

UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL

**Analysis of the Religious Practices of Hindus at Saint
Joseph's Oratory**

Transmission of Christian Faith after the Second Vatican Council

Par

John Jomon Kalladanthiyil

Faculté des arts et des sciences

Institut d'études religieuses

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Résumé

Dès le début du christianisme, la transmission de la foi chrétienne constitue la mission essentielle de l'Église. Dans un contexte pluri-religieux et multiculturel, le concile Vatican II a reconnu l'importance d'ouvrir la porte de l'Église à tous. Basile Moreau (1799 – 1873), le fondateur de la congrégation de Sainte-Croix, insistait sur le fait que les membres de sa communauté soient des éducateurs à la foi chrétienne et il a envoyé des missionnaires au Québec dès la fondation de sa communauté (1837). Pour ces derniers, parmi d'autres engagements pastoraux, l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal, fondé par Alfred Bessette, le frère André (1845 – 1937), est devenu l'endroit privilégié pour la transmission de la foi chrétienne, même après la Révolution tranquille des années 1960.

L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph accueille des milliers d'immigrants du monde entier chaque année et parmi eux beaucoup d'hindous. Pour beaucoup d'entre eux, l'Oratoire devient un second foyer où ils passent du temps en prière et trouvent la paix. Certains d'entre eux ont l'expérience de la guérison et des miracles. Le partage de l'espace sacré avec les hindous est un phénomène nouveau à l'Oratoire. Les hindous à l'Oratoire participent aux activités catholiques de dévotion. Parmi de nombreux autres chemins pour atteindre la *moksha* ou la libération, la *bhakti*, une dévotion intense à un Dieu personnel dans l'hindouisme, influe les hindous qui participent aux sacrements et aux sacramentaux chrétiens. Par mon analyse des pratiques religieuses des hindous à l'Oratoire – spécialement la pratique de l'utilisation de l'eau bénite et de l'allumage des cierges – j'explique en quoi l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph peut nourrir la piété et la dévotion des hindous qui s'adaptent à un milieu chrétien. J'explique comment les éducateurs et les éducatrices à la foi catholique peuvent mieux s'établir au service d'une population de plus en plus diversifiée et multiculturelle.

Mon étude s'appuie sur une série d'entrevues qualitatives menées tant auprès d'intervenants que de membres de la tradition hindoue. Cette étude aide à découvrir des points de rencontre entre les chrétiens et les hindous et elle éclaire la transmission de la foi chrétienne dans le contexte actuel de la présence des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph.

Mots-clés : *ārtī*, *avatāra*, *bhakti*, catholicisme et les religions non-chrétiennes, concile Vatican II, congrégation de Sainte-Croix, *Dīpavali*, eau bénite à l'Oratoire, éducateurs à la foi chrétienne, hindouisme et Québec, hindous et l'Oratoire, *moksha*, Oratoire Saint-Joseph, partage de l'espace sacré, philosophie hindoue, piété populaire et dévotions à l'Oratoire, pratique d'allumer les cierges à l'Oratoire, praxéologie pastorale, *pūjā*, sacramentaux, sacrements, *satchitānanda*, *īrtha*, théologie des religions, transmission de la foi chrétienne

Abstract

From the beginning of Christianity, the transmission of Christian faith constituted the essential mission of the Church. With the evolution of multi-religious and multicultural social milieu in many parts of the world, the Second Vatican Council recognized the importance of opening the door of the Church to all people. Basile Moreau (1799 - 1873), founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, insisted that members of his order be educators in Christian faith, and sent missionaries to Quebec since the founding of his community in 1837. For the latter, among other pastoral commitments, Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount Royal, founded by Alfred Bessette (Brother André, 1845 - 1937), became the privileged place for the transmission of Christian faith even after the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s.

Saint Joseph's Oratory welcomes thousands of immigrants from around the world each year, including many Hindus. For many of them, the Oratory becomes a second home where they spend time in prayer and find peace. Some of them experience healing and miracles. The sharing of sacred space with Hindus is a new phenomenon at the Oratory. Hindus at the Oratory participate in catholic devotional activities. Among many other paths to achieve *moksha* or liberation, *bhakti*, an intense devotion to a personal God in Hinduism, influences Hindus who participate in Sacraments and Sacramentals at the Oratory. Based on my analysis of the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory – especially the practices of the use of Holy Water and the lighting of candles – I recommend certain guidelines for the Oratory to nourish the piety and devotion of Hindus who adapt themselves to a Christian environment. I elaborate how the Catholic educators in faith can better establish themselves in serving an increasingly diverse and multicultural population.

My study is based on a series of qualitative interviews with the educators in faith and members of Hindu religious tradition. This study helps to discover the meeting point between Christians and Hindus at the Oratory, and throws light on the transmission of Christian faith in the current setting at Saint Joseph's Oratory, including the presence of Hindus.

Keywords: *Ārtī, Avatāra, Bhakti*, Catholicism and non-Christian Religions, Congregation of Holy Cross, Educators in Faith, Hindu Philosophy, Hinduism and Québec, Hindus and Oratory, Holy Water at the Oratory, *Moksha*, Pastoral Praxeology, Popular piety and devotions at the Oratory, Practice of lighting of candles at the Oratory, *Pūjā*, Sacraments, Sacramental, Saint Joseph's Oratory, *Satchitānanda*, Second Vatican Council, Sharing of sacred space, *Tīrtha, Dīpavali*, Theology of Religions, Transmission of Christian Faith

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CHAPTER 1

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I reached Québec in 2008 and started working at Saint Joseph's Oratory as a Catholic Priest from India belonging to the Congregation of Holy Cross. During my first two years of pastoral ministry at the Oratory, I studied the situation in the local Church in Québec, especially the pastoral life of religious and pilgrims at the Oratory. Listening to the stories and pastoral experiences of some religious Priests and Brothers in the pastoral ministry, and observing the life of and listening to pilgrims at the Oratory, I got interested in conducting research on the practices at the Oratory focusing on two specific aspects: Hindu pilgrims and Catholic transmission of faith. The title of my research is ambiguous. The ambiguity is deliberate due to the existing pastoral reality at the Oratory. The title indicates two areas of concern: the religious practices of Hindus and the transmission of Christian faith after the Second Vatican Council. My pastoral praxeological study analyzed certain elements of the religious practices of Hindus in a Catholic Oratory, and the ways in which educators in faith continue their pastoral ministry of the transmission of faith in the present interreligious and intercultural scenario at the Oratory. In this study, the usage of the term *transmission of faith* does not imply the conversion of Hindus to Christianity, but rather suggests a look at how the essential mission of the Church to transmit Christian faith continues amid the presence of Hindus at the Oratory. During this research, I had the enriching experience of interviewing fifteen Hindus and five educators in faith.

When I interviewed Kavita¹, one of the Hindus who visit Saint Joseph's Oratory regularly, I asked about her activities at the Oratory. She had plenty to tell me; expressing lot of gratitude for all the blessings she received from God. She said, "At the entrance, there is a statue of Saint Joseph. I go there and pray"; "I go to the Crypt Church and pray there"; and "I go to the cross, to the statue of Brother André. When I touch the cross, my hands tremble. I get a special power. I close my eyes and I give everything to God. My nerves are touched when I touch the cross and stand at the feet of Jesus. I close my eyes and tell him everything. I thank him and request him all that I want." Kavita narrated her God experience at the Oratory. She was from a practicing Hindu

¹ To keep anonymity of people interviewed, I have not used their real names in this study.

family. She informed that she had a profound Hindu religious life as she performed Hindu *pūjās* and rituals with her family members at home and in the temple. She lived with her husband and two children. She went to Hindu temples along with her family. When she came to the Oratory, she preferred coming alone and spending time in silent prayer. Her devotional activities at the Oratory helped her to regain spiritual energy that she considered to be important in her life. She was not afraid of entering the Oratory to perform her devotions, while Christians conducted their religious activities at the same site.

Pascal, one of the educators in faith whom I interviewed, confessed that he did not want to instil fear in any person at the Oratory belonging to another religious tradition. As a priest at the Oratory, he welcomed pilgrims of all religions and invoked God's blessings upon them at their request. When he sensed that someone was not a Catholic, he used generic words or terms to bless that person. According to Pascal, « Quand des gens viennent se faire bénir, on ne peut pas à mon avis bénir sans parler de Dieu d'une certaine façon, moi j'aime utiliser des termes un peu plus génériques, par exemple avec des hindous et des musulmans, je vais hésiter à faire un signe de croix, parler au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint-Esprit, alors je vais plutôt faire un geste en imposant les mains, donc en étendant les mains au-dessus de la personne et puis en faisant une bénédiction en disant par exemple, le Dieu d'amour de compassion et de miséricorde soit avec vous et vous bénisse, je vais utiliser toujours des mots qui sont plus génériques pour sans aller nécessairement dans des mots qui sont typiques de telle ou telle religion, alors je n'utilise pas les mots d'une autre religion mais des mots un peu plus universels pour parler du Dieu dont on parle, à mon avis le Dieu des chrétiens est un Dieu d'amour, de compassion, on ne trahit pas ce qu'on dit comme chrétien mais en même temps on utilise un langage dans lequel eux autres peuvent aussi se reconnaître. » This inclusive attitude of Pascal attracted many Hindus to him while he was at the Blessing Office at the Oratory. He did not impose Christian dogmas and teachings upon Hindus but just welcomed them in the name of God who is compassionate and loving. Pascal has gained rich experience during his 12 years at the Oratory. He informed me that people belonging to different religious traditions and cultures frequenting the Oratory for devotions and prayers were a recent phenomenon.

The transmission of Christian faith constitutes the essential mission of the Church.² In a multi-religious and multi-cultural context, the Second Vatican Council recognized the importance of opening the door of Catholic Church to all people. Long before the Council, Basile Moreau (1799-1873), the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, insisted that members of his Order be educators in Christian faith.³ Ever since its founding in 1837, the Order has sent out missionaries from France to different regions of the world, including Québec. For these missionaries, among other pastoral duties, Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal became one of the preferred places for the transmission of Christian faith, even after Québec's Quiet Revolution in 1960.

Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal is one of the reputed Catholic pilgrimage centers in North America. Every year more than two million people visit this famous place. Since its founding in 1904 by Alfred Bessette (1845-1937), known as Brother André, Saint Joseph's Oratory has played a great role in fostering the quest of millions of people in their search for the Divine.⁴ This Church has become the icon of Catholicism in Québec. Following the charisma of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the Directors, staff and volunteers of this renowned Church have been engaged in the transmission of Christian faith with continuity and vigour.

² Jesus sent out his disciples to the whole world by giving them the mission of announcing the Good News that is based on his life. In the Catholic theological terms, the Church is the body and Jesus is the head of the Church. The core content of the Christian faith is based on the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

³ In my study, the term "educators in faith" or "educators in Christian faith" will refer to the members of the Congregation of Holy Cross and their associates, especially those who are in pastoral ministry at Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal. I acknowledge that the terms "educators in faith" and "educators of the faith" have been discussed over the years. In French, the commonly used term is "éducateurs à la foi chrétienne". However, in English, the term "educators in faith" is widely used.

⁴ Brother André was a religious member of the Congregation of Holy Cross. Being a humble person, he had great compassion towards all who came to him in search of God. He brought new hope and renewed faith in the lives of thousands of people. A man of enormous faith in God, he spent his whole life bringing people closer to God and God closer to people. The Rector of Saint Joseph's Oratory has always been a Holy Cross Priest who follows, just like Brother André, the charisma of the Congregation of Holy Cross founded by Basil Moreau in 1837 at Le Mans in France. The charisma of a religious community is its unique personality within the Church – that which makes it distinct from others. To fill the spiritual and educational void of Post-Revolutionary France, Basil Moreau called on the members of his Congregation to be "educators in faith" who, with a preferential option for the poor, educate both mind and heart of people. "As disciples of Jesus we stand side by side with all people. Like them we are burdened by the same struggles and beset by the same weaknesses; like them we are made new by the same Lord's love; like them we hope for a world where justice and love prevail. Thus, wherever through its superiors the congregation sends us we go as educators in faith to those whose lot we share, supporting men and women of grace and goodwill everywhere in their efforts to form communities of the coming kingdom". See: *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, No. 2, "Mission", Rome, CSC, 1988, # 12.

The transmission of Christian faith has been conducted from the time of the early Christian communities, despite periods of crisis. In our age of post-modernity, this crisis has become crucial as there is a wider gap between faith and human experience. Many people, especially in the Western world, do not assign great importance for faith journey in association with the Church.⁵ The Second Vatican Council realized the importance of continued transmission of Christian faith in the post-modern society and it “rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions.” The diversity of faith was not a fear for the Council; rather it affirmed a commitment to dialogue that has opened a new era for Christianity and all world religions.

There are many ways of transmitting Christian faith. The Seven Sacraments have the formal nature of traditional transmission of Christian faith in the framework of Catholic Church. The older generation of Christians took initiatives to introduce their younger generation into Christian faith, especially through the three Sacraments of Christian initiation. This trend has changed in the post-modern society where families do not hold the same values, convictions, and religious affiliation. The transmission of Christian faith in practice does not seem to be “obligatory” anymore. However, it is interesting to observe that people who live in “traditionally Christian countries” like to practice their faith in other ways. Many people consider themselves to be “spiritual”, not “religious”, but want to be connected to the Divine.

Emilio Alberich and Jim Gallagher explained the challenges to the transmission of Christian faith in today’s post-modern society where people do not regularly participate in Church activities. The typical Christian family transmitted Christian faith from one generation to the other through the means of oral traditions and religious celebrations. The members of the same family, composed or re-composed in today’s context, do not always cherish the same values and convictions as typical Christian families.⁶

I observed that Saint Joseph’s Oratory has become a cradle for all people, both Christians and non-Christians. Over the years, the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory has been done

⁵ W. Kasper, *An introduction to Christian faith*, New York, Paulist Press, 1980, p. 2.

⁶ J. Gallagher, *Soil For the Seed – Historical, Pastoral and Theological Reflections on Education to and in the Faith*, Essex England, McCrimmons, 2001, p. 248-251. See also: E. Alberich, H. Derroitte, & J. Vallabaraj, *Les fondamentaux de la catéchèse*, Montréal, Novalis, 2006, p. 26-41.

homogeneously as a clear majority of pilgrims were Catholics. At present, this phenomenon is rapidly changing due to the presence of a growing number of pilgrims and visitors belonging to other religious traditions and denominations, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Among them are many Hindus.⁷ Despite their distinct religious identity, many of them take part in some of the Sacramental and Sacraments at Saint Joseph's Oratory.

1.1. Complexity of Hinduism

I do not dare to say that I know Hinduism with all its dynamics and diversity. Historians and phenomenologists study religions in different capacities and with varying viewpoints. However, they cannot give a complete picture of any religion that is complex, or make a perfect comparison of another religion. It may not be appropriate to judge one or the other religion and religious practices with limited knowledge of one's own experience. In this research, I have no intention to study Hinduism with all its minute details and diversity. However, I should elaborate certain elements of Hinduism in order to better understand the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory.

