

The Spirituality of a Diocesan Priest

Noel Sheth SJ

Dept of Indian Studies, JDV, Pune 411014

Abstract

A diocesan priest has often been considered inferior to a religious priest. The Second Vatican Council neglected the diocesan priest to a large extent. In this article the author pays attention first to those means that are more characteristic or more appropriate to the specific spirituality of a diocesan priest, and then takes up some common spiritual means to holiness which have a particular application to diocesan priests. Finally, the author mentions certain aspects of Indian spirituality that would help diocesan priests in India to be more inculturated. The diocesan priest is truly called to the challenging, even heroic, task of bridging the two poles of the sacred and the secular, of prayer and work, grace and effort. He resolves this polarity by becoming a contemplative in action, by surrendering himself to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and at the same time spending himself in selfless pastoral service of the people entrusted to him. His is a secular spirituality that does not keep the two poles juxtaposed in a happy balance, but that rather brings about a total compenetration of the two poles, so that prayer and action become but two aspects of the same total dedication and service. He does this by configuring himself to Christ who also united together the two poles of the sacred and the secular, the divine and the human.

Keywords

Secular spirituality, incardination, inculturation, Indian spirituality, evangelical counsels.

I. Introduction

For many centuries it has been customary to speak of the specific charism or spirituality of different religious

congregations, but the reference to a specific spirituality for diocesan priests is a rather recent phenomenon. There is of course a spirituality of the priesthood common to all priests, but it is not uncommon for people to wonder whether there is a spirituality that is specific to a diocesan priest (D'Souza 1994: 738). In fact, a diocesan priest has often been considered inferior to a religious priest (Ponnore 1998: 1-2). In this context it is worth noting that, even though the Second Vatican Council opted to use the term "diocesan" instead of "secular" – which in the eyes of many had a pejorative meaning – it neglected the diocesan priest to a large extent. Except for *Optatam Totius*, which basically deals with the training of diocesan candidates to the priesthood, Vatican II has no document exclusively dealing with the diocesan priest. While it makes just a few cursory remarks on the diocesan priesthood in a couple of places, it has whole documents on the bishops, the religious and the laity. Moreover the post-Vatican synodal and post-synodal documents too pay scant attention to the diocesan priesthood as such, even if they deal with the ministerial priesthood in general, i.e., with both religious and diocesan priesthood. Diocesan priests thus appear to be a neglected lot in the official Church documents (Ponnore 2001: 523-524).

In this article we shall pay attention first to those means that are more characteristic or more appropriate to the specific spirituality of a diocesan priest, and then we shall take up some common spiritual means to holiness which have a particular application to diocesan priests. Finally, we shall briefly mention certain aspects of Indian spirituality that would help diocesan priests in India to be more inculturated.

II. Incardination: The Specific Characteristic of Diocesan Priests

The Pastoral Guide for Diocesan Priests in Churches Dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (henceforth abbreviated as *Pastoral Guide*) says, "The priest becomes specifically *diocesan* by his incardination in a diocese,

in which he remains united to the bishop by a new title and is placed in a special way at the service of the particular *communio* which is the diocese. As a diocesan priest, he is called to build up communion between the members of the local community, and also to enlarge it through the evangelization of those who are still outside” (3). Furthermore it asserts, “Diocesan priests find their specific spirituality by living this reality [the special call of ministerial priests to sanctity] in pastoral charity, in communion with their bishop as successor of the apostles, forming a priestly family in the ‘presbyterium’, at the permanent service of the local Church through incardination, and available for the mission of universal salvation” (19). Incardination is not a mere juridical or organizational need, but implies spiritual attitudes and actions which spell out the specific spirituality and pastoral mission of the diocesan priest in the socio-cultural context of his particular diocese (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 31). The various aspects of the spirituality of the diocesan priest hinge on this specific characteristic of the diocesan priest’s incardination in a particular church, in which the universal Church is concretely present. The diocesan priest’s incardination in a particular diocese involves a relationship with the bishop of the diocese, with the presbyterium and with the people of the diocese.

