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Reformative Explorations

A Psycho-Spiritual and Crimino-Social Quarterly on Reformation and Rehabilitation

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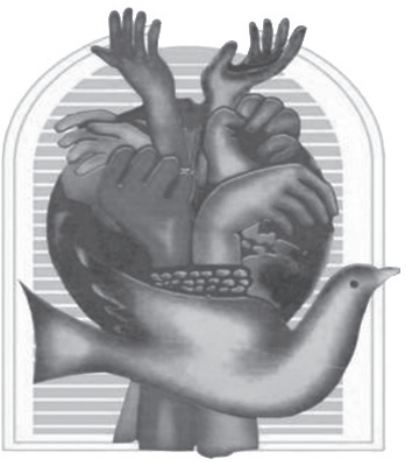

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CORE VALUES OF PRISON MINISTRY INDIA

Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Prison Ministry India (PMI) is an organization dedicated to providing spiritual, emotional, and social support to incarcerated individuals across India. The ministry strives to offer hope, transformation, and rehabilitation, embracing a holistic approach to ministry and social justice. The organization's mission is deeply rooted in its core values, which guide its work with prisoners, their families, and the wider community. Here are the core values and guiding principles that form the foundation of Prison Ministry India's work:

Compassion

At the heart of Prison Ministry India's work is compassion for those who are incarcerated. Recognizing that individuals in prison are often marginalized and dehumanized, PMI reaches out with empathy, kindness, and understanding. The organization believes that every person, no matter their past or their actions, deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, and love. Compassion motivates PMI's volunteers, staff, and partners to walk alongside prisoners, offering them emotional and spiritual support.

Restoration

Prison Ministry India operates on the belief that people are capable of change and transformation. It is committed to the restoration of individuals to their true selves. Through

counselling, prayer, rehabilitation programs, and spiritual teachings, PMI seeks to help prisoners rediscover their worth, purpose, and relationship with God. The ministry views prison as a place of potential transformation, not just punishment, and seeks to restore the brokenness in the lives of prisoners.

Hope

Hope is a central tenet of PMI's ministry. In a place where despair and hopelessness often prevail, PMI works to bring the light of hope to prisoners. Through education, spiritual guidance, and skill development, PMI seeks to equip prisoners with the tools they need to rebuild their lives. The ministry firmly believes that no situation is beyond redemption and that every person has the capacity for change. By offering a message of hope, PMI encourages individuals to believe in their ability to start anew, even after incarceration.

Reconciliation

Prison Ministry India fosters reconciliation on multiple levels—between prisoners and their families, between prisoners and society, and between prisoners and their own sense of self. Through forgiveness, healing, and restored relationships, PMI works to break cycles of violence, resentment, and bitterness that often contribute to criminal behavior. Reconciliation is viewed as a key component in the reintegration process, where prisoners are supported in rebuilding relationships and finding peace with themselves and others.

Justice

PMI is committed to promoting justice for the marginalized and oppressed, including prisoners who often face harsh conditions and legal systems that may not always prioritize rehabilitation. The organization advocates for fair treatment,

better living conditions, and access to legal resources for incarcerated individuals. By working toward a more just society, PMI aims to address systemic issues that contribute to crime and to help create an environment where all individuals are treated with fairness and equity.

Empowerment

Empowering prisoners is essential to their reintegration into society. PMI focuses on equipping individuals with the skills, education, and spiritual tools needed to thrive upon release. This empowerment includes providing access to vocational training, literacy programs, and life skills development that can help prisoners become self-sufficient and contributing members of society after their release. Empowerment is about giving prisoners the resources and confidence to chart a new course for their lives.

Community

Prison Ministry India understands that true transformation takes place in the context of community. PMI's work is not done in isolation but in partnership with local churches, volunteers, social organizations, and government bodies. By creating a network of support, PMI ensures that prisoners, once released, are not left to navigate their reintegration alone. The sense of belonging to a community is vital to the emotional well-being of prisoners, as it fosters a supportive environment for healing and growth.

Faith

Central to the work of Prison Ministry India is its strong Christian faith. The ministry is grounded in the belief that spiritual renewal and a relationship with God can bring about lasting change. Through prayer, worship services, Bible study,

and other faith-based activities, PMI ministers to the spiritual needs of prisoners. The organization believes that God's love can transform even the most hardened heart, and that faith is a key element in the rehabilitation process.

Integrity

Integrity is fundamental to the ethical and effective work of PMI. The organization values honesty, transparency, and accountability in all its operations. Whether in the treatment of prisoners, the management of resources, or the establishment of partnerships, PMI strives to maintain high moral and ethical standards. Integrity ensures that PMI's work is trustworthy and that its mission is carried out with sincerity and authenticity.

PMI Guiding Principles

In addition to its core values, Prison Ministry India follows specific guiding principles that shape its actions and strategy in reaching out to prisoners and others in need.

Lifestyle

Prison Ministry India follows a lifestyle of service, self-sacrifice, and devotion to others. The members of PMI live out their values by embodying humility, respect, and a willingness to be present in difficult situations. This lifestyle reflects their deep commitment to those they serve and a daily reminder of their mission to spread the love and teachings of Christ.

Weapon – Prayer and Fasting

The primary tools used in PMI's work are prayer and fasting. The organization recognizes the spiritual battles involved in transforming lives and advocating for justice. Prayer and

fasting are central to the ministry's work, empowering their team with divine strength and guidance as they work to bring about change in the lives of prisoners and their families.

Mantra – Thank You Jesus

The phrase "Thank You Jesus" serves as a constant reminder of the grace, love, and guidance that empower the work of PMI. This mantra reflects a posture of gratitude, acknowledging that all success in the ministry is the result of God's mercy and intervention. It is a powerful tool for staying grounded in the faith and remaining focused on the purpose of the work.

Action – Search, Serve, and Save the Lost

PMI's action plan revolves around three core activities: searching for those who need help, serving them with compassion, and saving them through the love of Christ. These principles guide all of PMI's outreach activities, ensuring that every effort is directed towards helping those in the greatest need and bringing them to a place of healing and restoration.

Bank – BDP (Bank of Divine Providence)

PMI operates through a faith-based financial model called the "Bank of Divine Providence." This concept reflects PMI's reliance on God's provision for its work. Rather than seeking foreign funds or wealth, PMI trusts that God will provide the resources needed to carry out its mission. The organization operates on a model of trust in divine support, relying on the generosity of local and global communities for the provision of funds.

Style – Maximum Inconvenience

PMI adopts a style of ministry that embraces inconvenience and sacrifice for the sake of others. The ministry's approach is to meet the needs of prisoners and marginalized individuals, even if it requires personal sacrifice, long hours, or difficult conditions. PMI is committed to going the extra mile and accepting discomfort to ensure that they serve others as fully as possible.

Mode – Begging and Blessing – No Foreign Fund

In keeping with its reliance on God's provision, PMI operates without foreign funding, choosing instead to rely on the generosity of local communities, personal donations, and God's blessings. The ministry adopts a mode of "begging and blessing," humbly seeking support while blessing others through the work it carries out. This mode encourages trust in God's provision and a lifestyle of dependence on Him.

Goal – Saving the Lost

Above all, the ultimate goal of Prison Ministry India is the salvation of lost souls. Whether through physical, emotional, or spiritual healing, PMI is dedicated to guiding individuals toward a relationship with Jesus Christ. This mission of saving the lost is the driving force behind all of the organization's efforts, programs, and outreach activities.

PMI Spirituality

Prison Ministry India's work is deeply spiritual, grounded in a strong Christian faith and commitment to the transformative power of God's love. The following spiritual elements guide and inspire the ministry's actions and outreach:

God Experience

Jesus had a profound love relationship with God the Father, and His life was filled with significant "God experiences." The Gospels recount key moments where Jesus encountered the Father in prayer: His baptism in the river Jordan (Luke 4), His prayer on Mount Tabor (Luke 9), His prayer at Gethsemane, and His final prayer on the cross. PMI is fundamentally a prayer group, and all its members are called to be praying persons. The Eucharistic celebration is considered the most powerful and vital prayer for Catholics, and PMI volunteers are encouraged to be daily communicants and Eucharistic adorers. As Pope Saint John Paul II recommended in his apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, PMI upholds four significant Eucharistic spiritual practices: Eucharistic celebration, Eucharistic communion, Eucharistic adoration, and Eucharistic contemplation.

Holy Spirit Experience

PMI volunteers are to be led by the Holy Spirit. Just as Moses was led by the Spirit and Christ was empowered by the Spirit, PMI members aim to be filled with the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit guides, empowers, and transforms them to carry out the ministry's mission of healing and restoration.

Fraternity Experience

The communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the perfect example of deep relationship and unity. Similarly, early Christians were "one in heart and mind" (Acts 2:44). PMI volunteers experience the depth of fraternity, fellowship, and unity, striving to reflect this same bond of love, mutual support, and collaboration. Fraternity will often be challenged, and PMI members are encouraged to face such challenges with the assistance and mediation of angels and saints.

Searching, Serving, and Saving the Lost Experience

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). In the synagogue of Nazareth, He proclaimed that He came to set the captives free (Luke 4:18), and on the cross, He saved the good thief, saying, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Likewise, PMI volunteers are called to search, serve, and save the lost, including prisoners and others on the margins of society.

Divine Providence Experience

PMI operates by trusting in the Divine Providence of God. This reliance on God's provision is modelled by Jesus' words about finding a place for the Passover (Luke 22:10) and His miraculous provision of money for the temple tax (Matthew 17:27). The ministry follows the Bank of Divine Providence, trusting that God will provide all necessary resources, even in the absence of a bank balance.

Inconvenience Experience

Jesus embraced discomfort throughout His life—born in a manger and dying on the cross. PMI believes that without asceticism, there is no mysticism, and without mysticism, there is no fruitful ministry. PMI members are encouraged to embrace inconvenience, organize fasting and prayer chains, and make small sacrifices as acts of love for the renewal of prisoners.

Mendicant Experience

Jesus humbled Himself to ask the Samaritan woman for a drink (John 4:7). This example of humility in begging is central to PMI's lifestyle. Begging not only for financial resources but also for the realization of projects requires humility, and PMI

believes that this humility is necessary for growth and divine blessing.

Power of the Name of Jesus

The power of the name of Jesus is central to PMI's ministry. As seen in Acts 3, when Peter and John healed a beggar in the name of Jesus, the name of Jesus holds the power to perform miracles and accomplish the impossible. PMI's mantra of "Thank you Jesus" reflects the power that lies in His name, which sustains and empowers the ministry's efforts.

Conclusion

Prison Ministry India (PMI) is a beacon of hope, compassion, and faith for those incarcerated in Indian prisons. With its core values deeply rooted in Christian principles, PMI strives to offer not only spiritual guidance but also practical support for prisoners, helping them to experience transformation and restoration. Through its lifestyle of prayer, fasting, service, and reliance on divine providence, PMI creates a space where individuals are given the opportunity to heal, grow, and find purpose beyond their past mistakes. At the heart of PMI's mission is the belief that every individual, regardless of their circumstances, is worthy of love, grace, and a second chance. The ministry's commitment to prayer, fraternity, humility, and empowerment creates an environment that fosters holistic transformation—spiritually, emotionally, and socially. As PMI volunteers continue their work of seeking, serving, and saving the lost, they remain anchored in the powerful love of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, and strengthened by the Eucharist. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the strength of their faith, PMI volunteers embrace a lifestyle of inconvenience, sacrifice, and begging, trusting entirely in the provision of Divine Providence. In doing so, they follow the example of Jesus, whose life and ministry demonstrated the ultimate sacrifice and unconditional love. Ultimately, PMI's

goal remains clear: to bring the love of Christ to those who need it most, offering them not only a chance at physical freedom but also the transformative freedom that comes with knowing and accepting Jesus as their Savior. Through their unwavering commitment to these core values and spiritual principles, Prison Ministry India is helping to change lives, restore dignity, and spread the message of hope to those in the darkest places.

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PRISONERS' REFORMATION AND REINTEGRATION: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

Sr Marina Gulati CSN

Bible although written centuries ago still provide insights that a prisoner can be reformed to compassion and redemption. The transformative power of faith is always at hand even in the midst of suffering of unjust imprisonment. Acts 16:25 depicts an extraordinary moment of faith amidst suffering: And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. Even in Prison, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns and the power of their prayers influenced other prisoners, exemplifying the transformative nature of faith and furthermore the conversion of the jailor explains the impact of faith in awful situations. No one is ever beyond redemption. We don't give up on people even when it seems they will never change. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Bible has only one concept and truth that all things are redeemable through Jesus Christ and it begins with the reformative therapy of repentance which can transform individual and the community. Just as any sickness is a problem to our physical body so also crime is moral or social problem against an individual, against a society or community and the solution is in the person of Jesus Christ.

Reintegration of the Incarcerated

Through the deeper relationship in Jesus Christ, all can have an experience of growth, healing and restoration. Healing takes place in the context of society, family and locality as the

incarcerated relate to others. There should be an appropriate balance in attention to spiritual, relational problems and socioeconomic problems. In short Spirituality plays an important role in reformation and reintegration and is the best restorative therapy for any incarcerated irrespective of any religion. The three words REFORM, RELEASE and REINTEGRATION as the theme reads are of great importance and are interconnected in the life of any human who is incarcerated and if taken care well will help in reducing recidivism. Release cites to the time when an incarcerated comes back to the community or society or family from a prison. When the freedom is curtailed, it is an awkward feeling and most of the time it can be suffocating. The real aim of incarcerating is to transform into honest and law-abiding human being so the reform should never be by use of force and compulsive methods. In ancient it was believed that rigorous isolation would reform the offenders but experience have revealed this as an antithetical effect and with the development of behavioural sciences, it began to federalize that reformation was not possible by detention alone. Mahatma Gandhi had remarked that "Crime is an outcome of a distorted mind and jails must have an environment of hospital for treatment and care.' Therefore, imprisonment is for reforming an "anti-social" personality into a social person. Imprisonment is for correction and not for destruction of personalities. However, the environment inside prisons is not conducive to reform. It is necessary that prisoners come out of jail for a short period at regular intervals. In Ancient it was a common practice to keep the prisoners in solitary confinement so as to afford them an opportunity of self-introspection so that later an incarcerated can be reformed.

Why Promote Prison Reform

It is not only important but essential that a incarcerated is reformed radically because if the unreformed is being released he or she soon will again get attracted towards criminality. Probation and Parole can get this objective achieved.

Recommendation for Reformation of the Incarcerated Education & Vocational Training

Offering educational opportunities and skill, building programs to equip individuals with tools for employment upon release.

Counselling & Therapy

Providing mental health support, substance abuse counselling, and therapy to address underlying issues contributing to criminal behaviour.

Restorative Justice

Encouraging offenders to take responsibility and make amends for their actions by engaging them in dialogue with victims or the affected community. Focuses on repairing harm caused rather than just punishing the offender through communication, mediation and compensation.

Alternative Sentencing

Exploring alternatives to incarcerated, such as community service, drug courts, or diversion programs, for nonviolent offenders. Emphasizing rehabilitation over punishment for certain types of offenses.

Behavioural Change Program

Cognitive- behavioural therapy and other programs aimed at altering criminal thinking patterns and behaviours.

Support Network

Building strong support network involving family, friends, mentors, and community organization to encourage positive choices and provide a safety net which will not create an isolation feeling mentally.

Aiding in Rehabilitation Programs

It might be utilized as a complementary tool within existing rehabilitation programmes to reinforce positive behaviour and encourage adherence to treatment or counselling.

Correctional Education

Establishing coordinated system of individualized learning services and activities within correctional facilities to provide inmates with educational opportunities, correctional education programs aim to equip offenders with necessary tools to succeed post- release and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Reformation by Way of Alternative Punishments

By sending the prisoners on Parole or furlough so that would help them to reintegrate into society they might triggered emotionally by their families and friends provoking self-realisation, so that they would try to reform themselves and not to indulge in crime again and which might also help them to offer probation on good behaviour.

Spirituality and Prayers

Whatever reformative measures we may use ultimately it is the grace of almighty that need to flow in the individuals lives therefore spirituality and prayers must be encouraged irrespective of any religion to transform.

Release

It is appropriate to talk to the release of guilt after the crime before any one gets released from the Prison walls. As if the guilt within is not healed it will always haunt a person. So release from all types of guilt is essential by means of reformative measures.

Types of Release - Permanent Release

It means completing the duration of the sentence and being released from the prison either based on good conduct or special circumstances or under certain legal provisions.

Release on Bail

Bail in law means procurement of release from prison of a person awaiting trial or an appeal by the deposit of security to ensure his submission at the required time to legal authority.

Bail, Remission, Parole and Premature Release

"Bail" remains an undefined term in the code of Criminal procedure, and nowhere else the term has been statutorily defined conceptually, it continues to be understood as right for assertion of freedom against state-imposed restraints. The word Bail is derived from an Old French Verb "Bailer" which means to give or to deliver, although another view is that its derivation is from Latin term "Baiulare" meaning to bear a burden. Bail is a conditional liberty. Bail in law means procurement of release from prison of a person awaiting Trial or an appeal, by the deposit of security to ensure his or her submission at the required time to legal authority.

Premature Release

It can be of four types 1. By way of commutation of sentence of life convict and other convict under section 433

of the code of Criminal Procedure. 2. By way of remitting term sentence of a prisoner under section 432 of the code of criminal procedure 3. By order of the Head of the state passed exercising power under Article 72 or Article 161 of the constitution of India. 4. Pre mature release under any special law enacted by the state providing for release on probation of good conduct prisoners after they have served a part of the sentence.

Remission System

Remission system aims at the reformation of a prisoner. Kinds of remission. 1. Ordinary Remission. 2. Special Remission

Authority to Grant Ordinary Remission

The superintendent of Prison, or an officer nominated by him on his behalf, is authorized to grant ordinary remission.

Eligibility

The following types of convicted prisoners shall be eligible for ordinary remission. A. Prisoners having substantive sentences of two months and more. B. Prisoners, sentenced to simple imprisonment for two months or more, who volunteer to work. C. Prisoners employed on Prison maintenance services requiring them to Work on Sundays and Holidays.

Parole and Furlough Parole

Parole is the conditional release of prisoners i.e. an early release of a prisoner, conditional on good behavior and regular reporting to the authorities for a set period of time. The object behind parole is to grant some relief to the prisoners in certain exigencies which may be as follows: 1. A member of the prisoner's family has died or is seriously ill or the prisoner himself is seriously ill. 2. The marriage of the

prisoner himself, his son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, brother, sister, sister's son or daughter is to be celebrated. 3. The temporary release of the prisoner is necessary for ploughing, sowing or harvesting or carrying on any other agricultural operation of his land or his father's undivided land actually in possession of the prisoner. 4. It is desirable to do so for any other sufficient cause. Parole can be granted only after a portion of the sentence is served. If the conditions of parole are not abided by the parolee, he may be returned to serve his sentence in prison. Difference Between Parole & Furlough: Over the years, the Hon'ble Supreme Court through various judicial pronouncements has differentiated between concept of parole and furlough, few of which are listed hereunder as follows 1. Parole can be granted in case of short-term imprisonment whereas furlough is granted in case of long-term imprisonment. 2. Duration of parole extends to one month whereas in case of furlough it extends to fourteen days maximum. 3. Parole is granted by Divisional Commissioner and furlough is granted by the Deputy Inspector of General of Prisons. 4. For parole a specific reason is required, whereas furlough is meant for breaking the monotony of imprisonment. 5. The term of imprisonment is not included in the computation of the term parole, whereas it is vice-versa in furlough. 6. Parole can be granted number of times whereas there is a limitation in the case of furlough.

Reintegration

What is the reintegration process? The reintegration process is the support and assistance provided to the Prisoners upon their release from Jail. Reintegration often starts when the offender is arrested by preparing them to deal with life and Society following imprisonment through prison programs and workshops. What is the goal of reintegration- The main goal

of reintegration is to prepare Prisoners to adapt to society upon their release, reintegration also prevents recidivism or crimes committed by the people who were formerly incarcerated.

Kinds of Reintegration
Social Reintegration

Social reintegration is often understood as the support given to offenders during their re-entry into society following imprisonment. A broader definition, however encompasses a number of interventions undertaken following an arrest to divert offenders away from the criminal justice system to an alternative measure. In Canada, the expression offender "reintegration" generally refers to re-entry or resettlement. In this review, these terms interchangeable to designate interventions, programs and services designed to assist prisoners to live law abiding lives in the community following their release. There is a recognition that preparation for reintegration should commence before the offender's release. After their release interventions should support their immediate transition from the prison to the community and reinforce the gains achieved through in prison treatment and continue until a successful reintegration is completed. This approach is often referred to as "THROUGH CARE"

Supporting the Transition

Supporting the transition from incarceration back into society by offering housing assistance, Job placement services, and mentorship programs.

Policy Changes

Advocating for changes in policies and laws to support rehabilitation efforts and reduce barriers for ex-offenders seeking employment, housing and education so that it would help them and they are not neglected from the society. Galatians: 6:9-10 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, Let us do good to all People. So Drawing strength from the word of God Let us continue to reform and reintegrate our brothers behind the bars in the society and families where they could live a life with dignity.

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UNLOCKING REHABILITATION: THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF PLAY IN INDIAN PRISONS

Robin Romer

In the rigid, often dehumanizing space of prisons, the idea of play can seem almost absurd. Yet across the world, growing evidence suggests that play; particularly between incarcerated parents and their children, holds transformative potential. While countries like Scotland have institutionalized this through initiatives like the Play in Prisons program in East Ayrshire, India is only beginning to explore this powerful and profoundly humanising tool for rehabilitation, reintegration, and dignity.

Play for Restructuring Familial Bonds

The Indian prison system currently houses over 5.5 lakh inmates, of which approximately 75% are undertrials (Prison Statistics India, 2021, National Crime Records Bureau). Among them are thousands of parents, separated from their children not just by walls, but by stigma, bureaucracy, and years of absence. The emotional rupture caused by incarceration is rarely addressed in our justice systems. Its consequences ripple through families, particularly affecting children, who often face long-term trauma, disrupted schooling, behavioural issues, and even social ostracization. At such a critical juncture, play can in fact serve as a therapeutic bridge to rebuild ruptured familial bonds.