Hinduism is one of the ancient religions in the world. It has a literature that goes back to the beginning of recorded history. Hinduism has its roots from Vedic traditions and culture. The entire South East Asian region has been influenced by Hinduism, its teachings and culture. Ramchandra Narayan Dandekar said that "Hinduism has persisted through centuries as a distinct religious entity."⁸ But Gavin Flood opined that "Hindus will often say that Hinduism is not so much a religion, but a way of life. Hinduism also contains developed and elaborate traditions of

⁷ In the study conducted by *Léger Marketing, Tourisme Québec*, Caroline Roy underlined that Saint Joseph's Oratory attracts much more visitors from outside Québec with a wider religious diversity. After the Catholics, the second biggest religious group visiting the Oratory is Hindus that comes to 7% of the entire visits. See also: C. Roy, *Étude de caractérisation des clientèles du tourisme religieux et spirituel au Québec*, Montréal, Léger Marketing, 2012, p. 22. It is worthwhile to mention that in another study conducted in 2004 by *COGEM Recherche inc.*, there is no mention about Hindus at the Oratory. The groups mentioned in that study are Catholics, Christians from other denominations, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews and Others. There is also no mention of Tamil or Hindi as languages spoken by pilgrims and visitors at the Oratory. See also: *COGEM, Rapport d'une étude sur les caractéristiques de la clientèle actuelle et potentielle de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph*, Montréal, COGEM Recherche inc., 2004, p. 64-66.

⁸ R. N. Dandekar, "What is Hinduism?" in *Sanskrit and Indological Studies*, Dr. V. Raghavan Felicitation Volume, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p. 89.

philosophy and theology, which can be very different from those of the West.”⁹ He underlined that the diversity of Hinduism is truly vast and its history long and complex. “Most Hindu traditions revere a body of sacred literature, the Veda, as revelation, though some do not; some traditions regard certain rituals as essential for salvation, others do not; some Hindu philosophies postulate a theistic reality who creates, maintains and destroys the universe, others reject this claim. Hinduism is characterized as belief in reincarnation (*samsāra*) determined by the law that all actions have effects (*karma*), and that salvation is freedom from this cycle.”¹⁰

André Couture stated that Hinduism maintained a history connected to its politico-geographical, cultural and linguistic specificity. « On a parfois prétendu que l’Inde n’avait aucun sens de l’histoire. Les textes religieux nous ont pourtant conservés de l’Inde ancienne toute une histoire lignagère qui se perd dans la nuit des temps. S’y mêlent des conquêtes et d’inévitables interventions divines. Il est bien difficile d’identifier les événements que ce langage évoque. Mais si ces récits ont été si jalousement conservés, c’est peut-être qu’ils sont porteurs de valeurs qui dépassent les faits bruts décidément inaccessibles. »¹¹ A. Couture added that different sects in Hinduism have their history described by various gurus. « Les sectes ont aussi leur histoire, et c’est le plus souvent celle des gourous qui les ont illustrées. Ces histoires vénérées portent chacune leur accent particulier et reflètent davantage des convictions religieuses propres qu’une histoire documentée et critique. »¹² A. M. Shah had similarly affirmed that there is a popular Hinduism that is mainly non-sectarian and a sectarian Hinduism that is guided by a guru.¹³ It is essential to understand diversity in India to comprehend Hinduism. A. Couture also noted that it was in the 19th century, may be with the influence of Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), that Europeans recognized Hinduism with its religious beliefs.¹⁴ G. Flood underlined that along with Ram Mohan Roy, sometimes called the father of modern India, one can see the influence of

⁹ G. Flood, *An introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 1.

¹⁰ G. Flood, 1996, p. 5-6. *Samsara* is the cycle of rebirth. In Hindu tradition, there is a distinction between *karma-kānda* and *jñāna-kānda*. *Karma-kānda* is action oriented with *pūjās*, texts related to sacrifices and rituals. *Jñāna-kānda* is knowledge oriented with texts related to meditation and insights. For the adherents of *karma-kānda*, the liberation does not occur with metaphors of *jñāna-kānda* people as they do not see any divine revelation in it. For the adherents of *jñāna-kānda*, the liberation does not occur with sacrifices and *pūjās*. See also: R. C. Zaehner, 1962, p. 63.

¹¹ A. Couture, *Sur la piste des dieux – Initiation à l’étude des religions*, Montréal, Médiaspaul, 2009, p. 113.

¹² A. Couture, 2009, p. 114.

¹³ A. M. Shah, “Sects and Hindu Social Structure” in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 40, 2, 2006, p. 220.

¹⁴ A. Couture, 2009, p. 10.

Dayananda Sarasvati, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Gandhi. They had played significant roles in gaining India its independence. In contrast to the committed secularism of the Congress Party, in the face of the religious and cultural pluralism of India, several right-wing Hindu nationalist groups have developed, wishing to promote India as a Hindu, rather than a secular, state. It is well known that India had been subjugated by foreign invaders for many years, and, therefore, certain groups like BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) make the case to safeguard India for Hindus.¹⁵

Alexander Henn opined that the formation of Hinduism is marked by cultural features and historical dynamics that cannot be easily compared to the formation of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or any of the Semitic religions that emerged from the Middle East. The term “Hindu” has its origins in the eleventh century Persian term al-Hind indicating the land beyond the Indus River, and gradually transformed around the thirteenth century into an ethnic marker of South Asian people distinguishing themselves from “Turks”. The term “Hindu” gained its explicitly religious connotation only in the nineteenth century, and began to designate the supra-local “imagined religious communities” of Hindus of today. The formation of Hinduism and Hindu identity, thus, was a gradual and protracted process marked by two major factors that were internal and external. Not claiming a monotheistic exclusivity with a focus on a single charismatic founder, unitary text-based orthodoxy and centralized ecclesiastical organization, Hinduism was characterized instead by its capacity for theological pluralism, historical plasticity, semantic translatability, pragmatic diversity and idiosyncratic variation, which made some scholars argue that it rather marked the cultural cohabitation of many than the theological orthodoxy of one religion.¹⁶

In the same line of thought as above, G. Flood also observed the complexity of Hinduism. People see “two contemporary cultural forces which are characteristic of modern communities: on the one hand a movement towards globalization and identity formation which locates Hinduism as a trans-national world religion alongside Christianity, Buddhism or Islam; on the other, a fragmentation which identifies Hinduism with a narrowly conceived national identity. Both

¹⁵ G. Flood, 1996, p. 263.

¹⁶ A. Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa. Religion, Colonialisms, and Modernity*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 11.

forces, towards globalization and a fragmented nationalism, are strong within Hinduism and it remains to be seen which becomes the more prominent voice.”¹⁷ Hinduism maintains many positive elements that help different groups of people to follow it. The dynamic and flexible nature gave space for newcomers and leaders in Hinduism. R. N. Dandekar underlined that “Hinduism is essentially dynamic. Unlike most religions, which are prophetic or creedal and which, therefore, necessarily tend to remain static, it has exhibited, throughout history, a remarkable silence and responsiveness to the needs of different communities and to the demands of different ages and regions. It has never hesitated to sponsor newer scriptures, newer gods, and newer institutions. It has rejected none; it has welcomed within its fold all those who have sought its spiritual leadership and social sustenance.”¹⁸ Hinduism has many religious traditions and practices. There are different sects, gurus and schools that hold on to varied teachings and principles. While some gurus have numerous disciples, others have only a few; some sects align themselves to particular *avatāra*, but others do not.

Compared to many other religions, Hinduism is complex from the point of view of dogmas and practices. A. Couture rightly said that some people were tempted to associate certain magical words with Hinduism. « Selon que domine le scepticisme ou l'intérêt, on parle de curieux amalgame ou de tolérance extrême. On associe facilement à l'hindouisme quelques mots magiques, à peu près toujours les mêmes : l'*ātman*, le Brahman, les brahmanes, les castes, le karma et les renaissances, les vaches sacrées, le Veda et le yoga. Il arrive que l'on s'arrête au mystère des *Upanishad*, ou que l'on avoue s'inspirer de quelque tradition secrète.»¹⁹ R. N. Dandekar said that “Hinduism does not honour any particular person as its sole prophet or founder. It does not recognize any particular book as its absolutely authoritative scripture. It does not insist on any particular religious practice as being obligatory. It does not accept any doctrine as its dogma.”²⁰ G. Flood emphasized on the same point of R. N. Dandekar by stating that Hinduism does not have a unified system of belief encoded in a creed or declaration of faith. It does not have a single system of soteriology and it does not have a centralized authority and

¹⁷ G. Flood, 1996, p. 4.

¹⁸ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 93.

¹⁹ A. Couture, 2009, p. 80.

²⁰ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 89. See also: A. Couture, 2009, p. 79-80.

bureaucratic structure. It is a very different kind of religion in these respects from the monotheistic western traditions of Christianity and Islam.²¹

There are hundreds of divinities and rituals in Hinduism. Looking at the images and sculptures in some Hindu temples, one would say that everything including sexuality has a sense of sacredness in Hinduism. Compared to many other religions, one could easily say that “Hinduism can hardly be characterised as a religion in the strictest sense of the term. Unlike most religions, Hinduism does not regard the concept of god as being central to it. Hinduism is not a system of theology – it does not make any dogmatic affirmation regarding the nature of god. And what often appears confusing is that the Hindus are seen to worship many gods though they may be actually believing in only one god as the single ultimate reality.”²² R. N. Dandekar considered Hinduism as an ethnic religion as he stated that “Hinduism is, in a sense, an ethnic religion. It was not revealed to a prophet and then either propagated among or imposed upon the people.”²³ However, A. M. Shah argued that the different sects in Hinduism have their founders and specific ways of worship with definite sacred texts and social organisations. He stated that due to the absence of adequate ethnography, many people have false notions about the geographical spread and social composition of sects, particularly of the larger and older ones.²⁴

People say that there are different stages of life in Hinduism, and there are various religious ceremonies conducted at different stages of life. These are not codified ceremonies that all Hindus follow systematically to become a Hindu. R. N. Dandekar underlined that “there is no dogma or practice which can be said to be either universal or essential to Hinduism as a whole. People who call themselves Hindus have, in fact, not much in common as regards faith and worship. What is essential for one section of the Hindu community may not be necessarily so for another.”²⁵ This does not mean that attempts have not been made to lay down some criteria for Hinduism. “Belief in the absolute validity of the Veda is, for instance, often mentioned as a distinctive attribute of a Hindu. Actually, however, one can be a good and devout Hindu without

²¹ G. Flood, 1996, p. 6.

²² R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 89.

²³ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 90.

²⁴ A. M. Shah, “Sects and Hindu Social Structure” in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 40, 2, 2006, p. 218.

²⁵ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 89.

having to profess such a belief.”²⁶ But it is to be noted that the Vedas have numerous interpretations and sometimes it’s not easy to give absolute authority to the Vedas.

Hinduism offers many striking parallels to other great religions but cannot compare herself to any of them. The holistic understanding of Hinduism is not easy and straight forward since that involves understanding its evolution, sects, castes, divinities, incarnations, concept of time, notion of conversion, present adherents, and different schools of thought. “The Hindu society is cut up horizontally into castes and vertically into religious sects – but the vertical stratification is not as rigid and as exclusive as the horizontal one.”²⁷ To know Hinduism, one needs to consider many facets of Hindu life with its unity. Hinduism keeps its door open to diversity and richness. I agree to A. Couture that « Connaître l’hindouisme, c’est d’abord s’expliquer sa grande souplesse. On a dit que l’hindouisme était une multitude de religions et, d’une certaine façon, cette impression se vérifie. Chaque caste a ses façons spécifiques d’entrer en contact avec l’invisible. Il n’y a pas de volonté artificielle d’unité, mais plutôt une acceptation des différences qui, toujours, cherche à se fonder sur le Veda et sur le rapport au sacrifice. »²⁸ It is also interesting to note that A. M. Shah proposed the recognition of a sect as a structural principle of society as a whole, rather than merely of religion. He affirmed that there are sectarian and non-sectarian configurations in Hinduism. Some historians say that sects emerged in India as a

²⁶ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 90.

²⁷ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 95. In Hinduism, the caste system is a social stratification based on different hereditary groups called *jātis*. There are four *varnas* or caste groups called *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. Some *jātis* excluded from the four *varnas* are the *dalits* or untouchables. *Brahmins* are the priestly class. They study Vedas, perform rituals for themselves and others. They are the middlemen between God and people. They are temple Priests and invoke God’s blessings upon people. They are supposed to lead an exemplary life. They are well educated and expected to preserve the traditions of Hinduism. *Brahmins* are supposed to protect *dharma*. They have higher authority and power over other caste groups. *Kshatriyas* are the warrior class. They must protect the people and serve the *Brahmins*. They offer sacrifices to God and ancestors. This caste group consists of Kings. They have power and authority to destroy their enemies. They give gifts to *Brahmins* and protect the caste system. *Vaisyas* are the merchant class. They trade money and cultivate the land. They participate in certain Vedic rituals, but they are restricted in many religious and social activities. They cannot marry from someone belonging to a higher caste. *Shudras* are the labour class. They serve the people belonging to the other three caste groups. They do not observe any Vedic rituals. They cannot participate in any religious ceremony or hear any sacred chants. They cannot marry from a higher caste group or eat food with higher caste members. All those who do not belong to any four caste groups are called the untouchables. They are *chandalas* or impure people. They are the *dalits*. Mahatma Gandhi called them the *harijans* or God’s people. They were forbidden to walk in the presence of other caste group members around them. They were the neglected people in the society. See also: D. Kinsley, *Hinduism*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1982, p. 122-126; K. Knott, *Hinduism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 19; J. Lipner, *Hindus – Their religious beliefs and practices*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 127-147.

²⁸ A. Couture, 2009, p. 93.

reaction against the ritualism of Vedic or Brahmanic Hinduism. A. M. Shah underlined that this may well be true at the doctrinal level. But he observed that the lifestyle of lay members of any sect today is highly ritualistic. There are different kinds of rituals done by people belonging to different sects.²⁹ G. Flood also underlined that Hindu ritual occurs in different places at different occasions in life. Rituals are done to please gods and to receive blessings. He said that “ritual patterns constrain life from birth, through childhood, to marriage and finally death.”³⁰

The sectarians stick to their founder with a principal deity. “Most accounts of a Hindu sect begin with narration of how it was founded and what the ideas of its founder and his disciples were. When we enter the home of a member of a sect, we usually find in the front room pictures of only one principal deity and a few minor ones associated with it.”³¹ Sectarians go on pilgrimage mainly to those places considered sacred by the sect. They have significant differences in their behaviour.³²

Non-sectarians seem to be more open to different religious practices. “The members of a non-sectarian household, in a village or an urban neighbourhood, visit the temples of several different gods and goddesses.”³³ They celebrate festivals in honour of all the major gods and goddesses. They are open to read or listen to discourses on a variety of scriptures. As per the character of the deity and the nature of the occasion, they sing praises and worship. “A non-sectarian might develop special attachment to one among the several deities he worships – to what is called *ishta devatā* (favourite deity) – but this does not mean that he is a member of the sect in which that deity occupies the central place.”³⁴ Hindus decorate their homes with images and statues of God and goddesses, often joined by the God and goddesses of other religions. Local traditions and specific revelations have a definite place in the lives of people.³⁵ Klaus Klostermaier also underlined that “the two great merits of Hinduism have been its concern for the specific spiritual

²⁹ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 216.

³⁰ G. Flood, 1996, p. 198.

³¹ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 213.

³² A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 216.

³³ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 211.

³⁴ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 217.