(a) Relation with the Bishop

The diocesan priest is in communion with his bishop since he is the pastor of the particular church in which the diocesan priest is incardinated. Loyal attachment to, and generous cooperation with, his bishop helps the diocesan priest to grow in sanctity (*Lumen Gentium*, 41). His relationship with his bishop is hierarchical¹ as well as spiritual. Accepting in his bishop the authority of Christ the Supreme Pastor, he cooperates with him in a spirit of obedience, respect and love. This relationship between the priests and their bishop is based on faith and is strengthened through respect for each other’s roles and through mutual trust, and friendly and brotherly love (*Pastoral Guide*, 5). It is only through communion with his bishop that the diocesan

priest can meaningfully exercise his priestly ministry in his diocese. Although all priests, whether diocesan or religious, are associated through their ordination and ministry with the bishops (*Lumen Gentium*, 28), the diocesan priests have a special relationship with their bishop, cooperating with him in the building up of the particular community in which they are incardinated. They collaborate with him more than the religious do, and they have a greater solidarity with the diocese and the diocesan structures. This relationship between the diocesan priests and their bishop develops a deeper faith, hope and love in both of them (Ponnore 1998: 258-259).

(b) Relation with the Presbyterium

Sharing in the one common ordination and mission, all priests are united with the one brotherhood of the presbyterium. This should result in mutual support that is holistic – spiritual, material, personal and pastoral – and in loving collaboration in the Lord’s vineyard (*Lumen Gentium*, 28). Living in a community of caring and loving priests can be a great help to one’s spiritual and psychological growth, through mutual encouragement, friendly advice, brotherly love and understanding forgiveness. Priests’ Associations too can be very beneficial to the member priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8). A diocesan priest is of course particularly united with the priests of his own diocese. In addition to being mutually helpful, this brotherly love among priests is a powerful witness of Christian love to the people in the diocese (Ponnore 1998: 260).

While the importance of community life even for diocesan priests is highlighted in more recent Church documents, it should be pointed out that it is nevertheless not an absolute requirement, but a strong recommendation (*Pastoral Guide*, 26). Religious, on the other hand, are expected to live in communities. Even when religious are staying alone due to circumstances, they are generally assigned to a community, which they visit from time to time. The diocesan priest cannot and should not be a loner, but

he must be able to live alone, to stand on his own feet and not be so dependent on a community², for there are times and places when a diocesan priest may be quite isolated from his fellow priests. It needs to be emphasized that the primary community of the diocesan priest is the people he is serving.

(c) Relationship with the People

Although he may live in a community of priests, and this is even recommended as a very good thing, his case is not like that of religious, who belong to a community of members who share the same goals, charism, etc. In addition to this community, the religious may work with, say, the larger community of a parish. But for the diocesan priest, his parish or diocese is his real and primary community. Some religious may work in a parish or for a diocese, but this relationship is temporary and accidental, while in the case of the diocesan priests the relationship is essential and permanent.³ Religious may at times find themselves torn between the demands and requirements of their own communities and that of the parish or diocese, but not so the diocesan priest, who is essentially linked with the diocese in which he is incardinated.

It is this essential characteristic of the diocesan priest, viz., his incardination in a particular diocese, that colours and shapes the specific spirituality of the diocesan priest. We shall now briefly present the contours of this spirituality.

III. Secular Spirituality

The spirituality of the diocesan priest is a secular⁴ one, a spirituality of involvement in the world. On the other hand, the spirituality of the religious is somewhat inward-looking; it emphasizes the sacred, the holy: there is a sense of separation from the world, even in the case of apostolic religious institutes, and even when one is involved in the work of liberation and justice. But the diocesan priest's life emphasizes the secular aspect. In a way, it could be said that when St. Ignatius founded the Jesuits, he was making religious life diocesan in some ways.

