

# **Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis: Relevance to the Church in India**

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Ecclesiology, the systematic theological reflection on the Church, was at the heart of the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. All the Sixteen documents of the council deal either directly or indirectly with the Church. The Church and ecclesiology also received a great deal of attention in recent theological writings and discussions. Twentieth century was the century of the Church. The changes brought about by the second Vatican Council and their impact were also felt in the Church. This essay will examine the understanding of the Church in India in the light of documents, writings and talks of Pope Francis on the Church. The words and actions of Pope Francis continue to attract the attention of Catholics, other Christians, and people of other religious traditions from around the world. It is, I think, worthy of exploration and sustained reflection. While Pope Francis has not authored a systematic treatise on the Church, a number of salient ecclesiological themes are present in his writings and in the talks he has given. Here, We shall deal with those themes in this essay, to reflect the vision of the Church that Francis proposes. Therefore, this essay is on “ECCLESIAL VISION OF POPE FRANCIS: RELEVANCE TO THE CHURCH IN INDIA.” First, let us look at the “Challenges and Problems Faced by the Catholic Church in

India in the Emergent context” These Challenges can be viewed in different realities like social, economical, political, religious and ecclesial. We need to analyze how these challenges of India affect the Church and its growth.

## **1. CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA**

Christianity in India is complex. There is great denominational diversity. Geographically, Indian Christianity has various pockets of concentration. – the north-eastern region, the central plains, and the coastal and some inland areas of southern and western India. Indian Christians comprise both caste and tribal communities, and among the castes, they range between the highest and the lowest. Some Christian communities like the Syrian Christians were in existence for hundreds of years, while some others such as those in the north-east have not yet completed a century. Such a diverse Church has come about because of a long history of conversion in many different ways to the faith. In India we find the awakening of the Dalit Christians who are the majority in the Church, and who point to Jesus, who chose to empty himself to become one of them, and to die on the cross. In response, Christian theologians such as Michael Amaladoss, Samuel Rayan, Sebastian Kappen, and Felix Wilfred have developed a Theology of the Subaltern. In India too, we find one Catholic Church, but divided into three rites—a God-given privilege or a scandal? The conflicts and quarrels concerning the question of the rites and the ecclesial structures have severe negative consequences for the work of the Catholic Church in India and obscured its witness in the eyes of the general public. The challenges have become more severe with the raise of fascist forces in India. Most of these challenges are fought in media, and Christian churches have not equipped themselves to tackle these challenges. Many Indian churches and Christian communities are forced to act when they are affected by some of these challenges under the terror of fascism.

## **1.1. Challenges Faced by the Catholic Church in India**

The Christians along with other minority communities are facing serious challenges in last one and half decade. The challenges have become more severe with the raise of fascist forces in India. Most of these challenges are fought in media and Christian churches have not equipped themselves to tackle these challenges. Many Indian churches and Christian communities are forced to act when they are affected by some of these challenges under the terror of fascism.

### **1.1.1 Social Realities**

The social context of India is multi-dimensional because it involves various factors like cultural, economic, and political elements, and one cannot draw lines between each of them, but all of them intersect at different points. The people of India inherit many cultures that vary from place to place and people to people. They affect the social, economic, and political life of the people of India. However, there is a consensus that India has “a common cultural ethos, an overarching common culture,” which is unique, and grounded in religion and philosophy. Cosmotheandric understanding of reality penetrates the world vision of India.<sup>1</sup> It is an indicator that religious sciences and secular sciences have an interconnection in the Indian context. However, the society is not without numerous problems. India with 52.5% people of Backward Classes, 22.5% Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; India where more than 40% of people live below the poverty line, here 16.5 million children are forced to work and 22 million and more adults are unemployed.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the responsibility is placed upon society at large. For Ram Ahuja, an Indian sociologist, a social problem is a condition undesirable for some people in the society.<sup>3</sup> Based on the factors responsible for the social problems, Ahuja categorizes them as (1) economic – poverty, unemployment etc.; (2) cultural – divorce, juvenile delinquency, etc.; (3) biological – infectious diseases, food poisoning, etc.; and (4) psychological – neurological diseases,

a cult, etc. If one examines these social problems closely, one realizes that moral conscience plays an important role in these problems. In his well-studied work, *Social Problems in India*, Ahuja names twenty-four problems that principally affect Indian society: Poverty, Unemployment, Population Explosion, Aging and Elder Abuse, Communalism, Secularism and Regionalism, Backward Castes, Tribes, and Classes, Youth Unrest and Agitations, Child Abuse and Child Labor, Crime Against Women, Illiteracy, Urbanization, Globalization and Consumerism, Crime and Criminals, Juvenile Delinquency, Domestic Violence, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Drug Addiction, AIDS, Terrorism, Corruption, Tribal Unrest, Bonded Labor, Agrarian Distress and Farmers' Suicides, Ecological Problems and Black Money. Many of these problems are interconnected.