Lessons From Scotland

The Play in Prisons model in East Ayrshire, Scotland, demonstrates how this can be done meaningfully. This initiative creates safe, nurturing environments where incarcerated parents can engage with their children through play in an atmosphere free of uniforms, surveillance, or institutional barriers. The idea is simple but profound: to focus not on the crime, but on the relationship. Play becomes a medium to encourage trust, nurture empathy, and allow parents to reclaim an identity beyond their sentence. It also allows children to experience their parent as a caregiver and not just a convict.

Implementation in India

For India, the potential is immense and urgent. Prisons in India struggle with chronic issues: overcrowding, understaffing, and a system historically more focused on punishment than reformation. Amidst this, one vital need often gets ignored: the wellbeing of children of prisoners. Children aged 0-6 are allowed to live with incarcerated mothers in most cases. However, those growing up outside without consistent or quality access to their parents are often left with a severed connection to an important figure. This severed connection often leads to perpetuating cycles of crime The National Model Prison Manual (2016) acknowledges the need for creches and educational facilities for such children, but implementation is fragmented and uneven across states. Most central prisons do have basic infrastructure in the form of open spaces, creches, libraries that could be creatively repurposed for structured, play-based interventions. Several NGOs have introduced creative and educational activities inside prisons, but these remain sporadic and are often not integrated into a formal policy framework.

To make play a sustainable rehabilitative tool in Indian prisons, we need policy-level recognition of its value. This means: Training prison staff in child-sensitive practices; Partnering with organisations experienced in play-based learning and trauma-informed care; Reframing play not as a luxury, but as a developmental necessity especially for children in such precarious circumstances. When incarcerated parents engage with their children through play, they reconnect with their emotional selves, develop patience, and often find renewed motivation to reform. For children, play offers routine, comfort, and the possibility of building a loving bond under difficult circumstances. It is a far more constructive response than relying solely on prison visits, which are often rushed, emotionally difficult, and fail to create meaningful connection. Structured play enables children to feel like participants in a relationship, not just visitors to a broken one. Play also supports broader goals embedded within India's Model Prison Manual, which calls for prisons to be spaces of reformation, not just confinement.

Structured Play Programs

Structured Play Programs Could be Integrated into: Family Visit Days, Open Jail models and Parole-readiness assessments. Such models are not too progressive to implement; they simply require the recognition that, regardless of what we think of those in prison, their children are rights-holders. If we fail to support their emotional and developmental needs, we risk perpetuating cycles of neglect and resentment which are outcomes that ultimately do not serve society either.

Shifting the Focus

Countries like the UK and Norway have already begun shifting prison paradigms by integrating family-based interventions

and child-friendly visitation practices. In India, even small steps like structured weekend play sessions, storytelling corners, or supervised play-led bonding can catalyse change. This isn't just about making prisons less grim. It's about making society more just. For many incarcerated individuals, the most compelling reason to embrace rehabilitation is not fear of punishment, but the hope of reuniting with the family waiting for them outside. When we support those familial bonds especially through something as simple and human as play we strengthen the social fabric that makes reintegration possible. Incarceration in India too often erases the person behind the crime. Play offers a gentle but powerful way to restore the humanity of the prisoner, rebuild the trust of the child, and soften the edges of a harsh system that rarely leaves room for healing. If justice must heal as much as it punishes, then play may be one of its most overlooked and essential medicines.

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DEATH ROW AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Sr Santan Nago, FS

Introduction

Death row is one of the most controversial aspects of the criminal justice system, symbolizing both the ultimate form of punishment and the most morally and legally complex issue in modern society. Across history, the death penalty has been used as a means of justice, deterrence, and retribution, but it has also sparked debates on human rights, wrongful convictions, and the effectiveness of capital punishment. While some argue that the death penalty ensures justice for the most heinous crimes, others believe it is an outdated and inhumane practice. This exploration delves into the history of death row in the United States, its global variations, and the lived experiences of those awaiting execution. It also examines its portrayal in popular culture, the key arguments for and against capital punishment, and the growing abolitionist movement that continues to challenge its existence. Death row, also known as condemned row, is a place in a prison that houses inmates awaiting execution after being convicted of a capital crime and sentenced to death. The term also applies to the status of prisoners who are awaiting execution in regions where a separate facility for housing them does not exist; nevertheless, they are referred to as "being on death row."

History of Death Row in the U.S.

The term death row may have first appeared in print in 1894, in the Denver newspaper Rocky Mountain News, which referred to an inmate occupying a cell on death row at Colorado's Canon City Penitentiary. But it came into popular consciousness from the trial and sentencing of Giuseppe Zangara, a 32-year-old unemployed bricklayer from New Jersey, who on February 15, 1933, had attempted to assassinate U.S. Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt in Miami. While Roosevelt was not injured in the attempt, Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak, who was accompanying the president, was shot and killed. Zangara pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and was sentenced to death. According to Florida law, prisoners awaiting execution were not permitted to share cell space with other prisoners. When Zangara was sentenced, the prison where he was to be held had a "death cell," but this was already occupied by another man convicted of murder. Consequently, prison officials expanded the waiting area from the single death cell to a death row.

In the U.S. 24 of the 50 states have banned the death penalty. Another 6 - Arizona, California, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee - allow capital punishment but have formally or informally suspended all executions, granting death row inmates a reprieve. The federal government also has a provision for capital punishment, for relevant federal crimes. In 2023 more than 2,300 inmates were on death row across the United States. (See capital punishment in the United States.) The use of the death penalty, and subsequently the number of inmates on death row, has declined sharply in the 21st century, and opposition to the death penalty has grown. Since 1973 more than 190 people on death row have been released after their convictions were overturned, which has added to

the call for the end of the death penalty in the United States. In 2002 the U.S. Supreme Court held, in the case of Atkins v. Virginia, that it is unconstitutional to execute individuals who are deemed to have an intellectual disability. However, as of 2022, over 2,400 prisoners were still on death row, more than half of whom were in California, Florida, and Texas.

Execution Around the World

China executes the most people per year, and Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt also execute a significant number of prisoners per year. As of 2021, 55 countries were using the death penalty for ordinary crimes. Belarus remains the only country in Europe to continue to use the death penalty. In India the Prisons Act of 1894 stipulates that prisoners sentenced to death shall be confined in a cell apart from all other prisoners and shall be placed under the charge of a guard at all times. In the Cellular Jail, a British colonial prison located in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands, inmates sentenced to death used to be housed in a special row of cells facing the gallows.

Life on Death Row

Death row inmates typically stay confined in solitary isolation for many years, sometimes decades, while their cases are appealed through the judicial system. Viva Leroy Nash, who was sentenced to death in 1983 for first-degree murder in the state of Arizona, died of natural causes in 2010 while appeals against his execution continued to be heard. Opponents of capital punishment have argued that prisoners' isolation, coupled with uncertainty over their fate, creates a high likelihood that they will develop mental disorders. The term death row phenomenon has been used to describe the psychological effects of living on death row, notably in legal arguments on prisoners' behalf that prolonged solitary

confinement could affect their judgment as well as their will to live.

Death Row in Popular Culture

Death row has figured prominently in several works of fiction. Stephen King's novel The Green Mile, which was adapted into a successful movie of the same name, features a death row supervisor's interaction with a convict who has supernatural abilities. John Grisham's The Chamber delves deeply into the legal aspects of the death penalty and the related appeals process. In the television series Prison Break, the protagonist enters a prison to help his wrongfully convicted brother escape from death row. Works featuring death row or death row inmates typically focus on innocent inmates who attempt to secure release or on the psychological profile of inmates during the lead-up to their execution.

Capital Punishment in the Early 21st Century

Capital punishment is execution of an offender sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law of a criminal offense. Capital punishment should be distinguished from extrajudicial executions carried out without due process of law. The term death penalty is sometimes used interchangeably with capital punishment, though imposition of the penalty is not always followed by execution (even when it is upheld on appeal), because of the possibility of commutation to life imprisonment.

Historical Considerations

Capital punishment for murder, treason, arson, and rape was widely employed in ancient Greece under the laws of Draco (fl. 7th century BC), though Plato argued that it should be used only for the incorrigible. The Romans also used it for a

wide range of offenses, though citizens were exempted for a short time during the republic. It also has been sanctioned at one time or another by most of the world's major religions. Followers of Judaism and Christianity, for example, have claimed to find justification for capital punishment in the biblical passage "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed, for in his own image God made humans. (Genesis 9:6). Yet capital punishment has been prescribed for many crimes not involving loss of life, including adultery and blasphemy. The ancient legal principal Lex talionis (talion) - "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life" - which appears in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi, was invoked in some societies to ensure that capital punishment was not disproportionately applied.

The prevalence of capital punishment in ancient times is difficult to ascertain precisely, but it seems likely that it was often avoided, sometimes by the alternative of banishment and sometimes by payment of compensation. For example, it was customary during Japan's peaceful Heian period (794–1185) for the emperor to commute every death sentence and replace it with deportation to a remote area, though executions were reinstated once civil war broke out in the mid-11th century. In Islamic law, as expressed in the Quran, capital punishment is condoned. Although the Quran prescribes the death penalty for several hard (fixed) crimes - including robbery, adultery, and apostasy of Islam - murder is not among them. Instead, murder is treated as a civil crime and is covered by the law of (retaliation), whereby the relatives of the victim decide whether the offender is punished with death by the authorities or made to pay diyah (wergild) as compensation.

Death was formerly the penalty for a large number of offenses in England during the 17th and 18th centuries, but it was never

applied as widely as the law provided. As in other countries, many offenders who committed capital crimes escaped the death penalty, either because juries or courts would not convict them or because they were pardoned, usually on condition that they agreed to banishment; some were sentenced to the lesser punishment of transportation to the then American colonies and later to Australia. Beginning in the Middle Ages, it was possible for offenders guilty of capital offenses to receive benefit of clergy, by which those who could prove that they were ordained priests (clerks in Holy Orders) as well as secular clerks who assisted in divine service (or, from 1547, a peer of the realm) were allowed to go free, though it remained within the judge's power to sentence them to prison for up to a year, or from 1717 onward to transportation for seven years.

Because during medieval times the only proof of ordination was literacy, it became customary between the 15th and 18th centuries to allow anyone convicted of a felony to escape the death sentence by proving that he (the privilege was extended to women in 1629) could read. Until 1705, all he had to do was read (or recite) the first verse from Psalm 51 of the Bible, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" - which came to be known as the "neck verse" (for its power to save one's neck). To ensure that an offender could escape death only once through benefit of clergy, he was branded on the brawn of the thumb (M for murder or T for theft). Branding was abolished in 1779, and benefit of clergy ceased in 1827.

From ancient times until well into the 19th century, many societies administered exceptionally cruel forms of capital punishment. In Rome the condemned were hurled from the Tarpeian Rock (in Roman legend, Tarpeia was a Vestal Virgin

who betrayed Rome to the Sabines. She was crushed to death by the Sabines' shields, and the cliff where she died became known as the Tarpeian Rock); for parricide (killing of a parent by the child) they were drowned in a sealed bag with a dog, cock, ape, and viper; and still others were executed by forced gladiatorial combat or by crucifixion. Executions in ancient China were carried out by many painful methods, such as sawing the condemned in half, flaying him while still alive, and boiling. Cruel forms of execution in Europe included "breaking" on the wheel, boiling in oil, burning at the stake, decapitation by the guillotine or an axe, hanging, drawing and quartering, and drowning. Although by the end of the 20th century many jurisdictions (e.g., nearly every U.S. state that employs the death penalty, Guatemala, the Philippines, Taiwan, and some Chinese provinces) had adopted lethal injection, offenders continued to be beheaded in Saudi Arabia and occasionally stoned to death (for adultery) in Iran and Sudan. Other methods of execution were electrocution, gassing, and the firing squad.

Historically, executions were public events, attended by large crowds, and the mutilated bodies were often displayed until they rotted. Public executions were banned in England in 1868, though they continued to take place in parts of the United States until the 1930s. In the last half of the 20th century, there was considerable debate regarding whether executions should be broadcast on television, as has occurred in Guatemala. Since the mid-1990s public executions have taken place in some 20 countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria, though the practice has been condemned by the United Nations Human Rights Committee as "incompatible with human dignity." In many countries death sentences are not carried out immediately after they are imposed; there is often a long period of uncertainty for the convicted while

their cases are appealed. Inmates awaiting execution live on what has been called "death row"; in the United States and Japan, some prisoners have been executed more than 15 years after their convictions. The European Union regards this phenomenon as so inhumane that, on the basis of a binding ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (1989), EU countries may extradite an offender accused of a capital crime to a country that practices capital punishment only if a guarantee is given that the death penalty will not be sought.

Arguments for and against Capital Punishment

Anti-death penalty protests

Capital punishment has long engendered considerable debate about both its morality and its effect on criminal behaviour. Contemporary arguments for and against capital punishment fall under three general headings: moral, utilitarian, and practical.

Moral Arguments

Supporters of the death penalty believe that those who commit murder, because they have taken the life of another, have forfeited their own right to life. Furthermore, they believe, capital punishment is a just form of retribution, expressing and reinforcing the moral indignation not only of the victim's relatives but of law-abiding citizens in general. By contrast, opponents of capital punishment, following the writings of Cesare Beccaria (in particular On Crimes and Punishments (1764]), argue that, by legitimizing the very behaviour that the law seeks to repress – killing - capital punishment is counterproductive in the moral message it conveys. Moreover, they urge, when it is used for lesser crimes, capital punishment is immoral because it is wholly disproportionate to the harm

done. Abolitionists also claim that capital punishment violates the condemned person's right to life and is fundamentally inhuman and degrading.

Although death was prescribed for crimes in many sacred religious documents and historically was practiced widely with the support of religious hierarchies, today there is no agreement among religious faiths, or among denominations or sects within them, on the morality of capital punishment. Beginning in the last half of the 20th century, increasing numbers of religious leaders - particularly within Judaism and Roman Catholicism - campaigned against it. Capital punishment was abolished by the state of Israel for all offenses except treason and crimes against humanity, and Pope John Paul II condemned it as "cruel and unnecessary."

Utilitarian Arguments

Supporters of capital punishment also claim that it has a uniquely potent deterrent effect on potentially violent offenders for whom the threat of imprisonment is not a sufficient restraint. Opponents, however, point to research that generally has demonstrated that the death penalty is not a more effective deterrent than the alternative sanction of life or long-term imprisonment.

Practical Arguments

There also are disputes about whether capital punishment can be administered in a manner consistent with justice. Those who support capital punishment believe that it is possible to fashion laws and procedures that ensure that only those who are really deserving of death are executed. By contrast, opponents maintain that the historical application of capital punishment shows that any attempt to single out certain kinds

of crime as deserving of death will inevitably be arbitrary and discriminatory. They also point to other factors that they think preclude the possibility that capital punishment can be fairly applied, arguing that the poor and ethnic and religious minorities often do not have access to good legal assistance, that racial prejudice motivates predominantly white juries in capital cases to convict black and other non-white defendants in disproportionate numbers, and that, because errors are inevitable even in a well-run criminal justice system, some people will be executed for crimes they did not commit. Finally, they argue that, because the appeals process for death sentences is protracted, those condemned to death are often cruelly forced to endure long periods of uncertainty about their fate.

The Abolition Movement

Under the influence of the European Enlightenment, in the latter part of the 18th century there began a movement to limit the scope of capital punishment. Until that time a very wide range of offenses, including even common theft, were punishable by death - though the punishment was not always enforced, in part because juries tended to acquit defendants against the evidence in minor cases. In 1794 the U.S. state of Pennsylvania became the first jurisdiction to restrict the death penalty to first-degree murder, and in 1846 the state of Michigan abolished capital punishment for all murders and other common crimes. In 1863 Venezuela became the first country to abolish capital punishment for all crimes, including serious offenses against the state (e.g., treason and military offenses in time of war).

San Marino was the first European country to abolish the death penalty, doing so in 1865; by the early 20th century several other countries, including the Netherlands, Norway,

Sweden, Denmark, and Italy, had followed suit (though it was reintroduced in Italy under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini). By the mid-1960s some 25 countries had abolished the death penalty for murder, though only about half of them also had abolished it for offenses against the state or the military code. For example, Britain abolished capital punishment for murder in 1965, but treason, piracy, and military crimes remained capital offenses until 1998. During the last third of the 20th century, the number of abolitionist countries increased more than threefold. These countries, together with those that are "de facto" abolitionist - i.e., those in which capital punishment is legal but not exercised - now represent more than half the countries of the world. One reason for the significant increase in the number of abolitionist states was that the abolition movement was successful in making capital punishment an international human rights issue, whereas formerly it had been regarded as solely an internal matter for the countries concerned.

In 1971 the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution that, "in order fully to guarantee the right to life, provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," called for restricting the number of offenses for which the death penalty could be imposed, with a view toward abolishing it altogether. This resolution was reaffirmed by the General Assembly in 1977. Optional protocols to the European Convention on Human Rights (1983) and to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1989) have been established, under which countries party to the convention and the covenant undertake not to carry out executions. The Council of Europe (1994) and the EU (1998) established as a condition of membership in their organizations the requirement that prospective member countries suspend executions and commit themselves to abolition. This decision

had a remarkable impact on the countries of central and eastern Europe, prompting several of them - e.g., the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia - to abolish capital punishment. In the 1990s many African countries - including Angola, Djibouti, Mozambique, and Namibia - abolished capital punishment, though most African countries retained it. In South Africa, which formerly had one of the world's highest execution rates, capital punishment was outlawed in 1995 by the Constitutional Court, which declared that it was incompatible with the prohibition against cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment and with "a human rights culture."

Capital Punishment in the Early 21st Century

Despite the movement toward abolition, many countries have retained capital punishment, and, in fact, some have extended its scope. More than 30 countries have made the importation and possession for sale of certain drugs a capital offense. Iran, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines impose a mandatory death sentence for the possession of relatively small amounts of illegal drugs. In Singapore, which has by far the highest rate of execution per capita of any country, about three-fourths of persons executed in 2000 had been sentenced for drug offenses. Some 20 countries impose the death penalty for various economic crimes, including bribery and corruption of public officials, embezzlement of public funds, currency speculation, and the theft of large sums of money. Sexual offenses of various kinds are punishable by death in about two dozen countries, including most Islamic states. In the early 21st century there were more than 50 capital offenses in China.

Despite the large number of capital offenses in some countries, in most years only about 30 countries carry out executions. In the United States, where roughly 50 percent of the states

and the federal government have officially retained the death penalty, about two-thirds of all executions since 1976 (when new death penalty laws were affirmed by the Supreme Court) have occurred in just six states - Texas, Virginia, Florida, Missouri, Louisiana, and Oklahoma (see capital punishment in the United States). China was believed to have executed about 1,000 people annually (no reliable statistics are published) until the first decade of the 21st century, when estimates of the number of deaths dropped sharply. Although the number of executions worldwide varies from year to year, some countries - including Belarus, Congo (Kinshasa), Iran, Jordan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Yemen - execute criminals regularly. Japan and India also have retained the death penalty and carry out executions from time to time. In only a few countries does the law allow for the execution of persons who were minors (under the age of 18) at the time they committed their crime. Most such executions, which are prohibited by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, have occurred in the United States, which has not ratified the convention and which ratified the covenant with reservations regarding the death penalty.

Beginning in the late 1990s, there was considerable debate about whether the death penalty should be imposed on the mentally impaired; much of the controversy concerned practices in the United States, where more than a dozen such executions took place from 1990 to 2001 despite a UN injunction against the practice in 1989. In 2002 and 2005, respectively, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the execution of the mentally impaired and those under age 18 was unconstitutional, and in 2014 it held that states could not define such mental impairment as the possession of an IQ (intelligence quotient) score of 70 or below. The court

banned the imposition of the death penalty for rape in 1977 and specifically for child rape in 2008.

In the late 1990s, following a series of cases in which persons convicted of capital crimes and awaiting execution on death row were exonerated on the basis of new evidence - including evidence based on new DNA-testing technology - some U.S. states began to consider moratoriums on the death penalty. In 2000 Illinois Gov. George Ryan ordered such a moratorium, noting that the state had executed 12 people from 1977 to 2000 but that the death sentences of 13 other people had been overturned in the same period. In 2003, on the eve of leaving office, Ryan emptied the state's death row by pardoning 4 people and commuting the death sentences of 167 others. A number of states subsequently abolished capital punishment, including New Jersey (2007), Illinois (2011), Connecticut (2012), Washington (2018), and Virginia (2021). Further bolstering abolition efforts in the United States were the moratoriums imposed by the governors of Oregon (2011), Pennsylvania (2015), and California (2019).

Conclusion

The debate over death row and capital punishment remains deeply divisive, shaped by legal, moral, and practical considerations. While some nations continue to defend its necessity for justice and deterrence, others have moved toward abolition, citing human rights concerns and the risk of wrongful executions. The early 21st century has seen a shift in public opinion and legal reforms, yet the practice persists in many parts of the world. As the abolition movement gains momentum and alternative approaches to justice are explored, the future of death row remains uncertain. Ultimately, the question of capital punishment forces societies to confront their values, weighing retribution against mercy, justice against

potential injustice, and tradition against evolving ethical standards.

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MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA: A SAINT AND SAGE OF INDIA

Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

1. Introduction

Today's world has the need of a particularly striking and effective presence of Christ, where the Gospel message is lived out in concrete terms by persons who have committed themselves for God and mankind. These people make visible for humanity in our times the countenance and grace of Christ. Outstanding among them, is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the well-known missionary to the poor who has offered the modern world a radical Christian as well as religious model of life according to the norms of the Gospel[1]. In this paper we aim at presenting the Spirituality of this great missionary through whom God has revealed His power. We will trace it from her life history; from her vocation as a missionary to the poor and from her life and mission as the founder and charismatic leader of her congregation The Missionaries of charity. We will also explore her life and mission as a model of Christian life, in particular as a religious who committed herself to bringing to the world God's love and mercy through her life and mission.

1 Recent documents of the Church, in particular recent synod of bishops on the religious life has highlighted the importance of this cf. SYNOD Of BISHOPS, IX ORDINARY ASSEMBLY, The Consecrated Life and Its Role in the Church and in the World (Vatican City 1992) 61-62.