³⁵ K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 116-117.

competence of a person (*adhikāra*) and its readiness to allow him freedom of worshipping his chosen divinity (*ishta devatā*).”³⁶

A sectarian will know what to do in his sect’s centre as he would have gone there many times. A non-sectarian will need assistance in a sectarian temple. The sectarian and non-sectarian configurations are not isolated from each other as there are connections between the two. A sectarian can be defined by exclusive social boundaries. A non-sectarian seems to have loose or no boundaries.³⁷ It is possible for non-sectarians to become sectarians by joining a sect. The requirements are demanding for such a change as one has to change one’s belief system and behavior patterns. A guru of a sect has to accompany a person in the process.³⁸ There are also relations between sect and caste. A. M. Shah noted that there are a few sects composed of members belonging to only one caste. But in the present situation, there are also sects composed of members belonging to more than one caste and all of the members follow caste regulations.³⁹

It is possible that a sect that refuses any caste becomes a caste in itself. For instance, the Lingayats of south India is a sect that refuses any caste in it and gradually became a caste in itself. The greater issue is not whether a sect denies a caste, but the question of which castes in the hierarchy of castes are recruited to membership of which sect. It is to be noted that the membership of a sect cannot cover the entire cast hierarchy. There is also an important question of relation between members in a sect who belong to different castes. A. M. Shah observed that the sectarian fellowship seemed to break caste barriers to a significant extent. It is under the leadership of a guru that all gather and maintain the relationships.⁴⁰ Along with these above relationships, one should not forget the connections between *tribals*, *dalits* and *adivāsīs*. “*Tribals* were all part of the vast mass of non-sectarian Hindus. Over the last two centuries the process of Sanskritisation has intensified among all of them. If Hindu sects recruit them into their fold, or if new sects emerge among them, they will be building on a foundation already laid by a long

³⁶ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 93.

³⁷ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 217-218.

³⁸ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 226.

³⁹ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 227-234. See also: C. Clémentin-Ojha & M. Gaborieau, « La montée du prosélytisme dans le sous-continent indien : Introduction » in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 87/1, 1994, p. 17-20.

⁴⁰ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 234-235.

process of Sanskritisation.”⁴¹ Many tribal groups are found in the seven states of North East India, and *adivāsīs* and *dalits* are spread out in different regions in India.

K. Klostermaier opined that one also needs to consider the way religion has its place in India and the way it is understood today in the West.⁴² Hinduism incorporates and assimilates many other religious traditions as seen in the history and geography of India. With its accommodative character, Hinduism expanded to many regions in the world. “In the course of its long history, it has manifested a unique capacity for almost infinite expansion. One of its basic assumptions seems to have been that, though religious practices and beliefs were bound to change according to different times and different climes, they could all be comprehended within a larger unity. Accordingly, Hinduism has always been variable, elastic, and receptive.”⁴³ Hinduism seems to offer ample freedom to its adherents to choose among many options, and exerts little pressure on its followers, in matters of faith and belief. However, individual confessions strictly follow caste rules and sectarian discipline. The flexibility of Hinduism makes it complicated to understand certain rituals as there are differences between theory and practice.⁴⁴

Freedom of worshipping makes Hindus grow in a way they desire. They are free to discover new gods and patterns of worship. Dogmas and doctrines are not imposed upon Hindus. All Hindus do not follow the same teachings of a guru. “Doctrines regarding *ātman*, *karma*, *samsāra*, and *moksha* may perhaps be regarded as axiomatic in many schools of Hindu philosophy, but they are by no means either universal or essential so far as Hindu religion is concerned. For, a person can claim to be a Hindu without believing in any or all of these doctrines, while a person is not entitled to be called a Hindu only because he accepts any or all of these doctrines.”⁴⁵ In this regard, it is interesting to note the points of G. Flood who observed that in Hinduism “practice takes precedence over belief.” What Hindus do are more important than what they believe. As Hinduism is not creedal, adherence to *dharma* is not an acceptance of certain beliefs, but the practice or performance of certain duties, which are defined in accordance with *dharmic* social

⁴¹ A. M. Shah, 2006, p. 240-242.

⁴² K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 1.

⁴³ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 92.

⁴⁴ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 7.

⁴⁵ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 91.

stratification. The social hierarchy is governed by the distinction between purity and pollution, with the higher and lower castes.⁴⁶ G. Flood also underlined that “at a universal level *dharma* refers to a cosmic, eternal principle, yet it must also relate to the world of human transaction. At a particular level, *dharma* applies to specific laws and the contexts to which they are applied.”⁴⁷

Hindu reformers openly spoke of the abolition of caste system. Observance of caste rules is no longer a universally valid criterion of Hinduism. But certain caste rules and regulations in Hinduism can still be noticed. Paradoxes and polarities are part of Hinduism. Religious equality is ideal in Hindu way of living but there is a greater promotion of social hierarchy. R. N. Dandekar rightly said that Hinduism “allows complete freedom in the matter of belief but insists on a rigid conformity to caste-rules. And what is particularly striking is that, though the lower castes suffer from many disabilities both in the religious and social spheres, we see that the lower the caste is in the social hierarchy the more religiously conservative and conformistic it usually happens to be.”⁴⁸

The caste system is complex in Hinduism. In general, we hear that there are four major castes: *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shūdra*. In ancient religious texts in India, these four categories are well mentioned. It is called *varna* or colours. *Varna* is theoretical classification based on occupation. But there is a fifth category called the “untouchables” that was added to the four groups and Mahatma Gandhi called them *Harijan* or the people of God. The Indian Constitution established in January 1950 also bestowed scheduled-caste and scheduled-tribe privileges for those who are indigenous and marginalized in the society. Apart from these major categories of castes, there are also many other caste groups that sociologists call *jāti*. The term *jāti*, or community, refers to thousands of endogamous groups. For instance, in villages in rural India, people belonging to different *jātis* are recognized by their birth names and professions. In village life, people respect every *jāti* and members of each *jāti* do their jobs and contribute to the daily affairs of the society. G. Flood noted that the term *jāti* refers not only to social classes, but to all categories of beings. Insects, plants, domestic animals, wild animals and celestial beings are all

⁴⁶ G. Flood, 1996, p. 12.

⁴⁷ G. Flood, 1996, p. 57.

⁴⁸ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 95.

*jāti*s, which shows that differences between human castes might be regarded as being as great as differences between different species.⁴⁹

Normally people from the same *jāti* get married to each other and have families. However, in modern society, and especially in cities, people intermingle and get into inter-caste and inter-*jāti* marriages. It is important for every *jāti* to hold on to its deity. They do not need to go to popular temples for worship. The chosen divinity of a group is associated with the daily life of its members. In certain cases, the performance of duties associated with each caste and *jāti* by the members is considered as helping them in their liberation.⁵⁰ A. Couture rightly said, « Quand on parle de l'hindouisme comme d'un mode de vie, c'est donc à ces groupes de naissance diversifiés, séparés et hiérarchisés que l'on fait d'abord allusion. Cet hindouisme est fait de mythes, de rites, de croyances plus ou moins superstitieuses, de pratiques éthiques adaptées à chaque groupe. »⁵¹ He also underlined that one has to take into consideration the different schools or sects that come around a guru with specific traditions called *sampradāya* and with specific interpretations of the words of Veda. To know Hinduism, one needs to know hundreds of ways and manners of living.⁵²

Religious conversion is a complex reality in India. There were different periods of religious conversion to Christianity in India. Various states in India have different stories of conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. Saint Thomas Christians in the state of Kerala claim that they have a long history of Christianity as their ancestors were converted by Saint Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus. Christians in the state of Goa claim that they were converted by Portuguese missionaries. Saint Francis Xavier is a great figure for them, whose tomb still exists there. Both Keralite and Goan Christians witnessed conversions among the highest castes, including Brahmins. This was not the case with Christians in the state of Tamil Nadu and many other states in northern India. There, Hindus from lower castes got converted to Christianity for myriad reasons, including liberation movements. In the northeastern states of India, many tribal groups got converted to Christianity as a result of their relationship with missionaries from abroad and

⁴⁹ G. Flood, 1996, p. 59.

⁵⁰ A. Couture, 2009, p. 81-85.

⁵¹ A. Couture, 2009, p. 85.

⁵² A. Couture, 2009, p. 95-102. See also: G. Flood, 1996, p. 59.

from southern India. It is to be noted that there are different theories, modes and motivations of conversions in every stage in India.⁵³ Some writers suggest that conversions in India were not forced upon people, the missionaries were humane in their outlook, and only converted people when they volunteered to become Christians. Other authors state that missionaries imposed their way of doing things and that the local people were compelled to convert.⁵⁴ With regard to the question of conversion to Catholicism, Rowena Robinson underlined that “while the methods of conversion were often based on enforcement, Catholicism was in certain ways adaptable to local social needs.”⁵⁵ Catholic missionaries encouraged traditional celebrations and feasts. In his opinion, for the lowest caste, conversion promised a more positive status as they had some role in some of the church celebrations.⁵⁶ When it came to a comparison of conversion from Hinduism to Catholicism between Goa and Kerala, R. Robinson pointed out that, in the two states, despite the radical differences in the methods and political contexts of conversion, common means were found to protect the privileges of the high-caste local elites. Missionaries did forge links with local practices, and people themselves adapted to the limitations placed on them without completely giving up their own social and cultural modes.⁵⁷ Sathianathan Clarke pointed out that conversion to Christianity in the state of Tamil Nadu was mainly done in a collective form of mobilizing *dalit* communities who seemed to be marginalized by a system of traditional Brahmanic vision.⁵⁸

Frederick S. Downs studied the question of conversion in the North East India where people belonged to various tribes. The seven states in North East India welcomed people from many ethnic communities that migrated into the region from Burma, Tibet, China, Bangladesh and Cambodia. Most the people belong to Indo-Chinese Mongoloid racial root. The region of North

⁵³ S. Clarke, “Conversion to Christianity” in *Religious Conversion in India – Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, Rowena Robinson & Sathianathan Clarke, (ed.), New Delhi/New York, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2007, p. 285-286.

⁵⁴ R. Robinson, “Sixteenth Century Conversions to Christianity in Goa” in *Religious Conversion in India – Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, Rowena Robinson & Sathianathan Clarke, (ed.), New Delhi/New York, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2007, p. 303.

⁵⁵ R. Robinson, 2007, p. 302.

⁵⁶ R. Robinson, 2007, p. 309.

⁵⁷ R. Robinson, 2007, p. 315.

⁵⁸ S. Clarke, “Conversion to Christianity in Tamil Nadu: Conscious and Constitutive Community Mobilization Towards a Different Symbolic World Vision” in *Religious Conversion in India – Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, Rowena Robinson & Sathianathan Clarke, (ed.), New Delhi/New York, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2007, p. 329.

East India is rich in cultural diversity. There are hundreds of tribal dialects spoken in the area. Language is linked to the culture and way of life in North East India. Until medieval period, the clear majority of inhabitants in the region were adherents of primal religions. New migrants to the area brought in their religions and practices that made the situation complex. Small Christian communities were established in the late 17th century. More tribal people embraced Christianity in the 20th century because of the missionary works of Europeans and South Indians, especially from Kerala, Karnataka, Goa and Tamil Nadu. The educational and medical facilities that they provided for the tribal people attracted them to the missionaries. It is said that the government administration had been neglecting these aspects of the people of North East India for a long period. Some missionaries learnt local dialects and got involved in the daily life of tribal people to understand their culture. Though there were moments of struggles and conflicts, in general, the missionaries respected the culture of tribal people. This drew the latter to Christianity.⁵⁹ F. S. Downs pointed out that “as an ‘insider’ Christianity was as attractive an agent of acculturation in the highly unsettled second half of the twentieth century as it had been during the previous 170 years when it was viewed as having a close relationship to the colonial power. Actually, the acceleration of the conversion movement in the later period suggests that indigenous Christianity is a more effective agent of acculturation than foreign-controlled Christianity.”⁶⁰

From another point of view, on conversion to Hinduism, Catherine Clémentin-Ojha and Marc Gaborieau observed that proselytism in India is not only a theoretical problem but also a political issue. Hinduism is generally non-missionary but the Hindu sectarian traditions have missionary attitudes to gather followers. « La notion de conversion ne fait pas davantage partie du vocabulaire de l’hindouisme. Les pratiques que ces termes désignent lui sont étrangères : il n’a pas mis au point de procédure permettant de transformer un non-hindou en hindou et, pour cette raison, la démarche inverse lui est inconcevable. Il est pourtant possible de *sortir* de l’hindouisme. »⁶¹ Many scholars would argue that one becomes a Hindu by birth. If not born in a

⁵⁹ F. S. Downs, “Christian Conversion Movements in North East India” in *Religious Conversion in India – Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, Rowena Robinson & Sathianathan Clarke, (ed.), New Delhi/New York, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2007, p. 381-397.

⁶⁰ F. S. Downs, 2007, p. 397.

⁶¹ C. Clémentin-Ojha & M. Gaborieau, « La montée du prosélytisme dans le sous-continent indien : Introduction » in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 87/1, 1994, p. 17.

Hindu family, a person has no caste status and no access to any *samskāras* or rituals. It is believed that *samskāras*, often called the sacraments of Hinduism, are rituals by which Hindus become full members of their community. The notable ceremonies that Hindus undergo include *annaprāsana*, or first feeding of solid food, *cūdākarma*, or tonsure before receiving the sacred thread, *vivāha*, or marriage, *nāmakarana*, or name giving, and *samnyāsa*, or renouncing. However, *upanayana*, or initiation, is the most important *samskāra* that most of the Hindus celebrate in a grand manner. The family astrologer determines the time for the ceremony of *upanayana*. During the ceremony, the sacred thread is put on for the first time over the left shoulder of Hindu boys.⁶²

S. Clarke might have reason to say that in all these conversion modalities “it must be acknowledged that while conversion did entail a movement away from a real world of cumulative and comprehensive disabilities, which were in a complex and ambivalent way connected with local variants of popular Hinduism, it did not involve a procession into a real world of equality, freedom and dignity, which was promised by missionary-proclaimed Christianity.”⁶³ Hindus from lower castes who became Christians did not get a better status in Christianity, either. In some parts of India, caste discriminations exist in Christianity for newly converted Hindus to Christianity. It is humiliating to observe that caste practices within the Church divide Christians in certain sections of the population. Therefore, conversion from one religion to another or from one sect to another may not really bring a change in the status of a person. However, the converted person might adapt to certain new religious practices in his new adhesion.

In general, people might say that Hindus are open to other religions. Some people even get converted within Hinduism as in the case of a non-sectarian becoming a sectarian. Some Hindus become Christians or Buddhists. However, André Couture asked an interesting question: « *est-il possible de prétendre à une ouverture vers les autres religions en les enfermant dans une opposition aussi simpliste?* » He affirmed that it is important to re-examine the question of time and its complexity. What is ‘time’ in religion? « Il s’agit essentiellement du discours que chaque

⁶² K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 147-151.

⁶³ S. Clarke, 2007, p. 344.

culture religieuse construit pour mesurer son propre déplacement le long de l'espace symbolique qu'elle propose à ses adeptes d'explorer. »⁶⁴ A. Couture underlined that « le temps religieux se situe entre le prévisible et l'imprévisible. Il n'y a nulle part de temps religieux qui ne serait que nouveauté, et nulle part de calendrier qui ne serait qu'un cercle indéfiniment répétitif. »⁶⁵ If we really want to understand the concept of time in religion, we need to study each religious tradition, including its teachings and salvation story. We need to take into consideration the prophets, gurus, masters or people who play vital roles in every religious tradition.

