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THE MISSION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN PROMOTING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Abstract

Peace, reconciliation and mercy are the attributes of the Triune God. The Catholic Church's mission is to be the living sign of God's peace and reconciliation in the contemporary world, which is being torn apart by conflicts and strife. There is widespread unrest between nations, groups and individuals on various issues. Modern people are hoping against hope to see a world, where peace, reconciliation and mercy flourish. In this paper, we shall examine theologically the mission of the Catholic Church in promoting peace, reconciliation and mercy in the contemporary world. The primary resources for our study are Magisterial documents, documents of various Christian denominations and research of theologians in this field.

Keywords: Christianity, Conflicts, Peace, Religious Intolerance, Reconciliation

1. Introduction

Peace and reconciliation seem to be vanishing in the contemporary world. Conflicts and wars are on a rise in the world. The world community is longing to see the day, when nations and groups would renounce every form of violence and injustice. Even though it

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may seem to be naive to dream a utopian world, God has called and mandated the Church to be the living sign of the values of the Kingdom of God in this world. In this paper, we shall examine theologically the mission of the Catholic Church in promoting peace and reconciliation in three specific areas, namely, within (intra) the Church, between (inter) the Churches and in the world. For the purpose of our study we shall refer to Magisterial documents, documents of various Christian denominations and research work of theologians in this field.

2. Intra-Church

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like yeast that leavens the entire flour (see Mt 13:33). Yeast is small but has the potential to initiate a great change in the flour in which it is mixed. Further, this change, which it brings, is not instantaneous but gradual. It is a process. The Church too needs to be like the yeast in the society.¹ It needs to influence the society to initiate the process of eliminating all non-life giving elements and promote a culture of love and peace. The Church, which exists to promote the values of the Kingdom of God, needs to be the living sign of those values. Even though it may take eternity to see the reign of God flourish in this world, it is worth to work towards this goal.

Before the Church embarks to preach about peace and reconciliation in the world, it needs to practise that message in letter and spirit within itself. Jesus is the prince of peace, who reconciled the whole world through His Cross, Death and Resurrection (see Is 9:6, Rom 5:1). The Church needs to imitate Jesus to be the peace and reconciliation in the world. There are a number of issues, which the Church needs to look into to bring peace and reconciliation within the community. Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) notes that intra-Church conflicts are damaging the missionary work. He notes, "How many wars take place within the people of God and in our different communities. In our neighbourhoods and in the workplace, how many wars are caused by envy and jealousy, even among Christians."²

Conflicts arise within dioceses, parishes, monasteries and religious communities when some individuals or a group tries to usurp power

¹See Robert Baldwin & Galen Blom, *The Missing Church*, Mustang: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2010, 207-222.

²Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 105 (2013) 1019-1186. English version available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed on August 31, 2016), no. 98.

and authority in order to dominate over others. Sometimes these individuals and groups take recourse to spiritual talks on forgiveness, patience and unity to pacify the agitating people. The group that appeals for maintaining the status quo benefits the most. Some people, who enjoy power by manipulation, devise strategies to enjoy unhindered access to power. Their appeal to maintain peace, patience and unity is a garb to cover their misdeeds and a means to continue enjoying power. In such a situation, it would be absurd on the part of the Church authorities, to appeal to the victims to close their eyes to the gross injustice and abandon their legitimate struggle to seek justice. The Church, as the people of God, needs to address the problem directly without camouflaging it with artificial spiritual talk.³

For instance, the sexual abuses committed by the clergy need to be investigated thoroughly both by the local investigating agencies and the Church authorities.⁴ It would be better, if the Church authorities could include laywomen and men in the investigation committees to bring more transparency to the whole process. Under no circumstances, the Church should abdicate its responsibility to render justice to the victims. In the past, the Church hierarchy tried to hush up and cover the scandals by transferring the priests to other places. In order to maintain its prestige and image, at times, the Church hierarchy did not care to reach out to the victims and heal their deep-seated wounds. The Church hierarchy at times, gave priority to *deal* with the scandals by employing the best lawyers and seeking, out of court settlements. Would Jesus, the Lord of the Church do the same in such a situation? Jesus did not hesitate to chase the moneychangers out of the temple because He did not want His Father's house to be a marketplace (see Jn 2:13-16). The Church too needs to cleanse itself of all forms of evils by asking the guilty to take the responsibility for their actions and atone for their crimes. The Church hierarchy needs to take the extra mile to reach out to the victims and stand by their side in their fight for justice.⁵

The Church hierarchy is reserved to males. Thus, women have no place in the higher decision making process of the Church administration. This gender disparity creates conflicts in the Church.

