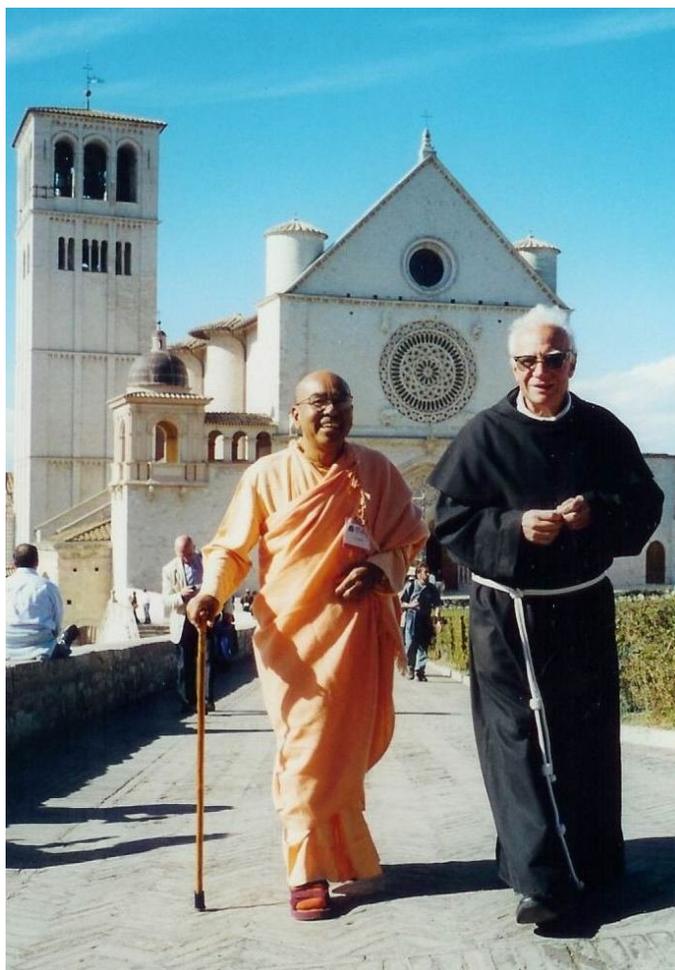


**Fr. Maximilian Mizzi's contribution to the book  
"THOUGHTS ON SYNTHESIS OF SCIENDE AND RELIGION"  
PUBLISHED IN 2001 BY THE Bhaktivedanta Institute, Calcutta  
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*Fr. Max Mizzi OFM Conv.©*

*Dr. T.D. Singh, Director of the Bhaktivedanta Institute,  
with Fr. Max Mizzi in Assisi in October 2002*

## **SCIENCE AND RELIGION FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

*By Fr. Maximilian Mizzi OFM Conv.*

Religion is that relationship which binds God and man in a relationship of spirituality and love. And since we cannot separate loving and respecting God from loving and respecting all other human beings, we can say that religion and spirituality, therefore, binds together all the people especially those who practice religion.

Religion is as old as man is. According to the *Bible* man was created by God. ‘God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them’<sup>1</sup>. From the very first moment of his creation man had a very intimate relationship with God because God loved man and created him out of love. The words of the Bible ‘God created man in the image of himself’ are a clear statement of how much God loved man.

Religion is an essential part of the human nature because it reflects the relationship between God and man. Man and God are so intimately related to each other that nothing and nobody can separate them from each other. It’s like the relationship between the mother and her child. Religion is the gateway to this wonderful relationship between man and God. I believe that this is also true with those people who claim that they profess no institutional religion or no religion at all. In my opinion religion is in the heart of every person and it is present like a hidden file in a computer.

Man has not always been faithful to God’s commandments. Soon after his creation man disobeyed God’s commandments and as a consequence the harmony that had existed between God and man was broken by the sin of disobedience. This affected also the relationship between man and man, and men became aggressive to each other. Man became enslaved in this primal disobedience and for this reason he became more and more a prisoner of itself.

But God had mercy on man and promised him salvation. For this reason God sent his son Jesus Christ to reveal his love, wisdom and forgiveness. In his mercy God donated man the light of his Spirit to enlighten reason through faith.