Often, people say that Judaism and Christianity ascribe to the idea of “proper” linear time and most Oriental religious experiences have a cyclical concept of time. However, A. Couture argued that the « opposition entre un temps linéaire qui serait typique du judéo-christianisme et un temps cyclique qui serait l'apanage de presque toutes les autres expériences religieuses est en quelque sorte trop tranchée pour vraiment coller à la réalité concrète. »⁶⁶ A. Couture was concerned about how the notion of time entered religions, and found that it was connected to the concept of salvation in each religion. Religions talk about time. They organize doctrinal discourses and perform rituals that use temporal categories. They do not just reiterate the discourses of people who they speak about, but rather represent a new time and show the futility, or relativity, of some old perceptions of time. Religious traditions are reformulated as per the time and experience of salvation.

In Christianity, there is a clear concept of time. The Scriptures make a distinction between “temporal” and the “eternal” time. Saint Paul says that the things that are seen are temporal and the things not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4: 18). The concept of time is not the same for God and human beings. God's time is endless but human perception of time has a beginning and an end. In the Scriptures, time is represented as a linear experience. It is represented as a historical era, starting with the creation and ending with the second coming of Jesus Christ. There was a preparatory period in human history and there was a fulfillment period. The divine plan of salvation took place in its time. A. Couture rightly said that « les rites de la vie prétendent

⁶⁴ A. Couture, « Temps et religions – Réflexions au-delà des « évidences » in *Liturgie, foi et culture*, Vol. 31, Montréal, CECC, 1997, p. 29.

⁶⁵ A. Couture, 1997, p. 30.

⁶⁶ A. Couture, 1997, p. 28-29.

conduire l'être humain à sa perfection. La prédication d'un maître de doctrine est censée faire accéder à la conversion. La venue d'un sauveur déclenche un mouvement qui doit renouveler le monde. Le salut, sous quelque forme qu'il se présente, force le croyant à se déplacer. L'arrivée d'un sauveur instaure pour celui qui y croit un temps du salut, c'est-à-dire un temps original qui mesure le déplacement que suppose l'acceptation de ce salut. »⁶⁷

The Catholic liturgical time is organised in three levels that progress simultaneously. There are three cycles: three-year, one-year and seven-day. Three dimensions of time are experienced throughout the year. There are six seasons in every cycle of the liturgical calendar: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Triduum, Easter, Ordinary Time. The liturgical calendar begins every year during the month of November on the first Sunday of Advent and runs through the solemnity of Christ the King. The liturgical year is the temporal structure within which the Church celebrates the life and mysteries of Christ. The lectionary follows a Sunday cycle and a weekday cycle. Along with this time frame, A. Couture underlined that in the heart of the liturgical time, the eschatological time plays a greater role in the Church. « Inscrit au cœur même de la liturgie, le mystère pascal cherche à créer une rupture par rapport au temps séculier. Il instaure un temps eschatologique qui remet en question les points de repère immédiats de la vie humaine. Ce temps 'différent' crée un écart, une distance critique entre la vie quotidienne et ce salut qui ne saurait se réaliser entièrement dans les limites du temps et de l'espace ordinaires. C'est comme si les cycles naturels de la vie et de la mort étaient brisés pour être réinsérés dans d'autres cycles, triennal, annuel et hebdomadaire, fondés sur la logique de la mort-résurrection. »⁶⁸ All Christians live like other people following the cycle of the sun and the moon, and form a part of the social, the political and the economic life of the society. However, they also follow a time in their faith life that is connected to the life cycle of Jesus Christ, oriented toward the salvation history. For Christians, what is primordial is to live in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The concept of time is complex in Hinduism. A. Couture rightly said, « l'hindouisme a énormément réfléchi sur la notion de temps. Il serait dommage d'imaginer qu'on puisse réduire

⁶⁷ A. Couture, 1997, p. 29.

⁶⁸ A. Couture, 1997, p. 35.

ce temps à n'être qu'un éternel retour, comme le voudrait un cliché trop répandu. S'il est exact que le temps est la mesure du salut, il faut d'abord affirmer qu'il y a dans l'hindouisme autant de conceptions du temps que de façons de percevoir la libération. »⁶⁹ Time is known as *kāla* that signifies both time and death. Time is personified as the god of death, *Yama*, as death is a limiting factor in human life. Therefore, death and time are related. The concept of time is based on human experience of time as a recurring and predictable phenomenon measurable in terms of units such as days and nights, or months and years. There is regularity to human beings' time and gods' time. The regularity is known as *ṛta* or the cosmic rhythm manifested by God. *Ṛta* is perceived in every aspect of creation. In the human body, it is biorhythm, including heart beat and breathing. In the universe, it is perceived in the configuration of the planetary bodies and their fixed movements. *Dharma*, or God's eternal law, protects this regularity of rhythm. There is also a period of construction and destruction at different levels. « L'hindouisme des grandes traditions de dévotion voit le temps de l'histoire comme une série de constructions et de destructions à tous les niveaux. Dieu s'y présente comme un grand Yogin qui intervient soudain comme un jeu (*līlā*). »⁷⁰

It is said that the Hindu concept of time has a cosmic perspective to it. Hindus believe that the process of creation moves in cycles. The Hindu concept of time comes from a sage, *Ganita*, who is mentioned in *Manusmṛti* and the *Mahābhārata*. He calculated the duration of each cycle of creation in human years. He divided cosmic time into *kalpas*, days and nights in the time and space of *Brahmā*. A *kalpa* consists of two *artha kalpas* and each *artha kalpa* is divided into a thousand *mahāyugas*. Each *mahāyuga* is divided into four *yugas*, namely *satyayuga*, *tretāyuga*, *dvāparayuga* and *kaliyuga*. It is said that the current *yuga*, or epoch, is *kaliyuga*. A. Couture presumed these elements to underline the process of liberation achieved through the aspects of time. « Dans le gigantesque édifice temporel mis en place par les sages de l'Inde, le *kalpa* renvoie à une durée construite par l'accomplissement des rites. On identifie ce *kalpa* à une journée de vie d'un Brahmā, un dieu créateur censé vivre cent années de trois cent soixante jours. Bien que l'hindou se situe idéalement en plein milieu de cet édifice parfait, il dit en même temps qu'il vit dans le *kaliyuga*, une période où les humains sont incapables de respecter les normes et

⁶⁹ A. Couture, 1997, p. 32.

⁷⁰ A. Couture, 1997, p. 36.

où règne le désordre le plus total. Idéal et réalité s'opposent diamétralement, mais seulement pour faire apparaître sur la scène cosmique un Dieu yogin pour qui cette immense structure temporelle ne semble qu'un instant et qui est capable d'intervenir soudain pour apporter la libération.»⁷¹

In Hinduism, time is also seen as an aspect of creation. It exists only when we are bound to the things of this world through our senses. Time is a mental concept that people created by perceiving the movements of celestial objects through their senses. It is a component in the illusion in which people live and assume to be reality. There is no division of time for God; just the present and continuous state of existence. People hold different philosophical outlooks of time. A. Couture summarized it in these words: « Certaines philosophies comme le Vaisheshika considèrent le temps comme une catégorie à part et le support de toutes choses. La philosophie Sāmkhya accepte la réalité du changement, mais refuse de poser le temps comme un principe indépendant. Le Yoga ne confère de réalité objective qu'aux instants; le temps en tant que collection d'instant ne serait qu'une construction mentale. Les spéculations du Vedānta rejettent le temps qui fait lui aussi partie des illusions (*māyā*) du monde phénoménal. S'il dépend des actes rituels qui servent à construire la durée du monde, c'est donc que le temps peut être aussi déconstruit. Il n'est pas une force absolue. Il doit exister une réalité qui transcende le temps aux mille tentacules, qui transcende toute fatalité. Avec ou sans réalité ontologique, le temps fait partie des constructions de l'ego, et le vrai sage sait qu'il n'existe que dans l'instant. Pour lui, seul l'instant compte, l'instant qui ouvre l'être tout entier à la présence d'une source libératrice. »⁷²

In general understanding, many people believe that Hinduism considers time to be cyclical. This is based on people's experience of time in the form of days and nights. People perceive this cyclical pattern in days, weeks, months, years, seasons and epochs. Time is a never ending cyclical process. A. Couture opined that the ongoing process of time is also connected to different castes, their devotional activities and their *dharma*. « L'Inde valorise un temps qui se construit d'année en année grâce aux rites appropriés. Elle valorise les règnes que des rois

⁷¹ A. Couture, 1997, p. 33.

⁷² A. Couture, 1997, p. 33.

clairvoyants édifient en se faisant précéder de leurs chapelains. Elle finit par valoriser le *dharma* de chaque caste et le temps propre à l'activité de chacune de ces castes. Mais en même temps, l'Inde pense que ces constructions proprement historiques sont soumises à l'intervention salvifique du Dieu de la dévotion. Ce que disent ces mythes, c'est que la création du monde est inséparable de sa destruction. La libération n'est ni dans la création du monde, ni dans sa destruction; car création et destruction font partie de l'écoulement même du monde (*samsāra*). C'est au milieu de cette roue cosmique (*samsāra-cakra*) qu'arrive soudain un salut qui change en un instant la face de l'univers. »⁷³

The concept of liberation is not simple in the Hindu world. By living everyday-life, doing good deeds and walking through cosmic perspectives a new world is created. Many Hindu philosophers and theologians spoke about the notion of *karma-samsāra-moksha* as a metaphysical and ethical outlook in Hinduism. Some of them spoke about the caste system as a more socio-ethical outlook. Due to his ignorance, man gets into a cycle of existence that has existed since eternity (*samsāra*). His essential oneness with the absolute reality happens when he is delivered (*moksha*) through his good actions (*karma*).⁷⁴ Some Hindu authors suggest that salvation is not achieved only through a single path; Hinduism offers different paths to *moksha*. « La notion d'une voie obligée, unique et indispensable au salut de tous les hommes, lui est profondément étrangère. »⁷⁵ I could not cover all the multiple paths of the concept of liberation and salvation in my study. My preoccupation was more with Hindus who participate in religious and devotional activities at the Oratory. It is in this context that I chose to assign more importance to *bhakti* devotional practices of Hindus at the Oratory. I chose to do a pastoral praxeological analysis of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles by Hindus at the Oratory.

⁷³ A. Couture, 1997, p. 34.

⁷⁴ R.N. Dandekar, 1975, p. 94.

⁷⁵ C. Clémentin-Ojha & M. Gaborieau, « La montée du prosélytisme dans le sous-continent indien : Introduction » in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 87/1, 1994, p. 28.

Bhakti is a vast concept in Hinduism and has many interpretations in different schools of thoughts.⁷⁶ Besides *bhakti*, philosophical ideas and religious practices also have significant presence in Hinduism. Some Hindu scriptures give prominence to *bhakti* since it simplifies Hindu religious practices. Other scriptures do not deem *bhakti* important because they hold that the practice of *bhakti* weakens the caste system in Hinduism. The commentators of the *Bhagavadgītā* distinguished between *jñāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*. Yoga is directed to the pre-existing union between the individual consciousness and the universal consciousness. Yoga is not only intended for simple physical fitness but also aims to have a higher experience of God. Krishna, in the *Bhagavadgītā*, insisted on the importance of *bhakti* to the Supreme Lord (*Īshvara*).⁷⁷ It was in the 19th century that the Hindu reformer Vivekananda, inspired by the teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā*, propagated three distinct paths to liberation: *jñāna-mārga* (way of knowledge or wisdom), *karma-mārga* (way of action) and *bhakti-mārga* (way of devotion or divine love). The fourth path, *rāja-mārga*, derived from the idea of *rājavidyā* (royal knowledge) that Krishna propounded to Arjuna in the 9th chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*. It is to be noted that

⁷⁶ In my study, I did not elaborately study various *bhakti* schools in Hinduism that exist across India and different parts of the world. I aimed to interpret the *bhakti* practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph’s Oratory based on my data collection through interviews.

⁷⁷ *Īshvara* means Lord. It is an honorific title given to the supreme deity in the context of *bhakti* and theistic Hinduism. *Īshvara* occurs in various compound titles such as *Mahēshvara* – Great Lord, *Amarēshvara* – Immortal Lord, *Paramēshvara* – Supreme Lord, and *Yajñēshvara* – Lord of Sacrifice. In the earliest Vedic literature, *Īshvara* denotes the power of a ruler, lord or master. After the final revision of the *Manusmṛti* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Īshvara* was used almost exclusively in the sense of *Paramēshvara*. *Īshvara* is the concept of personal God. People get to know *Īshvara* through *bhakti*. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Lord Krishna reveals himself and insists on the necessity of *bhakti* for liberation, and in the *Īshvaragītā*, Lord Shiva reveals himself and teaches the importance of *bhakti*. As one correlates Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā* and Shiva in *Īshvaragītā*, one observes a striking parallel between the transfiguration of Krishna (*Bhagavadgītā*, ch. 2) and the dance of Shiva (*Īshvaragītā*, ch. 5). *Īshvara* is the general term for the most powerful god. There are three words *īśa*, *īśāna*, *Īshvara* that all derive from the root, *īś*, to have power. All three can be translated as “lord,” or “the one who possesses the power.” These terms were applied to *devās* in the Vedic period: *Indra*, *Mitra*, *Varuna*, *Soma* and *Sāvitrī*. In late Vedic texts, *Rudra*, linked to Shiva, was called *īśāna* – master, or “the ruling one.” *Purusha* was also known as the *Īshvara* of immortality and the immortal and imperishable *īśa* in the *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*. In later periods, these terms came to be used exclusively for a God seen as the Supreme Being, either Vishnu or Shiva. The term *Īshvara* is frequently applied to Shiva. In Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* (1.24), and so in the *Sāmkhya-Yoga* tradition, *Īshvara* is described as a “special *Purusha*”, an omniscient being, eternally untouched by *klēshas*, or defilements, such as *avidyā*, or ignorance, or by the workings of *karmā*. However, for Sankara, *Īshvara* is *Saguna Brahman*. In Sankara’s *Advaita*, there is *para Brahman*, higher *Brahman* (*Nirguna*, the impersonal, distinctionless absolute) and *apāra Brahman*, lower *Brahman* (*Saguna*, with qualities) or God (*Īshvara*). The Lord (*Īshvara*, *Paramēshvara*) is *Brahman* associated with name and form (*nāma-rūpa*). In his *Yoga* system, Patanjali uses the term *Īshvara* to refer to his conception of God as a unique *Purusha*; his God is not the cause, creator, preserver or destroyer of the universe. See also: W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 150-151; D. Cush, C. Robinson, & M. York, 2008, p. 379-380; J. Stutley & M. Stutley, 1977, p. 120.; M. Dhavamony, *Love of God according to Saiva Siddhanta*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 89.; G. Williams, 2003, p. 158-159.

after Vivekananda, there were many neo-Hindu and occidental interpretations of the four *mārgas* in Hinduism that I do not intent to distinguish in my study.