### **1.1.2 Economic Realities**

The India of today is in the grip of dehumanizing poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy. Staggering millions are reduced to a state of abject misery, want and destitution by a group of rich exploiters who handle and control every sector of life. They suck the blood of the poor, heap injustices on them and keep them impoverished and enslaved with the support of corrupt political, social and economic systems. Appropriation of large areas of land and other means of production by the rich reduce the poor to a state of total dependence. In pursuit of greater power, position and profit. The rich march on callously trampling underfoot the poor and the weak. The victims of injustice live in sub-human conditions in the huts of our villages, in the slums and pavements of our cities with no hope for a better morrow.<sup>4</sup>

In the globalized economy, mass media promotes greed and creates an interest to 'become rich today.' Such publicity has also paved the way for corruption, bribery and other unethical practices. As a result, no citizen is insulated from corruption, anti-social, unjust structures, from commercialization. Liberal economy views everything, including human beings

as marketable commodity. Economic liberalization, free markets and globalization were the new factors for the widening split between the rich and the poor. Reasons for this contradiction are many. The poor and the uneducated became unwanted and unemployed due to mechanization and computerization.

### **1.1.3 Religious Realities**

India historically touts itself as a secular state, where all religions are recognized and can peacefully co-exist. Well, at least in theory, it is. Unfortunately, the reality is much different. An April 11, Pew Research Center analysis of 198 countries ranked India as fourth worst in the world for religious intolerance. In the country of 1.3 billion, the incidence of hostility related to religion trailed only Syria, Nigeria and Iraq, all places where sectarian violence is widespread. India is not alone in seeing more religious unrest. Globally, Pew says, government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion increased in 2015 for the first time in three years. Pew analyzed cases that involved hate crimes, mob violence, communal violence, religion-related terror, the use of force to prevent religious practice, the harassment of women for not conforming to religious dress codes, and violence over conversion or proselytizing. Fundamentalism is a religious attitude understood as a narrow affirmation of the truth of one's own beliefs. Fundamentalism tends to promote a state religion.<sup>5</sup> This tendency is widespread throughout the world. In India, for instance, Hinduism dominates public life. Inter-religious dialogue has no space in the fundamentalist society. In the fundamentalist world other religions tend to be regarded as of second class status, even the status of 'enemy'.<sup>6</sup> Secularism, on the other hand, is "an ideology which focuses on humanity and reason and ignores, if it does not deny, God and the transcendent, which are aspects of experience that religion believes in".<sup>7</sup> One of the most common happens in secularist countries where religion loses its role and appears as a tendency to privatize

religion. The emergence of globalization has carried tremendous impacts upon the life of Asian people. If not most, many of Asian people tend to wall themselves into “a new world”; a life of materialism and a life of consumerism. This “world” has successfully fortified them into the extreme of individualistic and secularist society.

#### **1.1.4 Ecclesial Realities**

The history of Christianity in India goes back to the first century that marked the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle in India.<sup>8</sup> The Indian Christians who belong to the Eastern Churches, also known St. Thomas Christians, believe that their Church was founded by St. Thomas the Apostle. Indian theologian Placid Podippara qualified St. Thomas Christians as “Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion and Oriental in Worship.”<sup>9</sup> This description shows the diversity and the richness of their tradition, which is very much rooted in the local Hindu culture and oriental form of worship. Today Christianity in India is fragmented. The one Church of St. Thomas Christians before the beginning of colonization, is now divided into eight Churches. Two of them, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syro-Malankara Church, belong to the Catholic communion.<sup>10</sup> Other than these churches with Oriental traditions, there are also the Roman Rite (Latin) Church and many reformed churches in India. Conflicts between individual Churches, Institutionalization of the Church, Tensions between Bishops, Clergy, and Laity, Clerical hierarchy – Vestiges of a caste – Conscious society, Lack of apostolic and pastoral planning in most dioceses, Compartmentalization and discrimination in the Church, the foreignness of the Church, the challenge to become the Church of the poor.

