***Nov.1, 2014***

*Medicine of Mercy, not Severity!*

Can’t Say: Neither do I Condemn you?

**Note: *“If you can’t say: “Neither do I condemn you”, as Jesus did, you in positions of power, have only one heavenly option left: just quit and get out of His Way, as Benedict XVI did to steal yourself into heaven like the good thief. Even if you are the 11th hour worker in the Vineyard, you will be given one dinar. Doors of heaven, our Father’s house, stay wide open always before you, in case you happen to be the worst prodigal in this world.” This is the conclusion of my prayerful reflections. None of you have to accept it, but you are welcome to it. Perfect freedom, perfect openness, perfect readiness to embrace every one deformed or crippled and perfect humility to take the last place are the sine qua non (things you can’t do without) for being a true follower of Jesus. If to think so, is to be biased, then I am. You may accept or reject the following reflections in the same vein.***

**dr.james kottoor**

**Family of Man** is seriously sick. It needs emergency treatment to save it from imminent death. Its ailments are too many to recount. Doctors who examined it in Rome agreed on most of the symptoms but could not, on three afflictions: 1.Gay and lesbian relations masquerading as families – claiming marital status as between man and wife, 2. Broken families floating as divorced ones – with new partners civilly recognised but not religiously, 3. Divorced without annulment and cohabiting with new partners.

These patients are all in the war-zone Field Hospital called the Catholic Church with its Chief physician, an Argentinean called Francis whose trump card is a generous medical mix of mercy and compassion with any and every treatment to achieve infallible healing. Recently he treated 20 couples – living together in a sexual mess -- with or without children, no legal bonds and outside church regulations but held together by the bond of what they call “love”. No questions were asked for blessing them and none raised any objections either. All went hale and happy.

Doctors under him treating families – all families’ not just Catholic families – are bishops and medical practitioners called pastors. At the two-week Rome Synod some 191 doctors examined 62 common sicknesses and reached consensus, meaning agreement by two-thirds called Super majority on all except three. The one-third or more who differed are asked to continue discussion to reach a possible hundred percent agreement in identifying illness and medication to be prescribed by next October 2015 latest, when a final call will be taken on each case. So they will have to start with the three most contested issues first. The first one among them is gay-unions which fell short just by two votes for two-thirds, reportedly. So the margin of “Nay”-Sayers is expected to disappear fast during the current year. Here those with opposing views are not aiming at reaching a balance of terror as between political power blocks on a war path but the bonhomie of a palliative nursing home exuding love and care

**Define Human Family?**

We are not here to define first what a “Family” is and then apply it to what constitutes a marriage and what marriages deserve to be called families etc. What we call human family is all inclusive: an aggregate of married, divorced, cohabiting to stay permanently or for a short period - a Noah’s ark if you like. Living together will not make it a marriage, said one of our cardinals on his return from Rome. But “If a same-sex couple has been in a relationship for thirty years, I can’t call that nothing…although it is not “all ok”, Pontier, the President of the French Bishops’ Conference said and added: I’ll be surprised if we don’t reach a consensus on the Synod’s final document. And Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich, President of the German Bishops’ Conference and a member of the 9-member Council of Cardinals said: “Exclusion is not the language of the Church!” So let discussion continue till Oct.2015, to see what types of unions of love pass for family. What is important to note here is that traditionalists and conservatives follow the top-down approach, while Francis and his field hospital group start from harsh ground realities -- bottom–up route -- saving the dying without wasting time checking minor things like cholesterol.

This is what Jesus also did. He was the WORD made flesh, but never wrote even a single word to define dogmatic prescription principles to start from. What comes from Jesus is the only valid route, and what is valid can come only from Jesus even if it is difficult for weak stomachs to digest because only he can write straight with crooked lines. Francis explained it beautifully when he said: “One, a temptation to hostile inflexibility that is, wanting to close oneself within the written word, (the letter) and not allowing oneself to be surprised by God.”