This secular spirituality implies a number of attitudes and qualities. Firstly, the diocesan priest must be totally available to the people. Unlike the religious, he is not bound by rules and regulations or community obligations. Even religious belonging to active congregations may have certain restrictions on their availability, since they also have obligations towards their own communities, but not so the diocesan priest. This, I think, is one of the hallmarks of a diocesan priest. He must be ready to make adjustments in the times of his prayer, rest and personal interests for the sake of his people. In this he follows Jesus who made time even for little children (Mk 10.13-16), and was readily available to people – who were like sheep without a shepherd – even though he had not had time to eat and had retired to rest and even when it was getting very late (Mk 6. 31-44). In fact, when his relatives heard that in his zeal to attend to the needs of people he did not have time even to have a meal, they came to take charge of him, convinced he was out of his mind (Mk 3. 20-21)!

However, the diocesan priest cannot allow things to come to such a state that he has to regularly sacrifice prayer for the sake of work. “Pastoral tasks may at times modify the order, the time, and even the manner of exercises of piety, but they should never eliminate prayer.” (*Pastoral Guide*, 24). The diocesan priest must learn how to be Martha and Mary at the same time, how to be a contemplative in action, where prayer and action go hand in hand. His prayer should energize his works and his works should give power and joy to his prayer. The prayer of the diocesan priest has to be apostolic. This means that, besides occasionally retiring into solitude to pray, just as Jesus did, he must conduct services *for* the people and *with* the people, and with their cooperation and participation. He must get used to praying with the people, and to find God in all persons, events and activities. He needs to develop the ability to find God, not *in spite of* the world, but *through* the world. In fact he grows in spirituality through his ministry, which does not take him away from Christ but rather brings him in intimate union with him (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14). In this context, it is worth noting that the Vatican II Decree

On the Ministry and Life of Priests (in Latin, *De Prebyterorum Ministerio et Vita*), i.e., the document *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, was earlier entitled the other way around, viz., *On Priestly Life and Ministry* (in Latin, *De Vita et Ministerio sacerdotali*). In the final title the order was changed, giving prime importance to the ministerial function of the priest, rather than his life and status, thus bringing out the idea that it is his ministry that shapes the priest's spiritual life (Lécuyer 1969: 195; Wulf 1969: 210, 214).

Inculturation is another aspect of this secular spirituality. Following the principle of the Incarnation, he will immerse himself in the life and culture of his diocese, adopting, adapting – when modification is necessary – and, especially, assimilating into his prayer, thought, language and way of life the positive cultural elements of his diocese. At the same time, of course, he should also follow the principle of the Paschal Mystery – the Death and Resurrection of Christ, which leads to newness of life –, transforming those aspects of the culture (e.g., racism, the caste system or male chauvinism) which are in need of redemption. Again, here too, inculturation is to be expected more from the diocesan priest than the religious for, as the *Pastoral Guide* asserts, “The primary subject of inculturation is the local Churches”. It should also be noted that inculturation is an ongoing process, involving “the continuous integration of the Christian experience in a culture, which is never stable or closed” (*Pastoral Guide*, 11).

Moreover this secular spirituality requires involvement in the lives of the people. The diocesan priest's secular involvement has to be much more than that of the religious. He should pay particular attention to the families, since they are the cells of society (*Pastoral Guide*, 15), exercise pastoral care for the sick and the aged (*Pastoral Guide*, 16) and be a friend and guide to the youth (*Pastoral Guide*, 12). In accordance with the needs of the times, the prophetic dimension has to be stressed. A preferential option for the poor, conscientization, working for liberation and prudently fighting for justice (*Pastoral Guide*, 9)

are really more proper to the diocesan priest than to the religious. These are in fact intrinsic to the spirituality of a diocesan priest.

Since he does not live a cloistered life but constantly interacts with people, it is very important for the diocesan priest to keep abreast of developments in theology and other disciplines so that he can respond appropriately and wisely to the challenges of the times and the pressing problems of his people.

Precisely because of this outward-looking attitude, which is so characteristic of a diocesan priest, he cannot be ghetto-minded, thinking about and being involved in only the affairs of his own Catholic flock. He has to be open to the other churches and to other religions, in fact open also to atheists and different ideologies. His secularity must have this universal outlook. In the context of India, it is not only necessary to study, but also to experience, to some extent, the non-Christian religions and engage in dialogue with them, so that we may be mutually enriched.

