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Is and Should True Christian Faith Today Be A Gift or a Sacrifice?

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Dear Archbishops, Bishops, Rev. Fathers, dear Rev. Sisters and Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ, the honourable delegates of this 10th PA of CBF,

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased and honoured to share with you a few points for consideration on the main theme of our Conference in the Asian point of View. The topic that is given to me is, “**Is and should true Christian faith today be a gift or a sacrifice?**”

The missionary mandate of Jesus sets the stage of our continuous life of proclaiming the Word of God (cf. Matt 28:16-20). The great commission of proclamation of Jesus was understood originally as a witness to all nations.¹ The missionary dimension of Jesus’ mandate is very well articulated and actively undertaken by St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9:16; Rom 12: 18-20), resulting in not establishment of churches (cf. 1 Cor 1:17) but leading people to ‘*metanoia*’ by giving a new meaning to life in Jesus Christ.² Leaving out the “crusading mind” aggressively converting others to form a separate world, but taking up the “crucified mind,” we proclaim the Gospel, as St. John the Baptist, “growing smaller” (cf. Jn 3:30) in taking up the harsh challenge of discipleship. The “crisis or scandal” of the Cross is not only seen in people’s misunderstanding of Jesus’ mystery of salvation, but also in our missionary endeavours of proclamation of Jesus Christ to others.³ It is worthwhile revisiting our prophetic proclamation in today’s fragile world.

¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33B, Dallas, 1995), 889.

² Karl Müller, *Mission Theology: An Introduction* (Styler Verlag: Netherlands 1987), 33.

³ Cf. L. Legrand, *Mission in the Bible* (Ishvani Publication, Pune 1992), xi-xii.

1. SETTING THE CONTEXT

I would like to point out briefly the fragility of the world of today before going to the main points,

1.1 Political Fragility

1.1.1 Hate and Divisive Nature

Hate seems to be the new currency of politics across the world and especially in Asia. Hateful aggression is being preferred over a courteous discourse between political opponents. In politics, jarring, crude, and unedifying, hate speech, incitement to violence and verbal intimidation have descended to depths that cast serious doubts about our collective ability to be civil and courteous in our public discourse.

1.1.2 Fundamentalist Nationalism

Today, political and social nationalism leans ever more towards fundamentalism or neo-nationalism that looks into one's own interest and gain and is not concerned with global reality. Conservatives and the right-wing populism are gaining ground and getting elected as ruling regimes in many countries, like Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy, recently. These right-wing nationalists are anti-environmentalism, anti-migrants, and anti-inclusivism. Racism and casteism are kept alive by these neo-nationalists. Irony is that most of them 'live' in the name of Jesus but conveniently forget his way of life.

1.2 Social Fragility

It is noted that Asia's recent past is littered with examples of shocking inhumanity against civilian populations.

We live in conflicting situations in the multi-religious context of Asia and the world at large. Fierce anti-Christian political and social uprisings, increasing menace created by the anti-ecological environment, displacement of migrants, religious fundamentalism and over-drawn secularism all over the world. This is in consonance with racism and similar divisions in other parts of the world.

1.3 Religious Fragility

Asia has been a cradle of major religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, and Sikhism. All religions are peace-loving. However, factors such as extremism, and religious fundamentalism create intolerance towards people of other religions. As a consequence, no dialogue becomes possible.

1.4 Fragility of the Christian Families and Ministers of the Word

Today, by and large, we, the ministers of the word lack religious fervour. The knowledge about our own faith is weak. Since there is no scope for catechism in schools, children don't grow in faith. Parents are not ready to spend time with children or accompany them in their faith journey.

The ministers of the Church, by and large, lack the missionary fervour that accompanies sacrifice and mercy, attracting many more to the life-style of the Gospel; it is rarely found or heard that they become "letters of Jesus Christ" for all to read and live. Homily, having "a quasi-sacramental character" (EG 142) is not often sufficiently scriptural and catechetical. Many a time, the homilist does not seem to help faithful to encounter the Bible and to grasp the beauty of God's Word in their life.

Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism, and other subtle forms of self-centredness.”⁴

1.5 Bogey of ‘Forced Conversion’

Although Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, indicating freedom to change one’s religion or belief.” However, nobody accepts forced conversion to any religion. Nevertheless, the bogey of ‘forced conversion’ is in the centre stage in countries like India, allocations are made, even ‘misquoting’ Jesus’ words that every Christian is bound to convert.⁵ In reality, no forced conversions happened in Christianity down through the centuries but this is true or not, this is the image the non-Christians have about us that we have to proclaim the Gospel; it is a duty imposed on us (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). There is zero tolerance to multi-religious nature of the world and zero commitment to freedom of religion.⁶

Besides the above, painful soil of natural calamities and the human-made pandemic has become a new ‘normal’ today. The society is lost in the virtual world, digitally dazed, immature in their judgements, prodded on by emotions, ready to be led by political wizards and twitter kings. The cyber-armies win. Blind surrender to the ‘Strong Man’ leads people down the blind-alley.⁷

In this murky situation of the fragile world, we must remember the facts of the proclamation of the Word today.

1.6 Faith: A Gift of God

Christian faith is a supernatural gift of God. Paul affirms this: “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). Our response to salvation is faith, but even that is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. Faith is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources. Faith brings salvation (cf. Rom 10:9) and if salvation would be in part by our own works, then we would have some ground to boast in ourselves. But Paul’s emphasis is that even faith does not come from us apart from God’s giving it. Human effort has nothing to do with it (cf. [Rom 3:20](#); [Gal 2:16](#)), and thus no one should boast, as if he/she contributed any part.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate*, 165.

⁵Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court in the case of alleged “forced conversion” of a girl student of a Christian missionary-run school in South India, on January 31, 2022, quoting Mt 28: 19-20 as Mission-mandate, saying “every Christian is bound to convert others.” Cf. *Frontline*, India’s National Magazine, Feb 25, 2022. On November 14, 2022, the two-judge bench of the Supreme Court consisting of Justice M.R. Shah and Justice Hima Kohli observed that forced conversions may “ultimately affect the security of nation and freedom of religion and conscience of citizen.” They alleged: “if forced conversions were not checked, Hindus would soon become a minority in India.” There could not be a bigger lie than this. Cf. Cedrick Prakash, *Indian Currents*, page 8, Vol. XXXIV, Issue: 48, November 2022.

⁶ Cf. John Dayal, “Hunted by Conversion Ghost,” *Indian Currents*, page 15, Vol. XXXIV, Issue: 48, November 2022.

⁷Cf. Thomas Menampampil, “Action, not Rhetoric, Matters,” *Indian Currents* (02 - 08 January 2023), 26. Cf. also, Stephen Alathara, “*Missio Ad Gentes: The Perennial Mission of the Church in India*,” *The Living Word* (April-June 2021), 129-131.

Scripture consistently teaches us that faith is not conjured up by the human will but is a sovereign gift of God. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” ([Jn 6:44](#)). And “No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father” ([Jn 6:65](#)). [Acts 3:16](#) speaks of “the faith which comes through Him.” [Phil 1:29](#) says, “To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake . . . to believe in Him.” And Peter wrote to fellow believers as “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours” ([2 Pet 1:1](#)).

2. FAITH: A SACRIFICE

Just like the Israelites who had to struggle in the wilderness for 40 years to humble themselves before God (Deut 8:3), we too have to go through varying degrees of **red sea experiences**, trials, pandemics, and crisis in our lives to be tested and tried for eternal life. God tests us in varying ways so that we emerge in purity and humility.