#### **1.1.5 Political Realities**

The secular character of our nation is today threatened by the Hindutva movement, started by some Hindu fundamentalist groups. The alarming thing is that several political parties have allied with the religious fundamentalist

groups in order to win vote banks and gain political power and thus capture the government. The Hindutva is a very dangerous ideology which claims legitimacy for the majority religion, the Hindu, and to a monolithic culture, and calls for the creation of a Hindu Rashtra, where the minorities who belong to other religions and cultural traditions are caricatured as 'foreigners' and they are to be either eliminated or reduced to second class citizens.<sup>11</sup> Communalism, on the other hand, is a political attitude. Communalism believes that people who share the same religious beliefs also share the same economic and political interest. The danger of this group is that it tends to regard other beliefs as enemies and the followers second class citizens.<sup>12</sup> Tolerance or acceptance is far from praxis while nursing hatred and mistrusting becomes a menu of daily life. Rise of Fascism, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru said once, 'When fascism comes to India, it will come in the form of communalism.' We have seen this in many forms in many parts of the country. India has militant fascism, cultural fascism, religious fascism and political fascism etc. At the risk of these fascist forces, the life of innocent civilians and their fundamental rights have been attacked and disturbed from time to time. To curb the militant related fascist violation, the measurements are taken from state and central level in North Eastern state, Jammu and Kashmir and now the Maoist affected states although they are not able to control totally. What worry the most for the country is the rise of saffron fascist forces, which has attacked on religious minorities, the Dalits and Hindu secular civil societies.

## **1.2 Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis**

When we think about what is distinctive about Pope Francis's vision of the Church, many themes come to mind. Shortly after being elected, he put it this way: "How I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor."<sup>13</sup> This was the great desire of Pope John XXIII on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, and it marked a defining agenda among a group of bishops

participating in the council.<sup>14</sup> It cannot be denied that, from the first day of his pontificate, Pope Francis has devoted himself to local Churches that are poor and to poor people around the world. This is one main reason why he chose Francis for his name after Francis of Assisi, the friend of the poor; it captures the preferential option for the poor especially associated with the Church in Latin America. While it is true that Francis has given special emphasis to the poor, he has done so to draw widespread attention to the Church's mission to alleviate the effects of poverty that affect daily life and living conditions as well as to struggle against the causes of poverty, the social, cultural, and institutional patterns of exclusion that affect people. Another defining feature of the Pope's ecclesiology is his summons for all the members of the Church to embrace a missionary option for a mission of mercy and justice, a missionary option as a field hospital in a wounded world. Mindful of these defining characteristics of Pope Francis's teachings, I wish to concentrate on the themes those demonstrate that Pope Francis has initiated a new phase in the reception of Vatican II.

### 1.2.1 Pope Francis: The Image of the People of God

Pope Francis' Ecclesiology is greatly influenced by the "theology of the people" which considers the "faithful people of God" as a key source for theological reflection.<sup>15</sup> It is beyond dispute that Pope Francis has initiated a new phase in the reception of Vatican II by returning the Church's attention to a cluster of theological ideas around the teaching of the council associated with the vision of the Church as the people of God. This motif captivated many members of the Church around the world after the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*)<sup>16</sup> was issued, which gave special attention to the Church as people of God in chapter two and in various other documents. Yet this motif has been overshadowed, virtually eclipsed since 1985 when the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, in reviewing the aftermath of Vatican II, maintained that communion ecclesiology was central

to the documents. This orientation came to define the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Francis changed this in his first major interview after becoming pope in 2013 when he said, “the image of the Church, I like is that of the holy, faithful people of God.”<sup>17</sup> For Francis, the image of the people of God is not just a central idea; rather, it reflects a style of spirituality, a practical way of life, and a pastoral style of ministry.<sup>18</sup> People outside of Latin America are now gaining a better understanding of the historical reality that there were influential theologians not all liberation theologians who devoted special attention to the “people of God” vision of the Church and, with it, attention to the daily life and cultures of local peoples. It is this attention to the diverse daily lives of people, their diverse local cultures, and popular forms of piety that is so central for Pope Francis. We clearly hear this in a statement in *Evangelii Gaudium* where he speaks about “a people of many faces”.<sup>19</sup>

### 1.2.2 Pope Francis: *SensusFidelium*

For Pope Francis, the vision of the Church as the people of God is closely related with the ideas in *Lumen Gentium* of the sense of the faith of all the people of God.<sup>20</sup> This chapter developed the theme that, through baptism, all the faithful are anointed with the Spirit of God and are gifted and called to participate actively in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ in the life and mission of the Church.

Pope Francis who understands the Church as the pilgrim people of God envisions a new way of being the Church. For him, if the Church wants to encourage every member to be a responsible person, it needs to pay attention to the exercise of the *sensusfidelium* in the Church. Based on this teaching, Pope Francis has challenged bishops, priests, and theologians to be in close contact with the sense of the faithful to pray and worship.”The *sensusfidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.” with the

faithful, to eat and drink with them, to collaborate with them in religious education and in works of mercy and to work for justice to be totally immersed with the sense of the faithful people of God in local Churches and communities and among populations that have been excluded and on the periphery of the Church around the world.