Bhakti-mārga, the discipline of devotion, is a social and gender-inclusive path to liberation outlined in the *Bhagavadgītā*, involving complete *prapatti*, or surrender, to Krishna as the supreme and omnipotent God. *Bhakti-mārga* is said to supersede or incorporate the other *mārgas* though the *Bhagavadgītā* itself does not give a systematic representation of every *mārga*.⁷⁸ The practice of *bhakti-mārga* is seen around temples, images, processions, feasts and eminent gurus. *Bhakti-mārga* consists of acts of worship, and loving devotion to God.⁷⁹ *Bhakti-mārga* is considered an effective avenue to achieve personal liberation. Generally speaking, *bhakti* indicates a position of dependence vis-à-vis another, in which offerings may be made in the hope of receiving grace. The majority of Indian scholars consider that *bhakti* derives from the root *bhaj*, “to worship,” “to be devoted to.” This is plausible, as *bhakti* practice involves acts of worship and loving devotion to God. In Sanskrit sources, the earliest *bhakti* soteriology appears in *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad* and the *Mahābhārata*, particularly the latter’s *Bhagavadgītā* and *Nārāyanīya* sections, where exclusive devotion is said to be indispensable for direct experience of God.⁸⁰

Klaus Klostermaier remarks that the majority of Hindus are followers of *bhakti-mārga*. *Bhakti* as a past-participle, according to its grammatical form, can be derived from two different roots. If derived from the root *bhaj*, “to separate,” *bhakti* would have to be translated as ‘separation’. That makes sense in so far as *bhakti* systems presuppose the Supreme, Absolute Being to be unidentical with, and separated from, the individual human. In this view, inner longing for reunion is characteristic of human life, and the *bhakta* is aware of the painful separation between himself and God and tries to overcome it. *Bhakti* is rooted in the idea of God being the eternal

⁷⁸ R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 126-127. See also: W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 53.

⁷⁹ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 210.

⁸⁰ D. Cush, C. Robinson & M. York, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 88.

exemplar of the liberated soul and, therefore, leads souls not only to liberation but also to the ‘state of Brahman’.⁸¹

Nārada, the author of *Bhaktisūtra*, defines *bhakti* as *parama-prema*, highest affection for the Lord, possessing immortality in itself. The *Bhagavadgītā*, one of the best-known *bhakti* scriptures, sees the essence of *bhakti* in fixing one’s mind on Krishna and worshipping him.⁸² *Bhakti* is popular in India as it not only recognizes the emotional approach to God as entirely valid but also breaks down all the barriers of privilege to certain groups of the population. *Bhakti* became the means of salvation for everyone, including women and children, low-caste and outcast. *Bhakti* breaks the orthodoxy in Hinduism.⁸³

The central act of *bhakti* is *prapatti*, self-surrender, which consists of five individual components: the intention of submitting to the Lord⁸⁴; giving up resistance to the Lord; the belief in the protection of the Lord; the prayer that the Lord may save his devotees; the consciousness of utter helplessness. The Gaudiya-Vaishnavism speaks of three grades of *bhakti*. *Sadhanabhakti*, the first stage, contains *vaidhībhakti*, ritualistic devotion, and *rāgānugā*, passionate following. The next major level is *bhāvabhakti*, emotional devotion, in which the theory of *rasas*, rapturous emotions, finds a masterful application. It begins with the sentiment of ‘peacefulness’, continuing through ‘servitude’, ‘companionship’, ‘parental love’, and culminating in *madhurasā* or ‘sweet love’. The third stage of *bhakti* is *prema* which is love at its highest level. It is permanent and cannot be detached from the devotee.⁸⁵ K. Klostermaier aptly remarked that the majority of Hindus today are followers of *bhakti-mārga*, whose exterior manifestation in Temples, images, processions, feasts, and illustrious gurus characterize so much of present day India.⁸⁶

⁸¹ R. C. Zaehner, 1962, p. 125-127. See also: R. Singh, *Bhakti and Philosophy*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2006, p. 3. 26; K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 211.

⁸² K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 211.

⁸³ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 212.

⁸⁴ The word “Lord” is used in Hinduism.

⁸⁵ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 185-186.

⁸⁶ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 181.

Among many religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory, I chose to study two prominent symbols: water and fire. The symbolic usage of water and fire is known in Hinduism. Water and fire are used in Hindu *pūjā*, or prayer. Receiving Holy Water from the Oratory might be normal for some Hindus as they consider it being in a holy place of worship and cult. In Hindu temples, at the end of prayer, *tīrtha* or Holy Water is distributed to the people. Some of them drink it and others put it on their head or body. Light is not a strange element in Hindu *pūjā*. During prayers, Hindus offer *ārtī*, or light from wicks soaked in ghee, or from camphor, in front of an image of divinity to honour him/her. *Ārtī* removes *rātri*, or darkness. The origin of *ārtī* seems to come from *homa*, or fire rituals, of the Vedic time. The festival of *Dīpavali* is another instance where the use of fire is important in Hinduism. *Dīpa* signifies “light” and *avali* signifies “row” or “series”. Therefore, the Sanskrit word *Dīpavali* signifies row of lights. *Dīpa* is lit in honour of Rama who returns to Ayodhya after having won the battle against the evil Ravana. The origin of *Dīpavali* is found in the epic *Rāmāyana*. Light against darkness is the theme behind the feast of *Dīpavali*. It’s a symbol of the victory of good over evil.⁸⁷

1.2. Diversity of the transmission of Christian faith

The transmission of Christian faith started from the time of the Apostles who were sent out to proclaim the Gospels to all people. In the *Actes of the Apostles*, I see how small Christian communities came to the Apostles to listen to their teachings based on the life and message of Jesus. In primitive Christianity, the Church was not institutionalized as it is today. The faith of the people was the central element that gathered them to follow the teachings of the Apostles. “All who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Y. Bonnefoy, *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1981.

⁸⁸ *Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 2 : 44-47.

Catholic faith comprises of the creeds of the Church from the earliest times, significant extracts from all the necessary decrees, declarations of councils, popes, and Vatican congregations. The Church's living tradition today comprises of twenty centuries of Christian faith and life, and no people can ignore this fact.⁸⁹ Yves Congar underlines biblical faith as religious submission of the entire person not merely as intellectual adhesion or moral obedience. « La foi biblique vient chercher le 'oui' de toute la personne avec toutes ses capacités, l'invitant à répondre à Dieu qui se révèle et à s'offrir elle-même dans un mouvement vivant de sa volonté, de son intelligence, de ses affections et de sa capacité d'action. Au sens biblique du terme, un croyant est quelqu'un qui accepte d'obéir à Dieu et de s'en remettre à lui dans la foi, de donner à Dieu un crédit absolu en admettant qu'il est la vérité et se fiant à lui plutôt qu'à soi. Il advient ainsi vrai et uni à Dieu. »⁹⁰ Therefore, faith is the synthesis of all life.

There are two related words *pistis*, faith, and *pisteuein*, to believe, used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to indicate different words and concepts that connect to faith in the Hebrew text. However, the common word in Hebrew *aman* means certitude or unity. The word *amen* has been used throughout the history of the Christian liturgy as an affirmation.⁹¹ The response *amen* in Catholic liturgy contains an entire Christology. Jesus Christ in himself is the *Amen*, the faithful and true witness of faith (Rev 3: 14) who arouses the *amen* of faith in others. In the New Testament, faith is mostly used in the context of miraculous healings of Jesus. In his helplessness, man turns to God for an experience of a miracle. The believer is convinced that everything is possible for God. "Everything is possible for one who has faith" (Mk 9: 24) is a clear indication that Jesus invited people to grow in faith. Whoever has got faith would experience God. Faith is a saving aspect to every person as Jesus says to the blind man of Jericho "Go; your faith has saved you." (Mk 10: 52). "In the imitation of Jesus, being a Christian means being a believer. Being a Christian is defined by faith and faith alone."⁹²

⁸⁹ J. Neuner & J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Seventh Revised and Enlarged Edition, New York, Alba House, 2001, p. XXXIII.

⁹⁰ Y.-M. Congar, *La foi et la théologie*, Paris, Desclée, 1962, p. 84-85.

⁹¹ W. Kasper, 1980, p. 79.

⁹² W. Kasper, 1980, p. 82.

The words of the Risen Jesus Christ in the Gospels are clear to all those engaged in the transmission of Christian faith. A few examples are stated in the following passages. “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” (Jn 20: 21) This mission entrusted to the disciples of Jesus is evident in the Synoptic Gospels. “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16: 15); “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28: 19); “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached...to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.” (Lk 24: 47). The Church, a people chosen by God (1 Peter 2: 9), from the time of the Pentecost (Acts 2: 14) strengthened by the Holy Spirit, does the work of the transmission of Christian faith.

The Second Vatican Council brought a turning point in the ecclesiological framework about the participation of all God’s people in the transmission of the faith. *Koinonia*, “communion” is the term widely used to signify the change. The Church is considered to be the “people of God.” All God’s people participate in the prophetic mission of Christ.⁹³ Y. Congar puts it as a “movement” from Christ to all ministers with different charisma. The actors in the movement are Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Ecclesial Community and Ministers with different charisma.⁹⁴ From an ecclesiological perspective today, taking into consideration all changes that have happened in our society and reading the signs of the time, the efforts of the transmission of Christian faith continues with vigour. The Second Vatican Council was open to recognizing the people belonging to other religious traditions striving to discover the Divine. Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53 acknowledged that the proclamation of the faith is also available to the people who practice non-Christian religions. The Church esteems the non-Christian religions as they are the living expression of the soul of many groups of individuals, who consider dear the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest, although incomplete, often made with heartfelt sincerity and righteousness. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They

⁹³ P.-A. Martin, *Vatican II – les seize documents conciliaires – texte intégral* (Nouv. Éd.), Montréal, 2001, p. 57-62. See also: Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, p. 32-35.

⁹⁴ Y. M. Congar, *Ministère et communion ecclésiale*, Paris, Cerf, 1971, p. 19.

are all impregnated with innumerable “seeds of the Word” and can constitute a true “preparation for the Gospel.”⁹⁵

The Second Vatican Council comprised of many representatives from outside Europe. The so-called “mission countries” had their native representatives to share their experiences of living in multi-religious and multi-cultural background. They had a rich experience of the transmission of Christian faith.⁹⁶ Some of the official documents of the Council take into account their shared experiences and state of today’s world.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 16 declares that people who did not yet receive the Gospel are also connected to the people of God. The Divine Providence does not deny the help necessary for salvation to all people who do not have an explicit knowledge of God, but, with His grace, strive to live a good life.⁹⁷ The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes* 22, underlines that the Holy Spirit guides every person in the direction of being associated with the paschal mystery.⁹⁸ *Ad Gentes* 5, the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, underlines that the mission of the Church is fulfilled by her missionary activity that is influenced by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is fully present to all peoples in every nation. The Church, by the example of her life and preaching and the Sacraments, may lead people to the faith. In this way, they might have an open door before them to experience the mystery of Christ.⁹⁹

Nostra Aetate 2 enlightened and encouraged the Christians to receive non-Christians to their milieu in an esteemed manner. The Church recognizes that human beings are drawn closer together, and that the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger in the modern world. The Church promotes unity and love among all peoples and nations, and she admits the fact that

⁹⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Rome, Vatican, 1975, # 53.

⁹⁶ E. Lafont, « La théologie de la mission à l’heure du dialogue inter-religieux. » in *Sur la proposition de la foi*, H.-J. Gagey & D. Villepelet, (Dir.), Paris, Atelier, 1999, p. 147.

⁹⁷ W. Abbot, *The documents of Vatican II*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1966, p. 34-35. See also: P.-A. Martin, *Vatican II – les seize documents conciliaires – texte intégral* (Nouv. Éd.), Montréal, Fides, 2001, p. 36.

⁹⁸ W. Abbot, 1966, p. 222. See also: P.-A. Martin, 2001, p. 194.

⁹⁹ P.-A. Martin, 2001, p. 439.

some people come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious perception. Other religions try to encounter the restlessness of the human heart by proposing “ways”, comprising teachings, rules of life and sacred rites. The Church appreciates anything that is pure and holy in other religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and life. The Church opens her door to facilitate all people belonging to other religious traditions to discover the beauty of God who is Truth.¹⁰⁰ For example, “in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust.”¹⁰¹

Miikka Ruokanen has done a detailed study of Catholic doctrine of non-Christian religions according to the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰² His comment is pertinent about the shift of focus from Jews to all other religions during the course of the writing of the document *Nostra Aetate*.¹⁰³ Some modern critics of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration would say that basically nothing has changed in the outlook towards other religions, whereas theologically conservative critics would accept that the document makes a compromise between the unique and absolute truth of Christian faith and other “truths.”¹⁰⁴ M. Ruokanen observes that the official records of Catholic Church previous to the Second Vatican Council are very moderate in their views of the possibility of salvation *extra Ecclesiam*. There are no positive statements directly concerning non-Christian religions. The only extra-ecclesiastical way of salvation recognized is that of the direct relationship of man with his Creator through the illumination of reason and obedience to conscience. However, after the Second Vatican Council, there are many theologians who want dialogue with other religions.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate. Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions*, 1965, # 2. See also: P.-A. Martin, 2001, p. 550.

¹⁰¹ P.-A. Martin, 2001, p. 550.

¹⁰² M. Ruokanen, *The Catholic doctrine of Non-Christian Religions – According to the Second Vatican Council*, Leiden, New York and Brill, Koln, 1992.

¹⁰³ M. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 43.

¹⁰⁴ M. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ M. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 20-26.

The Second Vatican Council recognized Hinduism as it orients to the exploration of *mysterium divinum* and expresses its search in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. In its endeavor to express the divine mystery in a mythical and a rational language, Hinduism resembles Catholic theology. In addition, the Hindus seek release from the anxieties of present day life by ascetic practices and profound meditation. M. Ruokanen rightly noted that the Council text said nothing about what the Hindus have found in the divine mystery or what kind of relationship they have with it.¹⁰⁶

In 1964, Paul VI instituted a particular department of the Roman Curia for promoting relations with the people of other religions. It was called the *Secretariate for non-Christians* and, in 1988, it was renamed the *Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue* (PCID) in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, especially the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. The PCID tries to promote mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Christians and the followers of other religious traditions; it encourages the study of religions and promotes the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue. The two official documents of PCID¹⁰⁷ reaffirm the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and create a conducive atmosphere for further collaboration among Christians and non-Christians. In the same perspective, John Paul II, in his Encyclical letter on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, *Redemptoris Missio*, explains that the Salvation in Christ is offered to all.¹⁰⁸ The dialogue is supported by speaking and listening, and giving and taking.

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, reformulates for the American continent, the criteria to evaluate non-Christian religions as per the Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate*. According to this criterion, "Catholic Church, while affirming the specific originality of Christianity, does not reject anything that is true and holy in non-Christian religions." This document affirms that the Church in America takes steps to do her ecumenical and inter-religious

¹⁰⁶ M. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 72-73.

¹⁰⁷ The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *The attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions – Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, Rome, 1984. See also: *Bulletin Secretariatus pro non Christianis*, No. 13, 1984/2, # 6; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, Rome, Vatican, 1991.