³See Tara Klena Barthel & David Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion & Care*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012, 233-240.

⁴See Geoffrey Robinson, "Changing the Culture," in *Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church: A Decade of Crisis, 2002-2012*, eds. Thomas Plante & Kathleen McChesney, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011, 91-141.

⁵See Stephen Rossetti, *A Tragic Grace: The Catholic Church & Child Sexual Abuse*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996, 102-114.

Women generously contribute their skills, energy and resources for the good of the Church. However, the Church hierarchy keeps them out of internal administration of the Church. The Church hierarchy needs to devise means to bring structural changes within the Church institutions to render justice to women. The Church hierarchy needs to accept gratefully the important role, which the women play for the good of the Church.⁶

At times, there are conflicts within the Church because some people claim to be “*more equal*” than others are. If Church officials show favouritism to certain people because of their wealth or status in the society then it results into more conflicts within the Church.⁷ All humans have God’s image in them (see Gen 1:26). Thus, all have equal dignity in the eyes of God. In the Church too, there must be no space for discrimination. All are one in Christ. St James notes, “[D]o you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (Jas 2:1). In other words, those who claim to have faith in Jesus Christ cannot show partiality or favouritism. Most of the nations have framed legislations to ban discrimination based on caste, creed, status or gender. These nations may have the power to legislate. However, the tragedy is that they have no power to bring genuine conversion and change in human hearts. For instance, Indian constitution bans discrimination based on caste system. However, can we say that Indian society is truly free from all discriminations based on caste system?⁸ Partiality, favouritism and discrimination continue to breed rampantly in human societies in subtle ways. All the members of the Church need to reflect how they could claim to be different from those who discriminate if they themselves show partiality and favouritism. Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* (LS) condemns any sort of favouritism in the Church and the society. He observes that some people claim to be *more equal* than others are. He says, “In practice, we continue to tolerate that some consider themselves more human than others, as if they had been born with greater rights.”⁹

⁶See Mary Jo Weaver & David Brake, *Introduction to Christianity*, 4th ed., Belmont: Cengage Learning, 2009, 198-201.

⁷See Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry With Theological Praxis*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001, 180-186. See also Dag Heward-Mills, *Church Administration and Management*, Bloomington: WestBow Press, 328-329.

⁸See R.K. Purthi, *Indian Caste System*, New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2004, 161-166.

⁹Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si* no. 90, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclical/LS/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed, September 22, 2016).

The Church also needs to bridge the gap between the clergy and the laity.¹⁰ Before the Second Vatican Council, the Church looked upon the bishops and clergy as the spiritually elite. The Church considered the laity as worldly people. The Church hierarchy reserved the right to perform all the Church activities and administration. They did not encourage the laity to participate actively in the life of the Church.¹¹ The hierarchy expected submission from laity. However, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council strongly advocated the equality of all the baptized in the Church. They noted in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG) that,

By divine institution Holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity. For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another. Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: one Lord, one faith, one baptism; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.¹²

At times, the Church authorities are suspicious about people who do not agree with their views. They try to suppress dissent by any possible means. However, in the present times, with the rapid development of information technology, anyone can report in real time on internet forums about the misdeeds of the Church authorities. This can bring irreparable damage and harm to the Church. Thus, the Church authorities need to be open to healthy debates, discussions and dissent. Pope Francis too encourages diverse opinions in the Church. This is because debates and discussions have the potential to bear positive fruits. Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* strongly criticizes the witch-hunt tactics adopted by some Church authorities to suppress the truth or voices of dissent. He notes that,

¹⁰See Reginald Alva, "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement & Laity," *New Theology Review* 28, 1 (2015) 39-45.