In his Encyclical letter ‘Fides et Ratio’ (Faith and Reason) of November 28, 1998 Pope John Paul II writes “...faith is of another order than philosophical knowledge, which depends upon sense perception and experience and which advances by the light of the intellect alone. Philosophy and the sciences function within the order of natural reason; while faith, enlightened by the Spirit, recognises in the message of salvation the ‘fullness of grace and truth’ which God has willed to reveal in history and definitely through his Son”<sup>2</sup>.

The human spirit is not separated from our sense perceptions and experiences. And if it is enlightened by the Holy Spirit then it grows and attains greater perfection. “It should nonetheless be kept in mind that revelation (from the Holy Spirit) remains charged with mystery. ...Faith alone makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently”<sup>3</sup>.

I have no doubt that not only man is the object of God’s love but the whole of creation, from the very beginning. According to the *Bible* God created not only man and woman but also all the animals and, indeed, the whole universe. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”<sup>4</sup>. God said: “Let the earth produce vegetation: seed bearing plants, and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed inside, on the earth...” God saw that it was good<sup>5</sup>. God said: “Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth within the vault of heaven”... God saw that it was good<sup>6</sup>. God said: “Let the earth produce every kind of living creatures: cattle, reptiles, and every kind of wild beasts”... God saw that it was good<sup>7</sup>.

Man’s desire to learn, to search, to make new discoveries and to find new ways to better his lifestyle is a part of man’s nature. It is a gift from God. It is a seed put by God into the very essence of man from the very moment of his creation. If both the desire to learn and to discover new ways

to better one's own lifestyle and religion are part and parcel of every human being then they stem from the very same source, God.

Religion is a way to God and science is a way to discover new values in one's own life, in the life of others and in all those elements that affect the universe. It is of the utmost importance, though, that the values, which the researcher is trying to discover, be true. "The truth of these values is to be found not by turning in on oneself, but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person"<sup>8</sup>.

## **Science and Religion**

Many people wonder if science and religion have anything in common. Some people take it for granted that religion can offer nothing to science and viceversa. Some others believe that there have always been conflicts between science and religion and that new conflicts arise when new discoveries come to the surface.

As a Christian and Franciscan I see no contradiction and no conflict between faith and reason, between science and religion, between technology and theology. Rather one needs the other. One without the other is impoverished. The conflict comes into the arena when science and technology are misused and abused. Science and religion, faith and reason, technology and theology can and should integrate with each other. Religion has the potentiality to enlighten science, faith can give a new light to reason, and theology can be of some very good guidance to technology. Likewise science and technology can help the theologian understand better certain parts of the Bible in order to give them a better interpretation. This can only be done if the scientist and the theologian understand each other, respect each other and leave space to each other for research and reflection.

It would be sad if the scientist would not let himself be enlightened by the wisdom of religion. It would be an even more sad both for the scientist and for humanity if the scientist ignores the natural laws laid down by the Creator or if he even tries to go against these same laws. Likewise theology cannot ignore science and the new scientific discoveries. One specific task of theology is to interpret modern science and technology in the light of religion. Modern science and technology present a great challenge to the theologian who must not ignore the new changes, which are taking place around us. As in most other issues these changes and the new discoveries are greatly beneficial to humanity. But in some cases they can also be dangerous and harmful. The theologian, the spiritual leader, the man of religion, has a great responsibility with regard to the new technological discoveries. He is called to take them into consideration, to carefully and with a great sense of responsibility analyse them and interpret them in the light of sane theology with due consideration to moral and social ethics. The task of the theologian is to make the right discernment and offer the scientist his challenge. If scientific research and theology treat each other with respect and trust, if the scientist and the theologian collaborate honestly and trustfully with each other, then, and only then, true progress for the benefit of humanity will be achieved.