2. Brief History of Mother Teresa

Agnes Bojaxhiu was born on 27 August 1910 of Albanian parents at Skopje in Yugoslavia. Her parents conceived four children, one boy and three girls. Although their primary education was in a non-Catholic school, they had good guidance from Jesuit priests who helped prepare them to follow their vocation according to the call of God. While at school, Agnes became a member of the Sodality. During this time the Yugoslav Jesuits had accepted to work in the Calcutta Archdiocese. The first group arrived in Calcutta on 30 December 1925. From there some of the Jesuits sent enthusiastic letters from the Bengal mission field. Those letters were regularly read to the Sodalists[2]. At that time Agnes became aware, she had a vocation to serve the poor and needy. Agnes then volunteered for the Bengal mission, because she wanted to be a missionary. She was only twelve years old. She wanted to go out and dedicate her life for Christ and the people in the mission countries[3]. She contacted the Loreto nuns in Ireland, as they were also working in the Archdiocese of Calcutta. On 28 November 1928, she was sent to the Loreto Abbey, Rathfarnham, Dublin, Ireland and from there to India to begin the novitiate in Darjeeling. She took her first vows in Loreto in 1931 and then her final vows in 1937[4]. From 1929-1948 Mother Teresa taught Geography at St. Mary's High School in Calcutta. She loved teaching and in particular instructing her students about Jesus. She was also in charge of the Daughters of St. Anne, the Indian religious order attached to the Loreto Sisters. She was happy with her missionary works[5].

2 MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God (Harper Collins, London 1971) 154.
3 MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God, 83.
4 MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God, 84, 154.
5 MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God, 154.

3. Call and Commission to be a Missionary to the Poor

On 10 September 1946, 'A Day of Decision' had taken place in the life of Mother Teresa. While she was going by train to Darjeeling to make her retreat, she heard the call to give up all and follow Christ by serving the poorest of the poor. She expresses this experience in the following words: "It was a call within my vocation and it was a second calling"[6]. On that day Mother Teresa requested permission from her Superior to live alone outside the cloister and to work in the Calcutta slums. With the approval of the Archbishop of Calcutta, the Mother General of Loreto gave permission to Mother Teresa to write a letter to Rome. She had written it to Pope Pius the XII, and by return post, she got the answer on 12 April 1948. On 8 August Mother Teresa laid aside the Loreto habit and clothed herself in a white Sari with blue border and cross on the shoulder[7]. She went to Patna for three months to the American Medical Missionary Sisters for an intensive training in nursing. On 21 December 1948 she obtained permission to open her first slum school[8]. By opening the school she began responding to God's call to be a missionary to the poor in a concrete manner, extending God's love to the homes of poor and needy. This school began with a small group of five children and only the sum of 5 Rupees. Mother Teresa entrusted her work to the providence of God and expected and prayed for God's action in her mission. The next day three girls came to help her from the St. Mary's school where she had taught. Gradually the work started to grow. Some of the teachers of the same school where she taught before, extended a helping hand to Mother Teresa in her new mission in the service of the poor.

6 MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God, 85.

7 "The sari with the blue stripe is a sign of modesty of the Virgin; the string belt denotes purity; the sandals signify the free choice; the crucifix is a symbol of love". MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy (Collins Glasgow 1987) 129.

8 MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God, 155.

4. Charismatic Leader of the Missionary Sisters of Charity

A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance in proclaiming a single truth of God's love, His presence and His action in a tiny flower. This is applicable to the person of Mother Teresa. God for her is an abiding presence in the human heart. The greatest source of strength for Mother Teresa is absolute faith in God. She feels that she is only a tiny instrument in His hands who only knew how to make use of her and in what manner and to what extent. Her faith in God turned out brighter and firmer with every act she faced. On 19 March 1949 the first vocation came: A young woman called Agnes who was once a student of Mother Teresa, wanted to lead the same life as her teacher. This gave her impetus to begin The Missionaries of Charity which was born in Calcutta on 7 October 1950. The novelty of this new religious congregation was manifest in the fact that there is a fourth vow added to the usual three vows namely, to devote themselves permanently and exclusively to the poorest of the poor, without ever accepting any material rewards for their work. In the beginning stage there were only twelve. Gradually the numbers kept on increasing. In only 25 years' time, i.e., when they celebrated the Silver Jubilee on 7 October 1975, they already had 66 houses in India and 34 in other countries. The number of sisters were an incredible 1343. The total number of schools, shelters, leper houses, clinics, houses for the dying and assistance centres in India and elsewhere were 729[9]. The number of people who profited from their service and dedication (for example sheltered orphans, lepers, dying people etc.) were 6.544.864. The transforming power of the service and love shown by the self-giving of Mother Teresa

9 For further information cf. the statistics given as an appendix to this paper.

and her sisters reached the four corners of the world[10]. The culmination point of such a growth is exemplified in the opening of new houses in her own native town Skopje and recently in the Vatican City itself, requested by the explicit wish of the Pope. Thus the greatest desire of Mother Teresa, to attain full realization among the people, comes to gradual fulfilment through all these services, care and concern throughout the world through her life and mission as well as that of the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity.

5. Main Principles of the Spirituality of Mother Teresa

A missionary is someone called and sent by God for a specific mission, in this case to announce the kingdom of God to the poor. As we have stated above, she was convinced of a special vocation and mission to the poor within the common vocation of every Christian to announce the Gospel to the end of the world (Matt 28,16-20). The main principles on which she based her life and mission as the missionary to the poor can be reduced to four. The main motivation and inspiration to start her life as the missionary to the poor and that keeps her going during so many years is Jesus[11], Jesus is the God incarnate among men for the salvation of mankind. He is the source, the means, the continuous inspiration and model of her life. She is convinced that Jesus has called her and has given her a special mission to the poor with His living presence as the guide, inspirer and strength. That is why she has Jesus as the ideal and model towards which all the missionaries of charity should strive for. "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me". Her life repeats these words of St. Paul and "In Him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything" (Phil 4,13)[12].

10 MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 143-149.

11 For a general consideration in this connection cf. R.H. LESSER, Saints and Sages of India (Intercultural Publications; New Delhi 1992) 228-236.

12 LESSER, Saints and Sages of India, 228-229.

Secondly, she considers herself as an instrument of Jesus, an instrument that radiates God's power, an instrument docile to His will, to bring His love, providence and concern to mankind and in particular the poorest of the poor. In this regard, she relies completely on God who has never let her down. She says, "We put our hands, our eyes and our hearts at Christ's disposal, so that He will act through us... Each one of us is merely a small instrument: all of us after accomplishing our mission, will disappear"[13]

Thirdly, her life as a missionary to the poor springs from and is based on prayer life. For her, prayer has a preeminent place in her life and mission. The three hours she spends daily in prayer, cannot be sacrificed for anything, not even for her work with the poor. Of that prayer, Jesus is the heart. "Jesus is our prayer and He himself is the answer to our prayer. He has chosen to be Himself in us as the living song of love, praise, adoration, thanksgiving, intercession and reparation to the Father in the name of the whole creation"[14]. Rather the whole of life is a prayer. She says: "We begin our day by trying to see Christ through the eucharistic bread. Throughout the day we keep in touch with him under the appearances of the shattered bodies of our poor. In this way our work becomes a prayer, as we accomplish it with Jesus, for Jesus and toward Jesus. The poor are our prayer. They carry God in themselves. Prayer is in all things, in all gestures"[15].

The fourth principle of the spirituality of Mother Teresa is her commitment to God for the poor, to bring to them God's love. That which is outstanding in her life and mission, compared to those who follow different ways of religious

13 MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 67, 115.

14 Cited from the Constitution of the Sisters of Charity in LESSER, Saints and Sages of India, 231.

15 MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 92.

life, is her total commitment to God in order to serve the poorest poor. Mother Teresa considers this as a commission to renounce everything in order to follow Christ in the poor suburbs. Mother Teresa says "In order to help us deserve heaven, Christ set a condition to love His people; here in the slums, in the broken body, in the children, we see Christ and we touch Him"[16]. What this meant to her is reflected in her prayer at the starting point of her life as a missionary to the poor.

I prayed: O my God, by free choice and for your sake, I desire to stay here and do what your will requires of me. No, I will not turn back. My community is the poor. Their safety is mine. Their health is my health. My house is that of the poor of the poorest among the poor, of those one tries to avoid for fear of contagion and dirtiness, because they are covered with microbes and worms; of those who do not go to pray, because one cannot go out of one's house naked; of those who do not eat any more, because they have no strength for eating; of those who fall down on the streets, knowing that they are going to die, and at whose side pedestrians pass and don't look back; of those who do not weep anymore, because they have run out of tears; of the untouchable[17]

Her prayer indicates that it is not a mere social work, but a deep and profound commitment to God and mankind in the poor. Her aim is to take God and His love to the homes of the poorest of the poor and lead them to Him. This love is open to all; it goes beyond ethnic background or place in the society and manifests the love and compassion God has for them. Mother Teresa wants to show through her life that God loves the world and loves the poor. Therefore, her life and mission is in no way a monopolizing of charity, but

16 MUGGERIDGE, Something Beautiful for God 114.

17 MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 40.

carrying out in a special way God's love for mankind. She carries out in a special way that which is the responsibility of every Christian, to be concerned with his brother's and sister's need[18].

Mother Teresa's commitment to the poor, as she sees it is exclusively out of a love of God. She believes that in this dedication God's power is at work (Rom 1,16-17) in providing for her life and mission for the dying, undesired and unwanted people, especially unwanted and abandoned children. She takes it as a magnificent opportunity to do something beautiful for God. The basic spirituality behind this commitment can be expressed in the following words "She commits with her whole heart to the poor and their cause. She serves Christ in their disfigured faces. For He himself said "As you did this one of the least of these brethren, you did it to me" (Matt 25,40). Mother Teresa makes Christ live anew on earth, putting herself at the service the poor, in terms of the Gospel norms, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty you gave me to drink, I was a stranger you welcomed me, I was naked you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison you came to me.... As you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Matt 25, 35-41)".

Therefore, the basis of her life and mission is the golden rule: love of God and love of neighbour (Luke 10,27). Her life is not an activism, as some are prone to criticize or a compromise with the rich and powerful, as some may think. She is a contemplative in the very heart of today's world, a contemplation at the service of Christ in the poor and needy according to the demands of the Gospel. This contemplation springs from an awareness that poor are worthy of love, that they are great as God's children. This leads her to love them

18 LESSER, Saints and Sages of India, 232.

and to serve them. She loves by responding to the call of God through a life lived out in following of the footsteps of Christ, through a life according to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, obedience and the vow of charity. Thus the call to radical commitment to the Gospel values finds its intense living out in her life according to evangelical counsels.

For her, the life of chastity flows from a free choice to dedicate oneself for God and his kingdom in the service of the poor, leading to the final fulfilment of life in Christ in heaven. It is a visible expression of God's presence and His Lordship in her or better said an overpowering experience of the love of the kingdom of God. Her life is caught up into a divine love, directed and enriched by the redemptive love of Christ and the salvific actions of the Church. Thus her life and being is available to all without excluding anyone from this love, not being possessed by anyone except God[19].

The model of poverty for Mother Teresa is Jesus Christ who was rich, yet for our sake became poor, so that by his poverty we become rich (2 Cor 8,9)[20]. For her this poverty is a radical sharing of all that she has, all that she is, all that she hopes to be. This is what Jesus has done in His life so that mankind may share him fully and have life. Poverty provides Mother Teresa the possibility to be open to all in an unconditional way. This calls for a radical sharing, "there be not a needy person among them" (Acts 4,34). It gives her a freedom, by means of a radical observance, to love as Christ loved and to make others what they are and what they will be. Such a life of poverty keeps her from the slavery of the world to personal achievements, possessions and making everything materially rich. This life

19 For similar reflections on the evangelical counsels cf. SYNOD Of BISHOPS IX ORDINARY ASSEMBLY, Consecrated Life, 12. See also in this connection F.J. MOLONEY, A Life of Promise (St. Paul's Publications, Homebush 1984).

20 MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 87.

according to the vow of poverty demands care for the other and not just grab what you can while the going is good. The life of poverty makes her and her sisters sharers of what they are and what they have through reciprocal dependence and productivity motivated by exceptional love. It is a blessedness in being completely open to God with absolute trust in His power and providence in service of the poor. This attitude allows Mother Teresa to withdraw from world's attractive offer for wealth, power and possessions and enables her to be available to all in view of the building up of the kingdom through a shared life 'in Christ'. The basic premise of poverty for Mother Teresa therefore, is a shared life in Christ, who emptied himself and became man, died and was resurrected, appeared to the disciples and is now present in the Eucharist[21] for whom Mother Teresa lives her life. Thus, in her view, the life of poverty becomes an evangelizing force so as to create admiration for the radical following of Christ in the service of the poor[22].

The vow of obedience for her is a gift of God, a free decision to choose God's will and thus give unceasing worship to God. The model is Jesus Christ who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, death on the cross (Phil 2,5-8)[23].

21 21 The poor are not drop-outs of the society; in their nakedness, they are the centre of the world because they are both the reflection of the human poverty which each being carries within himself, and also, since the Son of God identifies Himself with them, they are the means of attaining the ultimate purpose of humanity: union with God, reconciled in Christ. God's presence in the world is symbolized by the scrap of bread and a drop of wine which we use in our eucharists celebrations, humble objects which identify him with the poor B. CHARLEMAGNE, "Poverty" A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality (ed.) G.S. WKEFIELD (London 1983) 306.

22 With regard to the poverty she says "I think there are no vocations in the Church, it is partly due to the fact that there is too much wealth, too much comfort, too high standard of living, not only in the families but even in religious life. MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 87.

23 She calls it obeying as Christ in her book Heart of Joy, 81.

It is a virtue that touches and encompasses the whole of the Christian response. The virtue of obedience for her expects the submission to the will of God in the Spirit of faith and love for the purpose of collaboration according to the design of God for the building up of the body of Christ in the poor.

Jesus is the Son who is radically open to God. His life went on not knowing all the details of what might stand before him, trusting that no matter what came His way, God his Father had the last word. This is what happened in his death and in the divine intervention in his resurrection. He felt no need to control his future or did he desire to control it, as his radical openness and trust in the Father freed him from all such concerns. It was an obedience characterized by love, which ultimately benefited in the resurrection. Those who follow Him and live out this obedience will merit the rule of God in their lives. The experience of Jesus is transferred to the obedience of one's own life. It becomes an openness to God which is exhibited in a preparedness to lay one's life down for the redemption of others, especially the poor as is the case of Mother Teresa. Obedience, for Mother Teresa considered in this way, is the great free decision she makes for God and His will in view of the service of the poor[24].

6. Mother Teresa, a Model of Action for Christian and Religious Life

The life and mission of Mother Teresa gives an outstanding example of a genuine Christian and religious life based on the Gospel values for the world of today. Every Christian is called to live a life inspired by the love of God and love of

24 This is better expressed in the words of II Vatican Council: After the example of Jesus Christ, who came to do His Father's will (John 4,34; 5,30; Heb 10,7; Ps 39,9) and "taking the form of the servant" (Phil 2,7) learned obedience to what he suffered (Heb 10,8), religious moved by the Spirit subject themselves in faith to those who hold God's place... Lumen Gentium no. 40.

neighbour. Mother Teresa gives a genuine example for a life fully committed to God and neighbour in various situations of life. Christian life is a mission of love; a mission of the mercy and love of God lived out in everyday life. This demands a deeper life of prayer and sacrifice. The model is Jesus and Mary who gave up their life for others in order to have life. Through a life marked by self-giving one proclaims to all that Christ is alive. Jesus became man to meet the hunger of man for God and His salvation. In order to satisfy our hunger for God who is love, he has become hungry, naked and homeless (Matt 25,40). By following him, as Mother Teresa did, every Christian shows God's love manifested in Christ in his life and action. She offers every Christian an example to offer one's life for others in one's own way and within the call to genuine Christian life. In a world marked by thirst for comfort, power and success, she exemplifies a true Christian who loves God and the neighbour in manifold ways and makes Christ available to all without exception. She witnesses through her life the Fatherhood of God and sonship of Christians extending it to any one she meets in her life.

Moreover, the life and mission of Mother Teresa offers the religious in the world today an excellent model of religious life based on evangelical counsels and radical practice of gospel values. This does not mean that the charism of other religious societies is meaningless. They have their value. Her life and mission offers something more and different than that of others; she does something beautiful for God. She says: "Our congregation is fully devoted to feeding Christ who is hungry, clothing Christ who is naked, aiding Christ who is ill, offering shelter to Christ who is ousted. We profess the three vows of loving Christ with undivided love in chastity, through the freedom of poverty, in total commitment through obedience. We assume a fourth vow whereby we commit ourselves to

offer from our hearts voluntary service to the poorest among the poor, that is to say, to Christ under the humble appearance of the poor"[25].

This radical way of living out the Gospel in the Church within a community life, caring and supporting one another in dedication to the poor is a true witness of the Gospel. It is a total commitment to God which invites others to the Gospel. Mother Teresa says many young people tell her "I want a life of poverty, of prayer and sacrifice, to go along with the service of the poor". It is hard and heroic, and at the same time upholds the values of the Gospel in an exceptional way. She abandons herself and carries the cross of Christ in the poor, the handicapped, the blind, the abnormal, the dying, in their suffering. Her life answers the words of St. John: "How can you say that you love God, whom you do not see, if you do not love the neighbour whom you see? You are a liar if you say that you love God but you do not love your neighbour (I John 4,20)".

Because of the Gospel values she upholds and witnesses of her life that she is considered a sage and a saint both by Indians[26] and others. In terms of the Indian mind, she is a genuine bhakta, a devotee of God, one who follows bhakti mârga the path of love of God and totally surrenders herself to the divine. She is a Christian bhakta[27] who brings Christ, the object of her loving devotion and commitment, to her fellowmen through her simple and devoted life for the cause of the poor. She is a real sannyasini (religious) who has abandoned all her possessions and concentrated her life on the Supreme (Bhagavan) and bringing His love to mankind

25 MOTHER TERESA, Heart of Joy, 37.

26 On the relevance of this in the Indian situation cf. G. SOARES-PRABHU, "The Indian Church Challenged by Poverty and Caste" Sedos Bulletin 26 (1994) 171-182.

27 Bhakta means a devotee of God. Bhakti marga is the path of loving devotion.

in her work for the poor. Such a life devoted to God and others for an Indian, is a person who has encountered God in a profound manner and all those who see her and come in contact with her sees the light of God and the secret of the kingdom of God revealed through her life (Matt 11,25). She practices a spirituality of prayer and namajapa[28], renunciation, devotion to God, commitment for justice and equality which are all values admired and practiced by various religions in India. She is someone who has encountered God and left security for the sake of leading others to God and His kingdom. She gave herself to Christ and through Him to her neighbour. For her, 'neighbour' is open to all without distinction. She sees Jesus in every person and avoids no one Therefore she is a fully integrated Christian of India who offers a radical model of life according to the Gospel which is esteemed by the religious mind of Indians.

These Christian values practiced in a heroic manner in her life and mission would lead one to consider Mother Teresa as a living saint. She lives a life based on God's love manifested in Christ which extends to her neighbour, especially the poor and needy. Her life reflects the command of Jesus to follow Him unconditionally and serve Him in the humble, poor and needy. She has abandoned herself for the kingdom of God. Mother Teresa lives the above-mentioned basic principles life in a heroic manner making her a saintly person in the midst of a world which thirsts for God and His love lived out in the human situation. She is God's gift and grace to mankind and a model of Christian life, in particular religious life, according to the demands of the Gospel.

28 Japa is the methodical repetition of a sacred formula. Namajapa is the recital of the Lord's name.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that Mother Teresa is a genuine sage and saint of India. The life and mission of Mother Teresa proclaims the works of God through a humble soul. She calls the great work of God in her as a call within her vocation, a special commission to dedicate her life to the poor. The missionary zeal of Mother Teresa recalls the missionary zeal of St. Teresa of Lisieux; her life dedicated to the poor and dying follows the lifestyle of Peter Damian; simple life according to the evangelical counsels reflects the life of Francis of Assisi and care and dedication for the poor in India goes along with the mind of Mahatma Gandhi. Mother Teresa is a real sannyasini and Bhakta who has dedicated her life for God and mankind basing her spirituality on Jesus, profound prayer life and commitment to the poor based on the love of God and of neighbour. She upholds Gospel values appreciated by all as a living witness of the Gospel among men. Many others do the same but, in her life and mission, God has manifested His presence and love for mankind in such a radical manner that anyone who meets her, finds in her a living example of Christian life and religious life. In Mother Teresa and her life and mission, Gospel meets cultures and gets transformed into new way of life according to the Gospel. Her base is in India but her mission spans the continents.

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Death Row in India

Sr Santan Nago FS

Introduction

Death row refers to the section of a prison where inmates awaiting execution are held. These prisoners have been sentenced to death after being convicted of the most serious crimes, such as murder, terrorism, and crimes against humanity. The death penalty has been practiced across civilizations for centuries, often justified as a means of deterrence, retribution, or justice. However, the ethical, legal, and human rights implications of capital punishment have sparked intense global debates. While some countries have abolished it entirely, others continue to implement the death penalty under strict legal frameworks. The conditions, duration, and psychological toll of life on death row vary widely, with some inmates spending decades awaiting execution due to lengthy appeal processes and legal challenges.

Death Row in India

India retains the death penalty but applies it sparingly under the "rarest of rare" doctrine established by the Supreme Court. Death row prisoners in India are housed separately, facing prolonged periods of isolation and legal uncertainty as their cases move through the appeals process. While executions are rare, India has witnessed some high-profile hangings, primarily for terrorism, rape-murder, and heinous

crimes against the state. The debate over capital punishment in India continues, with concerns about judicial errors, human rights, and the moral implications of taking a life through state-sanctioned execution.

A Brief History of Death Row in India

The death penalty has been a part of India's legal system since ancient times, with various rulers and colonial powers using it as a form of justice. However, its application and frequency have evolved significantly over time.

Colonial Era (Before 1947)

During British rule, capital punishment was widely used as a legal punishment under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860. Death sentences were commonly awarded for crimes such as murder, rebellion, and acts against the colonial government. There was no formal process for mercy petitions, and executions were carried out frequently.

Post-Independence (1947–1973)

After India gained independence in 1947, the newly formed government retained the death penalty but introduced legal safeguards. On 30 January 1948, Nathuram Godse assassinated Mahatma Gandhi by shooting him at point-blank range. Narayan Apte, a co-defendant in the trial for Gandhi's murder was found guilty. Both were executed by hanging in November 1949 at Ambala Central Jail in Haryana. The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1898, was amended in 1955 to give judges discretion in awarding life imprisonment instead of the death penalty. The landmark case of Jagmohan Singh v. State of U.P. (1973) upheld the constitutionality of the death penalty but emphasized the need for fair trial procedures.