If we look back through our lives on earth, we see that our lives reflect the same kind of ‘**wilderness experience**’ that the Israelites went through, albeit in different degrees and forms. We realize that all the people who persecute and hurt us are instruments in the hand of God to help us get purified. Even when we go through these testing times, we see that God always gives us a helping hand to stay afloat and emerge a winner from these trials. God’s intervention here could be very subtle that we often fail to notice it.

How do we know that faith is God’s gift? Left to ourselves, no one would ever believe: “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God” ([Rom 3:11](#)). “So, it does not depend on the person who wills or the person who runs, but on God who has mercy” ([Rom 9:16](#)). That is precisely why when Peter affirmed his faith in Christ as the Son of God, Jesus told him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” ([Mat 16:17](#)). Faith is graciously given to believers by God himself. So, it is our duty to proclaim this faith to others (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 15:14; 1 Cor 9:16).

In this context how can be our proclamation of the Word of God? The Gospel model envisaged by Vatican II is:

2.1 *Missio Ad Gentes*

Vatican II states, even in our times the belief is that the Church, a pilgrim on earth, is necessary for salvation.⁸ However, the same Ecumenical Council believes that those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or the Church but lead a good life are not excluded from salvation.⁹ Here comes the emphasis on the intrinsic nature of the Church concerning its commitment to evangelisation and the duty of all the baptised to proclaim the Gospel.¹⁰ Throughout the centuries, this was the concern of the Apostolic Fathers. This is directed to the ‘*Propagation of Faith*,’ resulting in baptising the believers and establishing Christian communities.¹¹

⁸*Lumen Gentium* 14,1

⁹*Lumen Gentium*, 16

¹⁰*Evangelii Gaudium*, 14.4

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on mission in the world*, Pope Francis Message for World Mission Day 2019 October

Pope Francis declared October 2019 as the Extraordinary Missionary Month (*Baptised and Sent: The Church of Christ on mission in the World*) to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter: *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919). In the present world context, Pope Francis intends mainly to renew the faith and missionary commitment of the entire Church. He mentions the missionary formation/consciousness, which motivates us to "preach to all the world" (*ad gentes*). He motivates us by saying: "I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission." At this stage of history, there is a need to have a new paradigm shift in living Jesus' mission-mandate in 'mission' countries, like India and to venture a program of re/new evangelisation of the 'faithful,' as in the case of the so-called Christian countries. In fact, Paul wrote letters mainly to re-evangelise the already established Christian communities.

However, in the course of time, the term "mission" (spreading the Word) has become ambiguous. We also have to admit that this 'missionary propagation,' as Soares Prabhu notes, has led to some negative consequences like imperialism, colonialism, slave trade, paternalism, intolerance and lack of credibility.¹² Lucien Legrand has observed: "The word 'missionary' is so intimately associated with a savage, arrogant proselytism that its use has become altogether taboo."¹³ This is because we have taken the Markan version literally: "Go and preach" (Mk 16:15) and not the Matthean version: 'going, make disciples' (28:19) or the Lukan version: "Be my witnesses" (Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8). As noted by Simon Pinto, discipleship is both to follow and to be on a mission.¹⁴

This becomes a great challenge in this changed world. Realizing that our faith is not only a gift of God, it is also a sacrifice demanded of every faithful in proclaiming the Word. In this sense, with a mind of sacrifice, 'soiling the dust of the street,' we need to take up other ways and means of proclamation, such as:

2.2 Ad Inter-Gentes

No doubt, 'proclamation to all the people' (*ad gentes*), the original mandate of Jesus, is the source and strength of our missionary witness in a constantly changing world. Accordingly, the *mission to the nations* is to be carried out in today's context, especially in the suffocation of "anti-s" in a disturbed society, as a mission *among* the nations (*ad inter-gentes*), remembering that we 'are always missionary disciples.'¹⁵ Pope Francis has vividly proposed: "An evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.