*Fr. Max Mizzi OFM Conv.©*

*Co-operation between Religion, Politics and Science  
at the International Meeting  
“Global Forum of Spiritual and Political Leaders on Human Survival”  
in Oxford, England in 1988.  
Fr. Mizzi and a Muslim Spiritual Leader*

In past centuries the Catholic Church has contributed, and still does, a great deal to scientific research and to new discoveries, which have been made from time to time. Many of the great scientists in past centuries were Christians. Even today many scientists are Christians. Nicholas Copernicus and Galileo Galilei, to mention only two, were very devoted Christians. Copernicus' discoveries caused great revolutions in science and culture and yet science and faith lived with him in great harmony. The same can be said of his disciple, Galileo Galilei. He was a man of great faith and a very religious person. If science and faith could live together harmoniously in the hearts of these two great scientists and of many other followers of Christ then scientists should be able to do so all scientists, at least in principle.

It is true that there had been conflicts between scientists and theologians. That was not due, though, to a conflict between science and theology, but due to a misinterpretation of the Christian or biblical teaching. We have a typical example in the case of Galileo Galilei.

In 1979 Pope John Paul II in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences read a quotation from the Second Vatican Council 'Gaudium et Spes' (Joy and Hope): "We cannot but deplore certain attitudes which have existed among Christians themselves, insufficiently attentive to the legitimate autonomy of science. Sources of tensions and conflicts, they have lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed"<sup>9</sup>.

The Pope went on to explain that the Council Fathers are alluding to the Galileo case. Then he continued: “In order to go a step beyond this position taken by the Council, I wish that theologians, scholars and historians, animated by a spirit of sincere collaboration, might examine more deeply the Galileo case and, in an honest recognition of wrongs on whatever side they occur, might make disappear the obstacles that this affair still sets up in many minds, to a fruitful concord between science and faith, between the church and the world. I give my entire support to this task which will be able to honour the truth of faith and of science and open the door to future collaborations”<sup>10</sup>.

## **Risks**

The human mind has great possibilities to dig deeper and deeper into scientific and technological discoveries. On the other hand one must admit that the human mind is limited. The human mind, science and technology can never fully understand the immensity of God and his infinite wisdom. Christians believe that there are truths that go beyond the capacity of human understanding. These we call mysteries such as the mystery of God, the mystery of creation, the mystery of human suffering particularly the suffering of the righteous, the mystery of life after life. The danger is when man pretends to understand and to explain at all costs through scientific means what is beyond his reach. Many things can find an explanation through science. But also science is limited. Christians believe that certain truths cannot be explained by science alone or by intellect alone. They need the help of revelation. It doesn't mean that man must not try to explore what at the moment he cannot understand. But he must also realise that there are certain realities that are beyond his reach.

It is said that one day St Augustine (354-430 A.D.) was walking along a beautiful beach trying to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity when he saw a child with a shell in his hand. The child was taking water from the sea and emptying the shell into a small hole in the sand. St Augustine asked the child what he was doing. The child answered: “I am trying to put the water of the sea in this hole”. St Augustine smiled at the child and said to him: “My dear son, don't you see that you cannot put this whole sea into that little hole?”. The child looked him in his eyes and answered: “Don't you see that your mind is too small and limited to understand the mystery of God!”

There is yet one more danger or risk that we must take into consideration. Technology can get out of man's control or it can be misused and even abused. In that case then it's tragic. We live in an age in which many important new technological discoveries are taking place. We also live in a time of globalization.

A lot of talk and discussions are going on today with regards globalisation. Globalisation could either be good or bad for society depending on how it is used. It is ambivalent. Many people, therefore, today look upon globalization with suspicion.

Some people look at globalization only from one side, such as from the point of view of economics. But the pros and the cons of globalization are not to be judged only from the point of view of economic terms. A number of new realities are forcefully affecting the productive process, such as global finance, economy, commerce and work. However, these should never be allowed to violate the dignity, the sacredness and centrality of the human person or the democracy of peoples.

On April 27, 2001 the Pope in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences affirmed that globalization itself is neither good nor bad, but it depends on what people do with it. The Pope

said: “Globalization must not be a new version of colonialism”. He also said: “Many people, especially the disadvantaged, experience this (globalization) as something that has been forced upon them”. He also said that the Church will work, “to ensure the winner in this process will be humanity as a whole, not just a wealthy elite that controls science, technology, communication and the planet’s resources”<sup>11</sup>.