Bachan Singh Case (1980) and the "Rarest of Rare" Doctrine

The Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab 1980 is a landmark decision that played an important role in transforming the approach of the country to the death penalty. The Supreme Court addressed legality of capital punishment and established the doctrine of 'rarest of the rare'. This significantly reduced the number of death sentences awarded

Recent Trends and Legal Developments

In 1983, Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab further clarified the "rarest of rare" doctrine, outlining factors like the nature of the crime and its impact on society.

In 2004, the Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty should not be awarded for crimes where reformation of the convict was possible.

Current Status

India retains the death penalty but uses it sparingly. As of recent years, executions are rare, and the Supreme Court has been cautious about awarding capital punishment. However, it remains a legal punishment for severe crimes such as terrorism, rape-murder, and child sexual abuse cases. Since 1990, India has carried out several executions, primarily by hanging, for crimes including murder, terrorism, and rape. Below is a list of individuals executed during this period, along with details of their crimes, execution methods, and locations: Sukhdev Singh Sukha and Harjinder Singh Jinda: **Crimes:** Assassination of General Arun Shridhar Vaidya, the Chief of the Indian Army during Operation Blue Star. Both were convicted for the 1986 assassination of General Vaidya and were executed after their appeals were denied. Execution

Date: October 9, 1992, Method: Hanging, Location: Yerwada Central Jail, Pune.

Dhananjoy Chatterjee

Crimes: Rape and murder of Hetal Parekh, an 18-year-old schoolgirl, in 1990. Chatterjee was the first person to be executed in India in the 21st century. His execution followed extensive legal proceedings and debates over the death penalty. Execution Date: August 15, 2004, Method: Hanging, Location: Alipore Jail, Kolkata.

Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab

Crimes: Ajmal Amir Kasab with other Pakistani terrorists, who travelled through sea were responsible for the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, which resulted in the deaths of 166 people. Kasab was the lone surviving terrorist of the attacks. His execution was carried out under strict secrecy, and his body was buried within the prison premises. Execution Date: November 21, 2012. Method: Hanging, Location: Yerwada Central Jail, Pune.

Mohammad Afzal Guru

Crimes: Conspiracy in the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. Afzal Guru was convicted for his role in the Parliament attack. His execution was conducted in secrecy, and he was buried within the jail premises. Execution Date: February 9, 2013, Method: Hanging, Location: Tihar Jail, Delhi.

Yakub Memon

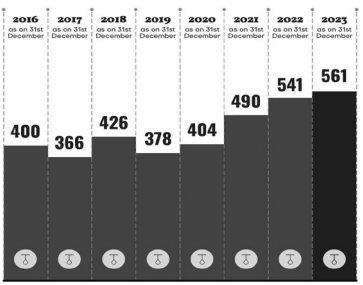
Crimes: Involvement in the 1993 Mumbai bombings, which killed 257 people. Memon was convicted for financing the bombings. His execution sparked debates on capital

punishment in India. Execution Date: July 30, 2015. Method: Hanging, Location: Nagpur Central Jail, Nagpur.

Convicts in the Nirbhaya Case

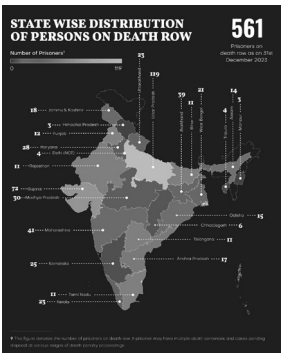
Crimes: Gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern in Delhi in 2012. The crime led to nationwide protests and changes in laws related to sexual assault. The execution of the four men was the first in India since 2015. Execution Date: March 20, 2020, Method: Hanging, Location: Tihar Jail, Delhi. These executions highlight India's cautious approach to capital punishment, reserving it for cases deemed as the "rarest of rare."

Annual Statistics



This is the eighth edition of the Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics Report. This annual publication presents changes in the death row population as well as political and legal developments in the administration of the death penalty in India each year. The statistics are compiled through a combination of data mining of court websites, media monitoring and Right to Information applications. At the end of 2023, a total number of 561 prisoners were living under a sentence of death, which is the highest population on death row in a single calendar year in nearly two decades as per the records published by the National Crime Records Bureau. As of 31st December 2023, 120 death sentences were imposed by trial courts across the country.

Developments in the Law



Three new criminal law bills to replace the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Evidence Act were passed by the Indian Parliament in December 2023 and received presidential assent. The Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita, which replaces the IPC, increases the number of offences punishable by death from twelve to eighteen. Procedures and time limits for filing mercy petitions by death row prisoners are codified by The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita, which replaces the CrPC, codifies the procedure for filing of mercy petitions by death row prisoners and introduces time limits for the filing of these petitions. The Supreme Court has directed the constitution of a committee of experts to re-examine whether hanging as a method of execution in capital punishment is in line with constitutional standards, 40 years after this method was upheld in Deena v. Union of India (1983).

Conclusion

In India, the death penalty remains legal but is imposed with extreme caution. The prolonged legal battles and the mental agony endured by death row inmates have led to calls for reform, including better prison conditions and alternatives to execution. With changing perspectives on human rights and justice, the future of capital punishment in India remains uncertain, with growing voices advocating for its abolition or more humane judicial processes. The existence of death row raises profound moral, legal, and practical questions. While proponents argue that it serves as a necessary deterrent and

delivers justice, opponents highlight the risk of wrongful convictions, the inhumane conditions of inmates, and the irreversible nature of capital punishment. Around the world, many countries are moving toward abolition, considering life imprisonment as an alternative.

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PMI Rising on Wings of Prayer

Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Introduction:

The journey of a human being through suffering, despair, and redemption is one that speaks to the deep need for faith and transformation. In the context of prison ministry, we are called not only to extend compassion to those behind bars but also to help them discover the power of prayer, which leads to healing, reformation, and eventual reintegration into society. The fallen human being is not beyond redemption - through the grace of God, they can rise again. This theme, *"Fallen Humans May Rise Again on Wings of Prayer,"* encapsulates the essence of our mission at Prison Ministry International (PMI). It reminds us that prayer is not a passive act; it is a transformative force that has the power to change lives, restore dignity, and offer hope even in the darkest of places. As we reflect on this theme during our international jubilee convention and Prison Ministry Sunday, let us remember the vital role that spirituality plays in the lives of prisoners. Without prayer and faith, the journey of rehabilitation is incomplete. Through our intercessory prayers and spiritual support, we can help bring about lasting change in the lives of prisoners. Just as we have witnessed the power of prayer to heal and transform, we are called to be instruments of that change.

Fallen Humans will Rise Again on Wings of Prayer

In this jubilee, I invite you to reflect on a theme very close to my heart - *Fallen Humans may Rise Again on Wings of Prayer*. This phrase is taken from Padre Diego's hymn in the morning prayer of the breviary. It serves as the theme for this year's Prison Ministry Sunday and will also be the guiding theme for our international jubilee convention, held from October 28 to 31 in Kerala. The uniqueness of Prison Ministry International (PMI) lies in its significant focus on spirituality. PMI is not just a social work agency; it is a prayer group at its core. Without the element of spirituality - our dependence on Jesus, His precious blood, and our faith in His salvation - we risk becoming mere social workers.

As Pope Francis opened the holy door in prison, he recognized that prisoners are in desperate need of the jubilee graces: indulgences, forgiveness of sins, and liberation from the punishment of their crimes. Our task is to draw grace from the cross and the blood of Jesus, sharing it with our brothers and sisters behind bars so that they may be reformed, rehabilitated, reintegrated, and redeemed. To achieve this, we must deepen our spiritual exercises - offering Holy Mass for prisoners, reciting rosaries and Divine Mercies on their behalf, and maintaining chain fasting. I am grateful for your active participation in our incessant intercessory prayers for the incarcerated. Each morning, I wake up hearing the intercessory prayers from Pauline, Christiana, and go to bed listening to the prayers of Goretti Martin and her team from Goa. Many more are welcome to join the PMI intercessory prayer.

The Power of Prayer in the Process of Release

Prayer, as heartfelt communication with the divine, serves as a cornerstone in the process of release. For prisoners, prayer

provides solace, strength, and guidance. Through prayer, they can find inner peace and develop a connection with a higher power. Prayer offers an opportunity for self-reflection, repentance, and a realization of one's mistakes. Through it, individuals can seek forgiveness and prepare spiritually and mentally for the next steps in their journey. As the Bible says in *Psalm 34:18*, "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." True prayer leads us to support prisoners with legal aid and financial assistance for their release. The PMI National Office has spent more than 15 lakhs solely for the release of prisoners.

Isaiah Matthews' Story

You might have seen the video clip of Isaiah Matthews, who spent 54 years in an American prison for a crime he did not commit. At the age of 18, Isaiah was arrested for a robbery he did not commit. With no family or money to prove his innocence, he was thrown into a cell with only his faith. The world forgot him, and he missed out on everything - falling in love, raising a family, experiencing life. Yet, every night he prayed, asking God why he was there, asking God to carry him through. And in the darkness, he felt God with him. When he was released, he shared his story on America's Got Talent. He said, "In darkness, God was with me. Only faith and music kept me alive." Like Isaiah Matthews, there are many in Indian prisons who are waiting for our prayers, support, and intervention. As *Matthew 25:36* reminds us, "I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Prisoners' Reformation Trajectory

During my doctoral research at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, I focused on prisoners' reformation. My findings are published as the *Eightfold Path of Prisoners'*

Reformation - a process that includes Reach-out, Release, Repentance, Reconciliation, Reformation, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Redemption.

Reformation: Transforming the Mind and Soul

Reformation is the crucial stage where individuals begin to transform their minds and souls. This process involves education, spiritual growth, and moral development. Faith-based programs and prayer groups within prisons play a vital role in this transformation. As *Romans 12:2* teaches us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." These programs offer prisoners a supportive community where they can grow in faith, engage in meaningful discussions, and develop a deeper understanding of their purpose in life. Reformation through prayer encourages individuals to adopt new values and behaviors, leading to positive change in their character.

Redeemed Wing

Recently, some released prisoners requested to offer a Mass for Sr. Noella, a sister who had visited them regularly but passed away in an accident. They could not attend her funeral because they were still in prison. We celebrated the Mass for her soul and visited her tomb in Bengaluru. There, 20 released prisoners gathered, forming a special task force named the *Redeemed Wing* for reformed and released prisoners. At her tomb, they took an oath to follow Sr. Noella's example and work for the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners. Many reformed prisoners now wish to be part of this ministry, and we encourage them to start businesses or purchase auto-rickshaws to support their reintegration.

Rehabilitation: Healing and Restoring Lives

Rehabilitation focuses on healing and restoring lives. Prayer plays a vital role in helping individuals overcome trauma and cope with challenges they have faced. Prayer can address underlying issues that lead to criminal behavior, such as addiction, mental health struggles, and broken relationships. By nurturing the spirit, individuals can rebuild their lives, as *Isaiah 61:1* reminds us: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives." In 1991, we launched our first rehabilitation center for released prisoners in Thrissur. Today, 23 inmates receive invaluable training from the Claritian Fathers, under the leadership of Fr. Alexander Kureekkattil. It would be wonderful if, during this jubilee year, you could visit one of PMI's rehabilitation centers. We also have homes for both men and women, as well as homes for prisoners' children, such as the Kolbe and Van Thuan homes.

Reintegration: Embracing a New Beginning

Reintegration is the final step - re-entering society as a transformed individual. While challenging, prayer continues to support and guide. Communities of faith play a critical role in welcoming returning citizens, offering mentorship, and creating opportunities for meaningful engagement. As *2 Corinthians 5:17* states, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Through prayer, former prisoners can cultivate hope, embracing a new beginning with confidence. In Delhi, we have 12 released prisoners from countries like Nigeria, Venezuela, and Colombia, who were in Tihar prison. PMI, in collaboration with CRI, provides them with food, accommodation, legal aid, and job opportunities.

PMI Welfare Projects for Released Prisoners

PMI has several initiatives for the reintegration of released prisoners, such as the employment, housing, educational scholarship, and release schemes. One of our most successful projects involves relocating prisoners to new villages, providing them with land, housing, employment, and support from their families and the local community. Recently, my own brother donated two acres of land for this housing project.

Prof. Cyril Moolakkatt's Testimony

Prof. Cyril, at Christ University in Bangalore, conducted a survey regarding recidivism among released and rehabilitated prisoners. To his surprise, he found zero recidivism among PMI rehabilitated prisoners. No one returned to prison or their former bad habits. The reason for this success is that PMI's rehabilitation is faith-based, Christ-centered, and supported by the Church, as *Philippians 4:13* assures us, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Practical Suggestions
Engage in Intercessory Prayer

As individuals and communities, commit to praying regularly for prisoners, their families, and the prison staff. Create a dedicated time each day or week for this purpose. You can join PMI's ongoing intercessory prayer chain or start a new group in your local community or church.

Support PMI's Spiritual Initiatives:

Participate in the spiritual exercises that PMI encourages, such as offering Mass for prisoners, reciting the Rosary and Divine Mercy prayers, and engaging in acts of fasting. These acts of devotion are crucial in offering spiritual support to prisoners.

Volunteer and Mentor Released Prisoners

Consider volunteering with PMI or similar organizations that provide mentorship to released prisoners. Help them with the difficult transition from prison back to society by offering guidance, job placement assistance, or simply being a supportive presence. Mentor released prisoners to help them rebuild their lives, offering the practical support they need to integrate into their communities.

Donate for PMI's Projects

Consider contributing financially to PMI's various welfare projects, such as the housing, employment, and educational scholarship schemes for released prisoners. If possible, donate directly to PMI's initiatives or organize fundraising events to help support their efforts.

Visit PMI's Rehabilitation Centers

If you have the opportunity, visit one of PMI's rehabilitation centers for men, women, or children of prisoners. Spending time with the residents and engaging with the programs will deepen your understanding of the challenges they face and the positive impact of faith-based rehabilitation.

Promote Education and Awareness

Advocate for the rights of prisoners and educate others about the importance of prison ministry. Organize talks, workshops, or discussions to raise awareness about the challenges prisoners face and the potential for transformation through prayer and spiritual support.

Support Reformation and Reintegration Programs

Help create opportunities for former prisoners to find work, housing, and community. This could be through mentoring,

connecting them with businesses that are willing to hire ex-prisoners, or providing them with access to educational and vocational training.

Offer Emotional and Spiritual Healing

For those who are released, emotional and spiritual healing is essential. Many prisoners suffer from deep wounds related to addiction, trauma, or family separation. Consider offering counselling services, spiritual direction, or creating a community of faith where former prisoners can find healing and support.

Conclusion: Rising on Wings of Prayer

The journey from incarceration to reintegration is a profound testimony to the power of prayer. It is a journey of release, reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration—affirming the inherent dignity and worth of every human being. As *Isaiah 40:31* promises, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint." Through prayer, fallen humans can rise again, finding hope, healing, and a path to a brighter future. Let us continue to support and uplift those on this journey, believing in their potential to soar on the wings of prayer and become beacons of hope and transformation in our world. The road from incarceration to reintegration is a long and difficult one, but it is a journey that can be empowered by prayer, faith, and the support of a compassionate community. Through the acts of prayer and service, we are reminded that no one is beyond redemption, and that with God's grace, even the most broken lives can be healed and restored. As we rise on the wings of prayer, let us remember that our task is not only to liberate the body but to free the soul. Let us continue to lift up those who are behind bars, believing that with God's help, they too can soar like eagles.

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Resting in the Heart of Creation

Fr Sebastian Thottipatt

The annual Festival of Christmas invites every man and woman to rediscover the place of God in his or her life. But how do we recognize the presence of God in us? It is only by discovering God's ineffable and all-pervading presence in creation that we are enabled to recognize the reality of that presence within our being at its core. The Bible speaks of creation as an act of God that brought everything into existence through his word. We read in the letter to the Romans 1: 20 "Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, are clearly seen in the things he has made." Creation, then, has a Creator and this Creator can be known from his creation. We only need to keep our eyes and ears open to the wonder hidden in each created thing in the vast universe to recognize the Hand that brought it all into existence and sustains them in being. Then we shall ever rest in that Heart. I wish to present to you a few quotes from some of the well-known men and women from history to corroborate what I have just stated.

Pope St. John Paul II wrote: "God has written a precious book whose letters are the multitudes of created things present in the universe. For the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message; to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice." "Each creature is a witness to God's power and omnipotence; and its beauty is a witness of the divine wisdom. Every

creature participates in some way in the likeness of the divine essence" **Thomas Aquinas.** "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine" **Canadian bishops' conference.**

Hildegard of Bingen

"It is God whom human beings know in every creature." Hildegard of Bingen **(**1098 – 1179) Hildegard is not haunted by any anthropocentrism that has affected thinking in the Church over the last centuries. She interprets the "Word made flesh" of John's gospel as speaking of the divine presence in nature itself. She writes: "There is no creature that does not have radiance." By the term radiance, Hildegard refers to the light and illumination that God is. "Just as every ray of the sun is the sun, so every ray of God is God (though not all of God). Thus every creature is a ray of God." The name given to the presence of God in the whole of creation in Christian terms is Cosmic Christ. We might say that the Cosmic Christ was first manifested for the first time at the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago. But the human Incarnation of God took place only about 2000 years ago in Jesus of Nazareth. "Christ" is not Jesus' last name but the title of his historical and cosmic purpose. Jesus presents himself as the "Anointed one" who was human and divine united in one body.

Richard Rohr OFM

As Richard Rohr OFM, a Franciscan priest who runs a Centre for contemplation in Arizona, USA puts it, "Christ is our short-cut word for the "Body of God" or "God materialized'. This Christ is much bigger and older than either Jesus of Nazareth or the Christian religion because the Christ is present whenever the material and the divine co-exist, which is always

and everywhere. In the last century, Albert Einstein through his theory of relativity showed that matter itself is a form of energy. For all practical purposes, energy is the real world. Everything is both matter and energy. We are therefore living in a Christ-centric world. This realization changes everything. Matter has become a holy thing and the material world is the place where we can comfortably worship God just by walking on matter, by loving it and respecting it. The Christ is God's active power inside the physical world, the radiance of God, a divine expression of God. "All things were made through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together" (Col.1: 16-17).

St. Francis of Assisi

St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) has been called second Christ because he followed the way of Christ in a significant way in the history of the Church. He followed the cosmic or creation-centered tradition of Hildegard that flourished in Rhineland, Germany. Francis grounded his sense of the Cosmic Christ in a struggle for Church reform and renewal. He sought to create a life style that would displace avarice and the systems both of the lingering feudalism and emerging capitalism. His greatest written work, "the Canticle of Brother Sun should be considered through the prism of Cosmic Christ", says Mathew Fox. "It echoes many of the richest themes of the Cosmic Christ. Francis acknowledged and celebrated divinity in its creative and creaturely manifestations. In his view the divine is incarnated in the flesh of nature." Can we not say vice versa that from the lap of nature we can leap into the heart of God? Again the themes of light, splendor and illumination are continued as Francis celebrates the brightness of the moon and the stars. The Cosmic Christ, "the light who enlightens all who have life" is present in all creatures and

therefore all creatures are brother and sister to one another. Francis takes seriously the idea of the family of all creation, the interconnectivity of all creatures. All are bound together and connected by the Divine light. "Divinity is the enfolding and unfolding of everything that is". He called this process "Learned ignorance." Divinity is in all things in such a way that all things are in divinity."

Nicholas of Cusa, German Philosopher 1401-1464)

Creatures can be said to be divine, for "whatever is found in creatures is found in the divine. This is to say it is divine. Humans are divine but not fully. We are as it were, a human deity. Humans are also the universe but not absolutely since we are human. Humanity is therefore, a microcosm, a human universe. The divine giver does not give anything other than divinity. But this gift cannot be received as it is given. Therefore, the infinite is received finitely."

"Every creature is a word of God and a book about God." (**Meister Eckhart**). We read at the beginning of the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that was made. Jn.1:1-3 Again in Colossians 1: 15 ff we read: "He is the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, rulers, authorities, powers; all things were made through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together."

I want now to draw your attention to the words of 13th century mystic, **Mechtild of Magdeburg**, who was one of the Beguine mystic women of Germany "You ask me where

God dwells: I will tell you. There is no Lord in the whole world who lives in all his dwellings at once except God alone. One day I saw with the eyes of eternity in bliss and without effort, a stone. This stone was like a mountain and was of assorted colors. It tasted sweet, like heavenly herbs. I asked the sweet stone: Who are you" It replied: "I am Jesus." What does it imply? The Cosmic Christ is the "I am "in every creature. The divine mystery and miracle of existence is laid bare in the unique existence of each atom, each tree, each bird, fish, dog, flower, star, rock and each human. In the words of Meister Eckhart, "In this breakthrough I discover that God and I are one." Our lives are stories of how our "I-am-ness" came to be and how it flowers into its own unique and beautiful expression of the divine one, that unique image of God that comes to birth once in a universe in us.

Mechtild of Magdeburg's greatest statement on the Cosmic Christ is: "The day of my first awakening was the day I saw and I knew I saw all things in God and God in all things." "I who am divine am truly in you. I can never be sundered from you; however far we be parted, never can we be separated. I am in you and you are in me. We could not be any closer. We two are fused into one, poured into a single mould. Thus unveiled we shall remain forever."

Kabir, an Indian mystic of the 15th century celebrates this when he declares: "I am like a pitcher of clay floating in the water, water inside, water outside. Suddenly with a touch of the Guru the pitcher is broken, Inside, outside, O friends, all is one. The separation between the human and the divine is broken through. As Kabir says, "O friend, Kabir has looked for him everywhere, but to no avail. For Kabir and he are one, not two. When a drop is merged into the ocean, how is it to be seen as distinct?" Divinity is not outside us. We are in God

and God is in us. This is the unitive experience of the mystics, East or West. "God is in all things and all things are in God."

Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit priest who lived in the first half of the 20th century, found Christ present in the entire cosmos, from the least particle of matter to the convergent human community. I recall a personal experience of mine while I stayed in Shantivanam in 1992. We had a satsangh with Fr. Bede during which a young lady from USA gave a testimony of her experience with Teilhard de Chardin. When she was a young girl of 13 she happened to go to a park. There she saw an old man, all radiant and smiling going around embracing the trees around. He looked to be full of life and joy. Later on she came to learn that this old man was Teilhard de Chardin.

Julian of Norwich (1342 – 1415) celebrated God in all creatures. "In all my understanding I saw God in a point. In seeing this I saw that God is in all things, God works in creatures because God is the mid-point of everything." For Julian all creatures are enclosed in Christ at the same time that Christ is in all creatures. "Christ is the one in whom we are all enclosed in the deep wisdom of the Trinity who is our Mother."

Cosmic Christ is present in the whole of creation in its every part. He is present everywhere, in everything but he cannot be grasped easily. He is the Ground of all existence; he is within all things and above all things and beyond all things. But he cannot be identified with anything. "Without it nothing could exist and without it nothing can be known. It is that by which everything is known which itself remains unknown" (Brihadaranayaka Upanishad).

The Incarnation which is the birth of God as man is the mystery that necessarily postulates the mystery of the Cosmic Christ. "And the Word became flesh; he pitched his tent among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son coming from the Father" (Jn.1:14). Without the historical fact of the Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, the whole concept and truth of the Cosmic Christ would fall apart. The Incarnation was a historical event in space and time, about 2000 years ago as attested to by historians. For Mother Mary who gave birth to the Child Jesus and for Joseph his foster father there was nothing extraordinary happening to them except the coming of the shepherds and of the wise men from the East bringing gifts for the child. They only held on strongly to their faith in God and his word. In the humble circumstances surrounding the historic birth of the Son of God, we see the emptying of the godhead about which St. Paul speaks of in Philippians 2: Jesus, "though being divine in nature, he did not claim equality with God, but emptied himself, taking on the nature of a servant, made in human likeness, and in appearance found as a man." (Phil.2:6-7). The Son of God divested himself of all glory to become one with the least of his brethren. It was not God entering into a pre-existent human person but on the contrary God assuming human nature in person.

If God became flesh in time, the way to find God is through the flesh. It is impossible for a human person to fall in love with a God who is abstract. Hence God himself has come to meet us by becoming one among us. In Christ, God has come into our human world and made his home among us. However, it was not a once and for all event that ended with Jesus of Nazareth. But rather, in Christ humanity takes a leap forward in recognizing the divinity present in it. When God took on human flesh and became man in Bethlehem 2000

years ago, he was taking on the inward part of the human person which is called the Ground of the Soul. It is that which is nameless within us above space and time, reflecting the transcendent eternity of God himself. But how was it possible for Jesus to be God and man simultaneously? Was he faking his humanity, as some may be inclined to think? The truth is that Christ was true God and true man – two natures in one Person which is the great paradox. The Incarnation was not merely a temporary taking on of human nature but a perennial entry into the inward part of the human person which is called the Ground of the soul. Meister Eckhart, a medieval mystic from Germany, considers this to be the real incarnation, much more than the taking of human flesh and blood in a particular cultural and historical situation. In the Person of God the Son, as Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth, God entered the Ground of the Soul – that inner sanctum common to all human beings in all periods of history and has remained there ever since. This descent into the ground of the soul is the real Incarnation.

To understand the real truth about the Incarnation, we need to ponder over the effects of it on us as human beings. Incarnation ceases to be merely a historical event in the past which is recalled and applied to our outer lives. There is an inward aspect to it which consists in God entering into Universal human nature which is common to all human beings in space and time. It becomes present here and now when our inner lives are transformed by it. Christ is an irresistible force within us, uniting us with God. Our spiritual life should essentially be God-centered in Christ. We should not see Christ as an external centre of worship and devotion but one with whom we are already united the moment we enter the Ground of the soul. We become sons in the Son.

We are not to be pre-occupied with the historical figure of Christ. As a matter of fact, we do not find in the writings of St. Paul any reference to Christ's historical life as he had never met him in that form and he did not give it much significance. He knew only the Risen Christ who appeared to him at Damascus. It should be the same with us too. We shall never meet the historic Christ but only the Risen Christ. That encounter is with Christ as a living, active force within us in the present moment rather than in our imagination as Jesus who walked around Palestine. Rather than follow Christ or believe in Christ, we ought to become Christ. And in becoming Christ we discover the essential paradox of his nature and ours: that we are creatures of the flesh yet destined for the immortal life of the spirit. As the Psalmist says, "You are gods, you are all sons of the most high but you shall die like other mortals" (Ps.82:6-7.) Here is the paradox of our existence. It is the paradox of Christ once we become one with him in the Soul's Ground. Jesus is the archetypal human being, the basic pattern we are all faithful copies of in some way or other. The fact that we are historical cannot be ignored but every one of us is destined to transcend history, space and time. As historical persons possessing a physical body, our life line with God is the breath of life that is drawn into our lungs throughout the length and breadth of each day. If our awareness is focused on it we maintain that link with divinity consciously. We shall soon become aware that the sound of our breathing is indeed the name of Jesus (Yesu).

Evelyn Underhill, a modern writer on mysticism grasped this sense of the Cosmic Christ yearning to be born when she said: "The Incarnation, which is for popular Christianity synonymous with the historical birth and earthly life of Jesus Christ, is for the mystic not only this but also a perpetual Cosmic and personal process. It is an everlasting bringing

forth, in the universe and in the individual ascending soul, of the divine and perfect life, the pure character of God." **Evelyn Underhill**

"People think God has become a human being there – in his incarnation – but that is not so; for God is here – in this very place – just as much incarnate as in a human being long ago. And this is why God has become a human being; that God might give birth to you as the only begotten Son, and as no less", says **Meister Eckhart**. He celebrates the human person as the full growth of the seed of God. "The seed of divine nature is the Son of God, the Word of God. The seed of God is in us… Now the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree…the seed of God into God. It is given to every person to become the child of God, substantially indeed in Christ, but in himself or herself by adoption through grace."

The divinity and humanity of Christ has to be held in right balance to have a correct notion of Christ and ourselves. If we want to know what it truly means to be human, Jesus is the supreme example and demonstration. Over emphasis of Jesus' divinity would be at the expense of his humanity. We would have difficulty in reconciling ourselves with the physical elements in him as well as in ourselves. If, on the other hand, we stress the humanity of Christ at the expense of his divinity we would lose sight of the transcendent element. It is very hard to face the fact for a being who is both divine and human, spiritual and material, mortal and immortal. The temptation is always to simplify the picture, to get rid of the painful paradox by suppressing one of the components. A being who is wholly spiritual and divine, will not be troubled by the humiliating worldly facts of suffering, weakness and death. That is what a Hindu friend of mine in Tiruvannamalai said when I told him about Christ's sufferings on the cross: "Father, if Christ were

to be God he could not have suffered." On the other hand, a being who belongs entirely in this world can cheerfully get on with the task of improving his environment without being distracted by thoughts about the beyond. To accept both the elements of the paradox, to recognize their truth and to attempt to live them is difficult and uncomfortable. However, it is the only way open to truth and life. If we accept this fact about Jesus of Nazareth, we ought to accept the same in the reality of our being too.

Jesus of Nazareth is supremely mysterious and the same is true in our case too. No final statement can be made on who or what Jesus is and the same about us too. No statement can give complete and full expression to what Jesus is because he remains a mystery beyond human comprehension. But once we stop seeing Jesus as a mystery, we shall stop seeing ourselves too as a mystery. When I stop thinking that I know myself and others, then there is a chance that some real knowledge might begin to grow. The paradoxical nature of Christ and ourselves must be recognized before any true knowledge of both is possible.

Most people consider this state of affairs to be irreconcilable and get used to living a false image of themselves. What is abnormal passes off as normal in real life. It is a diseased state that prevents us from being our true selves. It is this disease that Christ has cured through his Incarnation. In becoming man he becomes true Man in whom the potentialities of the human state are actually realized. In the Incarnation, God took on human nature, entering the Ground of the Man Jesus. God and man are united in the historical event that took place in Bethlehem 2000 years ago so that they are united here and now in the mysterious event which Eckhart calls the birth of God in the soul. The historical Incarnation in the

past and the mystical incarnation in us, here and now, are two aspects of the same mystery of the union between God and man. The far-off event in Bethlehem is truly fulfilled and understood only when it becomes a present reality enacted within ourselves uniting us with God now. Hence if we enter the Ground we shall encounter Christ, God the Son. Not only shall we encounter the Son, we shall become the Son ourselves. We shall share the same union the Son has with the Father and the Spirit.

A distinction must be made between Jesus of Nazareth and the Risen Christ who "fills the Universe." The latter and the Christ we are in touch with today is the Cosmic Christ. He is the One spoken of by Prophet Jeremiah: "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer.23:23-24). Cosmic Christ is that which connects everything in creation. He is the divine pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus offered connections to the dispossessed in particular: to the lepers, women, slaves, sinners and the outcastes of society. He did this by undergoing the death of the unconnected, the death of the dispossessed-on Calvary. The Cosmic Christ liberates all persons and, like Moses of old, leads a new exodus from the bondage of a mechanistic universe, of competitions, dualisms and anthropocentrism that pictures the universe bereft of mystery and mysticism. The Cosmic Christ represented in Jesus connects the poverty of the materially impoverished with the poverty of the impoverished. Thus all suffering and all poverty is connected as is all glory and all beauty. Suffering is not piecemeal; it is not meaningless. All suffering is coherent; it coheres in the Cosmic Christ (who is crucified and wounded) and it coheres in divinity as well as in humanity. When we hear of suffering anywhere it has to be recognized as suffering of the Cosmic Christ. As in the narrative of the Last judgment, anyone suffering is identified with Christ. (Mathew 25: 31-46)

Cosmic Christ is everywhere. "The entire planet is anointed and messianic," says Fr. Richard Rohr. "All bears the Christ mystery. The whole point of going to communion in church is to sacramentalize the universe. We are in communion when we are in nature as well. We must tune in to our ability to see beyond the physical reality that surrounds us, and awaken to the vast unseen world that exists. Then we can begin to see beyond sight and to hear beyond sound. We see the underlying structures that support our world and life begins to take on a new shape, new meaning. When we live as multi-sensory beings, we find that we are able to comprehend the language of every living thing. We hear the voices of trees, and understand the buzzing of the bees. And we come to realize that it is the interwoven substance of these floating rhythms that hold us in delicate balance with all life. Then, our life and our place in creation begin to make sense in a whole new way. Our vision expands to see the overall order of our path and tunes into a whole new source of information."

If we don't know how to love what's right in front of us, then we don't know how to see what is. So we must start with a stone. We move from the stone to the plant world and learn how to appreciate growing things and see God in them. In the entire natural world, we see the footprints or fingerprints of God. Once we can see God in plants and animals, we might learn to see God in our neighbors. And then we might learn to love the world. When all of that loving has taken place, when all of that seeing has happened, we might be capable of loving Jesus. I am reminded of what the English poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, "Earth is crammed with heaven and every bush is aflame with the glory of God, But only those who see take off their shoes; the rest just pick the berries." Creation spirituality is, first of all, the natural spirituality of people who have learned to see. Much of

institutional religion is useless if it is not grounded in natural seeing and nature religion. When we are at peace, when we are not fighting it, when we are not fixing it and controlling this world, we are not filled with anger, all we can do is start loving and forgiving. Nothing else makes sense when we are alone with God. All we can do is to let go; there's nothing worth holding on to, because there is nothing else we need. It is in that free space that realignment happens.

Nature is not outside of us but part of us and we must interact with it with love and care for it instead of seeking to dominate it. In 1990, indigenous leaders spoke at a global conference on the environment and provided a hopeful vision for the future: "We have jeopardized the future of our coming generation with our greed and lust for power. The warnings are clear and time is now a factor…We speak of our children, yet we savage the spawning beds of the salmon and herring, and kill the whale in his home. We advance through the forests of the earth, felling our rooted brothers indiscriminately, leaving no seeds for the future. We exploit the land resources of the poor and indigenous peoples of the world. We have become giants of destruction. We must return to the spiritual values that are the foundation of life. We must love and respect all living things, have compassion for the poor and the sick, respect and understanding for women and female life on this earth that bear the sacred gift of life. We must return to the prayers, ceremonies, meditations, rituals and celebrations of thanksgiving which link us with the spiritual powers that sustain us and by example, teach our children to respect."

It does not suffice that we are aware of Cosmic Christ in the outer world; the Cosmic Christ has to be born anew in us as Meister Eckhart pointed out: "What good is it to me if the Son of God was born to Mary 1400 years ago (for us 2021

Years) but is not born in my person and in my culture and in my time?" The name Christ means "the Anointed one" All of us are anointed ones but we must know it and recognize it; those who do, Meister Eckhart calls "**the enlightened ones**." We are called to radiate the divine presence to and from one another. As we read in 2 Cor.3:18 "And we with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the glory of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect." Humanity has the responsibility to increase the glory that is the divine presence in the cosmos. Teilard de Chardin thought that "besides his mystical body, Christ also has a cosmic body spread throughout the universe. And just as the mystical Christ has still to attain his full growth, so too has the cosmic Christ. "We are all meant to be mothers of God," as Eckhart would have it. We are called to birth the Cosmic Christ in self and society. We are called to be patterns that connect and bearers of coherence to a society of separation.

Paul celebrates the theme of our being other Christ and our growing into other Christ when he says, "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me.' (Gal.2:20). He sees his work of preaching the Good news as that of giving birth to the Christ. "I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again Until Christ is formed in you" (Gal.4:19). Jesus then becomes two persons for us. First he is the crucified one who lives in all of us. Second he is the power of the mystical life resurging in all of us. Because he is the one who denies death, he is the one who calls us to life and to resurrection, to mysticism and the connection to all that is. The Cosmic Christ assures us that nothing is trivial for nothing is unconnected to the whole. All is a source of awe, wonder, wisdom and the presence of the divine. All is revelation; all is unfinished; all is "eagerly waiting for God to reveal the divine sons and daughters…From the beginning

until now the entire creation as we know, has been groaning in one act of giving birth" (Rom.8:19, 22)

The Cosmic Christ is present wherever there is pain. The Cosmic Christ unites all this pain in the one divine heart, in the one divine but wounded body of the Christ which is the body of the universe. The Cosmic Christ is the crucified and suffering one in every culture, just as much as the Cosmic Christ is the radiant one, the divine mirror glittering and glistening in every creature. Divinity is not spared suffering – that is the lesson of the Cosmic Christ who suffers. Wherever injustice reigns, the Cosmic Christ is crucified again. This means that wherever justice is fought for and prevails, wherever healing takes place and is passed on, wherever compassion prevails, the Cosmic Christ is healing, redeeming and liberating in a cosmic scale. The Cosmic Christ leads the way to cosmic redemption.

Cosmic Christ leads us to true mysticism. The first meaning of mysticism is experience. As Kabir, the great creation mystic of India put it, "I say only what I have seen with my own eyes, and you keep quoting the scriptures! Experience, O seeker, is the essence of all things." The mystic is keen on the experiences of the divine and will not settle for theory alone. "Taste and see the Lord is good," said the Psalmist on knowing about the divine. Our mystical experiences are unitive experiences; the experiences of non-separation, of non-dualism. As Julian of Norwich put it, "Between God and the soul there is no between." The saint is celebrating the end of the primary dualism – that between humans and divinity. Mysticism announces the end of alienation and the beginning of communion. Yet it is not the loss of self or dissolution of differences. Eckhart says that "the soul becomes God but God does not become the soul." There is unity in diversity, diversity in the union of love.

Compassion is another word for the unitive experience and hence another name for mysticism. "Compassion," as Thomas Merton observed," is the "keen awareness of the interdependence of all living things which are all part of one another and involved in one another." In truth, compassion is the very origin and goal. "The first outburst of everything that God does," says Meister Eckhart "is compassion. This means that as creatures all children of God hold compassion in common. It is our universal heritage, our God-origin and our God-destiny. To experience compassion and to identify with the suffering of others, as well as with their joy, is to experience the Divine One who suffers and rejoices in each person. To struggle to birth one's own "I am" is also to experience the divine "I am" In fact we must all give birth to the Cosmic Christ in our being and doing for that is why we exist. Is not the purpose of the Incarnation in Jesus to reveal the imminence of the Cosmic Christ in the sufferings and dignity of each creature of the earth? As we discover our own "I am" and the ecstasy and pain of the Divine One in us, we gradually grow into an "I-am-with" others (Emmanuel = God-with-us); we grow into compassion and in doing so the divine "I am" takes on flesh once again. Since God alone is the Compassionate One, as we grow into compassion we also grow into our divinity. Compassion unites us and forms the common field that all creatures share.

I want to conclude by placing before you the most important quality that serves as the binding glue which brings about this all-important union between the Creator and the creature as well as between creatures themselves. It is the supreme quality of **Love**. Yes, it is love that is the underlying force behind the mystery of the universe and of creation. The letter that Albert Einstein, the great scientist wrote to his daughter towards the end of his life explains this superbly.

"There is an extremely powerful force that, so far, science has not found a formal explanation to. It is a force that includes and governs all others, and is even behind any phenomenon operating in the universe and has not yet been identified by us. This universal force is **LOVE.** When scientists looked for a unified theory of the universe they forgot the most powerful unseen force. Love is Light that enlightens those who give and receive it. Love is gravity, because it makes some people feel attracted to others. Love is power, because it multiplies the best we have, and allows humanity not to be extinguished in their blind selfishness. Love unfolds and reveals. For love we live and die. Love is God and God is Love. This force explains everything and gives meaning to life. This is the variable that we have ignored for too long, maybe because we are afraid of love because it is the only energy in the universe that man has not learned to drive at will. To give visibility to love, I made a simple substitution in my most famous equation. If instead of E = mc2, we accept that the energy to heal the world can be obtained through love multiplied by the speed of light squared, we arrive at the conclusion that love is the most powerful force there is, because it has no limits. After the failure of humanity in the use and control of the other forces of the universe that have turned against us, it is urgent that we nourish ourselves with another kind of energy…If we want our species to survive, if we are to find meaning in life, if we want to save the world and every sentient being that inhabits it, love is the one and only answer. Perhaps we are not yet ready to make a bomb of love, a device powerful enough to entirely destroy the hate, selfishness and greed that devastate the planet. However, each individual carries within them a small but powerful generator of love whose energy is waiting to be released. When we learn to give and receive this universal energy, dear Lieserl, we will have affirmed that love conquers all, is able to transcend everything and anything, because love is the quintessence of life." Well, that was Einstein writing personally to his daughter. Yes, when we

shall have grasped this eternal truth about love that brought into existence the universe with everyone and everything in it and sustains them, we shall have truly learned to rest in the One who is the Heart of Creation. In the Chandogya Upanishad we read: "In the city of Brahman, there is a secret dwelling, the lotus of the heart. Within this dwelling is a space and within that space is the fulfillment of our desires. What is within that space should be longed for and desired."

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Empowering Youth

Sr Adele Korah SCCG

Introduction

In several prisons in our country, a significant number of inmates are young individuals who have lost their way or made mistakes that led to their incarceration. While our ministry in the prison aims at their reformation and rehabilitation, we find many young prisoners idling away their time, veiling away their capabilities and talents within the four walls of the prison, devoid of opportunities for personal growth and development. However, it is interesting to note that if the volunteers of Prison Ministry take keen interest and help them to develop their latent talents with right initiatives; they can be empowered to take a new turn in their lives even during their stay in the prison.

Developing Skill in Spoken English

I started "Empowerment program" beginning with Spoken English class for the youth in the Prison School. Several young men and ladies came forward with great enthusiasm. When exercise books and stationery articles were provided, many more students were motivated to join the class. After teaching them the fundamentals of English grammar, they showed interest to improve their language skill. To those who showed great enthusiasm, I proposed, to get them enrolled as Arts external students at Open Universities to complete their graduation, for better prospects in life.

Motivated to become Degree Holders

About 11 students of the spoken English class registered their names to answer the B.A. exam. I approached some lecturers of local Colleges; a few of them volunteered to conduct classes for the inmates in Arts subjects. The Prison authorities were very cooperative in permitting the lecturers to conduct classes within the prison and to open a Centre for conducting Examinations for Graduation within the prison. The Chief Superintendent of the prison observed the earnestness of the youth in the prison and boosted their spirits with encouragement. After purchasing the needed text books, I had to help them to make summaries of important chapters so that they could prepare themselves for answering their exams. All the persons with intrinsic motivation within them were able achieve what they desired.

Aiming to become Postgraduates

It was a great joy when all the 11 students successfully completed the course and secured Bachelor's degree. Just a few of them were asked why not aim to be Postgraduates. They said a willing *'yes'* to themselves and took the needed steps to rise higher. I was reminded of the Helium filled balloons flying higher; not because of their color or size, but it is the properties of what is within the balloon that make it rise. Those who opted to go higher and obtain post graduate degree were highly motivated and the assistance of guest lecturers from nearby Colleges enabled them to prepare themselves well for the exams. With the permission from the prison authorities and their support, of one of the inmates a co-prisoner who was qualified was permitted to assist the students who were in need of help. 'Right for Education' is a fundamental right and prisoners are not deprived of it.

Opportunities Given for Education in Prison are Key to Reducing Crime

All the youngsters were not interested to study and go for Higher Education. Hence, those young men who had an aptitude for sports and games were given opportunities to get involved in Sports, cooperative games and in playing games such as Foot Ball, Cricket etc. Teams were formed to play Throw ball and Cricket, according to their interest and talents. Matches between teams created greater opportunities to develop their talents with competitive spirit. It was possible to arrange matches between nearby College Teams and our Prison Teams named as "God Loves Me Team & Emmanuel Team". The youngsters played in a sportive mood and the prison Team proudly achieved the Rolling shield which boosted their spirits. Prizes and certificates were given to the Man of the Match. The captain of the Team has preserved them in the prison office. Such cooperative activities of coaching and arranging matches for the prison team recognizing their achievements with awards and certificates can provide a platform for youth to develop new skills, build confidence and develop a sense of purpose. These activities can explore their potential, transforming the lives of the youth in the prison and empower them for a brighter future.

It was possible for me to conduct these activities within the prison, with the co-operation of my good friend Mr. Elvis Joseph the Founder Director of Bangalore School of Sports Foundation. (BSSF). He was a benefactor who provided beautiful uniforms, socks and shoes along with all that was needed for the youth teams. It was the golden period in our ministry in the prison as the Prison authorities were cooperative in permitting our entry to the prison early in the morning along with the expert coach. The Team captain who

received the shield has preserved it in the prison Sports room along with certificates.