As a pastor the diocesan priest is always with the people, and hence he would spend a good part of his life preaching the word of God and administering the sacraments. Through this he strengthens the faith and nourishes the spiritual life of the people. Here again it is vital for the diocesan priest to be up-to-date not only in theory but also in practice. He should be in constant contact with Scripture in his prayer, reading, study and preaching (*Pastoral Guide*, 23). In the context of the sacraments, the Eucharist is, and should be, at the centre of the diocesan priest's life and of the community entrusted to him. He has to find ways and means of building up the people into a community and helping them to grow to maturity through the Eucharist. Precisely because of the pastoral emphasis, the diocesan priest should have a deep sense of liturgy. He should be a real animator of the liturgical life of the people. He must be able to link life with the liturgy, make it more inculturated, significant and meaningful for the people, and encourage their active participation (*Pastoral Guide*, 8).

In his interactions with people, the diocesan priest must keep away from casteism or any other form of discrimination, treating

everyone equally, and yet having the courage to defend the weak and the oppressed. He should also involve the people as partners, exercising participative leadership through parish councils and other means. While being involved in the lives of the people, he must also cultivate true detachment. In addition, in a very special way he needs to develop real discernment, remaining tuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and reading the signs of the times. Cooperating with God's grace, he should endeavour to foster this secular spirituality in his thinking, his prayer, his attitudes, his entire lifestyle, so that he becomes a true contemplative in action.

IV. Particular Application of some Common Spiritual Means

In the above section, we treated aspects of spirituality which are more typical of, or appropriate to, the diocesan priest. However, this does not mean that all of them pertain exclusively to the diocesan priest. There is always a certain overlapping between different kinds of spirituality. We shall now take up certain common spiritual means, but which have a particular application in the spiritual life of a diocesan priest.

As a Christian and a priest, the diocesan priest shares in the spirituality of baptized Christians and that of ministerial priests in general. Like them he too is called to a life of holiness and uses various means which are common to Christians and to priests in general. Such for instance are prayer, the sacraments, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, the evangelical counsels, etc. Some of these means, however, have a more specific application in the life of a diocesan priest (Ponnore 1998: 236-238).

(1) Pastoral Charity

The spirituality of every priest consists mainly in living out the pastoral love of Christ (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13). In the case of the diocesan priest, this pastoral charity is specifically exercised in the concrete context of his diocese. Christ's pastoral

charity consists in his self-gift, dedicating himself to others in service even unto the Cross. As the Good Shepherd (Jn 10.11, 14), he lives out this pastoral love for his flock. He is moved to compassion for the crowds that were like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9.35-36) He knows them personally, calling each by name (Jn 10.3), and goes in search of those who have strayed away from the flock (Mt 18.12-14) He gives himself to his Church as the Bridegroom to his Bride. In his spiritual life the priest is called to live out this self-gift of Christ's pastoral charity, loving his people as spouse and mother. His people are his primary interest, even to the extent of giving his life for his flock. The Church is the Bride of Christ, hence it is obvious that "only in loving and serving Christ the Head and Spouse will charity become a source, criterion, measure and impetus for the priest's love and service to the Church, the Body and Spouse of Christ" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 23). This pastoral charity is the unifying principle that integrates the priest's interior life, his outward actions and his apostolic ministry, and enables him to bring harmony and peace in the socio-cultural context of a broken and fragmented world (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 21-23). If every priest is called to reflect in his life and ministry the pastoral love of Christ in the ecclesial and socio-cultural context, this is especially so in the case of the diocesan priest who, through his incardination in a particular diocese, is in more direct and intimate contact with the people of that diocese.