Science and technology have done a great progress. At the same time great problems connected with war, conflict, injustice and hunger have not been solved. In a number of cases the new technology has been used for death and destruction as in the case of the use of the atom bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, and again on Nagasaki, Japan, on August 9, 1945. In more recent times, the new technology of war was used as an instrument to genocide and great damage to creation such as during the ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (1999-2000), the civil wars in Black Africa and in many other places where the people involved are using the most sophisticated means of warfare to disseminate death and destruction.

The new technology, on one hand, has created a new welfare state in many countries and that is praiseworthy. On the other hand we must admit that the misuse and abuse of technology on the part of some scientists have created deeper barriers between the world nations. Rich countries have become richer and poor countries have become poorer. In other words science and technology can be used for good or evil. It’s not science or technology, nor the scientists, who are to be blamed but the misuse or abuse of science.



*Fr. Max Mizzi OFM Conv.©*

*Fr. Mizzi and Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union, and Founder of the Green Cross, during the Third International Meeting between Religion, Politics and Science “Global Forum of Spiritual and Political Leaders on Human Survival” in Kyoto, Japan in 1993.*

*Gorbachev was the main speaker at the meeting*

## **The Human Person and Moral Duties**

In the field of medical science a great progress has been achieved. Thanks to medical science the lifestyle of humanity is in much better condition than it was thirty to forty years ago.

Medical science deals with man's very existence. According to the *Bible* man is the most sublime in the whole of creation. He is endowed with a body and with a soul, which is immortal. In his infinite love God created man in his own image and entrusted him with the care of creation. These are some of the divine principles.

Science when dealing with a new discovery and new technologies should not disregard these most important principles. On the other hand, scientist must take into consideration some of these very important principles. First of all, the human person is created with a body and with an immortal soul. The human person must be dealt with and respected as such, as a whole.

Another principle is that the scientist in his technological or scientific research has no right to misuse or abuse a fellow human being whether man, woman or child, whether he is a fellow human being whether man, woman or child, whether he is a fellow citizen or a foreigner, whether he is a follower of his own religion or of another religion. No man has the right to exercise his power, physical, moral or spiritual, over and against another human being. Science and technology are to be used for the benefit of mankind not against it.

Another principle is that medical science must to be used for the benefit of the whole community as such and for the benefit of every single part of the community, that is for the benefit of every single person, man, woman and child including the unborn child. For this reason Catholic theology cannot accept the elimination of the unborn child (abortion) nor euthanasia. Life is sacred; it comes from God and belongs to God.

Here comes into the arena the problem of genetic manipulation. How is the theologian, the spiritual leader going to react to this new challenge? The expression 'genetic manipulation' is still ambiguous. It needs to be an object of true discernment. However there are certain rules and conditions which put a limit to genetic manipulation.

Medical morality has always claimed to respect and protect the human person. The golden rule is that every human life must be respected and safeguarded right from the very moment of its conception. The General Assembly of the World Medical Association, which met in Geneva in 1848, had adopted a form of saying which spelled out its content as follows: "I shall maintain absolute respect for human life from the time of its conception, even under threat. I shall never allow my medical knowledge to be used against the law of humanity"<sup>12</sup>. The dignity and identity of the human being is sacred. When dealing with the human being one must take into consideration its unity, which is an essential part of the human being. Every single person has a unique personality, which cannot be altered.

Allow me to quote once more the Pope's address to the members of the World Medical Association on October 29, 1983: "It is important that we do not isolate the technical problem posed by the treatment of a specific illness from the attention paid to the person of a patient in all his aspects"<sup>13</sup>.

“The biological nature of each person is untouchable in the sense that it is constitutive of the personal identity of the individual throughout the whole course of his history. Each human person, in his absolutely individual personality, is constituted not only by his spirit, but by his body as well. ... To respect the dignity of man, consequently, amounts to safeguarding this identity of man ‘corpore et anima unus’ as the Vatican Council II (Gaudium et Spes, 14) says”<sup>14</sup>.