"Evangelizers thus take on the 'smell of the sheep,' and the sheep are willing to hear their voice."¹⁶ Francis of Assisi, Fr. Damien of Molokai, recently Mother Teresa and many other missionaries proclaimed Jesus Christ through the Good News of love, mercy and forgiveness to those who do not

¹²Cf. Soares Prabhu, "Following Jesus in Mission Reflections on Mission in the Gospel of Matthew" ed. Isaac Padinjarakattu, *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today, Collected Writings of Fr. Soares Prabhu*, Vol.1 (Pune 1999), 35-36.

¹³ L. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality*, xii.

¹⁴Simon Pinto, "Discipleship: An Ecclesial Dimension," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections*, Vol. 81, No. 8 (Aug-2017), 176.

¹⁵*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

¹⁶*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

know Jesus (*ad extra*); motivated and strengthened the faithful in their faith-commitment to go ahead with a new vigour (*ad intra*).

Taking the exhortation of *Christus Vivit*,¹⁷ a broader understanding of the spread of the Word of God faster ‘among the people’ leads us to be among/with any individual or group of non-Christians or even anti-Christians as ‘the light of the world’ and ‘the salt of the earth’ with a heart for dialogue and understanding. “Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns.”¹⁸ Here there is no boundary of the region, language or ethnic/caste group; all are God’s children, and all need God’s love and mercy. Not vocal proclamation, but humanitarian service becomes the medium of mission ‘among the nations.’ As Pope Francis insists, any type of service to humanity, be it social, medical or educational, is the mode of evangelisation. In all our missionary activities, conversion of heart, as Mother Teresa said, and not necessarily membership of the Church, is the goal of the Christian mission.

Respecting other religions, honouring their traditions and cultures and having an on-going encounter with their way of life, our mission is enriched, and tension is not only eased but harmony is cherished. Inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism are effective tools of this mission: *ad inter-gentes*. Working for justice, peace and joy (cf. Rom 14:17), trying to uplift the poor and the oppressed, the migrants, displaced people and victims of sexual abuse in conflicting and selfish society should be the core concern of every baptised person, a true missionary ‘among the people.’

2.3 Missio Ad Vitam

Life-witness becomes a clear manifestation of our ‘carrying the Word of God’ to all. This can be classified into the following:

2.3.1 Proclamation by Attraction

Pope Francis invites every Christian believer to be a missionary in life. He calls it ‘proclamation by attraction,’ which can also be termed as a proclamation by the witness. The Kandhamal (Odisha, North India) victims/martyrs in 2008 are the Christians who proclaimed Jesus by attraction/witness. They were effective preachers by life. Doing my daily duties in my community, in the family, workplace, marketplace, or politics without any selfish motive, but bearing in mind that I am a disciple of Christ, is a mission ‘by attraction.’

This is in line with what Paul urged on the Roman Christians, “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). Much more than ‘door to door’ preaching or proclamation on public platform or media, a silent life of justice and love in society brings abundant fruit of an effective mission by life (*missio ad vitam*).

2.3.2. Proclamation by Witness

Jesus took upon himself all the challenges/conflicts of life for a mission. When he predicted his suffering and death, Jesus clearly said that he was setting his mind on divine things (Mt 16:23), that is, “to give his life for many” (Mk 10:45). The divine mission which he undertook to fulfil is not to live for himself but to “fall into the earth and die” (Jn 12:24) so that ‘he will draw all people to himself’ (Jn

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 25, March 2019, 177.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 203.

12:32). This motivation even in the difficult situation of shedding his blood-sweat at Gethsemane urged him to seek the will of God the Father (Lk 22:47).