¹⁰⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome, Vatican, 1990, # 10.

activities keeping in mind the pastoral guidelines laid down by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent *Magisterium*. *Ecclesia in America* highlights the good relations that exist with other Christian denominations and non-Christians. With regard to indigenous religions that existed before Christianity's arrival, the document states that the Church seeks to discover elements that are in connection with the Gospel so as to purify and integrate them into the life of local Church. It is a genuine challenge to the Church in the process of new evangelisation because, through energetic proselytization, new groups and sects spread rapidly in big cities and wherever the Church's presence is weak.¹⁰⁹

Ecclesia in America affirms "the Church involves in promoting social programs and religious assistance to migrants, with the aim of favoring cultural integration and social peace. Although it is true that illegal migrants face serious difficulties, there are positive aspects to the phenomenon of migration, which can favor greater integration among different peoples and the unity of the continent."¹¹⁰ The new generation is ready to welcome Christian faith. The presence of the educators in faith is indispensable when it comes to the transmission of Christian faith. Faith is God's gift, but we cannot maintain it without the help of the educators in faith. *Ecclesia in America* mentions that Asian migrants to America do know Christ. "The program of a new evangelization on the American continent...cannot be restricted to revitalizing the faith of regular believers, but must strive as well to proclaim Christ where he is not known."¹¹¹

The Pope Benedict XVI convoked the 13th General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that took place from 7th to 28th October 2012 on the theme *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian faith*.¹¹² The Synod envisaged giving particular attention to the changes in our society. The abandonment of the faith in Western society was a major concern along with the phenomena of individual freedom, changes in the economic sphere, and the mixing of races and cultures due to migration and interdependence of peoples. In all these, a new

¹⁰⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the encounter with the living Jesus Christ: the way to conversion, communion and solidarity in America*, Rome, Vatican, 1999.

¹¹⁰ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, Rome, Vatican, 1999, # 73.

¹¹¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999, # 74.

¹¹² Benedict XVI, The Apostolic Letter in the form of *Motu Proprio Ubicumque et Semper – Establishing the pontifical council for promoting the new evangelization*, Rome, Vatican, 2010.

way of evangelization seems to be the urgency of the time because it is seen “as an appropriate, timely tool in addressing the challenges of a rapidly changing world, and the way to respond to God’s generosity in our being gathered together by the Holy Spirit to experience God as the Father of us all and to bear witness and proclaim to all the Good News.”¹¹³

Keeping in line with the thoughts of Paul VI, Benedict XVI emphasized the need for renewal in the Church that is the community of believers. The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. The believers need to live in hope and foster the hope that they live so as to share it with others. The Church is the People of God and often tempted by idols. She needs to be constantly evangelized if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel. The Synod of Bishops underlined that among the obstacles to a new evangelization is the lack of joy and hope of Christian living. Today’s world needs people who are enlightened in heart and mind who can help people open their hearts and minds to discover God. For transmitting faith, people need to have enthusiasm and strong faith in God.¹¹⁴

1.3. Question of sharing sacred place

The question of my research concerns about sharing a sacred place of worship. Knowing that Saint Joseph’s Oratory is a Catholic place of worship, many Hindus go there to practice their religion. Although, this is a recent phenomenon at the Oratory, it has certainly happened in many other places in the world. In some countries, Christians from different denominations have been sharing the same Church for worship due to historical or geographical circumstances. Some years back, when I made a trip to the Holy Land in Israel, I observed few Churches being shared for cult by different Christian denominations, rites and congregations. In the context of the relations between the three monotheisms, the three branches of Abrahamic religions, Elizabeth Key Fowden asked the following questions: “Did worshippers of the Holy One simply turn a blind eye to those who burned incense to other gods at the same high place – or even at another, nearby, high place? To what extent does cohabitation actually compel those who experience it to consider the other, to be open to cross-fertilization? And might this inadvertent cross-fertilization

¹¹³ Benedict XVI, The Apostolic Letter in the form of *Motu Proprio Ubicumque et Semper*, 2010.

¹¹⁴ Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Rome, Vatican, 2012.

in turn lead the two to resemble each other more closely? Or might greater acquaintance lead to greater hostility?”¹¹⁵ She narrated the story at Mamre.¹¹⁶ Along with Jews and Christians, diverse religious population of Palestine gathered there. It is interesting to see how the story of Abraham’s encounter at Mamre gave rise to a variety of complementary interpretations of the cult: reverence for Yahweh, for His accompanying angels, for the Son of God and, by extension, for the Trinity. The different religious groups interpreted the same holy place according to their separate theological traditions.¹¹⁷ E. K. Fowden underlined that “sharing of religious experience at Mamre was part of a larger complex of social interaction that depended to a large degree, on individual, rather than communal, interest.”¹¹⁸ Glancing through the history of religious practices of different groups in the Middle East, especially in the 5th and 6th centuries, one sees that religious and political power changed places of worship according to the prevailing influence. Churches and Mosques were built and destroyed as per the religious and political power.¹¹⁹

E. K. Fowden emphasized that there is a connection between holy places and holy men. God manifests himself in such places. “The holy sites are considered holy because they are places where the divine has erupted into the mortal sphere. But another reason is their association with holy figures of the past, men and women who, like the place itself, have come into direct contact with God. The holy man becomes the holy site, becomes the Temple – that is, the place where God is present in the world.”¹²⁰ The shrine of St. Sergius at al-Rusafa is a great example of pilgrimage in the Christian Arab culture of late antique Syria and Mesopotamia. St. Sergius had been an officer in the imperial Roman horse-guard. He was martyred and buried in the early fourth century at a fort still known today as al-Rusafa (located in the Syrian steppe near the Euphrates). His tomb became a site of prayer and healing. As the religious site grew, a monastic

¹¹⁵ E. K. Fowden, “Sharing Holy Places” in *Common Knowledge*, Volume 8, Issue 1, Winter 2002, Durham, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 125.

¹¹⁶ Mamre was a classic sanctuary where pilgrims converged at a source of water and shade in an ungenerous landscape. It is quite possible that a pre-Abrahamic holy site, centered on the sacred tree and well, existed but cannot be proven indisputably. The well and tree had, according to the tradition, attracted the patriarch Abraham and his household. At Mamre, Abraham built an altar to the One God. It was in the tree’s shade that, in the form of three men, Yahweh and two angels appeared to Abraham and his wife Sarah, who offered hospitality to the unexpected strangers. On this occasion, Yahweh foretold Sarah’s conception of a son, despite her advanced age.

¹¹⁷ E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 126-127.

¹¹⁸ E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 129.

¹¹⁹ E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 129-133.

¹²⁰ E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 138.

community was drawn to it to propagate the cult. Thousands of Arabs were devoted to him. As a military saint and miracle worker, Sergius's help was sought for defense and mediation, not only by the Arab population, but also by the political leaders of Rome and Iran. The Umayyad caliph Hisham, who ruled from 724 to 743 A.D, built a country palace outside the walls of al-Rusafa and resided there permanently. Thus, the city came to be known to Arabic writers as Rusafat Hisham. He built a mosque closer to the main Church and it swallowed up over one-third of the church's monumental courtyard. Muslim worshippers could enter this courtyard directly from the mosque's prayer hall, and people observed how the city's main Church which housed the tomb of St. Sergius shared the sacred place.¹²¹

E. K. Fowden opined that sharing a holy place is a dynamic process and not a static condition. Sharing could be enriching, but at the same time there could have a gradual movement from sharing to separating as different religions clarify the meaning of the holy place in the context of their own developing tradition. Sharing of holy place is filled with symbolism and meanings that connect the people to other holy sites and holy men. It makes an ambiance of vibrant religious tradition.¹²² Speaking about the three monotheistic religions, E. K. Fowden affirmed that "the yearning for a unified vision of God and His relationship to creation – a yearning common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – is what eventually drives the individual to absorb or dispose of other religious traditions. It is the hunger for wholeness, for a harmonious marriage of all parts that leads the pilgrim to eliminate other possibilities, other roads to reality. This yearning for unity focuses the worshipper and excludes plurality as a distraction. It would be misleading to conclude that for this reason there cannot be sharing among distinct religions. The very act of yearning is in itself worship, and to the degree that those who visit holy places strive to know God and experience divine power, it is ultimately in that very striving that the sharing of holy places happens."¹²³ She gives much importance for the God-experience of people in common places of worship. Plurality is seen as strength when it comes to God-experience. Distinct religions should not separate people from each other; rather they should bring together people for a richer positive experience of life.

¹²¹ E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 134-135.

¹²² E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 145.

¹²³ E. K. Fowden, 2002, p. 146.

Anna Bigelow explored how a large Muslim-majority town in eastern Punjab in India managed to escape the violent situation of the 1947 partition, which split British Punjab between India and Pakistan. A. Bigelow affirmed that sacred and civic spaces in religiously plural communities are peacefully shared all the time, yet people rarely hear about such places. She studied the situation of Malerkotla, a town in India where the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu residents have coexisted for centuries, worshipping at the same sacred site in the heart of the town – the tomb shrine of the Sufi saint who founded the settlement. Malerkotla is situated in Punjab, the region most severely affected by the violence of India’s partition and independence; its case illuminates the micro strategies of accommodation that make interreligious relations possible. Most histories of Malerkotla began with the arrival of Shaykh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan and his encounter with Sultan Bahlol Lodhi (1451-1489). Unlike some Sufi saints, Haider Shaykh did not have a lineage of disciples who recorded his life during his time. The testimonials of pilgrims and residents gave special importance for Haider Shaykh’s reputation for working miracles and express the moral values of egalitarianism, pluralism, and tolerance that are most central to the saint’s cult and his territory. Many people belonging to different religious traditions visited his holy place. Sharing a sacred space became a reality for people in the city.¹²⁴ “Malerkotla’s integration is evident at wedding parties and funerals as people of all religious faiths are present, and provision is invariably made for dietary differences and gender separation...There is no need for Hindus or Sikhs to pray in a mosque or for Muslims to pray in a temple. The depth of connection is manifest in the respect for difference and in the participation in one another’s significant life transitions.”¹²⁵

A. Bigelow underlined that the common sense approach to living with religious diversity is the norm in Malerkotla, but the approach is made normal through practice and repetition. People take initiative to become part of the life and activities of the other.¹²⁶ Despite local, regional, and national situations that test the fabric of the community, the collective ethos of harmony retains its integrity, and the community remains bound together. Understanding Malerkotla and the dynamics of pluralism helps people to understand how functioning multi-religious communities

¹²⁴ A. Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred. Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 35.

¹²⁵ A. Bigelow, 2010, p. 218.

¹²⁶ A. Bigelow, 2010, p. 219.

work. It is vital to see the day-to-day life of the place where tension and conflicts are managed productively. A. Bigelow observed that there is much work remaining to be done to discover if some of the lessons of life in Malerkotla are applicable and replicable elsewhere. Malerkotla is a typical town full of all the normal vicissitudes of group life and it gives an example for coexistence.¹²⁷

Peace is a process involving a great deal of work in unity and togetherness. A. Bigelow explained how shared sacred sites, social spaces, and collective memories of the experiences of residents of Malerkotla helped to identify a zone of peace and an idealized example of Indian secularism. The stories Malerkotlans tell themselves and those that others tell about Malerkotla combine to make sense of the anomalous peace it experienced during Partition and provide a basis for continuing community engagement and interreligious harmony. A. Bigelow, after having studied the religious, political and social situations of Malerkotla, where there is perfect interreligious coexistence, affirmed in her work that “it is also an important corrective to the notion that Muslims are engaged in a clash of civilizations with non-Muslim cultures.”¹²⁸ Peacemaking is a process that has to start by living together. “The peace of Malerkotla is by no means devoid of pressure, social control, and enforcement, but this does not undermine the high level of community participation in telling the dominant story of Malerkotla and participating in the supporting institutions ranging from electoral contests to associational memberships to pilgrimages. The symbolic power of this identity is an important resource for the entire community as it has heightened the civic profile on the state level, maximizing Malerkotla’s ability to compete for finite resources in terms of government support and political power.”¹²⁹

In the work *Sharing the Sacra*, edited by Glenn Bowman, there are excellent articles from scholars adding to the anthropological and historical literature on shared sacred sites. They expose the diversity of sacred places, how they are shared and the roles of various actors in the process of sharing such places.¹³⁰ It is there that Anna Bigelow examined the interactive

¹²⁷ A. Bigelow, 2010, p. 239.

¹²⁸ A. Bigelow, 2010, p. 238.

¹²⁹ A. Bigelow, 2010, p. 244.

¹³⁰ G. Bowman, *Sharing the Sacra – The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2012.

choreography of shared sites with their modes, systems and strategies of exchange that substantively contribute to, or detract from, the production and perpetuation of peace. She also considered the ritual, narrative and administrative arenas of exchange in the shared sacred sites. The study was situated in Punjab and associated with Islam. A. Bigelow underlined the crucial time that Punjab lived during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 when millions of people were displaced. In 1951 census, the Muslim population in Indian Punjab seemed to have dropped from about 55 percent to below 1 percent. However, the Islamic shrines continued to play a vital role in welcoming all people including Sikhs and Hindus.

The democracy in India has known its ups and downs with different political parties in power. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) always had the agenda of promoting the Hindu nationalist ideology of *hindutva* (Hinduness) that equated “being Indian” with “being Hindu”. In some sections of the population in India, Christians and Muslims were considered to be “foreigners”. *Hindutva* indicated a profoundly Indian cultural and territorial identity and excluded people who had their holy lands outside India. Despite these elements, A. Bigelow was optimistic about the shared sacred sites where people had respect for each other.¹³¹ However, studying the Indian context, she said that “shared sacred sites frequently thwart spatial and iconographic categorization. Indeed, in some cases, attendees of these shrines indicate how misguided notions of fixed religious identity may be, by not identifying themselves with an institutional religion that is ‘Hinduism’ or ‘Islam’.”¹³² Even in shared sanctuary and environs, the religious identity has significance for every group.

Along with the Malerkotla’s ritual integration, A. Bigelow examined the case of Baba Farid Shakarganj and Sri Hargobindpur. Baba Farid was narratively incorporated into the lives of people in Faridkot near the Pakistan border. He was a 13th century Sufi saint who influenced the lives of people. The Sikhs in the region appreciated his presence and went to his shrine to obtain miracles. The saintly nature of Baba Farid was acknowledged by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. He helped the Hindu king to build a fort and the latter recognized his saintly nature. The locality was

¹³¹ A. Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other” in *Sharing the Sacra – The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, Glenn Bowman (ed.), New York, Berghahn Books, 2012, p. 25-27.

¹³² A. Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other”, 2012, p. 28.

named as “Faridkot” to remember Baba Farid. Now, two shrines are built in the locality, a *gurdwara* and a mosque. All people had access to these shared shrines where Baba Farid is remembered. However, A. Bigelow noted that Baba Farid’s identity was maintained by the imam who highlighted the importance of keeping the singular religious affiliation of each one. Nevertheless, the imam was open to welcome non-Muslim clientele. Non-Muslims contribute to celebrate the yearly festival of Baba Farid which is organized by Muslim Welfare Society, composed of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus.¹³³

A. Bigelow also examined the case of a jointly managed mosque by Muslims and Sikhs at Sri Hargobindpur in Punjab. The 17th century mosque was known as the *Guru ki Maseet*, or Guru’s mosque, which was looked after by a group of Sikhs. It seemed that the 6th Sikh Guru, Hargobind, after having defeated a Mughal army in battle, built not only a *gurdwara* but also temples and a mosque for the residents of the region. In this way, the Sikh Guru became a protector for the minority Muslim population. Over the years, though there were times of tension for managing the shared sacred space, the authorities came to a consensus that it would always remain to be a place of multiple identities. In 2001, a memorandum was signed to affirm that Guru Hargobind conceptualized the *Maseet* as a symbol of peace and unity between the Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. A. Bigelow underlined that the struggles over the *Guru ki Maseet*’s administration did not bring violence but the place was made a kind of secular monument. The existence of such a place contests religious divisions and represents an ideal of peaceful exchange. It is through dialogue and a series of compromises and strategic efforts by the interested parties that *Guru ki Maseet* remains to be a symbol of peace and religious harmony.¹³⁴

After having studied the three cases, A. Bigelow was appreciative of the efforts to promote harmonious religious and civil society. She affirmed that shared shrines promote and generate a dynamic of interreligious engagement to support cooperation and discourage discord. She said that “shared shrines illuminate the ways in which the relations between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims are negotiated on a daily basis through symbolic zones of exchange...”¹³⁵ A. Bigelow

¹³³ A. Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other”, 2012, p. 35-37.

