God's Presence. True trust is not necessarily about removal of suffering. To trust God is to choose His shadow over our own defences, knowing that His faithfulness is our shield.

confidence.

Trust matures when we rest entirely in God. Silence before God becomes an act of faith, a way of saying: *You alone are enough, Lord!*

- Rest your heart in God without anxiety.
- Refuse to build your security on unstable foundations.
- Cultivate the holy silence of trusting surrender.

Psalm 91 - Trust that dwells in God's protection

Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them (Psalm 91:14-15).

Psalm 91 is a majestic hymn of protection and divine assurance. It speaks to people afflicted with danger, disease, war and fear; yet proclaims that those who dwell in God live under His shadow. We are taught that trust is not 'part-time'; it is a dwelling, a constant abiding in God's Presence.

True trust is not necessarily about removal of suffering. To trust God is to choose His shadow over our own defences, knowing that His faithfulness is our shield.

- Choose to dwell daily in God's Presence.
- Replace fear with confidence in God's promises.
- Believe that God is near, even in unseen dangers.

Psalm 16 - My future is safe in Your hands

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you' (Psalm 16:1-2).

Psalm 16 is a joyful declaration of trust that looks beyond the present into the future. The Psalmist entrusts his life, inheritance and future to God, proclaiming that his portion is secure because God Himself holds it.

Trust is freedom from the fear of loss. This Psalm teaches us that trust is not passive, but hopeful. When God is our portion, even uncertainty becomes peaceful.

- Entrust your future fully to God.
- Find joy in knowing God is your portion.
- Live with confidence, not fear of loss.

This month, let us practise the virtue of trust – rest, remain and rejoice!

Trust is the peaceful strength of a heart rooted in God. It is choosing to remain faithful when answers delay and to rejoice even before clarity comes. St Gianna Beretta Molla – a young Italian paediatrician, wife and mother who chose her child's life over her own, trusting God beyond fear, beyond logic, beyond death – says, *'The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for all that He, in His goodness, sends to us day after day.'*

Through Psalms 62, 91 and 16, we are invited to quieten our hearts, dwell in God's shelter and walk joyfully into the future He holds. Start each day by surrendering it to God; create moments of silence through the day, to rest in God; and end every day with gratitude and renewal of love for the Lord. Indeed, *'trust is not knowing what will happen; it is knowing that God will be faithful, whatever happens!'*

May our hearts learn to say each day:
'Lord, I trust in You!'

God Bless! Live Jesus!



Fr Jijo Jose Manjackal is a Missionary of St Francis de Sales (MSFS). Ordained in 2012, he is currently pursuing his Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures from Biblicum, Rome. He was appointed as a Missionary of Mercy by Pope Francis in 2016.



NewsWatch

Pope Leo XIV Urges French Catholic Media to Put Human Connection First Amid AI Era



Pope Leo XIV called on Catholic journalists to renew their commitment to truth, compassion, and human relationships as artificial intelligence continues to transform the media world. In a message delivered on his behalf by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, the Pope addressed members of the Fédération des Médias Catholiques ahead of their annual Saint François de Sales meeting in Lourdes.

The Pope emphasised that in a time increasingly shaped by AI, communicators must refocus on what is essential: empathy, strong relationships, and inclusive dialogue. He stressed that Catholic media has a unique responsibility to serve truth for everyone, including those outside the Church. Pope Leo encouraged journalists to use language that promotes goodness and reconciliation, helping to counter hatred, extremism, and division in an increasingly polarised society.

He also urged media professionals to pay special attention to people who are often ignored, describing Catholic media as ‘antennas’ meant to receive and share the stories of the vulnerable, the marginalised, the lonely, and those longing to feel valued and loved.

The message highlighted the witness of Father Jacques Hamel, the French priest killed during Mass in 2016. Referring to a journalism award named in Hamel’s honour, the Pope praised his dedication to peace, interreligious dialogue, and attentive listening, noting his conviction that genuine closeness to others, without exclusion, is urgently needed today.

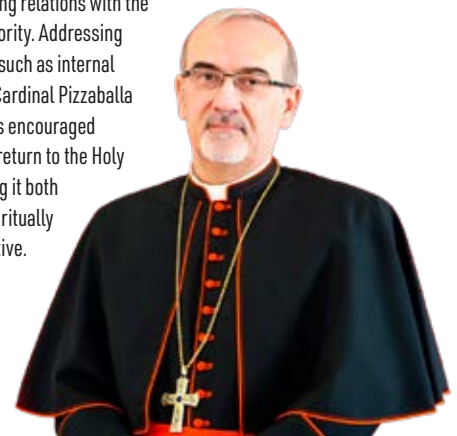
A UNIVERSAL CRY FOR JUSTICE: CARDINAL PIZZABALLA REFLECTS ON REGIONAL CRISES

Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, in an interview with Vatican News conducted in Jordan on 13 January, reflected on the universal human longing for life, dignity, and justice, emphasising that these values reside in the heart of every person. He made these remarks while commenting on the grave situation in Iran, where hundreds of demonstrators have reportedly been killed since late December after protesting against the government over worsening economic conditions. The Cardinal noted that Iranians have endured suffering for a long time and expressed his hope that the crisis would not escalate into further violence. He stressed that this desire for dignity and justice is inseparable from both personal and communal identity and cannot be ignored.

Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, was in Jordan attending a multi-day gathering with nearly 60 priests and bishops of the Latin Patriarchate. These meetings, held every few years, allow Church leaders to share experiences from their parishes. He explained that the Patriarchate’s diocese is particularly complex, as it spans several countries, each with unique political and social realities.

Turning to Gaza, the Cardinal described the territory as experiencing ‘total devastation.’ Although a ceasefire was announced in October, targeted Israeli strikes persist, and harsh winter conditions continue to claim lives. Many people, he said, are dying not only from the cold but also due to severe shortages of medicine. He also highlighted ongoing difficulties in the West Bank, including restricted movement, denied permits, and settler violence that disrupts daily life.

Despite regional instability, Jordan remains relatively calm and continues to offer medical support to Gazans in urgent need. The Latin Patriarchate plays a significant role in Jordan through its network of 30 schools, which foster Christian education while strengthening relations with the Muslim majority. Addressing challenges such as internal migration, Cardinal Pizzaballa nonetheless encouraged pilgrims to return to the Holy Land, calling it both safe and spiritually transformative.



By Sam Biju

Thousands join the March for Life in France



Approximately 10,000 people assembled at Paris' Place Vauban, facing the historic Invalides complex, for the annual March for Life on 18 January. The gathering, marked by a strikingly youthful, determined, and outspoken crowd, aimed to affirm the value of human life amid a tense moment in France's legislative calendar.

The demonstration occurred two years after abortion was written into the French Constitution and just days before a Senate debate on proposed end-of-life legislation that would legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide. For many marchers, these developments lent the event a sense of urgency and historical importance. Participants were largely young Catholics who viewed the issues at stake as fundamental to society itself.

Despite the strong turnout, the French Catholic episcopate was largely absent. Bishop Emeritus Dominique Rey of Toulon-Fréjus was the only bishop present, continuing a pattern that has prompted questions about how Church leaders engage publicly on sensitive moral questions, even as younger generations show renewed interest in clear ethical guidance.

Under banners proclaiming messages such as 'Care and support, never eliminate,' marchers processed peacefully

through the capital. Students, young families, and first-time participants joined seasoned activists. Organisers estimated the average age to be around 20, an impressive showing given limited institutional backing and sparse media attention. According to spokeswoman Marie-Lys Pellissier, the march remains one of the few opportunities for pro-life voices to be heard publicly in France.

Women played a prominent role this year, with several sharing personal testimonies about abortion and its lasting emotional impact, challenging prevailing narratives. Among them was Emilie Quinson, who has spoken internationally about her experiences and now advocates for greater support for women facing unplanned pregnancies.

In a climate where public opposition to abortion or euthanasia carries social and professional risks, young participants' willingness to speak out stood in contrast to the caution of Church leadership. Pellissier noted that bishops are routinely invited but often decline or remain silent.

For these young activists, questions of life and death are central, not peripheral, to the Church's mission. As a quiet but significant renewal of faith unfolds in France, they argue that clarity and courage from Church leaders are not optional, but essential.

LEADERS OF THE FSSP MEET POPE LEO XIV

Pope Leo XIV met privately with leaders of the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter (FSSP) on 19 January at the Apostolic Palace, marking his first personal encounter with a major community dedicated to the traditional Roman Rite. According to a statement released the following day, the Pope received FSSP Superior General Father John Berg, a native of Minneapolis, along with Father Josef Bisig, a co-founder of the fraternity and current rector of its seminary in Denton, Nebraska.

Founded in 1988 by priests who separated from the Society of St Pius X in order to remain fully obedient to the Pope while preserving the older liturgy, the FSSP requested the meeting as a chance to explain its history, mission, and nearly four decades of pastoral work. The fraternity said the audience also allowed for discussion of challenges it faces in certain regions and for clarifying questions raised by the Pope.



The meeting took place amid heightened sensitivity following Pope Francis' 2021 document *Traditionis Custodes*, which led to increased oversight of traditional communities, including an ongoing apostolic visitation of the FSSP that began in late 2024. Both the fraternity and Vatican officials have emphasised that the process is meant as routine accompaniment, not punishment. Observers see the audience as a hopeful sign of Leo XIV's willingness to listen and exercise a measured, pragmatic approach toward traditional communities. The FSSP reported that the Pope offered his blessing to all its members and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to meet, while inviting the faithful to pray for the fraternity during its upcoming novena.