Skill Training Programs

We were able to conduct a Beautician course for the benefit of the inmates. The Ladies in the Women's section were trained in Candle Making and in Ornamental Wax work. Thus we could see that criminal hands were turned to creative hands. We were able to sell out the products and use the profit for the purchase of wax and other materials needed for the training of new batches of ladies who were interested in Skill Training. In the Men Section a group attended the Skill Training in electrical repairs with the assistance of a team of me n. Certificates were distributed to the participants on the 'Workers Day' in the month of May. Rev. Fr. Antony Swamy MSW spoke to the prisoners on the dignity of labour.

Mentoring and Counselling

Counselling can be beneficial for the youth in many ways. It can help them cope with emotions, build self-esteem, manage stress and anxiety. Those inmates who willingly join in group prayer and counselling sessions held in the Prayer Hall were helped to become aware of the reasons why they lost their way and fell into a criminal life. Those who willingly open themselves to counselling and guidance during the time of imprisonment are helped to become aware of their weakness which led them to a sad state of life. Those who are ready to introspect, reflect and repent for their past misdemeanour and are willing to make amends for their mistakes are able to take a new turn in their life. They eventually become capable of returning and reintegrating themselves in to their family and society as transformed individuals. I had the satisfaction and the joy of witnessing the change of life in some of the

inmates. I recall with joy and gratitude to God, who touched the lives of those youngsters and adults, who opened their hearts to God's touch and became a blessing to their families and society.

Conclusion

Program for empowering the youth in prison has its focus on developing their potential instead of concentrating on their limitations. Such developmental activities along with counselling sessions provide them opportunities to discover their latent talents and promote their personal growth rather than brooding over their past failures. Initiatives taken for empowering them by developing skills in language and sports can be transformative. By providing opportunities for their personal growth and development, we can help the young people to acquire skills and gain confidence and with a sense of purpose reintegrate them into society. As they strive to build a brighter future, we can foster a sense of hope and redemption, ultimately contributing to a safer and more compassionate community. By investing on these young individuals, we can help them to rewrite their stories and emerge as positive contributors to society.

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Do the Dead Walk?

Sr Adele Korah SCCG

My Experience with Death Row Prisoners

No one can imagine a dead man walking. It may sound strange for those who never had an opportunity to accompany the brethren who are convicted to Capital punishment. They spend every minute, day by day in great distress. They drag themselves behind the bars, confined to four walls of a cell under strict police supervision. They appear stupefied by the unexpected order they received from the court, as if they received a blow on the head. Only those who have listened to their woes, heard their sighs, unheard by anyone, can understand the state they are in, as they spend days languishing behind the bars. Though externally they appear alive, yet they are distressed and in anguish walking like corpse with woebegone faces, heavy hearts, lamenting over their wretched state.

Confined to a Lonely Cell

They are those prisoners who are, convicted to Capital punishment and are confined to a prison cell. Capital punishment or the death penalty is a legal process by which a person is put to death by the State as a punishment for a capital crime. It is given in the rarest of the rarest criminal cases. Absence of persons dear to their hearts who could have shared their heartaches and anguish, aggravate their woes

leading them to despair, having no one with whom they can share their inner agony. As per the Statistics it is painful to know the fact that 156 inmates of prisons have committed suicide in the year 2020.

Accompanying those Convicted for Capital Punishment

Those who have come forward to offer their services to reach out to those who suffer in various prisons will have the opportunity to walk with such unfortunate brethren and accompany them in their painful journey. During the period of my service in the Central Prison, Bangalore, from the year 2004 onwards I had the opportunity to walk with several brethren during the painful years of their life in the prison. Some of them when they were under trial have expressed their anxiety about the judgment that would be given to them at the end of their trials. They suffer going through nightmares and sleepless nights.

Spending the Period in Desolation

I remember meeting such a prisoner in the Convicts' section. He shared with me his experience when he was in military training. At the request of a friend who wanted to punish a girl with whom he was angry, he kidnapped and offered her to his friends. In their anger, they raped, killed her and escaped from the place. Unfortunately, the military man was caught by the police while his friends could never be traced. The man who couldn't escape and was arrested is the only son of his widowed mother and is languishing in the prison after getting the death sentence. His mother had approached me pleading to forward a mercy petition to the President which I did on her behalf. There might be many who go through this type of painful ordeal. Prisoners sentenced to death penalty, spend their days in utter desolation. Yet occasionally with the

permission of the prison authorities I had the opportunity to spend some time with them, to listen to them and pray with them.

Meeting a Lady Prisoner in a Secluded Cell

I recall the occasion once when I was called by the Superintendent of the Central Prison, Bangalore, requesting me to go without delay to the Ladies section in Bangalore and spend some time with a lady prisoner who was convicted to Capital punishment as she was found guilty of having murdered six women. When I entered the small prison cell in the ladies' section of the Central Jail, I found the lady prisoner in a desperate state, beating her head on the wall of the prison cell. I found her in despair and in distress. After seeing me sitting beside her, she calmed down and started telling me that she was innocent and that she was accused and arrested with a false case and was brought to the prison. Without asking any inquisitive question, I felt that what she needed was just a silent and patient listening to her pain and sorrow at the desperate situation she was in.

Listening Can Reduce the Pain

I gave her a patient and compassionate listening heart without enquiring or judging her whether it was true or not. Though she spoke to me in this strain the report reveals the facts based on the investigations made regarding her crime. In her wicked plan to become wealthy, she would approach women in distress and offer her assistance to perform Mandala Puja which she promised, would solve all their problems. But before accompanying them to the temple she would request the women to wear their precious dress and all their jewels. She would take them to temples in the outskirts; they were unfamiliar with. There she would murder them very tactfully.

She said that the movies she watched had taught her about Cyanide and its use as a poison. She devised a brilliant murderous idea to become rich in a matter of days. She used to take the women for Puja and ask them to close their eyes and she would pretend to pray. The women had no idea that it would be their last. Then she would serve them with Cyanide laced water as "Holy water". That was how she would end the Puja. She was India's first convicted female who was found responsible for the murder of six women in the State of Karnataka. As it was one of the rarest of rarest cases, she was convicted to Capital punishment.

External Appearance Can be Deceptive

Another death row prisoner whom I met years ago in the prison was Sadananda (name changed) who appeared quite calm and composed. He was kept in a solitary confinement in the prison. He spoke to me for a long time quoting from scriptures of different religions including the Holy Bible. I was told by other brethren that he was a death row prisoner. He was one who very tactfully succeeded in getting away his wife for unknown reasons. But the cunning plan he made to get rid of his wife whom he hated for unknown reason was quite startling. He managed to put her to sleep in deep slumber with the help of heavy drugs. When he found that she had lost her senses, ascertained the fact that no sound or touch would wake her up, he lowered her body closed up in an airtight box into a rather deep pit dug under the concrete floor in his own house. After a period of time, his daughter who could not get in touch with her mother by phone, grew anxious and found that her mother was missing.

Love Dares to Break all Blocks

With a firm determination to trace out the whereabouts of her mother, she came home and asked her father and enquired

with her relations and neighbours. She was unable to accept the sudden disappearance of her mother. After a series of enquiry, she decided to make a thorough inspection of all the nooks and corners of her house. Sadananda had owned many apartments and villas in different countries too. But her love and attachment to her mother prompted her to fight tooth and nail engaging in vigorous combat, using all her resources to reach her target. She felt suspicious of the appearance of a specific area on the floor of her house, and succeeded in digging a particular portion of the floor in their house with the assistance of the police. She successfully discovered the remnants of her mother's corpse under a slab. Police officers handled the next step. Sadananda was imprisoned and court cases went on for years ending in declaring him guilty and convicted for Capital punishment. Several years are over. Sadananda managed to get his death sentence reduced to Life imprisonment at Hindalga jail.

Hindalga Jail

All the prisoners who are sentenced to Capital punishment in Karnataka are shifted to the Hindalga jail at Belgaum as it is the only prison in the State of Karnataka which has the facility for hanging those on the death row. There were 46 death sentence convicts at Hindalga Jail when I wrote this article. Two of them were released recently by the High court of Karnataka, twelve death row convicts including Cyanide Mallika were given life- imprisonment that is, life unto death within the prison. Out of those 46 convicts, plea of nine for Mercy petition are pending with the President of India and appeals of 36 convicts are pending in the High court of Karnataka and in the Supreme Court. Currently there are around 404 prisoners on the death row with Uttar Pradesh leading.

Conclusion

Though Capital Punishment is a legal course of action, with raised eye brows we question this action. Capital punishment is form of vengeance rather than just punishment. There is moral objection that retribution, or "an eye for an eye" is flawed and problematic in concept and practice. It is seen as an inappropriate response for a modern, civilized society and it does not deter crime. A major concern is the risk of executing innocent people due to flaws or mistakes in the justice system. Avoid Capital Punishment and why not give them a chance to reform themselves. Human life is valuable and even the worst murderers should not be deprived of the value of their lives. Why not prefer Reformative action rather than Retribution? Why do we kill people – who kill people? Is it to show that it is wrong to kill people???

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Prison and Penal Reform

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNODC works with over 50 Member States around the world to reduce the scope of imprisonment, strengthen prison management and improve prison conditions, and foster the social reintegration prospects of offenders, grounded in universally recognized UN standards and norms, such as the Nelson Mandela Rules. This page lays out our approach and provides an overview of our current areas of work.

Addressing Over Incarceration and Prison Overcrowding

Prison overcrowding affects constitutes an acute global human rights, health and security crisis. It affects a solid majority of prison systems worldwide and stands out as the greatest contributor to violations of international minimum prison standards. Yet punitive criminal policies, as well as a shortage of social protection services in the community, continue to contribute to a continuous growth of the prison population in many countries. While overcrowding can be temporarily decreased by building new prisons, practice shows that trying to overcome the harmful effects of prison overcrowding through the construction of new prisons does not provide a sustainable solution. In addition, building new prisons and maintaining them is expensive, putting pressure on valuable and limited resources. Instead, numerous international instruments recommend a rationalization in sentencing policy, including the wider use of non-custodial measures. The use

of alternatives to imprisonment also reflects a fundamental change in the approach to offenders and their place in society, changing the focus of penitentiary measures from punishment and isolation, to prevention, restorative justice and social reintegration. When accompanied by adequate support for offenders, this change assists some of the most vulnerable members of society to lead life without having to relapse back into criminal behaviour patterns. In many cases, the implementation of penal sanctions and other measures within the community, rather than through a process of isolation from it, are more effective in preventing in reoffending and therefore also offer a better protection of society from crime. Supporting the introduction and implementation of non-custodial sanctions and measures is therefore a key element of UNODC's work in the area of prison and penal reform.

Pre-trial Detention

Pre-trial detention is overused in many countries worldwide and has been identified as a main contributor to prison overcrowding. In more than 40 countries, the number of pre-trial detainees outnumber the number of convicted prisoners. This situation contradicts provisions in international standards, including the Tokyo Rules, which provide that pre-trial detention should only be used as a means of last resort in criminal proceedings, and only when certain conditions are met. Although pre-trial detainees should be presumed innocent until found guilty by a court of law, and treated as such, conditions in pre-trial detention are often worse than those for convicted prisoners. Recognizing the particular vulnerability of pre-trial detainees, international minimum prison standards therefore provide for specific safeguards to ensure that the rights of detainees are not abused, that they are not ill-treated and their access to justice not hindered.

The lack of resources for prison systems, however, means that people in pre-trial detention often do not have access to legal advice and assistance, with the result being that they may overstay on remand and do not receive a fair trial, further adding to the congestion of prisons. UNODC works to improve access to justice, supporting legal and paralegal aid programs, and improving information management and cooperation between courts and prisons to speed up the processing of cases. We also assist with the development of safeguards for pre-trial detainees and sentenced prisoners, such as internal and external, independent monitoring and inspection mechanisms.

Enhancing Prison Management and Conditions

In order for a prison system to ensure safe, secure and humane custody and to be managed in a fair and human rights-compliant manner, national legislation, policies and practices must be guided by international minimum prison standards and related safeguards. Prison authorities have a responsibility to ensure that the supervision and treatment of prisoners is in line with the rule of law and that the period of imprisonment is used to prepare individuals for their social reintegration upon release. In reality, however, prisons tend to be under-resourced and often struggle to ensure decent prison conditions or to provide for even the most basic and life sustaining needs of prisoners. National prison laws and regulations are often outdated and in need of reform. In many countries, the prison administration is under the authority of police or military institutions and managers and staff have received no tailored training as regards the distinct and demanding role of prison officers. Prison officers are typically held in lower regard than other public officials working in the criminal justice system. They tend to have lower salaries and

fewer career opportunities. This not only leads to difficulties in recruiting qualified staff, but also has negative consequences on their morale and performance.

Information collection and management systems are also inadequate in many prison systems worldwide, hindering the development of sound policies and strategies based on reliable, factual data. Safety and security are core elements of a prison system that require the significant attention of prison managers. In this regard, related prison management practices, such as the classification of prisoners according to individually assessed risks and needs, corresponding sentence plans and the prisoners' subsequent allocation to a suitable prison regime, are indispensable prerequisites. But very often, the extent to which tailored management approaches are implemented for prisoners with specific needs on the one hand, and those that may pose particular risks on the other, are lacking. All of the above deficiencies increase the risk of torture, ill-treatment and other human rights violations in prisons. Widespread corruption and security breaches, including continued criminal activity while imprisoned, can also have a destabilizing effect well beyond prison walls. Guided by international minimum prison standards, UNODC assists countries in revising national prison legislation, in developing tailored training programs for prison officials, in improving prison conditions, in ensuring prison and safety and security, and in strengthening the institutional capacity of prison administrations to apply core prison management practices. Gender-responsive approaches are mainstreamed throughout UNODC's technical assistance in this regard.

Fostering Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration

One of the principal objectives of UNODC in the area of prison and penal reform is to contribute to the successful social reintegration of prisoners into society upon their release. Rehabilitation and social reintegration support should start as early as possible within the criminal justice process in order to have maximum effect. Diversion from the criminal justice process to appropriate treatment programs, for example, or other non-custodial measures are key in this regard. Incarceration, by itself, does not have a reformative effect. On the contrary, it exacerbates many of the challenges faced by individuals who have come into conflict with the law. If a person is sentenced to imprisonment, purposeful and constructive activities while incarcerated are therefore vital to prepare a prisoner for re-entry to society, including education, vocational training, work and more specialized programs that address root causes of offending. Following release, interventions to support former prisoners and continuing care in the community can build on this.

The rehabilitation and social reintegration of prisoners is a societal task that cannot be fulfilled by prison services alone. More than any other aspect of prison management, this is an area for which the support of relevant government entities – complemented by the active involvement of civil society – is critical. Such cross-institutional cooperation ensures that services are provided in accordance with the standards applicable for similar services in the community, and are continued in the community upon release, as required. UNODC offers advice and support in this area, ranging from the development prison-based rehabilitation programs and related material or infrastructure support to the planning and implementation of continuum of care and post-release support in the community.

Healthcare

Prisoners are entitled to receive the same quality of medical care that is available in the community. However, this right is rarely realised in prisons, where healthcare services are usually inadequate. Prison health services are typically severely underfunded and understaffed, and often work in complete isolation from national health authorities, including national HIV and national tuberculosis (TB) programmes. In many cases, the gender-specific health needs of women are inadequately addressed. The right to health not only includes access to gender-responsive preventive, curative, reproductive and palliative health care, but also access to the underlying determinants of health, such as safe drinking water and adequate sanitation; safe food; adequate nutrition and housing; health and dental services; healthy working and environmental conditions; as well as health-related education and information. Technical assistance provided by UNODC in this area is based on the premise that prison and penal reform and health in prisons are interrelated, and that an integrated strategy needs to be adopted to address the high prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases in prison settings, in close cooperation or integrated into the public health system.

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PMI Volunteers Training Program 2025 Fallen Humans May Rise Again on Wings of Prayer Report

Sr Amala DC

PMI Volunteers Training Program 20025

Prison Ministry India convened its 35th Volunteers Training Program at Reformative Research and Documentation Centre (RRDC), Bengaluru from 1st to 11th May 2025. 38 PMI volunteers from various states participated in the training program. The theme was Fallen Humans May Rise Again on Wongs of Prayer.

Inaugural Program

The inaugural session of the Prison Ministry India Volunteers Training Program (PMI VTP) 2025 was gracefully anchored by Mr. Jerin Kurian Jose. A heartfelt prayer was led by Sr Krupalatha, Sr Rufina, & Sr Nirupama, invoking God's presence. The session began with a warm welcome by Dr. Francis Kodiyan MCBS, Co-founder and the National Coordinator of PMI, who extended his heartfelt greetings to all the dignitaries and honored guests. Sr. Amala presented an overview of the entire PMI course dynamics, outlining the structure and key components of the training program. This was followed by the Presidential Address delivered by the Chairperson of PMI, Most Rev. Mar Jose Pulickal.

In his inspiring speech, he emphasized the importance of the 4Cs, Communion, Compassion, Companionship, and Commitment, as essential elements of the mission of Prison Ministry. Felicitations were offered by Rev. Fr. Varghese Karippery, Co-founder of PMI, Sr. Inigo Joachim SSA, Former Superior General of the Sisters of St. Anne, and Rev. Fr. John Perumannikala MCBS, PMI North Regional Coordinator. Sr. Santan Nago introduced the Kolbe Home book, and Most Rev. Mar Jose Pulickal officially released it, handing the first copy to Sr. Pushpa SCS. Fr. Cyril O. de M. introduced the Reformative Exploration magazine. Most Rev. Mar Jose Pulickal also released this publication and presented its 20th edition to Rev. Fr. Varghese Karippery. Sr. Pushpalatha provided a brief introduction to the translation of the 50th House Key Distribution. As part of PMI's 50th housing initiative, the completed house key was ceremoniously handed over to Mr. and Mrs. Karthik and Kaviya by Most Rev. Mar Jose Pulickal. The session concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Rev. Fr. Benny Pachanal CRSP. A group photo marked the end of this memorable and meaningful inaugural function.

Founder's Vision: Fr Varghese Karippery

Fr. Varghese Karippery once again captivated everyone with his dynamic "Love Bomb" message centered on the Three Hearts, urging all to be love bombs that heal, not harm. He shared the inspiring foundation story of Prison Ministry India as Jesus Fraternity in Thrissur, Kerala, highlighting the transformative journey of faith and service. Emphasizing that true change comes not through logic or reason, but through unwavering faith, he encouraged all to believe in the power of love and the possibility of turning even mountains into mustard seeds.

PMI General Introduction: Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Fr. Francis Kodiyan introduced PMI's patrons, St. Maximilian Kolbe and Venerable Francis Xavier Van Thuan, as models of selfless love and faith. He mentioned Church bodies supporting prison ministry, including the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, FABC, CBCI, and Cardinal Francis Arinze. Highlighting PMI's core values and vision, he emphasized expanding outreach to 13,309 prisoners and 1,330 parishes to bring hope and healing. PMI was born on 8th December 1981at St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam. This is the initiative, hard work, prayerful dedication of two brothers Bro. Varghese Karippery and Bro. Francis Kodiyan MCBS. Prison Ministry Patron is St. Maximillian Kolbe, a Polish Catholic priest who volunteered to die in place of a man named Franciszek Gajowniczek in the death camp of Auschwitz, Concentration Camp, Poland on 14th August 1941. Hence the second Sunday of August every year is celebrated at Prison Ministry Sunday. PMI works under the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) and is a member of the International Commission for Catholic Prison Pastoral Care (ICCPPC). It has its diocesan coordinators in almost 170 Dioceses in India. **Motto**: Be a love bomb. Let it explode not to kill but to Heal the Broken Hearted. **Source:** Super Dynamic love bomb explosion of Jesus in Calvary.

Lifestyle

PMI Lifestyle is as follows: Weapon - Fasting and Prayer, Mantra - Thank You Jesus, Action - Search and Serve the Lost, Bank - Bank of Divine Providence, Style- Maximum Inconvenience, Mode - Begging and Blessing – No Foreign fund, Goal - Saving the Lost.

Methodology

The PMI methodology is as follows: Reach-out, Release, Repentance, Reconciliation, Reformation, Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Redemption.

Spirituality

Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS spoke about the spirituality of PMI which has the following characteristics. Overwhelmed by the Love of God, Redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, Led by the Holy Spirit, Empowered by the Word of God, Armoured by the Power of the Name of Jesus, Nourished by the Sacraments, Enlightened by Spiritual Exercises, Fortified by Ascetical Practices

Adorned by Virtues, Enriched by Fraternity, Enthralled by Seeking and Saving the Lost, Guided by Hierarchy

Spiritual Experiences

PMI volunteers shall aspire for the following spiritual experiences: God Experience, Fraternity Experience, Holy Spirit Experience, Seeking and Saving the Lost Experience, Divine Providence Experience, Prayer and Fasting Experience and Inconvenience Experience.

PMI Delhi Voice: Sr Inigo Joachim SSA

Sr. Inigo Joachim from St. Ann's Church regularly visits one of Asia's largest prisons in Delhi, home to 22,000 inmates and 3,000 police, including 800 women prisoners. Her presence brings hope and compassion to the incarcerated. She notes impactful rehabilitation efforts, such as a recycling program initiated by Kiran Bedi, where profits are shared among inmates (20%), the jail (20%), and a partner company (50%). Sr. Inigo emphasizes patience as a vital virtue for prisoners awaiting justice and a fresh start.

Insights from Farmer Coordinator: Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan

Fr. Sebastian Vadakumpadan, with his 7 years of legal expertise, gave us a detailed explanation on POCSO laws. His focused on punishable and non-punishable offences, juvenile cases, gender-neutral provisions, and related issues. He emphasized that without the intervention of a miracle-working, gentle God and His power, we are nothing. His innovative and insightful talk made a great impact and inspired us to deepen our understanding and raise awareness for Prison Ministry India (PMI), especially by drawing comparisons with international legal systems.

Kerala Innovations: Fr Martin Thattil

Fr. Martin Thattil, the Kerala State Coordinator, shared best practices and innovative approaches in prison ministry. Kerala has a total of 56 jails, with one currently under renovation. He highlighted the work of SSI (Saving the Soul of Innocence), an initiative dedicated to protecting and preserving the innocence of vulnerable individuals.