And this missionary journey for him was not a compulsion or a painful process but a willingly-undertaken mission as he himself said: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (Jn 10:18). The missionary witness envisaged by the Church¹⁹ is given in many ways: through respect and love, understanding and acceptance of others as they are, and solidarity in efforts to accomplish all that is noble and good. As noted by Paolo Giglioni, “evangelical efficacy of witness surpasses all speech.”²⁰ “The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life.”²¹

Love and mercy always remain the “driving force and sole criterion of the mission.”²² As we find in the lives of so many saints, this missionary witness is the strongest “pull factor” for others to come to know Jesus and become partakers of His grace. This missionary lifestyle requires each of us to be conscious of our special duties, to get actively involved in forming Christian and human communities in the model of the early Church (cf. Acts 2 & 4), to be ready to take up hardships for the sake of establishing *Gospel values* in our surroundings in a climate of freedom and availability, and to show practical tenderness and preferential attention to/option for the poor and the sick.

2.3.3 Evangelical Witness

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount stands at the peak of his evangelical message, which ends in inviting us to follow not just himself, but the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:48). In all the previous 47 verses of chapter five of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus shows who the heavenly Father is: merciful, loving, forgiving, just and holy. Here he gives witness to the Father through his evangelical preaching. The nature of God the Father’s love and concern for the sinners, the sick and the despised are very well revealed by Jesus in his parables of the “Lost” (Lk 15). He said emphatically that whatever he says and does is from the Father (Jn 5:19-21) and thus gives a vivid witness to God the Father through his evangelical mission. His address to the Father is much more evident: “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you have given me to do” (Jn 17:4; 14). This evangelical mission and witness brought him severe challenges and conflicts, which he overcame with a spirit of martyrdom!

This Evangelic witness, as we find in the lives of so many saints (in particular, St. Francis of Assisi), is the strongest “pull factor” for others to come to know Jesus and to become partakers of His grace. This requires each of us to a particular lifestyle, being conscious of our missionary vocation, in the model of the early Church (cf. Acts 2 & 4).

2.3.4 Sacrificial Witness

It is indeed a well-known fact that the martyrs’ blood becomes the fruitful seed of spreading the Word of God. Martyrs are, par excellence, heralds and witnesses of the Gospel. From his Nazareth proclamation, we

¹⁹ *Ad Genets*, 5, 11; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21, 41; *Redemptoris Missio*, 42.

²⁰ Paolo Giglioni, “Evangelization Process: Kerygma to Local Church,” in Sebastian Karotemprel (ed), *Following Christ in Mission* (Bombay 1995), 147.

²¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20; *Verbum Domini*, 98.

²² *Redemptoris Missio*, 60.

come to understand that Jesus highlighted the adverse reception of the prophetic life: “No prophet is accepted in his own country” (cf. Lk 4:24). The essence of prophetic life is to warn against evil and encourage good, even to the detriment of one’s life: “I lay down my life of my own accord” (Jn 10:18). Albert Nolan observes: “Jesus was not willing to compromise by accepting the Messiahship and resorting to violence nor was he willing to tailor his words to suit the authorities. The only alternative was to die.”²³ This was Jesus, consecrated to the Father and committed to his mission to the point of death, even death on the Cross.

The Post Synodal Exhortation: *Verbum Domini* succinctly puts it: “The Church must go out to meet each person in the strength of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:5) and continue her prophetic defence of people’s right and freedom to hear the word of God, while constantly seeking out the most effective ways of proclaiming that word, even at the risk of persecution.”²⁴

We are aware of the great blood-martyrdom of Jesus at Calvary, nailed to the cross. A Roman soldier pierced his side (heart) and at once blood and water came out (cf. Jn 19:34). In the mind of the Romans and Jews this should have been a fatal blow to Jesus; but for Jesus it was a life-giving act to all his believers. Just as Adam’s rib (*pleura*) gave life to the formation of woman, Jesus’ broken rib gives to his believers sacramental life of baptism (water) and Eucharist (blood) that cleanses them of their sin and sustains them for a life of discipleship.²⁵ Here Jesus manifests his sacrificial witness by taking upon himself the role of ‘*the Lamb of God*’ who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:19). His ‘blood and water’ here signifies his spirit of compassion like the ‘living water’ flowing from Jerusalem (cf. Zech 14:8).