¹¹ Anne Hunt, "A Council for the Laity? The Vision of Vatican II in Empowering the Lay Faithful," in *The Great Grace: Receiving Vatican II Today*, ed. Nigel Zimmermann, London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015, 37-56.

¹²Conciliar Document *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed, September 7, 2016).

It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act?¹³

Pope Francis envisions a Church, which welcomes dissent and differences. In his address to the youth of Paraguay on July 12, 2015, he appealed them to create *ruckus*.¹⁴ In other words, Pope Francis asked the youth to take the lead to revitalize the Church by prudently criticizing the unhealthy structures within the Church organization and working for the internal purification of the Church. Pope Francis appealed to the youth to shine as beacons and propel positive change of the Church structures. He had echoed similar thoughts, when he addressed the youth in Argentina on July 25, 2013. He noted that the youth needed to take the Church, out to the streets and not allow it to become complacent. He urged the youth not to allow the Church institutions to turn into NGOs. He said,

But I want you to make yourselves heard in your dioceses, I want the noise to go out, I want the Church to go out onto the streets, I want us to resist everything worldly, everything static, everything comfortable, everything to do with clericalism, everything that might make us closed in on ourselves. The parishes, the schools, the institutions are made for going out ... if they don't, they become an NGO, and the Church cannot be an NGO.¹⁵

As noted above, Pope Francis appeals to all Christians, especially the youth to participate actively in the Church activities to spread the values of the gospel. On the other hand, Pope Francis calls upon the Church authorities to be agents of peace, reconciliation and mercy. If the Church authorities lack mercy then all their lofty preaching about mercy and reconciliation may be in vain. Therefore, Pope Francis notes in *Misericordiae Vultus* that the Church needs to proclaim mercy and become a living witness of God's mercy:

The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the

¹³EG, 100.

¹⁴See Francis, *Meeting With Young People of Paraguay*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150712_paraguay-giovani.html

¹⁵Francis, *Meeting With Young People of Argentina*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130725_gmg-argentini-rio.html (accessed September 2, 2016).

great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ. The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹⁶

Thus, the entire Catholic Church, as people of God, needs to take the right steps to bring peace and reconciliation within the Church. If the Church can be an authentic witness of the values of the gospel then it can greatly influence all others to work for creating harmony and reconciliation in the world.

3. Interchurch

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church initiated a constructive dialogue with other Christian denominations. In 1960, Pope John XXIII established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in order to initiate dialogue with other Christian denominations and work together for spiritual unity. In 1966, Paul VI confirmed the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as a permanent dicastery of the Vatican. In 1988, Pope John Paul II changed the Secretariat to Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity organizes official theological dialogues with other Christian denominations.¹⁷

One cannot deny the goodwill on the part of the Catholic Church to engage with other Christian denominations. However, the long history of conflicts between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations created divisions, which are very difficult to bridge. The wounds of the past continue to haunt even up to the contemporary times. Thus, mere issuing of documents would not help to heal the wounds of conflicts. There needs to be real dialogue between the faithful of the different denominations at practical level.¹⁸

Conflicts and divisions among Christians tend to become a big scandal in the world.¹⁹ Love, peace and forgiveness, which are the basic tenets of Christianity, seem to be defeated, when Christians

¹⁶Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* no. 25, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html (accessed, September 1, 2016).

¹⁷History of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_pro_20051996_chrstuni_pro_en.html (accessed September 26, 2016).

¹⁸Edward Idris Cassidy, "Ut Unum Sint in Ecumenical Perspective," in *Church Unity and the Papal Office*, ed. Carl Braaten & Robert Jenson, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, 10-26.