To the lady caught in adultery he said:“Woman has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you (Jn.8.11) Had Jesus met a divorcee, lesbian or cohabitant (he had met one at Jacob’s well), in a similar situation, what else could have been His response? That of the advocates of doctrine or discipline? The stick of severity or the caress of compassion and mercy? And whom are we supposed to follow, Jesus washing the feet of a traitor Judas, or a self-styled upright leader Peter rebelling and admonishing Jesus not to make cheap jesters? Jesus had to tell him: “You will understand later.” In an earlier similar instance he had to tell him point blank: “Get behind me Satan, your ways are not mine”. Was not Francis imitating Jesus when he answered journalists on the plane:”Who am I to judge?” about gays in the Vatican, searching for Gods mercy? Was Francis frankly admitting he was just an ignorant infallible idiot? Or was he boldly burying once and for all, the man-made doctrine of infallibility, manufactured to appear Jesus-like before man? Pope Innocent III, of the time of Francis of Assisi, did it when on his own he promoted himself from the then held title of “Successor of Peter” to the “Vicar of Christ” and finally ended up naked in a Cathedral, as I remember reading Theologian Hans Kung. Pride goes before an ignominious fall.

**No to Communion?**

 In spite of such glaring examples staring in the face, why are some of the Synod Fathers hesitating, dithering, nay on a war path, some saying: “Definite NO to communion,” think instead of the “doctrine of sacramental indissolubility” etc., while the other “Casualty Field hospital in a war zone” group say: “Save the dying from permanent death, admit them to Table fellowship with sinners, publicans and prostitutes?”

 For Jesus, for Francis, for Walter Kasper, for Bishop Johan Bonny of Antwerp, our God is God of Mercy and compassion who never “never tires of forgiving......it is we who get tired of asking forgiveness” (Pope). The first group of Synod Fathers who stay-put with their: NO, have also any number of supporters, including mighty cardinals and zealous lay groups. For example American Cardinal Raymond Burke (some called him the Ottaviani of this synod) reportedly said: Francis owes the world an apology by issuing a clear statement of Catholic doctrine. A Conservative American Catholic group called “Voice of the Family,” had earlier called the interim report a “betrayal,” and added: Kasper’s “medicine of mercy” had spread “sickness and disease.” The International Coalition of Pro-family Groups tore to pieces the detailed article of Bp.Bonny pleading for table fellowship for divorcees, saying among other things, he (Bonny)“gives no criteria for worthiness to receive Holy Communion, and ***no explanation how mortal sin*** could possibly be compatible with receiving Holy Communion.”

**Mortal Sin?**

That reminds me of what a crazy writer wrote demolishing MORTAL SINS and sins in general. “I still have to find that guy smart enough to commit a mortal sin in this world,” he wrote, “and win the priced price of a Hell in the next. For example what are the conditions for rating a sin mortal? They are three: 1.Grave matter, 2. Full knowledge and 3. Full freedom. Grave matter could be committing a murder in an attempt to rob a Crore of rupees or raping a girl one is infatuated with. Full knowledge: when one is busy weighing various crooked ways to succeed in a dastardly act, where is balanced mind to study and analyse inherent goodness or wretchedness of the act he plans to commit? Full freedom: How can there be any freedom in a person intoxicated with enjoyment of the dream of possessing a Crore or his paramour in his embrace? Also remember that no crime, however dastardly it is, is ever committed except under the aspect of the good it brings to the doer. In other words, no one embraces evil seen as evil or tasted as bitter. That is still the Catholic theology. So is it impossible for any one to commit a mortal sin?.