PMI National Convention: Fr Kasper Manimaran

Fr. Kasper Mannimala, the UP-Diocesan Coordinator, announced that the National Convention will be held from October 16 to 18, 2026, in Varanasi. He shared that the diocese spans seven districts and runs ten schools with approximately 4,000 students. Varanasi, known for the famous Vishwanath Temple, is a significant pilgrimage site for Hindu worshippers, where the term "Guru" is widely used and deeply revered.

Fr. Jesu Amurtham's Contribution in UP

Fr. Jesu Amurtham, State Coordinator of Uttar Pradesh and a practicing lawyer, has been instrumental in providing legal aid

to the marginalized. Through the Lok Adalat system, he has helped secure the release of 75 innocent individuals. In his address, he stressed the struggles of the poor and the need for compassionate legal support, reflecting his deep commitment to justice and human dignity.

Special Task Forces: Fr Michael Francis

Fr. Michael Fernandes from Aurangabad, Command-in-Chief of a Special Task Force, shared inspiring insights about their spiritual mission. He described the 40 Task Forces as fighting a battle without weapons, driven by faith. Emphasizing that "For God, everything is possible," he urged all to join and support the mission of Prison Ministry India.

Central Regional Coordinator: Fr Wilfred Fernandes

Fr. Wilfred Fernandes, head of PMI Maharashtra, stressed the importance of carrying God's presence during prison visits, sharing his practice of praying for guidance before each visit. He highlighted the need for strong faith and organized teams, noting that Pune's PMI is divided into Prayer, Medical, Cultural, and Core Teams. PMI's work spans multiple regions in Maharashtra, with Fr. Francis serving as the National Coordinator overseeing the overall mission.

PMI Contemplative Wing: Mrs Goretti Martins

She emphasized the value of thanksgiving prayer, praying without asking but simply expressing gratitude. Reflecting on Romans 12:17, she urged participants to respond to evil with goodness. The session also highlighted intercessory prayer, praying for vocations, and deepening one's relationship with God through a life of service, compassion, and integrity.

Prisoner's Reintegration: Fr Alexander Kureekkattil CMF

Fr. Alexander Kureekkattiyil CMF spoke on prison reintegration, emphasizing the "Love Bomb" approach and initiatives like Snehashram in Kerala. Drawing from saints like Paul, Francis Xavier, and Augustine, he stressed the need to be "broken" to serve, citing Acts 26:14. He highlighted the Holy Eucharist as the core strength of PMI's mission, referencing John 1:29.

Premodaya: A Home of Hope for Prisoners' Children

Sr. Angeli from St. Anne's, Karnataka, leads Premodaya, a home for prisoners' children founded in 2019 by Sr. Carmilta. Caring for 19 children, it offers holistic development, counseling, life skills, and sports, with schooling at St. Rocks High School. Supported by Fr. Joyce Terecia and Sr. Inigo, Sr. Angeli ensures it remains a nurturing and empowering environment.

Prisoner's Reintegration Testimony: Mr Prasad

Mr. Prasad Babu from Kottayam shared his journey of transformation, from betrayal and hardship to hope through the Bible and the encouragement of a compassionate sister. Inspired by Jeremiah's message of God's plan, he forgave, served others, and became known as the "Mental Doctor" for helping the mentally ill. In 2024, he began a bag business, living a peaceful, purposeful life, an inspiring testament to faith and renewal.

Counselling Tips: Fr Emmanuel OFM

Fr. Friar Emmanuel, assistant professor, taught basic professional counseling skills, focusing on situational and

depth-oriented approaches. He emphasized key counselor traits, self-awareness, empathy, and authenticity, and covered types of counseling, including geriatric and terminal illness support. Highlighting ACA ethical guidelines, he stressed the importance of ethics. A role-play on rapport-building offered valuable practical experience.

Pastoral Ministry

The begging in a nearby church and surrounding areas, an eye-opening experience that exposed the harsh realities of depending on others for survival. While some gave generously, others turned them away, reflecting the unpredictability faced by those in poverty. Walking under the scorching sun deepened our empathy and admiration for the resilience of those who live this struggle every day.

PMI Spirituality: Dr Francis Kodiyan

Fr. Francis opened the session stressing prayer for patrons and the centrality of spirituality in PMI's mission. He introduced the PMI methodology, noting the use of secular language for effective communication. Emphasis was placed on spiritual preparation, ascetical practices, and virtues. He recommended reading Love Bomb and highlighted the power of God's Word. An overview of PMI's administrative structure and global and Indian prison statistics.

Reformation Testimony: Mr Antony Das

Mr. Anthony Das shared his journey of reformation. Wrongly arrested for a kidnapping case, he saw his imprisonment as divine intervention that led him to confront his past. Despite hardships, he experienced miracles that strengthened his faith, his daughter's school waived fees, and after five years, he finally got legal support.

PMI Projects & Fund Raising- BDP- Sr Amala DC

She spoke about PMI projects and fundraising, highlighting: The revival of the PMI Burning Bush Spiritual Banquet, and other spiritual activities. Plans and targets for PMI's Golden Jubilee celebrations. The Intercessory Invocation for the Incarcerated, launched in October 2020, which continues to expand PMI's spiritual reach globally and bring hope to prisoners. All were invited to join. She explained in detail the five funds of PMI. These initiatives reflect PMI's strong commitment to supporting prisoners spiritually and promoting its mission worldwide.

Prisoner's Redemption-Testimony: Mr Lawrence D'Silva

Mr. Laurel D'Silva shared his journey of redemption, transforming from a sinful youth to a devoted family man. Though sentenced to nine years in prison, he stayed strong in faith, regularly visiting the chapel. A turning point came when he forgave his enemies, soon after, the High Court closed his case, and he was released in just nine months. His story highlights the power of faith, forgiveness, and transformation.

Criminology: Prof. Cyril from Christ University

He focused on criminology theories. He explained how labeling and social disorganization can increase youth vulnerability to crime. He highlighted PMI's role in offering holistic support, prayer, meditation, moral guidance, emotional care, and home visits, aligning with its mission of rehabilitation.

Ministry Inside the Prison: Sr Adele Korah

Sr. Adele Korah, with 21 years of prison ministry experience, emphasized that every prisoner is a child of God deserving unconditional love. The ministry focuses on healing through

repentance, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Volunteers provide visits, counseling, education, healthcare, skill training, sacramental prep, and legal aid. Sr. Adele stressed that crime stems from circumstances, not birth, and the mission is to renew lives, reunite families, and build a better society.

PMI Rehabilitation Centres: Sr Pushpalatha

Sr. Pushpalatha, presented a concise report covering its founding, vision, mission, and key objectives. She highlighted the importance and ongoing need for rehabilitation centres. She also shared statistics on children sheltered from 1995 to 2025, and updates on inmates' education, employment, and legal progress. The session ended with a heartfelt testimony from a young woman.

Ministry Outside the Prison: Fr Benny Pachanal

Fr. Benny highlighted PMI's support for released prisoners and their families through counselling, legal aid, rehabilitation, and family visits to reduce stigma and reoffending. He emphasized the role of rehabilitation centres in offering acceptance and new beginnings despite challenges. PMI also promotes family reconciliation, supports prisoners' children's education, engages in advocacy, and conducts training and research as part of its holistic reintegration efforts.

The Art of Redeeming Prisoners: Mr Reni George

Mr. Reny George, once involved in serious crime and sentenced to life imprisonment, experienced a profound transformation after accepting Jesus in prison. Embracing faith, he turned away from his past and began ministering to fellow inmates. After his release, he dedicated himself to supporting prisoners' children, becoming a powerful example of redemption and the transformative power of faith.

RRDC: Sr Santan Nago FS

Sr. Santan briefed us on RRDC and the role of rehabilitation centers like Kolbe and Van Tuan Home in Bangalore. She outlined 11 key objectives focused on rehabilitation, stressed the value of ongoing research and documentation, and encouraged collaboration with NGO. She concluded with inspiring insights from the lives of Saints Maximilian Kolbe and Van Tuan.

Kolbe Home; Sr Pushpa SCS

Sr. Sherly from Madhya Pradesh shared her inspiring experiences of engaging prisoners through planned activities. She highlighted key aspects of PMI's mission, grounded in spiritual practices like the 24-hour Divine Mercy Chaplet, fasting, adoration, and contemplative prayer.

PMI MP State Adventures: Sr Sherly OSB

Sr. Sherly from Madhya Pradesh shared her inspiring experiences of engaging prisoners through planned activities. She highlighted key aspects of PMI's mission, grounded in spiritual practices like the 24-hour Divine Mercy Chaplet, fasting, adoration, and contemplative prayer.

PMI North Regional Enterprises: Sr Irene D'Souza

Sr. Irene shared PMI's work in the high-risk, politically sensitive North East, highlighting the challenges faced. With her vibrant spirit, she inspired us through lifestyle principles like weapon, mantra, action, and the Bank of Divine Providence. Emphasizing PMI's motto and goals, she urged reliance on the Holy Spirit and spoke on the spiritual and psychological reformation of prisoners.

Psycho-Spirituality of Prisoners & PMI Intercessory Prayer: Sr Marina Gulati

Sr. Marina Gulati CSN spoke on the psycho-spirituality of prisoners, stressing holistic growth and the dormant Divine within. Citing the Sr. Rani Maria case, she highlighted that transformation takes time. She urged us not to be prisoners of our own spirituality but to reconnect with the Divine through trust and repentance. Sr. Marina spoke on intercession as a call to partner with the Lord, where He increases and we decrease. She highlighted the spiritual armor from Ephesians 6:10–17 as essential tools in ministry. She concluded, not all intercessors are saints, but all saints are intercessors.

PMI Karnataka & Mysore Innovations: Dr Michael Noronha

Dr. Michael Noronha shared how PMI began in Mysuru in 2000, later expanding to nearby regions. With seed money of Rs. 5,000 raised through begging, the ministry took root. The team met monthly, beginning with adoration, and engaged in activities like de-addiction programs, stress management for prison staff, paying fines for early releases, and organizing volleyball matches with prisoners.

PMI Lifestyle and Best Practices: Sr Amala DC

Sr. Amala DC spoke of those involved in this ministry is centered around compassion, service, spirituality, and advocacy. She shared best practices for volunteers, stressing the importance of prayer before entering prisons. She outlined key rules like greeting officials, carrying ID, maintaining silence, and seeking clarification when needed. She highlighted values such as objectivity, patience, honesty, and active listening, concluding that a volunteer must always remain prayerful.

Prisoner's Reintegration: Dr Antony Sebastian

During the visit to Echo, Advocate Antony Sebastian spoke on the organization's mission to support children in conflict with the law, offering them a second chance through crime mapping. Siddharth shared his experience of police torture, which highlighted how trauma can shatter dreams. Dr. Antony explained how Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs, like the Traffic Police Assistance Programme and Hotel Management courses, help restore those dreams. He concluded with inspiring success stories of Nanjegowda, Srilekha, and Madesh.

Criminal Trial and Bail Procedures: Adv Dr Titto Paul

Adv. Titto Paul, with 11 years of experience in criminal trials and bail, emphasized the gap between how individuals see themselves and how society labels them as criminals. He stressed the importance of fair judgment and the right to change. He explained the two types of criminal trials and pointed out that Indian citizens are generally less aware of laws than those in the US. He introduced the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) code of 2023, designed to protect citizens and guide criminal procedures. Using simple terms and examples, he outlined the trial process from start to judgment and gave an overview of bail and its types.

Prisoners' Reformation Trajectory: Dr Francis Kodiyan

Fr. Francis Kodiyan offered a concise overview of the trajectory of prisoner reformation and the essential skills required for PMI volunteers. He began with a hypothesis stating that science does not progress via a linear accumulation of new knowledge. Instead undergoes periodic revolutions. These revolutions are called Paradigm Shifts. Prisoners

Reformation Trajectory consists of four stages such as Self-Acceptance, Self-Transformation, Self-Actualization, and Self-Transcendence. Prisoners' reformation has to undergo a trajectory of awareness of sin, reconciliation, attitudinal change, motivational change and personality change. In a true reformed prisoner, there shall be the following characteristics: Optimism v/s Pessimism, Dehumanization v/s Humanization, Victimization v/s Liberation, Hero v/s Servant, Self Esteem v/s Inferiority Complex, Forgiveness v/s Revenge, Virtue v/s Crime, Hard work v/s Laziness, Humility v/s Pride, Hope v/s Despair, Present v/s Past, and Spiritual Life v/s Material Life. Reformation is a Metamorphosis from Seven Deadly sins to Seven Life Giving Virtues. Reformation is a Transition from the Works of the Flesh to the Fruits of the Spirit. Prisoners Reformation Trajectory is a Paradigm Shift from Attitudinal Change to Motivational Change to Behavioral Change to Personality Change. This can only be achieved by PMI Volunteers by better manifestation of Expressions of Love. Compassion, Patience, Generosity, Gentleness and Tender Loving care.

Integrating Farming in Prisons: Fr Edmund Frank

Mr. Edmond Frank delivered an insightful session on Integrated Farming in prisons. He explained how farming can be practiced in limited spaces with minimal resources, citing examples from central prisons like Pune, Nashik, and Bangalore. He detailed the process of making wet and dry compost and growing bush pepper at home. He encouraged sharing these skills with inmates to help them earn a living through small-scale farming after their release.

Pilgrimage to Jeevodaya and Swanthana

At Jeevodaya, Sr. Pushpalatha warmly welcomed us with heartfelt testimonies about the inmates and uplifting dance performances. After a tea break, we visited Swanthana, where we were deeply moved by the love and joy of the orphans and special children. The dedication of the sisters, who care for them like their own, was truly inspiring and reminded us how small our own struggles are in comparison.

Pilgrimage to Devanahalli Open Jail

We were warmly welcomed at the Devanahalli Open Jail. Fr. Francis opened the gathering with a few words, followed by our self-introductions. The cultural program began with the prayer song "Madhur Milan," sung by Sr. Prudencia and her team. A lively Konkani dance followed, along with action songs and dance led by Srs. Prudencia and Rosemary, with Marshall joining in with great enthusiasm. Edwin added a soulful touch with a Kannada solo. Priyata shared a message on acceptance, forgiveness, and unconditional love, which Edwin translated into Kannada. Fr. Francis and Sr. Amala distributed gifts like fans an cricket bats to the inmates. The jail officer expressed deep gratitude for PMI's contributions. We were deeply moved by the warmth shown to us and impressed by the inmates' dedication to farming and agriculture.

Concluding Session

Fr. Francis nominated Arthur, Sr. Prudencia, and Mrs. Jolly as leaders of the VTP 2025 PMI group. Fr Francis and Sr. Amala conducted a 40-question exam, followed by a training evaluation where participants shared feedback. Fr. Francis then led a reflective session, with each volunteer sharing their personal journey. The session ended with meaningful memories, renewed motivation, and fresh inspiration.

PMI VTP 2025 Valedictory

The valedictory program was gracefully compered by Mrs. Priyata and commenced with a prayer led by Srs. Krupalatha, Rufina, and Nirupama. Fr. Francis Kodiyan warmly welcomed the guests of honour and volunteers, and felicitated the newly elected Provincial, Very Rev. Dr. Simon Chiramel MCBS, along with other distinguished dignitaries. Mr. Arthur Fernandes presented a reflective VTP appraisal. In his presidential address, Fr. Simon Chiramel commended the dedicated efforts of Prison Ministry India and lauded the leadership of Fr. Francis Kodiyan and his team.

Sr. Amala DC announced the winners of the poem, short story, and essay competitions. This was followed by the presentation of awards: Sr. Irene Dsouza UFS, North East Coordinator, received the PMI North East Star Award with a cash prize of ₹50,000 in recognition of her challenging service in North east; Sr. Adele Korah SCCG was honored with the PMI Bangalore Star Award and a cash prize of ₹25,000 for her significant contributions. Felicitations were offered by Fr. Benny and Mrs. Veera Pinto. PMI VTP certificates were distributed to all participating volunteers by Fr. Francis and Fr. Simon. Sr. Amala expressed heartfelt gratitude in her vote of thanks. The ceremony concluded with a closing prayer and a group photo.

Documentation
Reformative Explorations
11/12 (2025)
Pages 124 - 126

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Should Stand Against the Use of the Death Penalty for Drug Offenses

Ajeng Larasati[1]

The essayist argues that the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has "failed to take a public stance against" the death penalty being used by some countries to punish drug offenses, calling it a violation of human rights. Singapore once again executed a person for a drug offense recently. Drug control is driving the use of the death penalty worldwide; one of every three executions carried out over the past decade was of a person convicted of drug offenses. The figure increased to one of every two in 2023. Our record shows at least 280 drug executions took place this year so far. According to a report by Harm Reduction International, a nongovernmental organization, at least 3,113 people were executed for drug offenses between 2014 and 2023, but the number is likely hundreds more. The death penalty remains a mandatory punishment for certain drug offenses in 11 countries. As of 2023, these offenses accounted for 95 percent of people on death row in Singapore, 61 percent in Thailand and 52 percent in Indonesia.

Globally, more than 3,000 people are known to be on death row for drug offenses - though the actual figure is likely to be much higher. Drug offenses do not meet the threshold

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https://www.passblue.com/2024/10/10/unodc-should-stand-against-the-use-of-the-death-penalty-for-drug-offenses/

of "most serious" crimes to which the death penalty can be applied; its application is a violation of international human rights standards. Yet, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), under the leadership of Ghada Fathi Waly, has failed to take a public stance against this problem in the past few years. Equally concerning is UNODC's support for initiatives to strengthen punitive drug laws in retentionist countries, whether through financing, technical assistance or other forms of support. This includes a range of activities, including drug seizures, drug arrests, law enforcement training and prosecutorial capacity-building. This is problematic: not only do these activities often lead to human rights violations but the arrests and convictions can also lead to executions in countries that retain the death penalty. In Iran, where most executions are carried out for drug offenses, UNODC announced support for a specialist-training program cantered on "advanced skills" to investigate drug-related offenses. UNODC has also supported and taken part in the Mekong sub region's strategic plan in East Asia to, in their words, curtail the drug trade in an area where two countries, Laos and Myanmar, have mandatory death penalty for certain drug offenses.

As the UN agency leading on drug policy, UNODC is not powerless. On the contrary, it can play a pivotal role in curbing death sentences and executions, if it chose to do so. An important step would be to start publicly calling on retentionist states to stop executing people for drugs, halt any planned executions and make more progress toward the abolition of the death penalty, including for drug offenses. Public calls from the UNODC would be a vital first step. However, these must be followed by ending financial and other technical-assistance support for initiatives that contribute to or risk contributing to the imposition of a death sentence. This is

of utmost importance in countries where the death penalty is mandatory for drug offenses. The UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy Guidance Note would be a useful tool in this context. It mandates a risk assessment for any planned, provided or requested support aiming to determine if there is a genuine risk of grave violations of international human rights law.

Findings of such violations should lead to cancellation of support. However, if the UN agency thinks that it can influence the recipient's behaviour and a mitigatory measure is identified and guaranteed by the recipient, the UN may proceed with the support, accompanied by efforts to influence reform on the country's rights-violating behaviour. Unfortunately, such change of behaviour has yet to be seen in Iran or the Mekong sub region countries. Conversely, Iran carried out at least 459 known executions for drugs in 2023. China and Vietnam continue sentencing and executing people for drug charges without transparency - limiting access to information, which is a violation of basic human rights standards on capital punishment. In those cases, providing support runs counter to UNODC's own mandate to promote "global peace and security."

As reiterated by this year's World Day Against the Death Penalty, on Oct. 10, the death penalty protects no one: it neither curbs drug crime nor drug-related harms, and it is often misused to repress dissent. The UNODC has both the power and duty to change its course of action toward the death penalty and influence the political will to do so. There is no better time to start than now, when drug executions have reached a record high. The UNODC must include a plan to divest from unjust punitive drug policy, of which the death penalty for drug offenses is its most extreme example.

Drama
Reformative Explorations
11/2 (2025)
Pages 127 - 139

Freedom's Light
Drama

Sr Arpita & Ms Patricia

Characters

Narrator – Provides context and transitions, calm and clear

A19-year-old woman, wrongly incarcerated

A mother, strong and unwavering

A Senior Prison Social Worker involved with Prison Ministry India, empathetic, steady

A young, passionate Prison Ministry volunteer

Officer – a Correctional Officer, neutral but fair

Judge – Calm, authoritative (voiceover or off-stage)

A compassionate church member from the Legion of Mary

A supportive church member from the Legion of Mary

A supportive church member from the Legion of Mary

A supportive church member from the Legion of Mary

Attorney – Pro bono lawyer from the church community

NARRATOR

The story presented here is based on a true incident that occurred five years ago in Uttar Pradesh. The names and other socio-demographic details have been modified to maintain confidentiality and provide anonymity to those concerned.

The hymn "The World Stands in Need of Liberation, My Lord" begins as the scene opens.

SCENE 1

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY'S HOME (Opening Scene)

(The stage is Mrs. Grace Arokiaswamy's home. She is seen sweeping the floor. Members of the Legion of Mary, a group of compassionate and prayerful women from the church, have come to visit her.)

MS. JOLLY: Hello, Grace. How are you? This is Sr. Bindhu, Sr. Alphonsa, and Ms. Mary. We are from the Legion of Mary. We visit all the new parishioners to welcome them.

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (hurriedly dropping the broom, roughly patting down her hair, and smoothing her dress)**:** Namaste. Please come and sit. I'll get you some water. Shall I make tea? I don't have milk. I'm sorry. Can I make black tea? I don't have sugar either. I'm sorry. I'll go to the shop and get some milk and sugar.

MS. MARY: Don't worry, Grace. We just came to welcome you. You don't have to make anything. Just come and sit with us.

SR. ALPHONSA: Are you alone? Who else is there in your family?

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY: It's only my daughter and me.

MS. JOLLY: Where is your daughter? Has she gone out with friends?

NARRATOR: In the quiet corners of her home, a mother's voice trembles with grief yet echoes with unwavering hope. Here, in the company of her fellow parishioners from the Legion of Mary, she speaks of a loss too great to bear and a daughter too precious to abandon.