¹⁹ Conciliar Document *Unitatis Redintegratio* no. 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (accessed, September 26, 2016).

belonging to different denominations fight with one another, because of differences in doctrines.²⁰ Thus, the Catholic Church has the tremendous responsibility to promote genuine ecumenical unity among Christians belonging to different denominations. Catholics need to pray everyday to the Holy Spirit for spiritual ecumenism.²¹ No human effort alone has the power to bring transformation of heart. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent to change people's heart and mind to engage in fruitful ecumenical dialogue. Pope Paul VI emphasised in his address to the members of the Secretariat for Christian Unity that Christians need to take the help of the Holy Spirit to promote ecumenical dialogue. He said, "If there is a case where our human effectiveness is powerless to achieve a good result and shows itself mainly dependent on the mysterious and powerful Holy Spirit, then that is surely that of ecumenism."²²

Further, Catholics need to endeavour to promote spiritual unity and not uniformity among all Christians.²³ It would defeat the purpose of the ecumenical dialogue, if there were hidden motives to prove that one's own denomination is better than the other is. Such motives can create obstacles for genuine dialogue and breed more conflicts among the Christian denominations. The aim of dialogue needs to be spiritual union of Christians in order to bear witness to their Christian faith. Pope Francis too pointed out in his homily that unity does not mean uniformity. He stressed that the Holy Spirit bestows diverse charisms for the growth of the Church:

[T]he Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, which is not the same thing as uniformity. Only the Holy Spirit is able to kindle diversity, multiplicity and, at the same time, bring about unity. When we try to create diversity, but are closed within our own particular and exclusive ways of seeing things, we create division. When we try to create unity through our own human designs, we end up with uniformity and homogenization. If we let ourselves be led by the Spirit, however, richness, variety and diversity

²⁰See Kyriaki Avtzi, "Ecumenism as Reconciliation," in *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, ed. Robert Schreier & Kund Jørgensen, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013, 30-36.

²¹*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 8. See also Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today*, London: Burns & Oates, 2004, 155-171.

²²Paul VI, "Address to the Members of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, April 28, 1967," *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. 5, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1967, 193. Original text in French is as follows: S'il y a une cause où notre efficacité humaine s'avère impuissante à atteindre quelque bon résultat et se révèle essentiellement dépendante de l'action mystérieuse et puissante du Saint-Esprit, c'est bien celle-là, celle de l'œcuménisme. [Translation mine].

²³Michael Kinnamon, *The Vision of the Ecumenical Movement & How It Has Been Impoverished by Its Friends*, St Louis: Chalice Press, 2003, 51-64.

will never create conflict, because the Spirit spurs us to experience variety in the communion of the Church.²⁴

If Christians belonging to diverse denominations could come together to discuss the global issues like social justice, peace, economic equity and environmental concern then they could collectively work for resolving conflicts and promoting reconciliation. Thus, ecumenical dialogue is an important forum to bring all like-minded Christians to engage with global issues.²⁵

Ecclesial movements like the Catholic Charismatic Movement, Focolare, Community of Sant'Egido and others have greatly contributed to promote healthy ecumenical dialogue with other Christian denominations.²⁶ The Church authorities need to take the help of these movements as their spiritualities have many common features with the other Christian denominations. These ecclesial movements are doing a lot of work on the practical level of ecumenical dialogue. For instance, some Pentecostal pastors from other Christian denominations supported the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, which started in U.S. in 1967.²⁷ Similarly, in Japan too, Pentecostal pastors joined the Catholic Charismatic prayer groups.²⁸ In other countries too, Catholic Charismatics and Pentecostals/Charismatics belonging to other Christian denominations come together to pray. In some places, such ecumenical groups draw strength from their joint prayers services to work for the poor, the weak and the disabled.²⁹

Ecumenical reconciliation and dialogue can greatly help Christians, especially in places where they are in minority. For instance, in Japan, Christians form 1% of the total population. Prior to the World War II, Japanese government suppressed Christianity. Christians faced

²⁴Francis, "Homily, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Istanbul, November 29, 2014," http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141129_omelia-turchia.html (accessed, September 12, 2016).

²⁵See Norman Dow, *Christian Law: Contemporary Principles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 279-283.

²⁶See Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance and Issues*, Hyde Park: New City Press, 2011, 161-172. See also Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism & Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate*, New York: Paulist Press, 2005, 98.

²⁷See Susan Maurer, *The Spirit of Enthusiasm: A History of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 1967-2000*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2010, 23-35.

²⁸See Reginald Alva, *Spiritual Renewal In Japan: Journey of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement*, New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2015, 32-42.