This pastoral charity, especially in the context of the diocesan priest's particular church, has three aspects. (a) A Christological dimension: Maintaining an intimate union with Christ, he should strive to be a good shepherd, serving his flock, caring for his people with spousal and maternal love, and searching for the sheep that have strayed from the flock. (b) An ecclesial aspect: His union with Christ leads him to an ecclesial communion, i.e., a communion with his bishop, his brother priests and with the people whom he serves. This ecclesial communion should also lead him to communion with Christians of other denominations in a spirit of ecumenism, with people of other faiths and even atheists in a

spirit of dialogue, and indeed with the cosmos to bring about an ecological balance in our world. (c) A pastoral dimension: He must learn to be compassionate to those who are suffering, sharing their anxieties and problems, helping them to fight injustice and liberating them from the shackles of poverty and oppression. By leading his people to God and building them up into a community, he himself enters into deeper union with God and his people (Ponnore 1998: 248-285).

(2) The Evangelical Counsels

The diocesan priest does not practise the evangelical counsels in the same way as religious. Religious undertake the practice of the evangelical counsels as vows, but this is not so in the case of the diocesan priests. Of course, it is sometimes light-heartedly said that religious take the vows, while diocesan priests keep them!

In living the evangelical counsel of poverty, the diocesan priest may surely possess things and does not need the permission of superiors to dispose of them. But he is still called, like all priests, to witness to poverty through a simple lifestyle that avoids superfluous things, paying attention to the prophetic dimension of poverty, and in a spirit of solidarity with the poor (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 30). In fact, precisely because he is a diocesan priest, he must live in greater solidarity with the poor than even the religious. Particularly in the context of poor countries like India, he is expected to live a simple and fairly frugal life. He cannot build the community, if the people do not experience him as one of them.

Similarly, the diocesan priest does not practise obedience to his bishop in the same way as religious to their superiors. Religious are subject to their superiors more radically and universally: their obedience also includes the personal sphere. Unlike religious, diocesan priests are subject in personal matters to their bishop only to a certain extent, e.g., in connection with their public behaviour or for going on leave. The diocesan priest's obedience is in the realm of the apostolate. Yet, it can happen

that, from the human point of view, the obedience to his bishop in the case of a diocesan priest may turn out to be more difficult if the bishop is not understanding enough, for a diocesan priest has to deal with his bishop more or less permanently, whereas in the case of religious, their superiors change much more frequently (Ponnore 1998: 248).

It should be pointed out that the practice of celibacy is not obligatory on diocesan priests belonging to some Eastern Churches. In fact, obligatory celibacy for all priests of the three rites in India blurs the distinction between religious and diocesan priests. While emphasizing the importance and prophetic value of priestly celibacy, a proposal of the 1990 Synod of Bishops recognizes the discipline of some of the Oriental Churches as well as the exceptional cases of married priests who have converted to Catholicism from non-Catholic Christian denominations (Cited in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 29).⁵

Although this article does not concern itself with the formation and ongoing formation of diocesan priests, both of which are of prime importance, I would like to draw attention to a few items in this connection. One is that, although there are various formators who exercise different responsibilities, it is the seminarian himself who is the subject and agent of his own formation (*Priestly Formation*, 10.1). Secondly, seminaries should arrange adequate programmes and experiments that bring the seminarians in touch with people, with their joys and sorrows and their day-to-day life. Thirdly, in its guidelines on seminary formation, issued on April 25, 1987, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples explicitly states, "To promote the spirituality proper to the diocesan priest, it is fitting that the formators be chosen from among the diocesan clergy" (*Some Guidelines on Formation in Major Seminaries*, 4). Fourthly, in spite of several Church Documents insisting on the ongoing formation for all priests, very few take the trouble of updating themselves. If professionals like lawyers and doctors do not keep themselves abreast of new legislation and its interpretation and the latest developments in medicine, they will soon lose their

clients and patients. On the other hand, there are many who have been priests for several years, but have never read a book on theology or other relevant material ever since their ordination! I do not know whether this speaks volumes of the patience and understanding of the laity or of their indifference. With these few remarks, let us now move to Indian spirituality for the diocesan priest in India.