This is Christian theology. It is based on the fundamental principles of the *Bible* and of the Gospel. The other world’s religions have their own basic teaching in such matters, which are similar to this teaching. In the above mentioned cases it is clear enough that the conflicts arise between theology and technology when scientists misuse and abuse technology to the detriment of the human being or, as in the case of Galileo Galilee, when theologians misinterpret the *Bible*. In these cases the conflict is not between science and technology on one hand and religion and theology on the other hand. The conflict in this case is between the misuse and abuse of technology and the religious principles.

Is the theologian, the spiritual leader prepared to accept the challenge and offer to the scientist, to the researcher, the right answer to this problem? Is the scientist prepared to accept the wise advice of the theologian when it comes to moral and ethical issue? It’s not an easy question to ask, but it’s a crucial and an important question and I hope that it’ll have a positive answer.



*Fr. Max Mizzi OFM Conv.©  
Co-operation between Religion, Politics and Science  
Fr. Mizzi and the Soviet Astronaut, Georgy Griechko,  
who came to Assisi with a Soviet Peace Delegation in January 1989.*

## Creation

Science and technology on one hand, theology and religion on the other had must not be concerned only with the human life but also with the whole of creation. We all know that between man and the rest of creation there is deep interdependence. During the last few decades man has behaved very unjustly towards creation. On a number of occasions the misuse of new technology has caused much damage to God's creation with great negative results to humanity. Just think of the air and water pollution, the pollution of rivers and seas. Theology and religious leaders didn't seem to have bothered too much to raise a voice against the misuse of technology. Now, thank God, both theological scholars, world spiritual leaders and scientists are getting more and more concerned with such a vital issue as the safeguard of creation on which depends the survival of the human race itself.

Here I cannot but think of St Francis of Assisi who left us a great example of his respect and love for God's creation. His 'Canticle of the Creatures' or 'Brother Sun' is a song of praise to God for all the wonderful creatures, which he calls brothers and sisters that enrich the universe. How sad it is now to see so much damage being done by man and by the misuse of the new technology. How can the theologian, the spiritual leader, the scientist or the politician keep silent in front of such a tragedy! Is it at all possible that so much harm be done to 'sister earth, who is our mother'<sup>15</sup>? Is it at all possible that science can do nothing to stop this tragedy of which the first victim will be man himself?

St Francis of Assisi with his 'Canticle of Brother Sun' or the 'Canticle of the Creatures' which he wrote in 1223, three years before he died, can teach us a great lesson today of how we must deal with all the creatures, that is as brothers and sisters, when there is so much talk, discussions and writings about the new ecology. St Francis of Assisi was not a scientist in the sense that we know it. St Francis of Assisi with his 'Canticle of Brother Sun' is the forerunner of a new approach to creation. In Francis' time nobody talked about ecology as we talk about it today. Today we consider the ecological movement as the new science, which strives to safeguard creation.

In his 'Canticle of Brother Sun' Francis discovered a great reality, that of a universal brotherhood and sisterhood not only between man and woman but also with all the created elements. He calls the sun 'brother sun' and the moon 'sister moon' and the earth 'sister earth, which is our mother' and he praised God for all these creatures and on behalf of all creation.

'Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, yours are the praises, the glory and the honour. ... Praised be you my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour; and he bears a likeness of you, most high One. Blessed be you, my Lord, through sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful'<sup>16</sup>. Then he goes on praising God for 'Brother Wind', 'Sister Water', 'Brother Fire', 'Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs' and, finally, on praising God for 'Sister Death'<sup>17</sup>.

The new 'science' or the new approach of St Francis of Assisi with regards to all the creatures is to look upon them with respect as praiseworthy. Without any distinction he considered them members of the same and one family, which was created by God. Francis not only respected all the creatures but also called them 'brothers' and 'sisters'. In other words Francis discovered in God's creatures

that universal brotherhood and sisterhood which made him live in harmony with everything and everybody. Note that Francis of Assisi doesn't refer to these elements as 'nature' but as 'creatures' because he believes in God's creative act. He believes, as Christians believe, that God is a father (or a mother as you like). As Creator he is a Father, and a loving Father, who takes care of his creatures.