(Mrs. Grace Arokiaswamy looks around the circle, the faces of the Legion members offering comfort and support. She takes a deep breath before speaking.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (softly, yet with strength): Sisters, it's been three long months since my daughter, Deepthy, was wrongfully taken from me. My heart aches every day knowing she is locked away in a place where only injustice resides. I know that in the deepest darkness, there is still light.

(She pauses for a moment, allowing her words to settle. The hymn 'The World Stands in Need of Liberation, My Lord' rises slightly in volume, filling the room with a sense of longing for liberation.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (with a trembling voice): I have lost so much. My husband was taken from us in an accident, and we did not have any insurance. I was left to raise Deepthy on my own. And then, as if the weight of the world wasn't enough, they took my daughter from me, accused of a crime she did not commit. She did not steal. I have raised her to be a good Catholic, and I know that she would do no such thing.

(She wipes away a tear, but her voice remains resolute.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY: We had no money for a lawyer. We had nothing to fight the lies that have kept her locked away. We changed our home because we could not bear the taunts of the neighbours. I do not know how to help

my daughter get out of this situation. She is a good student. She has always been a topper. She would never steal.

SR. BINDHU: Do not lose hope, Grace. If we have God on our side, then we have nothing to fear. Be not afraid, our God goes before us always, and He will protect us. We will do our best to help you.

(The members of the Legion nod in solidarity, murmuring words of encouragement. MRS. GRACE looks down at her hands, but then looks up, a glimmer of hope in her eyes.)

(The hymn "The World Stands in Need of Liberation, My Lord" fades as the scene transitions into the next part of the play. The members of the Legion rise, one by one, embracing MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY and offering their continued support.)

NARRATOR: In this home, a mother's sorrow meets the strength of community. Through the unwavering support of the Legion of Mary, the light of justice shines brighter, and the chains of injustice have started to break. Long before justice is served in courtrooms, it is cradled in quiet homes where mothers pray and communities gather.

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (voice soft but pained): It's been three months since Maya was taken. Three months since they said she stole from that house where she worked so hard.

SISTER Alphonsa (gently): We know she didn't do it, Grace. We believe you.

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (nodding, tearful): After her father died in that accident last year, Deepthy took on so much. She worked part-time cleaning and still went to her

classes… She was writing her degree exam the day they said she stole from them.

Sr. BINDHU (calmly): We'll do everything in our power to help. Attorney Maryanne has agreed to represent her pro bono. The truth will come out.

(The lights dim slightly, signalling the end of the opening scene and the beginning of Deepthy's journey in the prison visitation room.)

SCENE 2

FLASHBACK: EMPLOYER'S HOME & EXAM HALL

(Stage split: on one side, DEEPTHY is tidying and folding laundry in a clean, modest room, dressed in casual housekeeping clothes. On the other side, a small desk and chair represent an exam hall. A clock and exam paper suggest a timed test.)

NARRATOR: Before accusations shattered her world, Deepthy balanced work and education with quiet determination. On the day of the alleged theft, she spent her morning working diligently as a housekeeper, and her afternoon in an examination hall.

(DEEPTHY finishes folding laundry, checks her phone or a clock, and quickly grabs a backpack. Lights dim on the work scene and brighten on the exam desk. She sits, pulls out a pen, and begins writing carefully and intently.)

NARRATOR (continuing): With dreams far greater than her circumstances, Deepthy gave her all to earn an education, not steal from another's pocket.

(Soft instrumental of **"The Lord is My Shepherd"** (an appropriate Catholic hymn symbolizing guidance and innocence) begins in the background as MAYA continues to write.)

(Lights slowly fade as DEEPTHY writes, transitioning back to present day in prison visitation room — Scene 3.)

SCENE 3

PRISON VISITATION ROOM

(Sparse table and two chairs. DEEPTHY, worn but resilient, sits waiting. Enter SR. ARPITA and MS. ROSE.)

NARRATOR: Three months ago, Deepthy Arokiaswamy was accused of a crime she didn't commit. Today, two social workers from Prison Ministry India bring a glimmer of hope to a place where hope is scarce. Sr. Bindhu has contacted them.

SR. ARPITA (warmly): Deepthy, Good morning. I'm Sr. Arpita, a Prison Social Worker, and this is Ms. Rose, a Prison Ministry volunteer. How are you holding up today?

DEEPTHY (shrugs, guarded): I'm here. Same as yesterday.

MS. ROSE (sitting eagerly): We've got some updates. Good ones. We may have found the evidence we need to reopen your case.

DEEPTHY (leans forward): Really? Are you serious? Don't just try to pacify me.

SR. ARPITA (nodding): Yes. Rose traced security footage from the store. The timestamp on your supposed "theft" doesn't match your location that day. You were at your part-time job — you have a timecard. And more importantly…

MS. ROSE (carefully): You were sitting for your accounting exam at the college that afternoon. We have records from the exam board and statements from your professor.

SR. ARPITA (smiling slightly): And even more — Rani Daniel, the daughter of the house owner where you worked, has confessed in a signed affidavit that she was the one who stole the jewellery. She feared her family's reaction and tried to cover it by shifting the suspicion to you.

DEEPTHY (voice breaking slightly): You believe me.

MS. ROSE (gently): We always have. We just had to find the proof.

SR. ARPITA (reassuring): Tomorrow, we'll be presenting this to the Judge. We're requesting your immediate release.

(DEEPTHY clasps her hands over her mouth, tears pooling.)

DEEPTHY: Three months… three months in here for something I didn't do.

SR. ARPITA (softly): And we're going to make it right.

(Lights fade as DEEPTHY exhales shakily. Instrumental of "Here I Am, Lord" plays softly during fade-out transition.)

SCENE 4

PRISON COURTYARD

(DEEPTHY walks slowly. OFFICER LUCY VIJAYAN approaches.)

NARRATOR: In the quiet monotony of prison life, even the smallest message can stir a heart waiting for justice.

OFFICER LUCY VIJAYAN (evenly): Deepthy Arokiaswamy. You've got visitors in the admin wing. Social workers again.

DEEPTHY (nervous smile): I know. They're working on my case.

OFFICER LUCY VIJAYAN (after a pause): For what it's worth, I've seen plenty pass through here. You don't belong here. I hope today's your day.

(DEEPTHY nods, small grateful smile. They exit together. Instrumental of "Amazing Grace" begins softly as they exit and fades out before next scene.)

SCENE 5

COURTROOM

(Minimal set; table and two chairs. JUDGE sits at a bench. DEEPTHY sits with ATTORNEY MARYANNE. SR. ARPITA, MS. ROSE, MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY, SR. BINDHU, and SR. ALPHONSA sit nearby. JUDGE is off-stage or voiceover.)

NARRATOR: The courtroom – a place where truth often struggles but can still triumph. The walls of justice now echo with truth. With evidence clear and voices unwavering, Deepthy's day in court arrives, strengthened by the tireless support of her family, community, and legal advocate.

JUDGE (firm but neutral)**:** We are gathered for the case review of Deepthy Arokiaswamy, charged with theft. Attorney Maryanne, you may proceed.

ATTORNEY MARYANNE (firmly): Your Honor, we submit new evidence. Firstly, verified timecards show

Deepthy Arokiaswamy was working her part-time job at the time of the alleged theft. Secondly, official college records and corroborating witness statements confirm she sat for her accounting examination later that same afternoon. Your Honor, with the newly uncovered evidence, and multiple alibis attesting to Deepthy's whereabouts, we respectfully move for all charges to be dismissed. Lastly, Your Honor, we have a signed affidavit from Miss Rani Daniel, the house owner's daughter, confessing her sole responsibility in the theft.

(He hands over documents to the judge's clerk. MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY clasps her rosary tightly, tears falling.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (tearful but strong): My daughter is innocent. I've known it every day of these long months.

SR. BINDHU (gently): Our church has stood by Deepthy and her family, Your Honor. We ask that justice be restored.

JUDGE PATRICIA (voiceover): After reviewing the newly submitted and overwhelming evidence and the advocacy of Sr. Arpita, Ms. Rose, Attorney Maryanne, and the character testimonies from Deepthy's community, this court finds reasonable doubt in the conviction of Deepthy Arokiaswamy. Charges are hereby dropped. Ms. Arokiaswamy, you are free to go.

(DEEPTHY gasps, covers her face in relief. SR. ARPITA squeezes her shoulder. MRS. GRACE embraces her. MS. ROSE and church members smile warmly.)

SR. ARPITA (smiling): You're going home, Deepthy.

DEEPTHY (whispers): I'm free…?

SR. ARPITA (nodding firmly): You're free.

(DEEPTHY breaks into silent sobs, clutches ATTORNEY MARYANNE'S hand. MRS. GRACE rushes to her as the gallery erupts in hushed gratitude.)

NARRATOR: Justice delayed, but not denied. And in its wake, forgiveness dawns.

(Soft **instrumental of "Be Not Afraid"** begins as scene ends and fades into next scene.)

SCENE 6

PRISON GATES

(DEEPTHY steps outside, sunlight implied with warm lighting. SR. ARPITA, MS. ROSE, MRS. GRACE, ATTORNEY MARYANNE, SR. BINDHU, and SR. ALPHONSA are with her. DEEPTHY holds her mother's hand tightly.)

NARRATOR: Freedom's air tastes different after injustice. Yet, with every step, Deepthy walks into a new chapter — one shaped by resilience, love, and unwavering community.

DEEPTHY (softly): I didn't think I'd breathe this air again so soon.

MS. ROSE (smiling): You earned this freedom.

SR. ARPITA (handing DEEPTHY a card): Our work doesn't stop here, Deepthy. We'll help you rebuild — counselling, job placement, anything you need.

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (embracing DEEPTHY): You're home, baby. You're home.

SR. BINDHU (nodding warmly): The church will support you, Deepthy. We all will.

SR. ALPHONSA (smiling): We'll help you start fresh.

DEEPTHY (voice steadier now): You didn't just fight for me… you reminded me I mattered, even when no one else believed me.

SR. ARPITA (quietly): That's our job — and our calling.

(DEEPTHY wipes her tears, straightens her shoulders, and steps confidently into the light with her family and community around her. As DEEPTHY walks out, the community softly sings "On Eagle's Wings", the hymn's uplifting melody symbolizing her newfound freedom and soaring spirit.)

SCENE 7

CHURCH SANCTUARY / MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY'S HOME

(Warm lighting, simple pews. DEEPTHY stands before a small congregation. MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY, SR. BINDHU, SISTER GRACE, SR. ARPITA, MS. ROSE, and ATTORNEY MARYANNE sit nearby. The atmosphere is peaceful and supportive.)

NARRATOR: In places of faith and fellowship, healing begins. Deepthy returns not only to freedom, but to a community that lifts her spirit and reminds her of her worth.

(As lights rise, the congregation softly sings **"Here I Am, Lord"** — verses 1 and 2.)

SR. BINDHU (gently, after hymn fades): Today, we welcome Deepthy back not as a victim, but as a victor. Her courage and faith carried her through injustice. And as a community, we pledge to walk beside her.

(Light applause and affirming murmurs.)

(The congregation softly sings **"Amazing Grace"** — verses 1 and 2.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (with growing strength): The Legion of Mary has given me something I could never repay — hope. And it is that hope, that faith, that has led us to today. With the help of Ms. Maryanne and your prayers, Deepthy is free. The truth has come to light, and she is no longer locked away.

(She smiles tearfully, a sense of relief washing over her. The hymn "The World Stands in Need of Liberation, My Lord" continues softly, emphasizing the theme of justice and freedom.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (with gratitude): Deepthy is home. And I stand here today, not just as her mother, but as a woman who has been lifted by God through all of you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for being the hands of mercy, for standing beside us when all I could do was pray.

(The Legion members smile warmly, and one of them, perhaps a leader, speaks up.)

SR. ALPHONSA (gently): You are never alone, Mrs. Grace. You and your family are part of this church, part of our hearts. We will continue to walk with you, always.

(Another member nods, placing a hand on Mrs. Grace Arokiaswamy's arm in a gesture of solidarity.)

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (nodding, her voice steady now): We have been through a trial, but we are not broken. Together, with God's grace and your prayers, we have overcome. Deepthy is home, and we have our family back.

DEEPTHY (emotion thick in her voice): I've learned that even in the darkest places, light finds its way through people like you — who never gave up on me. I'm standing here because of love… and I won't waste the second chance I've been given.

MS. JOLLY (nodding warmly): We'll help you every step, Deepthy.

MRS. GRACE AROKIASWAMY (smiling proudly): You're stronger than ever, baby.

NARRATOR: And so, surrounded by those who believed, Deepthy's story shifts — from injustice to redemption, from despair to hope. The light of freedom burns brighter than ever.

(The congregation begins to sing **"Be Not Afraid"** softly as DEEPTHY smiles broadly and embraces her mother and the community. Lights dim slowly as the hymn continues.)

Book Review
Reformative Explorations
11/2 (2025)
Pages 140 - 143

Andaman

Ratnadip Acharya
Aksora Publications LLP, 2022, 441 pages

Sr Santan Nago FS

Andaman by Ratnadip Acharya is an intricately woven tapestry of history, emotion, and the complex tapestry of human relationships. This gripping novel takes readers on an unforgettable journey through time, culture, and place, primarily set in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a region that remains somewhat enigmatic for many, even in the modern world. The author masterfully blends fiction with the region's historical background, offering readers both an emotional rollercoaster and an insightful look into the socio-political climate of the islands.

Plot Summary

Andaman begins with a personal tragedy as the central character, a man from mainland India, travels to the Andaman Islands. The novel shifts between two timelines, one depicting the present day and another one that explores the island's colonial past, particularly during British rule. The protagonist's life becomes intertwined with the complex histories of the islands, including the lives of the indigenous tribes, the impact of colonialism, and the resilience of those who fought for their rights. Through vivid storytelling, Acharya unveils the emotional and psychological struggles of the main character while exploring themes of isolation, survival, and identity.

The characters in the novel are not just figures in a historical setting - they are real, multidimensional, and relatable people who experience love, loss, hope, and despair in equal measure. The storyline weaves together the modern-day life of the protagonist with the ancient history of the Andaman Islands, making it both a historical narrative and a contemporary tale of survival and reconciliation.

Themes and Motifs

One of the key themes of *Andaman* is identity - how people come to terms with who they are in the face of adversity, colonization, and the forces of history. Acharya highlights the tension between indigenous traditions and modernity, the erosion of cultural values due to external influences, and the longing for a lost way of life. Another major theme is survival and resilience. The characters are frequently placed in situations where they must survive against all odds, whether it be through natural disasters, colonial oppression, or personal trauma. The narrative reminds us of the human ability to endure and find meaning, even in the most challenging circumstances. Furthermore, the power of history plays a central role in the story. The novel sheds light on how the legacy of British colonialism and its impact on the indigenous tribes of the Andaman Islands is still felt today. The intricate narrative delves into the rich history of the region, from the historical significance of the islands as a penal colony to their modern-day challenges and cultural struggles.

Writing Style

Ratnadip Acharya's writing is both poetic and evocative, drawing readers into the harsh yet beautiful landscape of the Andaman Islands. His prose is filled with vivid descriptions that bring the setting to life - whether it's the lush greenery,

the remote beaches, or the historical ruins of the penal colonies, the natural beauty and haunting history of the islands are effectively captured. The pacing of the novel is steady, with occasional jumps in time, which may take the reader a moment to adjust to, but this narrative style adds to the mystery and depth of the story. The book's length (441 pages) might initially seem daunting, but the complexity of the narrative and the immersive experience make it well worth the read.

Character Development

The characters in *Andaman* are rich and compelling. The protagonist is a figure who struggles with his own personal demons while seeking a sense of purpose in a world that feels increasingly disconnected. His journey toward self-discovery, which parallels the story of the Andaman Islands, is touching and thought-provoking. The supporting characters - particularly the indigenous tribespeople - bring depth to the story. Acharya does a remarkable job of portraying them as more than just "victims" of colonialism; they are portrayed as resilient, proud, and full of life. This is crucial in humanizing the history of the Andaman Islands and avoiding the trap of one-dimensional portrayals.

Historical and Cultural Significance

One of the standouts features of *Andaman* is its portrayal of the Andaman Islands' history. Acharya delves into the often-overlooked colonial history of the islands, which were used as a penal colony by the British. The book also gives attention to the indigenous tribes, such as the Great Andamanese, Nicobarese, and Jarwa, whose ways of life were irrevocably altered by colonial contact and modern encroachment. This historical perspective is presented not just as a backdrop for

the novel, but as an essential element that shapes the characters and their motivations. The tension between modern India and the traditional lives of the islanders is depicted with great care and sensitivity.

Final Thoughts

Andaman by Ratnadip Acharya is a beautifully crafted and thought-provoking novel that intertwines historical fiction with contemporary themes. The author's ability to blend the personal with the historical, the emotional with the intellectual, makes this a highly engaging read. Whether you are interested in the history of the Andaman Islands, the effects of colonialism, or simply a rich character-driven narrative, *Andaman* offers something for everyone. Acharya's careful research, nuanced storytelling, and emotional depth make this book a powerful exploration of survival, identity, and the scars of history. The book is a poignant reminder of how places and people, shaped by their pasts, continue to evolve and resonate through time. Highly recommended for readers interested in historical fiction, cultural exploration, and human resilience.

Book Review
Reformative Explorations
11/2 (2025)
Pages 144 - 147

Prisoners Our Own Brethren

Fr Varghese Karippery and Sr Latika, SJB
PMI Publications, Bangalore 2001, 143

Sr Santan Nago FS

Overview

Prisoners Our Own Brethren is a compelling compilation that delves into the powerful theme of compassion and reform within the context of prison ministry. The book features 24 insightful chapters, authored by 20 individuals who have dedicated their lives to prison ministry, many of whom have been involved since its inception over 40 years ago. One of the editors, Fr. Varghese Karippery, the co-founder of Prison Ministry India, contributes four chapters to the work. The compilation serves as both a tribute to the prison ministry's impact and a call to action for continued support and understanding for prisoners.

Structure and Content

The book is structured with a Dedication, a Preface to the First Edition (1998) by Fr. Varghese Karippery, and a Preface to the Second Edition (2001) by Fr. Sebastian Theckanath, then the National Coordinator of Prison Ministry India. There is also an Acknowledgment by Sr. Latika, SJB, and the book concludes with a map detailing the prisons and connected departments across India, showcasing the vast network of institutions involved. The message at the heart

of the book is beautifully summarized by an excerpt from the second national gathering held in Delhi in 1995, as featured on the back cover: "Let us thank the Lord for His great love and share the joy of loving. It is a beautiful gift of God to take care of people – men and women in jail. It is something beautiful for God and is a real gift." – St. Teresa of Kolkata. The book emphasizes that while sin, crime, and violence must be condemned, the criminals themselves are human beings who still possess a heart deserving of mercy and love. As Archbishop Alan De Lastic reflects, "We can restore in them the image of God, which has been defaced… this, I feel, is the goal of Prison Ministry India. Let us not point fingers at those who are caught but remember that we too are sinners who have not been caught."

Themes and Insights

The central theme of *Prisoners Our Own Brethren* revolves around the Christian mandate to extend love and mercy to those imprisoned, not just in body but often in spirit. The book challenges the perception of criminals as mere offenders and asks readers to see beyond the crime to the person within. Prison Ministry India's goal is not just about rehabilitation but restoring the lost dignity of these individuals, reflecting the gospel message in Matthew 25:36, *"When I was in prison, you visited me."* The initial chapters lay a solid foundation for understanding the origins and evolution of Prison Ministry India. Fr. Varghese Karippery, in his opening chapter, underscores the ministry's commitment to healing hearts and offering prisoners not just physical freedom but emotional and spiritual liberation. He encourages readers to become "love bombs," exploding with mercy and compassion rather than judgment.

Fr. Francis Kodiyan's chapter further deepens the reader's understanding by exploring the emotional and spiritual challenges faced by those involved in prison ministry. He introduces various experiences of prison ministry: divine providence, the struggles of maximum inconvenience, and the unshakable faith, hope, and charity that form the backbone of the ministry's work. Fr. Jose Pullickal, now the Bishop of Kanjirappally, introduces a fresh biblical perspective, drawing from the Gospel of Luke to highlight the ministry's dynamic charism and its relevance today. The book also addresses the often-overlooked heroic nature of prison ministry. It highlights the experiences of those who devote their lives to this apostolate, acknowledging the difficulties they face while focusing on the transformative nature of the work. Prison ministry is shown to be not just a service but a divine encounter within the prison walls, where God's grace can heal the broken and restore dignity to the lost.

Moreover, *Prisoners Our Own Brethren* offers a compelling framework for understanding the reintegration of prisoners into society through the Three 'R' Theories: **Release, Renew, and Rehabilitate**. These concepts guide the restoration of prisoners both to themselves and society at large, emphasizing a holistic approach to justice and mercy. The last chapters of the book focus on rehabilitation centers, such as Snehashramam, Asha Deepam, and Jeevodaya Ashram, which provide crucial support to released prisoners and individuals in distress. These centers are shown to be a beacon of hope for those who have faced the despair of prison life, offering them a chance at a new beginning.

Cover Design and Symbolism

The cover design of *Prisoners Our Own Brethren* is both poignant and thought-provoking. It reimagines Michelangelo's famous fresco, *The Creation of Adam*, but with a powerful twist. One hand, red and reaching out from behind prison bars, symbolizes the incarcerated, while the other hand, glowing with light, extends from the outside, offering compassion and help. This visual encapsulates the central message of the book: to reach out to prisoners with love, empathy, and the hope of transformation. The imagery speaks to the mission of prison ministry—extending Christ's hand to those who are behind bars, reminding us that they are not outcasts but brethren in need of redemption and care.

Conclusion

Prisoners Our Own Brethren is more than just a book—it is a heartfelt call to action and a powerful testament to the transformative power of prison ministry. Through its comprehensive chapters, it invites readers to see prisoners not as criminals to be cast aside but as human beings in need of mercy, dignity, and love. The book serves as both a reflection on the deep spiritual value of ministering to prisoners and an encouragement to extend Christ's love to all, regardless of their past. The first-hand experiences and thought-provoking insights within these pages leave readers with a sense of hope and conviction, urging them to embrace the call to serve the forgotten and offer the healing touch of Christ to those most in need. *Prisoners Our Own Brethren* is an inspiring resource for anyone interested in social justice, Christian compassion, and the power of rehabilitation and forgiveness.

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Reformative Explorations

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Quarterly on Correction and Rehabilitation

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