¹³⁴ A. Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other”, 2012, p. 37-39.

¹³⁵ A. Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other”, 2012, p. 40.

concluded that “in the case of Haider Shaykh, ritual conflicts are circumvented through dialogue and mutual validation. At Faridkot, stories and poetic performances ground the Muslim saint in a Sikh community. And finally, at the *Guru ki Maseet*, proprietary competition is managed and the claims of each party ultimately affirmed. In each case there is a twofold dynamic, one which particularizes, specifies, and personalizes the saint and the site, and the other which simultaneously generalizes, incorporates, and includes.”¹³⁶ A. Bigelow did not see any threatening element in shared sacred sites, but rather saw powerful resources for community building with individuals, religions, genders, classes and age groups.

In a recent study, Delphine Ortis examined how Hindus nourish their devotion to the martyr Ghâzî Miyân, a saintly figure in Islam in North India. He lived in 11th century and his sanctuary remains near Bahraich in the region of Uttar Pradesh. From 13th century, his place of cult is visited by people belonging to different religious traditions. Miracles are attributed through his intervention and he is considered to be a heroic person who gave his life in the battle at the age of 19 to defend the local population.¹³⁷ D. Ortis underlined how the devotees and social researchers promote certain devotions and saintly figures.

In 19th century, Ghâzî Miyân had a special place in North Indian Islam and among the low caste Hindus. Many Muslims and Hindus promoted his holy name as he was martyred in the holy war, or *jihad*. Though he fought against Hindus, it is surprising that some Hindus became his devotees. D. Ortis underlined that there were certain values that were common to all Indians despite their diverse religious belongings.¹³⁸ Majority of Muslims in Bahraich are converted from Hinduism. « La majorité de ces musulmans descend d’hindous convertis, appartenant, dans une large proportion, aux castes agricoles de statut moyen et bas et, dans une moindre mesure, à des castes de services et d’artisans. »¹³⁹ Muslims and Hindus who were farmers had a special devotion to Ghâzî Miyân. Three out of five festivals celebrated in the Shrine of Ghâzî Miyân were decided as per the Hindu agricultural calendar. The Hindu farmers offered the fruits of their

¹³⁶ A. Bigelow, “Everybody’s Baba: Making Space for the Other”, 2012, p. 40.

¹³⁷ D. Ortis, « Comment des hindous peuvent-ils être les dévots d’un guerrier musulman? Pour une relecture de la geste de Ghâzî Miyân à la lumière de ses attributs et de son culte » in *Journal Asiatique* 304.1, 2016, p. 75.

¹³⁸ D. Ortis, 2016, p. 74-75.

¹³⁹ D. Ortis, 2016, p. 76.

agricultural products to Ghâzî Miyân. The devotion and cult towards Ghâzî Miyân spread with three specific elements as the rural people believed that he had special powers to master rain, harvest and healing.¹⁴⁰

There are many legends about Ghâzî Miyân that narrated how he became popular among Hindus. He seemed to have special concern for the sick and suffering people. He was close to the villagers and farmers. He had a heroic death as he fought for justice. In her work, D. Ortis described how the hagiography of Ghâzî Miyân was constructed in such a way that the Muslims from high class did not suspect the authenticity of the cult and devotion. Some historians have played a vital role to make the figure of Ghâzî Miyân acceptable to all Muslims and Hindus in the locality of Bahraich. It is also interesting to notice that there are oral and written traditions with regard to the cult and devotions relating to Ghâzî Miyân that cater to different levels of population. D. Ortis underlined that the legends and rituals are equally important for the making of a saintly figure. Some people in society hold on to legends and others give greater importance to rituals. In daily life, rituals and celebrations enliven the saintly figure. What is significant for people is to establish a living relation with the saintly figure. On the other side, the legends and stories will spread the news of the saintly figure and attract more people to the site. Among other legends, the story of the mixed marriage between Ghâzî Miyân and Zohra Bibi encourages the local people. Muslims and Hindus see this as an example of living together and forming a peaceful community.¹⁴¹

D. Ortis underlined that saints are not always historical figures. Some saints emerged from certain cults and devotions. It is society that makes someone popular. In her opinion, Ghâzî Miyân is an Indo-Muslim saintly figure. D. Ortis concluded her study by stating that « Si Ghâzî Miyân n'est pas le saint le mieux à même de nous guider sur les chemins mouvementés de l'histoire de l'islam en Inde, la richesse de son culte en revanche ouvre une voie intéressante pour une compréhension des relations interconfessionnelles qui privilégie les contacts, les emprunts et les convergences entre différentes traditions, ainsi que l'inventivité et la créativité.

¹⁴⁰ D. Ortis, 2016, p. 77.

¹⁴¹ D. Ortis, 2016, p. 81-88.

Le culte de Ghâzî Miyân offre une autre vision des relations entre musulmans et hindous que celle véhiculée par le communautarisme dont l'Inde souffre actuellement. »¹⁴²

Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli gathered and edited articles concerning sharing sacred spaces in the Mediterranean. The contributors to the published work examined various religious traditions along the shores of the Near East from North Africa to the Balkans. They highlighted that in the multicultural, multi-confessional world of the Eastern Mediterranean, shared shrines sustain intercommunal and interreligious contact among groups. They opined that “mixed practices do not constitute a single model; they are symbolically and practically complex activities, and their variations can be traced to political, demographic, and social conditions prevailing at the time of observation, as the relative importance of the religious communities concerned is changing over time.”¹⁴³ Their study revealed that while devotional practices are usually viewed as mechanisms for reinforcing religious boundaries, shared shrines sustain contact among groups that are heterodox, marginal, and largely ignored by central authorities.

Glenn Bowman studied shared shrines in the West Bank, Palestine, and Western Macedonia. Observing different sites in Macedonia, he said “there is here an intriguing practical logic in operation; people visiting sites whose powers are renowned as efficacious (particularly for healing) will, at those sites, carry out the rituals appropriate to those powers as far as is possible without explicitly violating the dictates of their own religions. Knowing that certain visits and the rituals involved therein have worked for neighbors of other religions, they mimic those activities as far as possible without ‘self-harming’, in the hope that such copying will produce the same effects for them, despite confessional differences. This is not a syncretism insofar as identities are not transformed, but it is a sharing.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² D. Ortis, 2016, p. 89.

¹⁴³ D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ G. Bowman, “Shared Shrines in West Bank Palestine and Western Macedonia” in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 9.

Gilles de Rapper underlined the importance of sharing religious space in Albania. He noted that the phenomenon of joint Muslim-Christian attendance at the same places of worship was common in Albania. He observed that the annual pilgrimage from the city of Lac to the Church of St. Anthony of Padua in the north of the country attracted thousands of Catholic worshipers, Orthodox Christians, and Muslims. It allowed the religious dignitaries of different confessions to demonstrate that they were on good terms. The fact that they could share places of worship was an argument to prove that the different religions present in Albania were tolerant and could coexist peacefully.¹⁴⁵ He also stated that Muslims visited Christian Churches and monasteries because they were *vakëf* (place for all religions) rather than because they were Christian places of worship. The notion of the *vakëf* appeared to express the idea of a place of worship whose confessional affiliation, though never completely forgotten, was less important than its sacred nature.¹⁴⁶

Dionigi Albera and Benoît Fliche studied how Muslims in Istanbul frequented Christian shrines to participate in various religious activities, especially the Shrine of St. Anthony's.¹⁴⁷ Muslims were not afraid to participate in various activities in the St. Anthony's shrine. Some of them went as tourists but others did devotional activities. St. Anthony's shrine was a space in which individuals of different confessions mingle, and their behaviors were inventive and had little to do with any Catholic routine. Everything was flexible. Different devotional manifestations coexisted under the roof of the basilica but appeared not to interfere with one another. No one bothered the other in his practice. Everyone performed their own rites without paying much attention to what their neighbours were doing. Votive practices established a sort of frontier around individual worshipers. Some of them touched the glass protecting the saint and others wrote down their intentions in the prayer book.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ G. De Rapper, "The Vakëf: Sharing Religious Space in Albania" in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 29.

¹⁴⁶ G. De Rapper, "The Vakëf: Sharing Religious Space in Albania", 2012, p. 47.

¹⁴⁷ D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), 2012, p. 94-114.

¹⁴⁸ D. Albera & B. Fliche, "Muslim Devotional Practices in Christian Shrines: The Case of Istanbul" in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 114-115.

D. Albera noted that over the years there were changes in the trend of sharing sacred spaces. The eastern Mediterranean, from Egypt to the Balkans and from the Middle East to Turkey, was the main center of shared worship. Until recently, similar phenomena were observable in the Maghreb, but they have almost completely died out in recent decades. In Europe, in contrast, religious mixing is a recent phenomenon, and still a limited one, even though some Marian shrines are also visited by what was admittedly a very small minority of Muslims.¹⁴⁹ Hybrid saints seemed to attract people belonging to different religious traditions to a common shrine. D. Albera rightly mentioned that Virgin Mary had a special place in the worshipping places of Christianity and Islam. In all the saintly figures, “it is probably Mary who does most to encourage a devotional rapprochement between Christians and Muslims. Although there is an element of doctrinal discontinuity where the Virgin is concerned, there is some theological continuity between Christianity and Islam. The Virgin is a central figure in two *suras* of the Koran, and she is the only female figure to be mentioned there by name. Because of this textual background, the Marian cult has attracted Muslims who go to Christian shrines to say prayers to her.”¹⁵⁰

In another article, D. Albera stated that Virgin Mary is indeed well accepted in the Islamic tradition as the sacred texts sanction it. She said, “Mary has a very significant place in the Qur’an. She is the only female figure designated by name, while all the other women are simply indicated as daughter, wife, mother, or sister of a man whose name is given. Moreover, the name of Mary recurs more times in the Qur’an than in the whole of the New Testament: 34 occurrences against 19...The Qur’an mentions the nativity of Mary, her presentation to the Temple, the Annunciation, the virginal conception and the birth of Jesus. Mary appears as a sign for humanity and an example for believers; she is a model of confidence in God, of abandonment to divine will, of modesty and piety.”¹⁵¹ In some shared shrines, things went well with a certain

¹⁴⁹ D. Albera, “Crossing the Frontiers between the Monotheistic Religions, an Anthropological Approach” in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 220.

¹⁵⁰ D. Albera, 2012, p. 229.

¹⁵¹ D. Albera, “Combining Practices and Beliefs: Muslim Pilgrims at Marian Shrines” in G. Bowman, *Sharing the Sacra – The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2012, p. 11.

understanding of the authorities who managed the places, whereas in other places there were moments of tension.

D. Albera analyzed the case of the Maronite sanctuary of Saidet-el-Tallé (Our Lady of the Hill) situated in the historical land of Mount Lebanon where the majority of the population was Druze. The church of Mary was located in the small town of Deir-el-Qamar which was the capital of Mount Lebanon between 16th and 19th century. Muslims and Druze population made their pilgrimage to Saidet-el-Tallé, which at one time was known to be the Virgin of the Druze, to receive miracles. However, in 1860, the region experienced hostilities between Muslims and Christians that started in Damascus and spread throughout the region. The miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary was destroyed and the church was vandalized. This unfortunate event did not stop the Druze to continue the devotions to the Virgin Mary.

D. Albera pointed out that “the long civil war (1975-1990) which opposed the various Lebanese religious groups did not put an end to devotional porosity. In spite of the ferocity of the battles and the massacres, even today there are numerous shrines attended by different religious communities. Among the Christian shrines which are also frequented by Lebanese Muslims of different denominations (Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze) there are several Marian sites, such as the monastery of Saidet-en-Nourié in the region of Tripoli, the sanctuary of Saidet-el-Mantara near Sidon, and that of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa.”¹⁵² D. Albera conceived the cult of the Virgin Mary as an important bridge between Christian and Muslim pilgrims. Relations between individuals and groups are critical in forming faith communities. According to her, one should refine one’s “analytical vocabulary to take into account the broad spectrum of instances in which people combine practices and beliefs at the same shrine.”¹⁵³

D. Albera also noted that mixed worship was more observed in new sites where supernatural grace suddenly manifested itself in spectacular ways.¹⁵⁴ Those who visited shared places of

¹⁵² D. Albera, “Combining Practices and Beliefs: Muslim Pilgrims at Marian Shrines”, 2012, p. 17-18.

¹⁵³ D. Albera, “Combining Practices and Beliefs: Muslim Pilgrims at Marian Shrines”, 2012, p. 22.

¹⁵⁴ D. Albera, “Crossing the Frontiers between the Monotheistic Religions, an Anthropological Approach” in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 227.

worship came both from the lower classes and from sections of the urban middle classes. The shrines of other religions seemed to attract more women than men because women were less involved in more “official” forms of worship, but men did cross religious frontiers.¹⁵⁵ It was also noticed that a practitioner of different traditions became a *bricoleur* while keeping his own cultural and religious singularities. “Cultural and religious modes of sharing are informed by specific time and space contexts: after having listed a number of ‘common’ practices, one realizes that the ‘mixed’ pilgrim corresponds to no single *habitus*. He is a person adapting to local custom, following a specific path, reproducing gestures or repeating words or prayers of those who have preceded him. He becomes a *bricoleur*, manipulating objects and signs within a symbolic territory and combining these with his own cultural and religious singularities.”¹⁵⁶

P. Y. Luke and John B. Carman released an interesting sociological study of the Christian Church living within Hindu culture, especially in Andhra Pradesh, South India. They elaborated the life situation of Christians in specific remote villages. Many Christians in those villages are members of the ‘outcast’ groups and do not have any land for cultivation. As Christians, they do not get special privileges from the government that are given to lower-caste Hindu groups. Many Christians work as day labourers. The poverty of the village Christians does not allow them to send their children to school as they require the children to work and contribute to the household. Children who work hard do not get well paid.¹⁵⁷ Christians and Hindus live side by side. It is interesting to note that some Christians have two names. “Almost all the Christians in these villages have both a Hindu name and a Christian name, the former given them at the traditional naming ceremony, the latter at baptism. As far as the church is concerned, it is their Christian baptismal name which is their official name, but these names are not found on the voting lists prepared by the village officials for the Government in the villages surveyed. Only the Hindu names of the Christian voters are entered on the official list. Most of the Christians are illiterate and thus unaware of this, and some would not be greatly disturbed if they did know.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ D. Albera, “Crossing the Frontiers between the Monotheistic Religions, an Anthropological Approach”, 2012, p. 232.

¹⁵⁶ D. Albera & M. Couroucli (ed.), *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, 2012, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture. Study of a Rural Church in Andhra Pradesh South India*, Lutterworth Press, 1968, p. 87-88.

¹⁵⁸ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 97.