V. Indian Spirituality for the Diocesan Priest in India

It is striking that, while the Indian religions have brought forth a whole galaxy of spiritual luminaries, Christianity in India has hardly produced any saints. Why is this so? There are several causes for this, but I think one reason is not only that our theology, but also our prayer and spirituality are not Indian. The West continues to produce spiritual giants like Teilhard de Chardin, Charles de Foucauld, Chiara Lubich, etc., but Christianity in India does not yet have an Indian soul. Even the formators and spiritual directors in seminaries often do not know and do not practise enough of Indian spirituality. But if priests, whether diocesan or religious, have to make a real difference it is high time that we not only develop but, more importantly, practise Indian Christian spiritualities.

India is a cradle of many religions, each of which has different spiritualities. In fact, even within each religion there are various spiritualities, so we cannot speak of one Indian spirituality. Without going into an exhaustive and detailed treatment, we shall mention certain aspects of Indian spiritualities which would be particularly helpful to the diocesan priest.

Deep religious experience (*anubhava*) is especially important in the context of our Indian tradition. In India *gurus* are recognized by popular acclaim: people witness their holiness and spontaneously go to them for guidance. In Christianity, on the other hand, spiritual leaders and guides are often appointed. However, those who are thus appointed may not necessarily be persons who have experienced God deeply (Sheth 1999: 84). The

Christian laity too want to see their priests as men of God. Since diocesan priests interact constantly and closely with the laity, a deep religious experience is a *sine qua non* for them to be effective pastors. Again, in the Indian context of the necessity of a *guru*, it is essential for even senior priests to seek the guidance of experienced and holy spiritual directors.

In the Indian tradition there is a deep sense of the sacredness of time and place, even if it is not always practised. The celebration of the sacred mysteries should be marked by devotion and unction. Busy and time-pressed though he may be, the priest should not go through them as a chore to be hurriedly done with. On the other hand, since he is not a mere cultic priest, the early Vedic path of ritual action (*karma-mārga*), where ritualism was the be-all and end-all, is surely not the road for the diocesan priest to follow. On the other hand, there is much in the Indian rituals of sacrifice (*yajña*) and ritual worship (*pūjā*) that can be judiciously integrated into our liturgical services so as to make them more inculturated and put us in deeper communion with nature (Sheth 1998, Pt II: 764-768).

The Upaniṣads advocated the *jñāna-mārga*, the path of knowledge, which led to renunciation, to fleeing from the world. But the *Bhagavad-gītā* discouraged renunciation of action and retirement into the forest (3.4, 3.8) and advised not to give up action, but engage in action, without however selfishly desiring the fruits for one self (2.47, 18.6). One must be *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Furthermore, it advocates working for the welfare of the world (*loka-saṅgraha*), without being attached to it (3.26). The *Gītā* calls this means of selfless action *karma-yoga*. It is this kind of secular spirituality, which requires both deep involvement in the life of his people and real detachment that is proper to the diocesan priest.

The *Gītā* gives preference to a third road, that of loving devotion, which it calls *bhakti-yoga*. Combining *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*, it urges people to lovingly offer all their actions to God (9.27), who is their only refuge (18.66) and loves them dearly

(18.65). While it criticized *jñāna-mārga*'s renunciation of the world, it appreciated its spirit of interiorization and meditation, and thus brought about a certain synthesis between the three ways of *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti yogas*, while giving the highest place to *bhakti* (Sheth 1998, Pt I: 687-688). This synthetic approach of the *Gītā* is eminently appropriate for the diocesan priest, who is expected to be a contemplative in action. While giving importance to loving devotion and selfless action, he should not neglect quiet meditation and inner silence.

The pastoral love of the priest is rooted in God's love for him and his love for God and manifests itself in his love for his people. Loving devotion or *bhakti* also blends together these vertical and horizontal dimensions of love. Moreover, the practice of the various types of *bhakti* will increase the much-needed affective aspect of the diocesan priest's spiritual life, for the present purāṇic practice of Hindu *bhakti* has a deep emotional colouring that, especially in certain types of *bhakti*, make even the spontaneous and intense Christian charismatic outpourings of feelings look rather pale. While many kinds of *bhakti* find their echo in different Christian forms of devotion, the diocesan priest can broaden his experience of devotion by adopting certain Hindu types of *bhakti* which are practically absent in Christianity, e.g., parental love (*vātsalya*) for God, which can be practised, for instance, at Christmas time towards the Child Jesus (Sheth 1984: 108-131; 1999: 70-86; 2001: 197).