These people of God provide a reliable and challenging source and norm for the confession of faith. As we read in *Evangelii Gaudium*: In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy, thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible in *credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith *sensus fidei* which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.2.3 Pope Francis: The Poor Church for the Poor

*Evangelii Gaudium* is in a starkly different tone and style from what we are used to in documents coming from Rome. Pope Francis writes in warm, familiar and down-to-earth language, with wit and affection but also with harsh words. Harsh words especially for elitism and clericalism in the Church, harsh words for materialism and selfish individualism, and harsh words for indifference to social injustice and the deteriorating plight of the poor.

“That is why I want a poor Church for the poor.... to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, and to lend our voice to their causes.”<sup>22</sup> Francis repeats over and over again, like a mantra, Realities are more important than ideas!<sup>23</sup> So with that in mind he looks at the realities in our world and in the Church and holds a mirror up

for us to see ourselves. This vision of the Church is based on the central narrative drama of the eschatological pilgrim people of God, a Church of the poor and in solidarity with the poor, marginalized people and the wounded earth. Therefore, he proposes, it would be a Church that has made a definite option for the poor and ready to translate this option into action in every sector of her life and mission.

#### **1.2.4 Church as Missionary**

Another defining feature of the Pope's ecclesiology is his summons for all the members of the Church to embrace a missionary option for a mission of mercy, inclusive and justice. Mindful of these defining characteristics of Pope Francis's teachings, it would be a Church that is missionary, that is conscious of its identity as a community in mission at all times and in all places. Pope Francis, frequently employ a favorite expression, the "smell of the sheep." He has used this image in an address to newly appointed bishops calling for them to have the smell of the sheep on them. He appealed to it in a homily at a priestly ordination, and in *Evangelii Gaudium*. He applies it to all the baptized, precisely in their work as missionaries. "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be." (EG 24). Francis wants a Church that is on mission, reaching out to others and accompanying them, especially those on the periphery. For Pope Francis the Church can never forget Jesus command to "go and make disciples." The Church should never hesitate to adapt this missionary spirit of going forth. The Church is more than a gathering individuals for the sake of a cultural or religious identity. Therefore, he qualifies

it with an important Christian notion: mission. For him, the Church is a missionary community of believers, i.e. a community with a mandate to preach the Gospel to all mankind. "If we attempt to put all things in a missionary key, this will also affect the way we communicate the message."<sup>24</sup> That is to say, the identity of the Church comes from its mission. Here, the mission is understood in a wider sense. Therefore, he says: "In our day Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary "going forth".<sup>25</sup> Certainly, what the Pope says is not something new. From its inception, the task of the Church consists in proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council reaffirms it when it says: "The Church has received this solemn mandate of Christ to proclaim the saving truth from the apostles and must carry it out to the very ends of the earth".<sup>26</sup>

The characteristic of the missionary community is that it is prepared to meet people where they are and accept them for what they are: "The shepherd will be found wherever the lost sheep is, while he is looking for the lost sheep, he challenges the ninety-nine to participate in the reunification of the flock."<sup>27</sup> In other words, in the eyes of Jesus, according to Pope Francis, there are no lost sheep, but only sheep needing to be found. If the mission of the Church is the salvation of the world then, the concern of the Church cannot be of her self-preservation.<sup>28</sup>

### **1.2.5 Church: Open Door Church**

Pope Francis wants the Church to be an "open door Church" which has always been a symbol of light, of friendship, of joy.<sup>29</sup> This Church should be a "Church of the poor" because it is the Body of Christ who himself "became poor"<sup>30</sup> (2 Cor 8:9).<sup>31</sup> He cautions about an "ecclesial introversion",<sup>32</sup> and warns that: "A Church that limits itself to administer parish work and that lives closed in its own community accomplishes the

same thing that an isolated person would: it atrophies physically and mentally. Or it deteriorates like a walled-in apartment where mould and humidity grow.”<sup>33</sup> Here we see how Pope Francis seeks to push the Church outwards from being overly institutional to being more simple and servant-like. For Pope Francis, the mission of the Church is not building walls, but breaking them down<sup>34</sup> so that the Christians should readily welcome and embrace the strangers, the neglected and the abandoned. Here we see his concern for the refugees, especially those who come from the war zones.