²⁹See Marjo de Theije, "Cebs & Catholic Charismatics in Brazil," in *Latin American Religion in Motion*, ed. Christian Smith & Joshua Prokopy, New York: Routledge, 2005, 106-120.

persecutions and difficulties to practice their faith. Even though after the war, there are no restrictions on preaching Christianity, the rapid pace of secularization has depleted the space of religions in the society. If Christians (Catholics and Christians of other denominations) want to promote the values of the gospel in the society then they need to come together and put aside all their differences. They need to explore ways to resolve tensions and seek reconciliation. In Japan, ecumenical dialogue has taken firm roots. Chitose noted in *The Japan Christian Yearbook*,

Having experienced the oppression of the Church during the war, Japanese Christians have learned that the individual Christian has need of other Christians, and that he can have fellowship with other Christians through the mediation of Jesus Christ. The wartime experience fostered the realization that the consciousness of brotherhood in Christ is stronger than that of denomination. The conscious and unconscious recollection of the wartime experience constitutes an important contributing factor to the ecumenical movement in Japan.³⁰

Thus, the Catholic Church needs to promote reconciliation with other Christian denominations by seeking genuine dialogue and openness to the working of the Holy Spirit.

4. Church's Mission in the World

Most of the major religions in the world preach and promote peace and reconciliation. However, history teaches us that religions were also the driving force behind many wars. Even presently, there are individuals and communities who use religious ideologies to spread terror and panic in the society. Sunanda Shastri and Yajneswar Shastri note the irony of religions, which preach peace but eventually end up promoting ideologies, which trigger wars:

Every [religious] tradition in the world talks about peace. This talk of love for peace has been going on for thousands of years but, in spite of it, human history tells us that in every tradition there have been wars. War is not advisable, but preparation for war is going on everywhere. The whole world wants peace, yet the whole world prepares for war.³¹

The Church too, indulged in wars in the past and cannot absolve itself of this scandal. Nevertheless, the Church has a unique mission to be the living symbol of peace and reconciliation in the world.

³⁰Kishi Chitose, "The State of the Ecumenical Movement in Japan," in *The Japan Christian Yearbook 1969-1970*, ed. Ryokzo Hara, James Colligan & Lan Macleod, Tokyo: Kyo Bun Kwan, 1970, 177.

³¹Sunanda Shastri & Yajneswar Shastri, "Ahimsa & the Unity of All Things: A Hindu View of Non-Violence," in *Subverting Hatred: The Challenges of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, ed. Daniel Smith-Christopher, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007, 81.

In the Pre-Second Vatican Council period, the Church looked down upon the laity and considered them as worldly. The hierarchy in particular considered themselves as spiritually elite. However, after the Second Vatican Council, the Church Fathers appealed to all Christians, especially the clergy not to label all the laity as secular.³² On the other hand, they asked all the Church members to introspect and rectify their internal weaknesses. Mitchell observes in her study on Paul's letter to Corinthians that disunity and differences were tearing the Church in Corinth. In order to remedy this situation, Paul wrote the first letter to Corinthians to make them aware of their internal problems. She parallels the problems of the Corinth Church with the problems of the present day Church. She argues that the Church cannot take a moral high standard and needs to learn lessons from the Church in Corinth. She further says that the Church should not see evil only outside its domain but also take courage to recognize its own failures.³³ Thus, when the Church seeks to promote peace and reconciliation in the world, it does not do so because it is better than others are but rather it realizes even more the need for peace and reconciliation because of its own weaknesses.

The Church is not merely an NGO but a spiritual agent in the world. Her primary function is to awaken people's conscience to realize their true self and seek the presence of God. Pope Francis notes on the nature of the Church's mission in Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) as follows,

[T]he Church's mission is not political in nature. Her task is to open the world to the religious sense by proclaiming Christ. The Church wishes to be the sign and safeguard of the human person's transcendence. She must also enable people to seek the supreme truth regarding their deepest identity and their questions, so that just solutions can be found to their problems.³⁴

The Church realizes her mission to preach forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, which Jesus has gifted to the humanity. Thus, when Church recommends forgiveness and reconciliation as a way forward to break barriers among individuals and communities, it is not

³²See Conciliar Document *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1, 2, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed, September 21, 2016).