The techniques of Yoga and other forms of meditation, such as Vipassanā (Insight), can greatly help the diocesan priest to improve his concentration and awareness, and enable him to keep calm and tranquil in spite of the hustle and bustle of his busy life.⁶ In this context of various meditational techniques, it is worth pointing out that Hinduism, in which the soul has only a mistaken and apparent relationship with a body, paradoxically gives so much importance to the body in its rituals and meditational techniques. By contrast, in Christianity, in which soul and body are intrinsically united to form one being, the body is not taken seriously: it is involved so little in rituals, meditation and prayer.

This is very much the case with the Western Catholic Church and Protestantism than with the Eastern Rite Churches. The Roman liturgy hardly involves the body and so fails to grip the whole person, soul and body (Sheth 1998, Pt II: 766-767). As a Christian who believes in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and as a pastor who is very much in contact with flesh and blood people, the diocesan priest needs to develop a healthy spirituality of the body.

Buddhism can help bring home to the diocesan priest certain important spiritual attitudes and approaches, such as rising above caste and other prejudices, the necessity to avoid a fundamentalist interpretation of Scriptures, a relative freedom from dogmatism and narrow sectarianism, the importance and benefits of inculturation, the ideal of altruistic love, profound forbearance, and forgiveness and reconciliation (Sheth 1982: 23-26; 1988: 46-60; 2003: 79-97). A Christian will not agree with every Buddhist belief, e.g., the doctrine that there is no soul or substance, or that everything exists only for a moment or that, for Theravāda Buddhism, God does not exist. Nevertheless even such doctrines would help the diocesan priest to realize more deeply that things are ephemeral and that, as pilgrims on earth, we should not pin our ultimate hopes on passing things. Buddhism also offers a whole plethora of different meditational techniques, ranging from meditations for beginners to very high forms of concentration, from which one can choose according to one's spiritual needs and psychological background and preferences. Among these various techniques several Christians have tried out and benefited from the now quite popular Vipassanā (Insight), and also from the four Brahma-vihāras (Sublime States) through which one cultivates the virtues of universal friendship, compassion, joy and equanimity (Sheth [1973]: 106-110; 1974: 23-31; 2003: 90-96) – qualities that are vital especially for the diocesan priest.

An extremely important virtue in the Indian tradition is that of non-violence (*ahimsā*). There is no religion in the world that emphasizes this quality so much as Jainism, which goes to enormous lengths to prevent even the accidental hurting of all

kinds of life. It is not always realized that violence often springs from weakness and inferiority, while non-violence has an inner strength that can reduce the violent to helpless submission, or that non-violence benefits also the agent of non-violence by bringing inner peace and better health. The newspapers regularly report so many violent crimes, clashes and wars. Often we are even blissfully unaware of certain forms of violence in our modern 'civilized' world: boxing, for example, is a sport in which one human being physically hurts a fellow human being, so much so that boxers have even died in the ring, and yet it is a multi-million dollar business (Sheth 2001¹: 73-76)! We are gradually becoming painfully conscious of the violence we inflict on nature, which eventually boomerangs on us! Christians will not accept the Jain belief that souls are reborn, and that too even in things which for others are purely material and not alive. Still, the Jain emphasis on non-violence can inspire us to be less violent not only to our fellow human beings, but also towards our mother Earth and nature in general. It goes without saying that the diocesan priest must not only preach but also practise non-violence, for it is his duty to bring peace and harmony in a world that is torn apart by so much violence. The Jain *syādvāda* (doctrine of 'it may be') teaches us that reality has many facets and that we cannot comprehend reality fully, so that we should be careful not to be so cocksure and absolutist in our views. This is a very important attitude in the context of inter-religious dialogue, one of the tasks in which the diocesan priest is expected to be engaged in, especially in India.