#### **1.2.6 Church: Joyful and Inclusive**

While the theme of a “Joyful Church”, which is led and served by joyful bishops, priests, nuns and lay faithful runs through so many of Pope Francis’s writings, it is important to note that he solidly rejects any holier-than-thou attitude and exclusivism. In a homily expressing Christian identity, unity-in-diversity and inclusive belongingness, he said:

The Church does not pick and choose; it is a community that includes everyone. Christianity is an invitation to the Lord’s feast in which we must ‘participate fully’ and with everyone. Do we want to describe who belongs to the Church, to this feast? The sinners. All of us sinners are invited. The community has diverse gifts: one has the gift of prophecy, another of ministry, another for teaching and etc. We all have qualities and strengths. But each of us brings to the feast a common gift.<sup>35</sup>

Striving to optimize all the Spirit-given qualities, strengths, charisms and gifts of Christians, Pope Francis takes special care to strive to give visibility and voice to those who were on the periphery of Church and society. For instance, he writes about women: “Many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection, but we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church”.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the washing of the feet of women at the Maundy

Thursday service-some of them not even Christian shows how far Pope Francis has gone in reiterating that everyone is a child of God.<sup>37</sup>

### 1.2.7 Church as Communion

It would be a Church that is ready to oppose violence in all its forms. It should be a Church in constant communication with all sections of the people in order to arrive at perfect communion of all as children of God. The universal Church as a communion of local Churches is a sign and instrument of communion with God and with others; a Church summoned to express and to effect solidarity with all women and men, especially with the poor, the marginalized, and other suffering people; It is clear that Pope Francis has been significantly influenced by the understanding of the Church as communion. He frequently describes the Christian life as a call to communion with Christ and with others. Francis emphasizes the importance of fostering collegiality in the Church at all levels. During a ceremony of blessing and the bestowing of the pallium on metropolitan archbishops that took place just a few months after his election as pope, he cited the description in *Lumen Gentium* of the college of bishops as the expression of the variety and unity of the people of God (LG 22). Francis urged these bishops, “Let us go forward on the path of synodality and grow in harmony with the service of the primacy.”<sup>38</sup>

A vision of the Church as communion is also evident in the way in which Francis describes the catholicity of the Church.<sup>39</sup> In a general audience, he enumerated three characteristics of the Church’s catholicity: first, **the** Church is the space in which the faith is proclaimed to us in its entirety; second, the Church is universal—it is spread to every part of the world and proclaims the gospel to everyone; and third, it is “the home of harmony.”<sup>40</sup> Francis often comments on the presence and action of the Holy Spirit as effecting harmony amidst diversity. The Holy Spirit is “the One who creates unity in diversity, because the Holy Spirit is harmony and always creates

harmony in the Church. And harmonious unity in the many different cultures, languages and ways of thinking.”<sup>41</sup> He likens the Church to an orchestra, with a rich variety of instruments playing together to create a magnificent harmony. The Holy Spirit is the true “maestro” of this orchestra.<sup>42</sup> Francis criticizes those who equate unity with uniformity. Uniformity, he asserts, kills life. He says, “The life of the Church is variety, and when we want to impose uniformity on everyone, we kill the gifts of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>43</sup>

On a more personal level, the ecclesiology of communion gives birth to a spirituality of communion that is evident in the words and actions of Pope Francis. So, he chooses to live, not alone in the traditional papal apartment, but in the house of Saint Martha—the saint famous for the hospitality that she extended to Jesus at the family home in Bethany. Francis remarked, “I was always looking for community. I did not see myself as a priest on my own. I need a community.”<sup>44</sup> He reminds us that our ultimate destination is the reign of God, which will mean “full communion with the Lord, familiarity with the Lord, entry into his own divine life, where we will live in the joy of his love beyond measure, a full joy.”<sup>45</sup> On our way to that destination Catholics and other Christians are summoned to make life in the church an experience of communion.

“It is necessary to seek to build communion, to teach communion, to get the better of misunderstandings, starting with the family, with ecclesial reality, in ecumenical dialogue, too. Our world needs unity; this is an age in which we all need unity. We need reconciliation and communion, and the Church is the home of communion.”<sup>46</sup> In his 2014 apostolic letter on consecrated life, he exhorts consecrated women and men to become experts in communion.

In an address to newly appointed bishops, Francis urged them to welcome magnanimously: “May your heart be large enough to welcome all

the men and women you come across during the day and whom you go and seek out when you go about to your parishes and to every community . . . the Church is a good mother who always welcomes and loves.”<sup>47</sup> For Francis, an ecclesiology of communion entails the concrete practice of fostering communion at the local parish and diocesan levels.

### **1.2.8 Church as Servant**

It would be a servant Church always ready to lay down her life for others. the Church as servant, in which ministry *ad intra* and mission *ad extra* are imbued with the spirit of faithful, humble service exemplified by Jesus in his ministry.

It would be a prophetic community ready to uphold the cause of God and the legitimate rights of her children. All these themes of Pope Francis are taken from the views proposed by him in his different documents especially *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si*, and *Amoris Laetitia*.