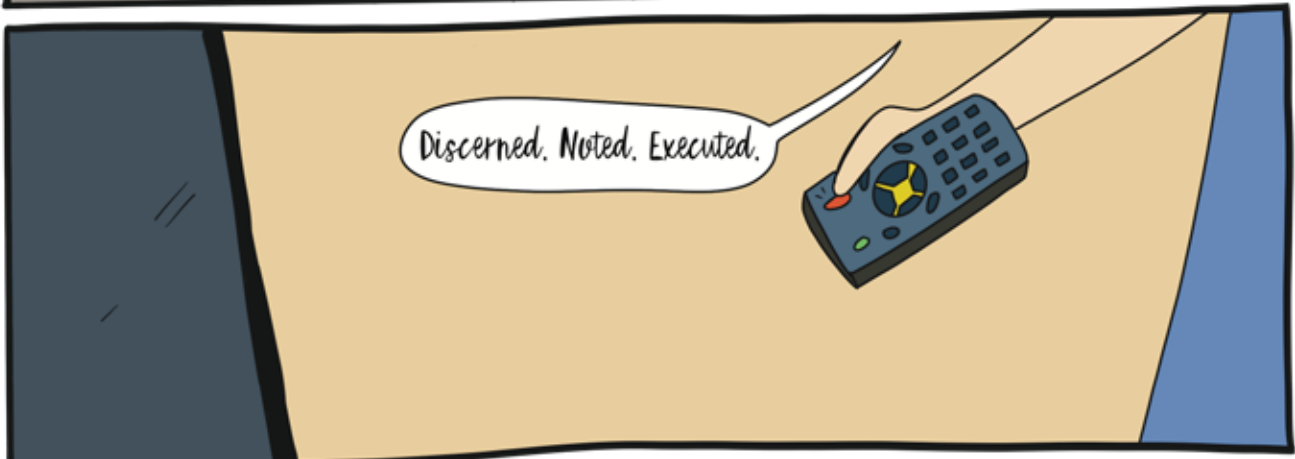
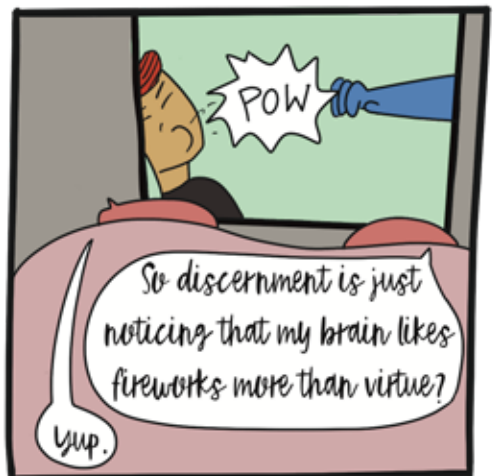
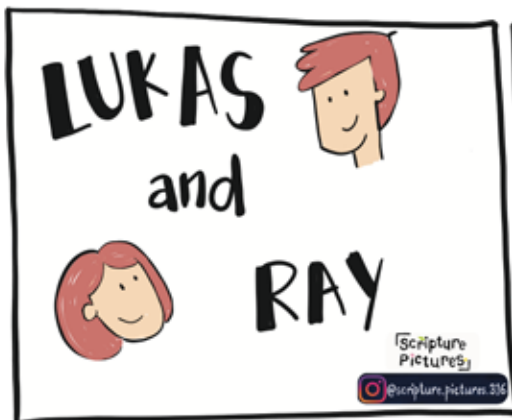
CROSS AND WORD

Oops! Our keyboard has run away with the letters! Cross out all unwanted Ws and Xs to find a beautiful prayer to St Joseph.

XWOXXDWEXXAWRWEWSWXWTWWSWXTXXJWOXXSWWEXWPWWHXX-
 ,WWIXWCXXOWXNWWSWWEXXCWXRXXAWWTWXEWWWYXXSWXEWS-
 LWWFXXTWXOXXTWXHWYXXHWWOWWWNXXOWXUWWRWAWNXDW-
 WGXXIWVWEWXMWWYXXSWWEWWLXXXWFWTXOXTWHXEWEWXTXX-
 HXXAXXTWWTWWHXOWUXWMXAWYXEWSSWWTWWWAXLWXAXYXSWB-
 WEXMYWFXAXTWHWEWRW,WMWYXPWWRXWOWTWEXCWTWOWRX,AWN-
 DMMWYXGWUWIXDWEXIXNWTWHXEXWAYXOFWSWAXLWVXAXTWIXOWN.
 WOXBWTXAWIXNFWORMEXAWGREATWPWURWITYXOFWHXEWEARTWAXN-
 WDWAWFWERXVEWNTLOWVEXOFWTHXINWTEWRIWORXLIXFEW.