*St. Francis of Assisi  
Fresco by Cimabue, Basilica di San Francesco, Assisi*

However the relationship between God and creation is not on the same level as God and man. Only man was created in the image of God. At the same time creation is the manifestation of God. Brother sun is the manifestation of the beauty of God, sister water of God's purity and humility, the stars of God's clarity! Likewise Francis' approach to creation is not pantheistic. The sun is not God, nor the moon or the stars, but the reflection of God. They show us the beauty, the greatness, the splendour of God.

Francis was a man of peace. With his 'Canticle of Brother Sun' he proposes to us a new theological approach, that of respect, of peace and reconciliation not only with God, but also with all the human family and, indeed, with the whole of creation. Francis lived in peace and in harmony with all the creatures because he lived in peace with God and with himself. It's Francis' theological approach to the cosmos. Wrong technical methods and a wrong approach to the cosmos, is a source of great damage to the eco system and threatens the very existence of humanity.

### **The Crises**

Today man is very much conditioned by science and technology, either in a positive way or in a negative way. Sometimes he feels overwhelmed by the new technology and by globalisation, or by the excessively good conditions of his lifestyle. Sometimes man feels completely helpless. Adults and especially children receive very good and useful information from the mass media. But their thinking and acting are also very conditioned by what they read in the papers, by what they hear on the radio and by what they see on the TV. In front of these phenomena some people feel as if they are losing their own identity. Some of these people feel that they are overwhelmed by globalization.

People, today, in most of the European countries live in, and have to deal with, a materialistic society. On one hand some people feel lost and helpless, others feel strong and very self-sufficient. Many think that they can handle everything by themselves, with their own resources, by means of technology, without any help and inspiration from God. Because of this attitude many people have set apart the concept of God. They speak less about God, they think less of God.

On the other hand there is so much yearning for spirituality today. Many people are feeling some sort of spiritual thirst because they are experiencing a spiritual drought. They are discovering that in life there is more than money, business and the worries that burden their everyday life. Many people today feel that their life is empty and have started to resort to prayer and meditation, to spend some more time to take better care of their health and to help those people in need.

Some years ago I was lecturing to a group of young people in a country in Europe which was considered then to be a well off country. I talked about the spiritual life of St Francis of Assisi, about his simple way of life, about his poverty and about his spiritual intimacy with God. When I finished my lecture a young girl said to me: "Could you tell us more about the life of St Francis. We are materially rich, we have everything we want, but we are poor spiritually. Francis of Assisi was poor materially, but very rich spiritually". And that is true. Francis of Assisi was a master of spirituality. He was a great teacher of spirituality not so much by what he said but by what he did.

### **The Science of Spirituality**

Can we talk of spirituality as a science? If by 'science of spirituality' we mean a particular method then my answer will be no. If by 'science' we mean a way that leads to God and puts man in relationship with God then spirituality is the 'science of sciences'. It's the science that teaches people how to relate to God, how to relate with other human beings in the bond of love and respect and how to relate to the whole of creation which is the mirror of God and reflects the presence of God in the world. Spirituality is, in a particular way, the science of relating to one's own self in a spiritual way. Spirituality is the 'way' which leads to God and to one's own inner self. I am afraid that today many people have lost contact with God and with their own inner self or that they don't know how to relate to themselves with love and respect, with confidence and trust, in a spiritual way.