### **1.2.9 Church as Synodal**

This vision of the Church provides the basis for the promotion of synodal deliberation in the Church, not only in expressions of the collegiality of bishops in the synod of bishops and episcopal conferences, but also in diocesan and parish councils and community forums that engage all the faithful people, and that strive to advance democracy throughout civil society. He wants a synodal Church, in which the bishops and faithful people walk together and authority is understood as service. All these challenges are towards the Church for the transformation of our contemporary society. Finally, experience and discernment have a key role in Pope Francis’ way of proceeding. For him, faith enters the Church through the living experience of the ordinary people, not through the heads of intellectuals.

#### **1.2.9.1 Church of Collegiality**

Another great change that is taking place in the Church is its governance<sup>48</sup> in a bid to clean up the Roman Curia he said: “Like anybody, it

is exposed to sickness, malfunction and infirmity, they are illnesses and temptations that weaken our service to the Lord.”<sup>49</sup> He listed these illnesses like Spiritual Alzheimer’s, the temptation to overwork and not pray: *Martha-ism*; Double lives: Existential *schizophrenia*, terrorism of gossip, funeral face and so on. Aware of these illnesses plaguing the Roman Curia, Pope Francis has instituted a core group of eight cardinal consulters. Moreover, his appointment of new cardinals from all over the world indicates his resolve to ensure greater collegiality and more equitable representation.<sup>50</sup> All the above measures augur well for the health and the future of the Church.

### 1.2.9.2 Collegiality to Synodality

First, *Amoris Laetitia*’s view of the Church is collegial and synodal. Francis quotes his first exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* seventeen times, Vatican II’s constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes* nineteen times, but also ten documents of National Bishops’ Conferences (Spain, Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Australia, the council of the Latin American bishops CELAM, Italy and Kenya). This is new because the “synodal process” of Francis is something that never happened before: a synod in two steps and a synod with a real freedom of debate.

Moreover, the ecclesiology of Francis is not just limited to episcopal collegiality, but it is trying to expand towards synodality: participation in the Church decision-making process cannot be limited to the gathering of the bishops in the Synod only. The laity must be involved in some way, as the Synods of 2014 and 2015 tried to do (with mixed results) by sending questionnaires to the Catholic faithful all over the world.

Finally, the ecclesiology of *Amoris Laetitia* and of the synodal process also entails a radically new understanding of the role of the bishop of Rome, as he suggests in the opening of the exhortation:<sup>51</sup>

“I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it.”

This is very important because ever since Vatican II, the issue of collegiality in the Church had largely been addressed as an issue of participation of the lower level (the bishops) to the upper level (the papacy). But Francis makes clear that collegiality and synodality in the Church also entails a certain measure of withdrawal of the papacy from the role of primary and unique “maker” of the Catholic tradition. There are other levels where some issues can and must be addressed.

#### **1.2.10 Ec(O)clesiology: Ecology as in ‘*Laudato Si*’**

‘*Laudato Si* – Care for Our Common Home’ constitutes a substantive addition to the corpus of Catholic Social Teaching. The encyclical is of equivalent importance to *Pacem in Terris* (PT) (and arguably even *Rerum Novarum*). Like John XXIII’s PT, which inspired world leaders with a moral vision when the world seemed in danger of nuclear war and planetary catastrophe, today, LS comes at a time of potential ecological disaster and is again addressed to all people of good will. It is above all a call for dialogue with honesty and transparency to involve all persons and peoples, institutions, and organizations that share this same deep concern for our common home.

Given his mantra ‘Reality is more important than Ideas’ he wants the perspective of the poor to be heard, understood, felt and smelt by the upper ranks in the Church and in society. It is exposure to reality that can change us; ideas have an altogether more ephemeral presence in our lives. And lack of physical encounter with the problems of the excluded leads to a numbing of consciences.

### 1.2.11 Church: Family of Families

At Paragraph 87 of *Amoris Laetitia*, Francis defines the Church “a family of families”: one wonders what is the role of singles non-married Catholics. Paragraph 161 about virginity does not talk to all non-married Catholics, just like paragraph 162 about “celibacy that can risk becoming a comfortable single life.” Besides that, what is lacking is a direct ecclesiological appreciation of the ministerial dimension of married couples of families in the Church. This is something Francis can be helped to develop in his ecclesiology, where sacramentality is deeply connected with an understanding of the human person that is very concrete and not idealized.