³³Margaret Mitchell, "Paul's 1 Corinthians on Reconciliation in the Church: Promise & Pitfalls," *New Theology Review* 10, 2 (1997) 39-48.

³⁴ Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 23, https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf (accessed, September 27, 2016).

because the one who forgives is great or morally superior. When one forgives the other, it is out of the realization that every person including him or her, errs in life and is in need of forgiveness.³⁵ Jesus summed up the Christian teaching about forgiveness in the prayer that He taught His disciples. “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us” (see Lk 11:4). When Christians forgive, they need to look upon Jesus as their model, who emptied Himself on the Cross and forgave all those who tormented Him (see Phil 2:3-11). Even though Jesus was without any fault, He suffered for the good of all (see 2Cor 5:21). How much more Christians, as weak human beings who themselves are in need of forgiveness and mercy need to forgive others. For instance, the presence of the Catholics in Nagasaki, Japan was instrumental in helping the people of Nagasaki to forgive those who dropped the atom bombs in Nagasaki. Even though the Japanese condemned the atomic bombing, devout Catholics like Dr Nagai and others chose to forgive their perpetrators, because they accepted that Japan too had inflicted attacks on others and was in need to ask forgiveness.³⁶ Thus, the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven are on the same level. Pope Benedict XVI noted in his Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* that when one forgives, he or she realizes that there is no one who is not in need of God’s forgiveness. All wound others sometime or the other and similarly, all get hurt by others sometime or the other. Thus, all are in need to forgive and receive forgiveness. Pope Benedict XVI noted, “Divine justice indicates to human justice, limited and imperfect as it is, the horizon to which it must tend if it is to become perfect. Moreover, it makes us aware of our own poverty, our need for forgiveness and for God’s friendship.”³⁷

The forgiveness and reconciliation, which the Church preaches is not artificial forgiveness wherein people verbally express forgiveness without any accompanying actions.³⁸ Pope Francis noted that the way to forgiveness is through prayer. Genuine prayer for the other helps to initiate the process of forgiveness and healing. He says, “To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in

³⁵See Célestin Musekura, *An Assessment of Contemporary Models of Forgiveness*, New York: Peter Lang, 2010, 137-188.

³⁶See Susan Southard, *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War*, New York: Viking, 2015, 164-202.

³⁷Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, no. 25, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html (accessed, August 23, 2016).

³⁸See Robert Schreiter, “Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Twenty-First Century Mission,” in *Fullness of Life for All: Challenges for Mission in Early 21st Century*, ed. Inus Daneel, Charles Van Engen & Hendrik Vroom, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, 191-200.

love, and an act of evangelization. Let us do it today. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love."³⁹

Further, forgiveness is not instantaneous. It is a process.⁴⁰ Even though there are no fixed time intervals for forgiveness, the degree of forgiveness largely depends on the healing of wounds in the inner realm of a person. Pawlikowski says that human beings cannot erase the painful memory like machines. It is a process, which needs time and healing:

Reconciliation is not a question of simply striking the 'delete' button on a person's or people's memory bank. While it might involve a certain measure of 'letting go,' authentic reconciliation cannot occur until a certain measure of personal and group integration of the injury or atrocity is achieved. There is no 'cheap' reconciliation any more than there is what the late Paul Tillich termed 'cheap grace.'⁴¹

The contemporary world is facing war like situation in many places because of differences of ethnicity, religion, creed, nationality and societal status. In such a situation, perpetrators are harming many people physically, emotionally, economically and spiritually. It would be difficult for the Church to urge the victims to forgive their perpetrators, without seeking justice for the wrong done to them. Thus, there is need of, what some scholars call, *restorative justice*.⁴² Howard Zehr, a distinguished professor who is involved in justice and peace building in the world, defines restorative justice as follows, "Restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms and needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible."⁴³

Thus, when the Church appeals to the victims to forgive their perpetrators and seek reconciliation, it should also seek justice for them. In some cases, the perpetrators consider the Christian virtues of forgiveness and charity as a sign of weakness and take undue advantage of Christian victims. For instance, in 2008, the fundamentalist groups belonging to the majority religion persecuted

³⁹EG, no. 101.