 But all of us, the best and worst of us, commit small and big mistakes and blunders, unknowingly or half heartedly like the little child trying to walk, and falls down many times, before it succeeds. Such falls can cause hurt, fracture or even death. But we don’t call them sins. We call them unintended mistakes, or costly blunders. Learning and making mistakes will come to a stop only when we die. So just forget about mortal sins. It is like calling a dog a bad name just to hang it.” One who wrote it was the Editor of New Leader some 40 years ago and he got a fitting rebuke from his then Archbishop but not a convincing explanation to prove him wrong. I for one still hold on to that view. Hence my staunch refusal to believe in a Hell. What other message is Francis giving by his “who am I to judge”? While he does not condone homosexual behaviour, in the end is he not saying that ***it’s up to God to decide what does and does not qualify as sinful behaviour?***

**Communion to Divorcees**

 Now think of the plight of many a divorcee. Before finding that out, we should first define: What is marriage? The best description I have come across is: “Union of Love in the service of Life,” that is, fulfilling Love flowering eventually, not necessarily, in a new life. How many marriages can claim to possess these two characteristics to the hilt? First, what are the marks of true love that never fails? One has only to read Cor.l, 13: “Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people’s sins but delights in truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes. Love does not come to an end.”

 If this is what love, Christian or otherwise means and should mean and ought to bind together a married couple, how can there be a broken marriage? Even the possibility of a breakup is to be ruled out if all these ingredients of love are present in every marriage. On the contrary if any or many of these ingredients are missing, hasn’t one to conclude that such a marriage is flawed at the very source? That may be why Francis said: “Many people, without really knowing what they are doing, get married without knowing what it means to get married and what it involves.” So half of the marriages are invalid, he is reported to have said. Another controversy in The Times, NY ,is that Francis permitted an Argentinean Lady living with a divorcee to receive communion.

 Factors that prompt one to marry are too many to list. Few of them are: sexual urge seeking fulfilment, falling in love at first sight, need of companionship among adults, mutual attraction based on beauty, personal traits like position, possession and other benefits and finally external pressure coming from parents and relations in arranged marriages.

 In spite of many objections to love marriages, normal course should be the love between two persons leading to marriage, not marriage leading and coaxing two to love one another. In the later instance marriage becomes a cage for a male-female pair to learn to fall in love. Where arrangements play major role, such marriages are to be discouraged. Even in so called ideal marriages, one may find many flaws. As for the second part of our definition:”***in the service of Life***”, three lives are contemplated, lives of existing partners and the life or lives of children they plan to bring into this world.

 But in today’s work culture, when one gives precedence to one’s career and while commercials are clamouring to them: “Say good bye to motherhood, until career is built up,” there is the compulsion to postpone or follow the Chinese model of one Child homes, for two reasons: it helps one to build up a fat bank balance, provided one has a good job, 2. Christians can boast they are following the ideal Nazareth Family of one child (Just forget for the moment some bishops giving awards to families with four or more children.) Forgive them for they know not, what they are talking. Just recall the comment: *“Celibate old males sitting in boardrooms, should not decide the fate of young couples in bedrooms.”*

**One Litmus Test for all?**

 The heart of the conflict is, some say, there should be a general rule on the basis of which each instance of divorce must be judged to see if their first marriage was valid or not because of the presence or absence of essential ingredients. The opposing group say every marriage is singular or exceptional and so will find itself like a square plug in a round hole when applied to man-made general rules. In fact according to Archbishop Marx of Munich “majority” of German bishops were for admitting divorcees to communion even long before Kasper made his position known and even before Francis was elected Pope. That discussion can go on endlessly. For me the overriding principle is totally different. It is the answer to the simple question: ***What is the biggest wonder of creation?***

 It is that no two individuals in this world are exactly the same: you are not like me and I am not like anyone else. No one’s dress will suit me. To make a long discussion short, no church court or civil court can sit in judgement over the validity or nullity of a marriage. The only court that can give a verdict with minimum margin of error is the honest commanding conscience of individuals concerned before God. To prevent anarchy in the field of marriage and divorce, what I could suggest is that divorced couples should be mediated to settle issues between them, by a religious or civil authority which is cost free, not time consuming but plays more an advisory role of a mother rather than the prescriptive or judgemental role of a court imitating the way Francis dealt with the 20 couples. Also let us remember all sacraments were man-made after the 3rd century and not God-made and so have to keep on changing, *change being the only unchanging law of nature*. Sabbath is for man and not man for Sabbath and who wrote the Bible: God? Jesus?