In chapter one, Francis teaches that in addressing the Christian family, the Church must see things through the eyes of Christ because the light of Christ enlightens every person, even those in difficult situations or irregular marriages.<sup>52</sup> In chapters three and four, we see constant reference to illumination and the opening of the eyes, such as when he writes, “The aesthetic experience of love is expressed in that gaze which contemplates other persons as ends in themselves, even if they are infirm, elderly or physically unattractive”.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, love opens our eyes so that we can see the great worth of the other. The words of consent which couples give to each other “illumine all the meaning of the signs” of the sacrament.<sup>54</sup> Couples should allow their eyes to be illumined to see God’s gift in the embryo from the moment of conception.<sup>55</sup> The language of sex-education should be presented in such a way that it is an illumination for living in a mature way and embracing the joy of love.<sup>56</sup> The Church and all Christians and family members must embrace the light of faith<sup>57</sup> in order to see the goodness in everyone, especially those who are suffering and those who are weak and experiencing distress of different kinds.<sup>58</sup>

In AL there is a broader and integrated understanding of human life not built on an anthropocentric priority but on a Trinitarian relationship of

participation. Abortion,<sup>59</sup> birth and population control, polygamy, pornography, sexual exploitation, child abuse, etc,<sup>60</sup> are rejected, but within the larger context of understanding that pastoral discernment and pastoral judgement and action must be connected to people's lives.<sup>61</sup>

In AL, however, natural law is seen as a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions rather than a set of rules which impose themselves on the moral subject or on the Church. Same-sex unions<sup>62</sup> and the annulment process<sup>63</sup> are still reinforced with teachings from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and previous popes, but there are no harsh, judgemental condemnations of people with same-sex orientations or divorced and remarried Catholics, nor is there an explicit insistence on excluding them from communion<sup>64</sup>

### **1.3 New Image of the Church in India based on the Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis**

It states the relevance of Pope Francis' teaching, to the Church in India. It is a critical evaluation of the Church in India in line with the teachings of Pope Francis. We can take few guidelines to make his vision relevant to the Church in India in different contexts with the help of Indian Theological Association meetings, CBCI and FABC.

The Catholic Church in India to become more involved in movements that work for liberation and to collaborate with all the forces that are at work to usher in a new society. The difficulties that we encounter and the oppositions that we experience are the wrappings of a new future of great promise. The Church in India needs to face them with the courage that springs from the conviction that Jesus the risen Lord is with us and assures us of his Spirit until the end of time. We journey with the risen Lord in the power of his Spirit, facing the realities that confront us in serenity and peace that come from him. This is a journey that we, the disciples of Jesus have to

make along with all our brothers and sisters of diverse culture and creed having before us a common goal illumined by the light of hope. This goal is the new society envisaged as the Reign of God and realized in the creation of the new earth and new heaven in which all of us will experience a deep sense of belonging to the one family of God with love as our norm of life and sharing as our lifestyle.

The role of the Church is in being physically involved in the social and cultural affairs of the people. As the first step, the Church in India should relinquish triumphalism, authoritarianism, hierarchism, and a preference for the status quo, and work for the liberation of the people, because without being physically involved in the struggles of the poor, feeding them with the prospective of post-mortal paradise is a mockery.

The Church in India should exercise its prophetic role by publicly protesting against and criticizing social evils- socio-economic policies, casteism, corruption, gender discrimination, etc. in which the Church can also join with other non-Christian organizations.

The Church must stand with the poor and the unprivileged class and work for human rights and the development of the people. The Church should empower women who can bring changes in our society and the women religious who play their role in it. In addition, the Church must train the leaders imbued with basic human and Christian values and rise above the vested interests of some people or groups to bring about the liberative action of Christ in the nation. Theologians must be involved in the struggles of the people because without this involvement, an Indian theology of liberation is not possible. The Church is not only called to preach this good news, but also to live it as an authentic symbol of the kingdom in the world.

The Church is convinced of the richness of the religious background of India which is seen as the universal presence of the Spirit of God. In the

multi-religious context of India, the Church is aware of a theology of religions, of which the locus must be dialogue, liberation, and inculturation. Instead of noting the differences among religions, we believe that discovering similarities would help religions come together to work for the liberation of all the people of India

We have no blue print that will tell us exactly how we are to proceed but we have the vision of Jesus that beckons us on to a future of hope. The vision of Pope Francis will surely help our Indian Church to experience God and to put that experience into our life as true Church in India.

### Footnotes

1. Cosmotheandrisim is a term coined by Raimon Panikkar. According to this ideology, reality is one but has triple dimension: cosmic, divine, and human, and they cannot be separated. It's a holistic and integral vision of reality in which there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the spirit and the body. Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), 444-454.
2. Kuncheria Pathil, *Trends in Indian Theology* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005), 164.
3. Ram Ahuja, *Social Problems in India*, 3 ed., (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2014), 1.
4. Felix Wilfred, *The Emergent Church in a New India* (Trivandrum, Jayamatha Training Institute press, 1987), 19.
5. Michael Amaladoss, *Beyond Dialogue: Pilgrims to the Absolute* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2008), 20.
6. Michael Amaladoss, "Difficult Dialogue," *Vidyajyoti* 62/8 (1998), 569.
7. Michael Amaladoss, *Making Harmony: Living in a Pluralistic world* (Pune: ISPCK/IISR, 2003), 43.
8. Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, 1<sup>st</sup>