⁴⁰See Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spiritualities & Strategies*, New York: Maryknoll, 1998, 63-66.

⁴¹John Pawlikowski, "Reconciliation: An Imperative for Our Time," *New Theology Review* 10, 2 (1997) 3-5.

⁴²See Pierre Allard & Wayne Northey, "Christianity: The Rediscovery of Restorative Justice," in *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, ed. Michael Hadley, New York: State University of New York Press, 2001, 119-141.

⁴³Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, Intercourse: Good Books, 2014, 40.

innocent Christians in Kandhamal district of the state of Odisha, India.⁴⁴ In such a scenario, it would be inhuman to expect the victims to forgive without getting justice. It is here, the Catholic Church as one of the biggest organizations in the world, needs to stand in solidarity with the poor victims. Many of the victims lost their dear ones, houses and means of livelihood. The Catholic Bishops and faithful from all around the world need to appeal to the United Nations, governments of their respective nations to exert pressure on Indian government to render speedy justice and compensate adequately all the victims. It is only when the Church stands in solidarity with the victims to seek justice, can it appeal to the victims to begin the long yet important process of forgiveness and healing. Violence would only breed more violence. Hence, the path of forgiveness and reconciliation is the only path for gifting the future generations an era of peace.

The Church also has a great task to appeal to all people to seek reconciliation with the environment. The world community needs to respect and protect the earth, which is our *common home*.⁴⁵ Greed for more and consumerism are systematically destroying the eco-systems.⁴⁶ The rich and the powerful exert pressure on lawmakers to formulate laws and policies, which give them a free hand to destroy the environment in the name of progress and industrialization. Rapid industrialization and deforestation has damaged the traditional socio-cultural fabric of those places. This has led to mass displacement of poor people resulting in immigration within their countries or abroad. It has also led to destruction of environment and bio-habitats of animals. The whole creation is crying desperately for restorative justice. Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* has enumerated a number of steps, which the Church, all religions, political leaders, environmentalists and economists need to take in order to stop the disfigurement and exploitation of our planet. Christians in particular, need to take heed of the Pope's appeal to develop integral ecology. Pope Francis seeks genuine integral ecological approach, which serves the interests, both of the environment and the weak. He observes, "Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the

⁴⁴See Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia*, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012, 149-172.

⁴⁵LS, no. 1.

⁴⁶See Michael Carley & Ian Christie, eds., *Managing Sustainable Development*, 2nd ed., London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2000, 93-102.

environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."⁴⁷

Thus, the Church has a tremendous task of conscientizing the people to confront the unjust political, economical and social structures, which are systematically trampling the weak, the poor, the disabled and the environment. Along with seeking justice and harmony in the society, the Church also needs to make people aware of the great need to forgive, reconcile and foster peace in their hearts, families, neighbourhood and society at large.

5. Conclusion

The Catholic Church, right from its beginning promoted peace and reconciliation in the society. Even in the midst of constant persecutions, Christians give witness to their faith through love and forgiveness. However, the Catholic Church as an institution needs to introspect, to weed out the unhealthy things, which block peace, unity and reconciliation within the Church. Further, the Catholic Church also needs to build bridges with other Christian denominations and make them partners in promoting its mission of peace and reconciliation. The Catholic Church also needs to be the living sign of peace and reconciliation in the world. When the soldiers were on the verge of arresting Jesus, His disciples wanted to resort to violent means to stop it. However, Jesus replied, "No more of this" (Lk 22:51). Thus, the Catholic Church too has formidable task of saying "No more of this," when there are power conflicts and scandals within the Church. The Church needs to say "No More of this," when Christians belonging to different denominations try to pull down each other and scandalize Christianity. The Church also needs to have the courage to say, "No More of this," when power mongers try to destroy the dignity of human persons, breed economic disparity, cause wars and destroy the environment. The Catholic Church has the great challenge and obligation to initiate the process of peace and reconciliation within itself, among other Christian denominations and in the world.

⁴⁷LS, no. 49.