The high veneration that Sikhism accords to the *Guru Granth Sāhib* will remind the diocesan priest to find strength and nourishment for his spiritual life in the word of God, preaching and practising it and making it relevant to his people. The Sikh Scripture has integrated into itself the religious compositions of Hindus and Muslims. This can embolden the diocesan priest to also discover the diverse ways in which God has spoken to other peoples. One of the important things that a diocesan priest can learn from Sikhism is its freedom from clericalism, since it has

no separate priesthood: all, both men as well as women, are empowered to perform all the ceremonies and rituals. The Church urges all priests to follow their Master who came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20.28), and it reminds them that they are brothers to all the baptized, being members of one and the same body of Christ (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9). Sikhism, which is more radical in this regard, can be a source of inspiration to priests, particularly to diocesan priests who have to daily rub shoulders with the laity, to take the Church's exhortation more to heart. The fact that in Sikhism men and women are equal can also prompt priests to shed their male chauvinism. Among the different forms of *bhakti*, Sikhism gives pride of place to remembering and reciting the name of God (*nām-simran*). While this Prayer of the Name has been very much in vogue in the Eastern Churches, it has not been popular in the Western Church. Nevertheless, more and more Latin Christians are slowly discovering the charm and joy of the now well-known Jesus Prayer (Sheth 1999: 72-75). Walking *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the diocesan priest can "pray unceasingly" even in the midst of his hectic pastoral activities.

The various tribal religions of India can help the diocesan priest to understand and appreciate more deeply the significance of community, and practise a more intimate relationship with earth and nature that will enable him to come into more direct contact with the Cosmic Christ.

These, then, are some of the facets of Indian spirituality that can serve to enrich and inculturate the spirituality of a diocesan priest in India. While paying particular attention to those aspects which are more pertinent to his call to be a contemplative in action, he should wisely choose, with the advice of his spiritual director, those elements that will be more suited to his own temperament, needs and circumstances, so that he may be a holy and effective pastor of his people.

We have dealt with some of the salient features of the spirituality of diocesan clergy, both those more specific or appropriate to diocesan priests as well as some aspects of lay or priestly

spirituality in general but having a particular application to diocesan priests. This does not mean that every diocesan priest is to be formed in one and the same mould or that his spirituality manifests itself in one and the same way all over the world. Although there is a spirituality common to all diocesan priests, the specific form it takes will depend very much on the socio-cultural context of each particular diocese (Ponnore 1998: 364-365). If anything, the spirituality of the diocesan priest has to be an inculturated one, both for his own growth in the Spirit and for the spiritual development of his particular flock.

Thus we see that the diocesan priest is truly called to the challenging, even heroic, task of bridging the two poles of the sacred and the secular, of prayer and work, grace and effort. He resolves this polarity by becoming a contemplative in action, by surrendering himself to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and at the same time spending himself in selfless pastoral service of the people entrusted to him. His is a secular spirituality that does not keep the two poles juxtaposed in a happy balance, but that rather brings about a total compenetration of the two poles, so that prayer and action become but two aspects of the same total dedication and service. He does this by configuring himself to Christ who also united together the two poles of the sacred and the secular, the divine and the human (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14).

Notes

1. It is hierarchical in the sense that his priestly power is canonically or juridically determined by the bishop.
2. While community support is important, one should not have unrealistic expectations from one's community.
3. This does not preclude diocesan priests from working at the national level or in other dioceses, when the need arises (*Pastoral Guide*, 5).
4. We are obviously taking secularity in the good sense of the word.
5. This point has not been explicitly mentioned by Ponnore (1998: 244-245) in his treatment of celibacy for the diocesan priest.

6. For the sake of completeness, we may mention the peculiar Hindu salvific path of hatred for God (Sheth 2000), which of course Christians would naturally fight shy of practising, just as they would not dare to practise some forms of tantrism (Sheth 1998: 695-696). References

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