- ed, ed, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 92; Mathias Mundadan, *Indian Christians: Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003), 4.
9. Paulachan Kochappilly, "Brief Survey of the Ecclesial Mission and Pastoral Care of the Migrants of the Syro- Malabar Church in India and Abroad," in *The Ecclesial Mission and Pastoral Care of the Migrants of the Syro- Malabar Church*, ed. Pauly Kannookadan (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2009), 143.
  10. Other Churches having St. Thomas tradition are: Syrian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Syrian Church, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, St. Thomas Evangelical Church, and Assyrian Church of the East.
  11. Victor Machado, ed., *Society and Church: Challenges to Theologizing in India Today* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004), 113.
  12. Michael Amaladoss, "Folk-Culture as Counter Culture: The Dalit Experience," in *Jeevadhara* 24/139 (1994), 37.
  13. Joshua J. McElwee, "Pope Francis: 'I would love a Church that is Poor,'" (National Catholic Reporter, accessed 20 November 2019, Published on March 16, 2013), <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-francis-i-would-lovechurch-poor>.
  14. Hinze, "Vatican II and U.S. Catholic Communities Promoting Grassroots Democracy", in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, eds. Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 156-157.
  15. J.C Scannone, "Pope Francis and the Theology of the People," in *Theological Studies*, vol. 77/1 (2016), 118-135.
  16. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, in *The Documents of Vat II*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Mumbai: St. Pauls Publications, 2007), no.9.
  17. Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God," *America*, September 30, 2013, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith>, accessed 20 November 2019, Published 2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis.
  18. Austin Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Picador, 2015), 110-117.

19. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World] (Vatican website, accessed 18 December, 2017, published on 24 November 2013), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).
20. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no.12.
21. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 119.
22. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 198.
23. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 231.
24. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 34
25. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no.20
26. Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 17.
27. Francis, "No One is Ever Lost." *L'Osservatore Romano*. Eng. ed., 6 May 2016,1.
28. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 27
29. Saverio Gaeta, *The Life and Challenges of Pope Francis* (Mumbai: St Paul's, 2013), 52.
30. Stan Chu Ilo, "The Church of the Poor Towards an Ecclesiology of Vulnerable Mission" in *Ecclesiology* 10/2 (2014), 229-250. who discusses this aspect of 'poor church' with a focus on the Ecclesiology of Pope Francis
31. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 197-201.
32. John Paul II first used the term while addressing the Bishops of Oceania. Pope Francis quotes him in *EG*, no. 2.
33. Saverio Gaeta, *The Life and Challenges of Pope Francis*, 52.
34. Francis, "More Responsibilities for the Laity," *L'osservatore Roma no*.eng.ed., 2 October 2015, 16.
35. The whole text from the Vatican Radio's English Service for South Asia: Weekday Homily of Pope Francis "The Church does not Pick and Choose" on Tuesday, November 5, 2013.
36. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no.103.
37. Thomas O'Loughlin, "From a Damp Floor to a New Vision of Church: Foot washing as a Challenge to Liturgy and Discipleship," in *Worship* 88/2 (March

- 2014), 137-150, for insights into what Pope Francis's prophetic action of foot washing means in terms of providing an impetus to liturgy and a new vision of Church.
38. Francis, "Homily at Mass Bestowing Pallium," in *Origins* 43 (July 11, 2013), 146.
  39. For an exploration of the notion of catholicity, see Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997). See also Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
  40. Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 33-35.
  41. Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*, 29; general audience of November 25, 2013.
  42. Francis, *The Church of Mercy*, 35, October 9, 2013.
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  44. Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God," 17.
  45. *The Simple Words of Pope Francis: The Joy of Evangelization* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2013), 35; talk given in Saint Peter's Square, June 12, 2013.
  46. Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*, 28, November 25, 2013.
  47. Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*, 85; address to newly appointed bishops, September 19, 2013.
  48. Katarina Schuth, "Open to All: The Emerging Ecclesiology of Pope Francis," in *America*, March 17, 2014,
  49. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2014/12/22/the-15-ailments-of-the-Vatican-curia-according-to-Pope-Francis/> accessed on August 11, 2015.
  50. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/08/Pope-Francis-is-reshaping-the-Geography-of-the-college-of-Cardinals-Website> accessed on August 11, 2015.
  51. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 3.
  52. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos, 60, 70, 78.
  53. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 128.
  54. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 214.
  55. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 168.

56. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 280.
57. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 253.
58. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 296, 308.
59. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 170.
60. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos, 39-44, 53-57, 80-82, 135-41, 291-94.
61. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 200-1.
62. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos, 250-51, 311-12.
63. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos, 239-47, 291.
64. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 301.