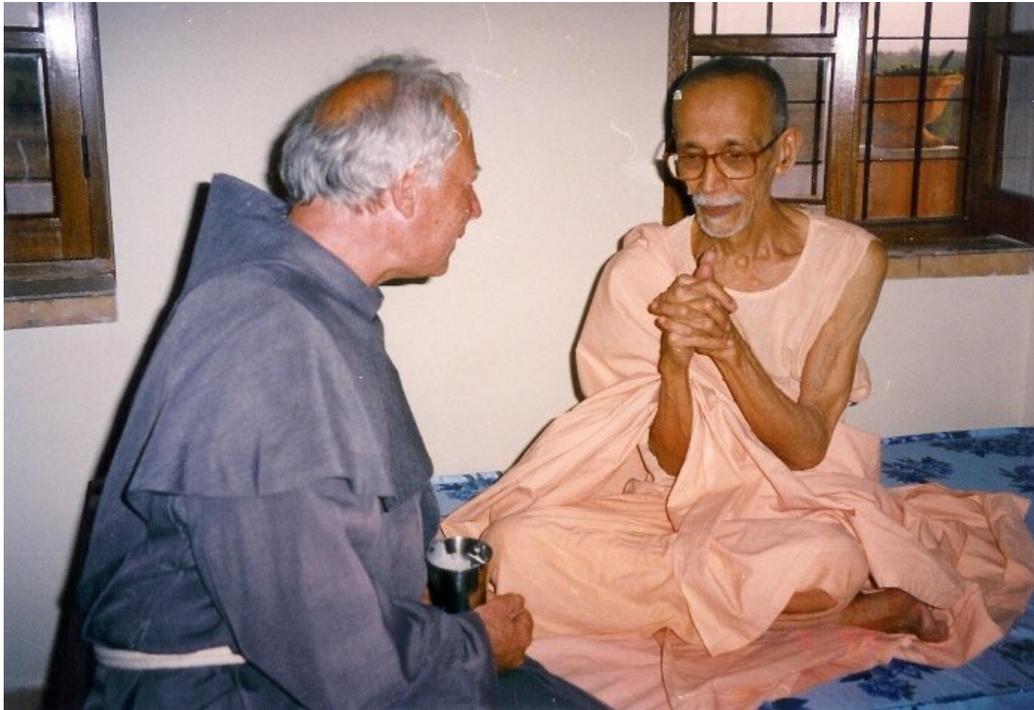
The 'science' of spirituality is a way of life. It's not a method subject to rules dictated by man but by the 'spirit of God'. It's more than just ethical or moral behaviour. It's not a restriction of the mind, but inspiration. It's freedom of the soul which makes you fly freely above earthly things breathing the fresh air of the 'Spirit' around you, in you and permeates the whole of the universe.

Religion and spirituality are related to each other as the body to the soul. Spirituality is to religion what the soul is for the body. Religion without spirituality is like a body without the soul.

Man today needs spirituality perhaps more than ever before. Today man has less time for himself. Many people are overwhelmed with the lifestyle which they lead or which is imposed on them by society and by their own activities. Some people are always on the go day and night to the detriment of their own health of body and mind. They have no time for a little rest, for prayer and meditation, which are the great sources of the 'science' of spirituality. Jesus Christ, during his public life, had a busy life going through villages and towns, preaching the message of salvation to the people,

instructing his disciples and healing the sick. The Gospel tells us that sometimes he didn't even have time to eat. But he found time to pray, to be alone in deep meditation and contemplation of the Father. Very often he would go on the mountain by night or to the desert and be alone to pray and meditate.

If man today gives some more space to learn more about the great and most important 'science' of spirituality and puts it into practice then he will be able to give a better contribution to humanity.



*Fr. Max Mizzi OFM Conv.©*

*Dialogue about Spirituality*

*Fr. Mizzi and Swami Chidananda, known as St. Francis of India, in Rishikesh, the most holy Centre of Hinduism in India in 1996.*

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1, 27

<sup>2</sup> Fides et Ratio, Chapter 1,2

<sup>3</sup> Fides et Ratio, Chapter 1,2

<sup>4</sup> Genesis, 1, 1

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1, 11-13

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1, 20-22

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1, 24-25

<sup>8</sup> Fides et Ratio, John Paul II, Chapter 3

<sup>9</sup> Gaudium et Spes N. 13

<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Sciences, November 10, 1979

<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Science, April 27, 2001

<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the World Medical Association, October 29, 1983

<sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the World Medical Association, October 29, 1983

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address to the World Medical Association, October 29, 1983

<sup>15</sup> St. Francis of Assisi

<sup>16</sup> Canticle of Brother Sun, St. Francis of Assisi

<sup>17</sup> Canticle of Brother Sun, St. Francis of Assisi

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