WAFXTEWRWTHIWNEXEXAWMPWLEW,WMAYXIXDOWXALLWMWYWACWX-
 TIONSWXFOWXRWXTHEWXGRWXEATWXERWXGLWXORWXYWWOWXFWX-
 GOWXDWW,WWINXXUNIWWONWWXWITHWWTHEXXDIVXXINEXWHEAW-
 WRTXXOFWWJESUSXWANDWWTHEWXIMMACULATEWWHEAWWRTOFWW-
 MARYWW!WANDWWDOWXTHOWXUWW,OWBLESWSEDWWSTWXJOSEPH,W-
 WPRWXAYXXFORWXMWWTHAWWTXWIWXMAYWWSHWXAREWXINW-
 WTHEWWPEWWACEWWANXDWWJOWWYXXOFWXTHYWWHOLYXXDEATHW-
 WAMENWW.

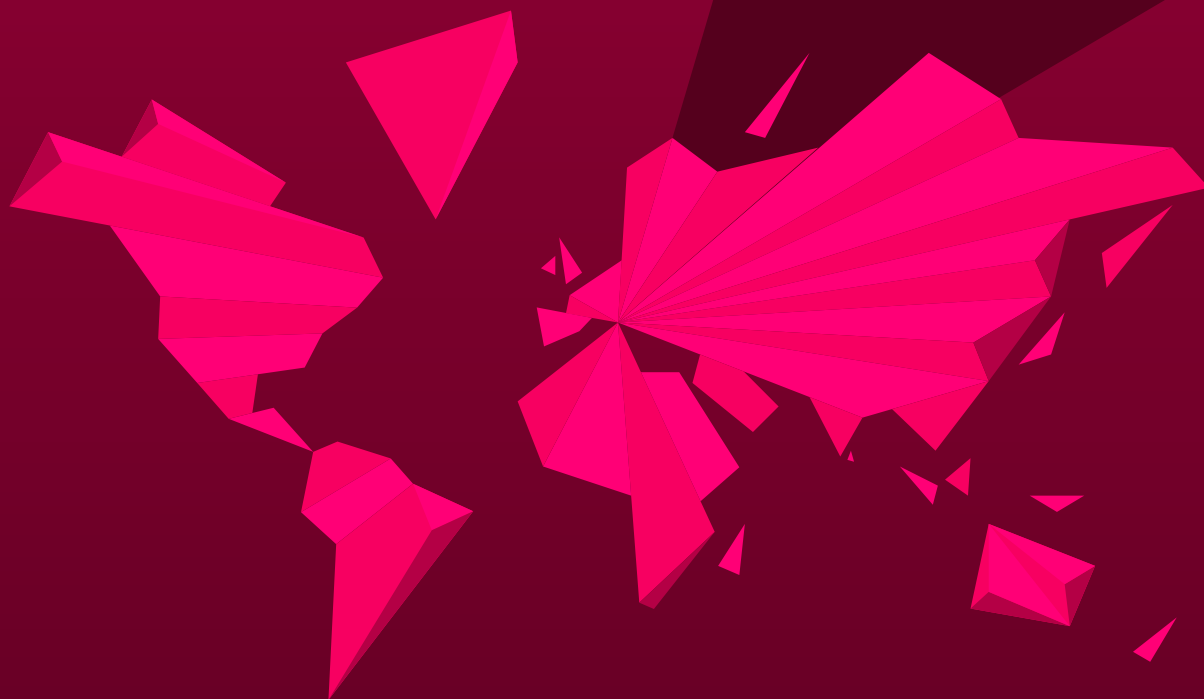
O DEAREST ST JOSEPH, I CONSECRATE MYSELF TO THY HONOUR AND GIVE MYSELF TO THEE. THAT THOU MAKEST ALWAYS BE MY FATHER, MY PROTECTOR, AND MY GUIDE IN THE WAY OF SALVATION. OBTAIN FOR ME A GREAT PURITY OF HEART AND A FERVENT LOVE OF THE INTERIOR LIFE. AFTER THINE EXAMPLE, MAY I DO ALL MY ACTIONS FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD, IN UNION WITH THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS AND THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY! AND DO THOU, O BLESSED ST JOSEPH, PRAY FOR ME THAT I MAY SHARE IN THE PEACE AND JOY OF THY HOLY DEATH AMEN.





**JESUS YOUTH
INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE
2026**

Go
TO THE ENDS
OF THE EARTH



**All flights
lead to Rome**

**20 - 25 OCT
ROME**

2026.JESUSYOUTH.ORG