Jesus told the rich young man that discipleship costs (Mk 10:21). The cost of discipleship is steep. Indeed, many ‘faithful’ have chosen to walk away from God because of it. “The call to discipleship is all about the radical choices that one has to make in order to become a perfect disciple according to the heart of the Master.”²⁶ Pope Francis observed: “Ours is a Church of martyrs; they suffer, they give their lives, and we receive the blessing of God for their witness.”²⁷ In this respect, *Verbum Domini* underlines the need to discern the “signs of the times” present in history and not to flee from a commitment to those who suffer and the victims of varied forms of selfishness.²⁸

2.3.5 Prophetic Witness

Prophecy implies a certain abnormality beyond the ordinary. Jesus, the greatest prophetic witness, uttered forty-one times the “I am” sayings, as recorded in the Gospels. These evangelical sayings provoke transformation both in individuals and structures. The evangelical radicality gives credibility to the missionary witness. Prophetic missions in today’s society and, specifically in Asia, where tackling poverty, slavery of all sorts, and deprivation of rights are pushed aside by powerful trends of majoritarianism, nationalism and selfish hoarding of wealth, are launched with much magnitude and aptitude.

²³ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Mumbai 2007), 170.

²⁴ Pope Benedict, *Verbum Domini*, 95.

²⁵ Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to St. John, II* (New York 1970), 953

²⁶ Dominic Kaniyantharayil, *Discipleship: A Costly Choice* (Bangalore 2017), 17

²⁷ *Angelus Message*, 21, April 2015.

²⁸ *Verbum Domini*, 100.

However, it is evident, as in the case of Oscar Romero, the prophet of justice, Sr. Rani Maria, the angel of the downtrodden, Fr. Tom Uzhunnani, the suffering servant of the poor, and recently Fr. Stan Swamy, the sacrificial giant of the tribals, that prophetic witness costs as much as one's own life. Nevertheless, more than blood-witness, life-witness to social justice and love of the oppressed is an effective means of proclaiming the Gospel in today's context. This is in consonance with Pope Francis' call for "moving from our comfort zone in order to reach to the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel."²⁹

A fine proclamation of the Word need not necessarily lead one to give her/his physical life. In our service to the Word of God, we are often left to bear mental tortures, betrayals, false accusations, misunderstandings, prejudices, insults, or severe opposition to the works of justice/mercy, as in the case of St. Mother Teresa. Hardships come in various ways: temptations, illnesses, loss of jobs, broken relationships and persecution.

Also, a prophetic witness brings all sorts of mental and physical torture, not only by anti-forces in society, politics, religious movements and governments, but also by our 'own' people who share the same faith and vocation in religious communities. In short, the mission, therefore, is *the Gospel made alive*.³⁰ Word God, through our witnessing life, will intrude faster even into the 'hard soil' of humans.

CONCLUSION: FACING THE DEBACLE

We, the believers in God the Almighty, of course, might be depressed in such a continuous torture. We are even inclined to pray with the psalmist: "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'... How long, O Lord shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked glory?" (cf. Ps 94:2-4). Some of the early Christians became an easy prey to the torturous situation (cf. Acts 5:4; Rev 2:14) and some others would go in for a life of compromise for a 'peaceful' co-existence (cf. Rev 3:15). But at this stage of faith-challenge we are invited to follow in the footsteps of the heroic martyrs, like Justin the Martyr (+165), Charles Lwanga and his companions in Uganda (+1886) or Rani Maria in India (+1995). "They have conquered him (Evil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Rev 12:11).

In order to march forward, being proud of our faith, it is relevant to remember the prayer of Jesus: "The world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world" (Jn 17:14). Our love is inclusive. We love all even those who persecute us and we live in poverty of insecurity, but enrich all.

²⁹*Evangelii Gaudium*, 20.

³⁰L. Legrand, *The Word is Near You*, Vol. II (Bangalore 2002), 165.