**Beautiful, Enticing & Convincing**

 Some of the very beautiful statements I read and readily agree with are the following: Life centred on Jesus will begin only when last are first in Christian communities, when serving the poor, sick, homeless, despised and marginalised become our first priorities. Church is the house of God where the doors are always open wide to the prodigal. In addition it is the emergency field hospital busy attending to the mortally wounded, not a mortuary to perform autopsies on the spiritually dead. Revere the church calling it holy, catholic, apostolic etc but don’t forget, whole of it, is made up of holy sinners (*santi peccatori*). Weren’t all the apostles sinful, cowardly deserters of Jesus in custody. Yet he chose them.

 What is truly of God: mercy or punishment? Gentleness and acting tough? Hence the call of John XXIII: go forward with the medicine of mercy, and the cry of Cardinal Kasper: “Name of our God is mercy.” To be graceful and merciful like Jesus, both rigourism and laxismare to be avoided; so too “hostile rigidity” of conservatives and “destructive good-will” of liberals.“ As for table fellowship, “communion should be withheld only in situations where we can visualise Jesus turning someone away from the table empty-handed and that is **NEVER**.” Let all argumentative theologians bent on finding out how many angels can stand on the pin point of a needle, put the above statements in their pipe and smoke it for one whole year!

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Published in: Alamaysabdam, Kerala, Indian Currents, Delhi, Matters India, Delhi, Daily News, NY, Joychenputhukulam, Chicago

On 5 November 2014 17:29, louis menezes <louismenezes@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mr. James Kotoor, a masterly piece. I am with you in everything you say. Do not be discouraged. More and more people are coming round to these positions and avidly read every word that Pope Francis utters. I am forwarding this to many friends.

In our own fraternity in Chennai, we keep on asking whether we are walking the path that Jesus expects us to walk. We know we fall short very badly. We also know that this cannot be corrected by our novenas, litanies, rosaries, pilgrimages and retreats. Nor by sermons. You have rightly brought out what position  Jesus  took in each difficult situation. That is what we should be doing.

Thank you for bringing Jesus into my heart and my home today. Warm regards. Louis

PS pl send me your phone number

**Alphonse Bernard** <alpho11228@yahoo.com>

Dear Dr Kottoor,

Your latest take on the theme of Pope Francis [Mercy over Punishment] makes a wonderful reading.

Perhaps I should call your reflections prophetic and provocative.

Every prophet in the Biblical tradition - from Isaiah to Amos, from Jeremiah to Joel-Jonah-John the Baptizer - dared to be provocative and subsequently prophetic.

A Christian prophet could is not man of lame words, singing the glories of the ruling party.

I am a regular reader of Almaya Sabdam and Puthukulam's magazine.

It is a pity that there is no counter Vaideeka Sabdam to sound your views loud and clear.

There is emerging a new and counter "pontificate" against Pope Francis in certain quarters of the United States. Many bishops, by being silent as they haven't nothing to say, are encouraging such

teachings.

Many hierarchs are boldly preaching counter messages. Many more lay members of the Church are becoming mini-popes. Media is full of them. Daily "blogs" are unfortunately becoming alternate Gospels, Letters, Infallible pronunciation and Encyclicals.

May be, that is a by-product of over-democratic journalism in the WEST!Catholics, non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, and non believers are part of this new teaching authority in the Church.

If a Church educates clergy exclusively in Canon Law with a subtle plot to ordain every one of them as bishops, surely such bishops can't have **non-canon-law-perspectives** on life.

The Franciscan Images of FIELD HOSPITAL or POOR CHURCH FOR THE POOR do not get into the heads of Capitalist market watchers.

Cheap unmarried men who have put on expensive ecclesiastical episcopal garbs have serious difficulty to listen to the anxious cries and existential needs of families.

Kindly continue to tell the King, "It is not right for you..."

I will pray that God spares your head/

Affection.

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