Hindus in villages have their worship patterned according to their caste groups and sects. Each sect might have its own *ishta devatā*, or favourite deity, but tolerates the presence of other sects to some extent. Hindus do not mind Christians joining them for certain celebrations. In a similar way, some Hindus join Christian celebrations. “This ‘hospitable’ attitude and tolerant spirit of village Hinduism made it much easier for the Gospel to gain a hearing and for Christianity to become one of the *matams* (religions or sects) of the village.”¹⁵⁹ P. Y. Luke and John B. Carman also noted that all Hindus do not accept Christians as they are. “The attitude of caste Hindus in the villages varies all the way from the few who are trying to reconvert Christians to Hinduism to the still fewer who are willing to listen to the Gospel and even to receive baptism. There are larger numbers whose attitude is somewhere in between. They may tolerate Christianity as a religion for outcastes but refuse to give the Gospel a hearing themselves, or they may have great respect for the powers of the Christians’ God, ‘Lord Jesus’, but be unwilling to accept Jesus as their special ‘Lord’, or at least unwilling to join the community of Christ’s followers.”¹⁶⁰ Therefore, one can observe the complexity of life for Christians in villages where Hindus are a majority.

Most of the Hindus receive Jesus, like Krishna and Rama, as a human incarnation (*avatāra*) of God. They believe that God is everywhere and Jesus Christ suffered for all people. The Passion story of Jesus is known to both Christians and non-Christians. Good Friday is a special day for many village Christians and Hindus.¹⁶¹ Easter celebration is not as popular as Christmas and Good Friday. “The many Christians who are ignorant of Jesus’ rising from the dead celebrate Easter at the urging of their evangelist, but without understanding or enthusiasm. They take Christmas much more seriously than Easter, though some seem to look forward to Christmas with less enthusiasm than to some of the Hindu festivals. *Kristu Jayanti*, the birthday of their special god, is analogous to the birthdays of the Hindu gods, such as *Krishna Jayanti*, the birthday feast of one of the most important incarnations of Vishnu.”¹⁶² P. Y. Luke and John B. Carman observed that the villagers do not distinguish between Lord Jesus and saints in their Hindu or Muslim traditions. “The Lord Jesus is accepted by villagers as one of many ‘*Swamis*’

¹⁵⁹ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 168.

¹⁶⁰ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 147.

¹⁶¹ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 169-170.

¹⁶² P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 171.

(divine lords) and no distinction in quality is made between *Yesuswami* and any of the other *Swamis*, including the Muslim saints.”¹⁶³ Jesus has an important place in the lives of both newly-converted Christians and some Hindus. The newly-converted Christians who are still influenced by the Hindu teachings give a higher place for Jesus Christ in comparison with other gods. They also wear Christian symbols of cross or medals of saints around their neck that seemed to help them chase away the demonic powers and evil spirits.¹⁶⁴ In the village case study, one could say that Hindus and Christians maintain their relations in everyday life without much tension.

Jackie Assayag studied the historical and social circumstances of the implantation of Islam in South Asia, and underlined the situation of Muslims in Karnataka state in India where the dynamics of the cultural forms of the alterity-identity pair has seldom been studied. He explored the relations between Hindus and Muslims in urban and rural milieu in ordinary and extraordinary seasons of festivals. There were times of tension and conflict as well as time of collective memories. He pointed out that the relationship between Hindus and Muslims is better among people of low caste. «La cohabitation exige des musulmans qu’ils entretiennent partout des relations avec le voisinage hindou. Mais celles-ci peuvent se réduire *a minima* tant ils sont minoritaires, isolés, rejetés parfois des collectivités dont ils partagent malgré tout la destinée; encore cela varie-t-il selon les villages ou les castes puisque l’unité villageoise est segmentée. De fait, la proximité est souvent plus grande avec les basses castes, voire parfois les intouchables, dont la position sociale peut être quelquefois *mutatis mutandis* supérieure à la leur. »¹⁶⁵ When it comes to dealing with evil spirits, people do not look for religious baggage, but rather approach places of worship or religious people and participate in cults that help them in deliverance. Christians, Hindus and Muslims go to the same particular place of worship when they learn that it is a place where they get a special favour of healing.¹⁶⁶

J. Assayag affirmed that walking together as Hindus and Muslims did not suppress the identity of one or the other. In the contextual study, he mentioned the openness of every religion to

¹⁶³ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 202.

¹⁶⁴ P. Y. Luke & J. B. Carman, 1968, p. 183-184.

¹⁶⁵ J. Assayag, *Au confluent de deux rivières. Musulmans et hindous dans le Sud de l’Inde*, Paris, Presses de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1995, p. 39-40.

¹⁶⁶ J. Assayang, 1995, p. 76.

accommodate the other in times of need. There was a reciprocal respect and relationship maintained to create peace. Every religious tradition also maintained its uniqueness. « Qu'en somme, il se peut que le rapport entre hindouisme et islam (ait constitué et) constitue (encore dans quelques régions) un système culturel, c'est-à-dire une codification des différences entre groupes voisins, un ensemble d'interrelations changeantes à l'intérieur de configurations en constante adaptation. Mais le plus remarquable est que le processus continu d'acculturation autorisa chaque tradition à conserver dans le même temps des manières singulières et des traits qui lui sont propres. »¹⁶⁷ However, it was not uniformity that was given thrust but plurality. The new dynamism came from plurality and being together, as he emphasised: « la pluralité des modes de vie n'est ni déterminée par des actions stéréotypées ou des valeurs uniformes, ni unifiée par quelque vague notion. On peut même gagner que les types de sociabilité sont, au contraire, à la fois pluriels, composites et conflictuels, et qu'ils ne furent, ni ne sont jamais, exempts de contradictions dynamiques. »¹⁶⁸

J. Assayag affirmed that people belonging to different religious traditions had no fear to gather together for different activities. The boundary between each religion is seen throughout history. He insisted that in India the dynamics of cultural forms of the alterity-identity pair played an important role. « La notion de 'frontière' souligne que l'appartenance communautaire ne peut se déterminer qu'à partir d'une ligne de démarcation entre membres et non-membres. Malgré les croyances et les pratiques éclectiques attestées entre hindous, chrétiens et musulmans depuis haute époque, la frontière subsiste à travers le temps, encore que cela dépende des contextes et varie en fonction des couches de populations. Elle est néanmoins retracée périodiquement, à la faveur de changements culturels internes au groupe ou en relation avec d'autres groupes. Mais la démarcation se fait toujours sur la base de dichotomies, et en référence à une altérité. »¹⁶⁹

J. Assayag also noted that the Christian model of conversion is not appreciated in India because it invites for a sudden change from the existing practices. For him, religion is much connected to

¹⁶⁷ J. Assayag, 1995, p. 215-216.

¹⁶⁸ J. Assayag, 1995, p. 217.

¹⁶⁹ J. Assayag, « Passeurs de frontières, poseurs de barrières. Chrétiens et musulmans en Inde » in *Altérité et identité. Islam et christianisme en Inde*, Études réunies par Jackie Assayag et Gilles Tarabout, Paris, Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (coll. Purusârtha 19), 1997, p. 59.

the life of people and their culture. The acculturation in India is connected to different castes, sects and groups. « Au plan des formes de la culture, il n’y eut jamais *une* communauté musulmane, *une* communauté chrétienne, ni a fortiori *une* communauté hindoue. La question de l’acculturation en Inde place ses interprètes en face d’une impressionnante collection de caste ou de clans, de groupes ou d’associations, d’ordres ou de sectes, de confréries et d’ethnies. »¹⁷⁰ Meeting of different religions in India would mean to share their places of worship with much respect for each other. They accommodate each other without condescending the other or claiming to be better. « Les rencontres entre le christianisme, l’islam et l’hindouisme ont donné lieu à des processus d’accommodation si riches qu’il est impossible de les réduire à l’opposition entre deux religions monothéistes et un polythéisme, ou inversement. Pas plus qu’il n’est loisible de parler unilatéralement de contradiction entre gens du Livre, à l’idéologie qui serait égalitariste, et gens du système des castes, dont on a pu faire le paradigme de la hiérarchie. »¹⁷¹

Alexander Henn explored the intersection of Hindu and Catholic practices and expressions in contemporary popular religion. He showed some of the syncretistic expressions and practices that bring Goan Hindus and Catholics together in jointly performed rituals. He explained the connection between Hindu village gods and Catholic patron saints that sustained religious coexistence and interaction of Hindus and Catholics in different villages in Goa. Today, Hindus and Catholics assert their own religious identities, but Hindu gods and Catholic saints attract worship from members of both religious communities.¹⁷² “People see their village as an embodiment of gods and saints, thereby enacting an iconic relationship between metaphysics and praxis. As a practical effect of this iconic equation, popular religion constitutes the village as a triad of neighborhood, genealogy, and well-being, and it is the ritual concern for these practical values and objectives that, at times, overrules doctrinal differences and divisions.”¹⁷³ A. Henn opined that the festival of Our Lady of Miracles, the patron saint of the town of Mapusa, and the ceremonies for Jagoryo, the tutelary god of the village Siolim, exemplified both the apex of popular religiosity and high points of the syncretistic intersection of Hindus and Catholics in

¹⁷⁰ J. Assayag, 1997, p. 28-31.

¹⁷¹ J. Assayag, 1997, p. 28.

¹⁷² A. Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa. Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 5.

¹⁷³ A. Henn, 2014, p. 85.

Goa. They showed that not religious differences but ideas of local proximity, family relationship, and bodily healing were at stake when Hindus and Catholics joined in common rituals.¹⁷⁴

The typical locations for the manifestation of local gods were either right in the center of the village and town plazas and marketplaces, or at the peripheries and liminal sites, such as borders between villages, boundaries between settlements and wilderness, or at seashores, riverbanks, dams, crossroads, and hilltops. The most gorgeous iconographic representation of local deities could be found in the village temples. A. Henn observed that “all over Goa, the Catholic Mary in her multiple incorporations as Our Lady of the Rosary, Our Lady of the Mount, Our Lady of Good Guidance, Our Lady of Miracles, and so on, is thus addressed and worshipped under the same title of *Saibini Mai* that is used to call upon and pay homage to the Hindu Devi under her multiple manifestations as Sateri, Bhumika, Kelbai, Shanta Durga, and so forth.”¹⁷⁵ Christians and Hindus found a mediating principle between Mother Mary and Durga. They protected the village people and stood for their well-being. “Similarities and affinities among gods and saints are most notable in the nature of their manifestation and in the material substances, bodily attitudes, and ritual practices used in their worship and devotion.”¹⁷⁶

Saint Francis Xavier is popular in Goa as his original relics are preserved there. Thousands of devotees, both Catholics and Hindus, regularly go to see the saint at his annual feast day, expressing their faith in the miraculous power of the body.¹⁷⁷ A. Henn affirmed that one of the strongest motivations for Goan Hindus and Catholics to transgress the doctrinal boundaries of their religions is therefore the appreciation of *ganvdevatā*, or village gods, patron saints, and tutelary beings, that is, distinctly spatial manifestations of the divine and saintly.¹⁷⁸ “In many villages, Hindus pay their respects to the Catholic patron saints and, vice versa, Catholics pay their respects to the Hindu *ganvdevatā* at the occasion of church and temple festivals. Local shrines display icons of both Hindu *ganvdevatā* and Catholic patron saints. Members of both religious communities remember and pay homage to local Hindu gods of *their* village that had

¹⁷⁴ A. Henn, 2014, p. 85.

¹⁷⁵ A. Henn, 2014, p. 106.

¹⁷⁶ A. Henn, 2014, p. 106.

¹⁷⁷ A. Henn, 2014, p. 108.

¹⁷⁸ A. Henn, 2014, p. 123.

been salvaged from destruction by bringing them to other regions. Principles of localistic religiosity come to the fore also at points where the replacement of a Hindu god by a Catholic saint reasserts the religious nature of a locality and where the spatial proximity and syncretistic appreciation of Hindu and Catholic shrines suggests competition over the religious significance of the locality rather than doctrinal harmony and tolerance.”¹⁷⁹

A. Henn also noted down that health and well-being of a person has so much to do with the Hindu-Christian togetherness. The images, substances, and tokens of Hindu gods that are used by Catholics, and likewise the images, substances, and tokens of Catholic saints that are used by Hindus, for therapeutic or protective purposes are innumerable. Popular religiosity renders the theological doctrines of Hinduism and Catholicism into two competing healing systems, and it is here the concern of health, protection, and well-being that overrules the loyalty to one’s religious doctrine and identity.¹⁸⁰ He stated that the transgression of the conventional boundaries between Hindus and Catholics, and the assertion of these boundaries, go literally hand in hand and cannot, at least in practical terms, be separated from each other. Goan Hindus and Catholics of all castes and classes, in the countryside and in the cities, pay ritual homage and invoke the spiritual help of divine or saintly powers of another religious tradition and community.¹⁸¹ In the conclusion of his research on Hindu-Catholic encounters in Goa, Alexander Henn affirmed that “there can be no doubt finally that syncretism constitutes religion, even if it does not confine itself to any one religion in particular. What is important here is to refute all elitist insinuations that this is only an inferior form of religion, in which people, and especially people of allegedly low class and little education, are suspected to engage only because they do not know better.”¹⁸²

Pascale Chaput studied the devotions to saints in Kerala state, with the most number of Catholics in India. She underlined that the Catholics in Kerala from three rites (Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Latin) give much importance for a few chosen saints like Mother Mary, Saint Joseph, Saint George, Saint Thomas, Saint Sebastian and Saint Anthony of Paduva. The festivals of European saints in Kerala have Indian or Keralite flavour with varied local cultural elements

¹⁷⁹ A. Henn, 2014, p. 124.

¹⁸⁰ A. Henn, 2014, p. 125.

¹⁸¹ A. Henn, 2014, p. 181.

¹⁸² A. Henn, 2014, p. 184.

akin to the festivals of Hindu divinities.¹⁸³ « Tous partagent l'idée que le christianisme a une existence indépendante de la culture dans laquelle il est pratiqué. Il nous semble au contraire que le christianisme n'existe que mis en œuvre dans une société donnée et que les emprunts qu'il fait à cette communauté ne sont ni totalement neutres ni totalement réitératifs. La forme principale que revêt l'acculturation du christianisme dans la culture kéralaise s'effectue en effet par l'emploi des plus proches équivalents, dans cette culture des valeurs et des rites que tend à traduire le christianisme. La plupart des termes et des pratiques ont ainsi deux références : l'une dans le christianisme européen, l'autre dans l'hindouisme. »¹⁸⁴ Religious festivals blended with cultural elements of a given place bring meaning to the daily existence of people. In Kerala, Hindus do not go to Churches to participate in the Eucharist but join the parish feasts and festivals of saints. Some Hindus participate in Christian non-Sacramental rituals as they make vows to certain saints for obtaining favors. In the villages in Kerala, it is common that Hindus decorate their houses and courtyards to join their Christian neighbours while celebrating festival public processions.

Rohan Bastin examined plural religious sites in Sri Lanka during the visit of Pope John Paul II. This significant event in 1995 brought together people of different religious background. R. Bastin underlined the *haskam* (in Sinhala), or "religious potentiality", in coming together keeping away all differences. He was eager to "explore *haskam*'s workings in the circumstances of a dynamic process of structure and event involving".¹⁸⁵ In Sri Lanka, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists walked together for such a great event.

R. Bastin remarked that the shared shrines in Sri Lanka played a big role in establishing religious harmony in the country. The Catholic Church dedicated to Saint Anthony is popular among other shared shrines. Saint Antony's shrine situated in the old inner part of Colombo known as Kochikade seemed to be a site of miraculous power or *haskam*. Christians, Hindus, Buddhists

¹⁸³ P. Chaput, « Équivalences et équivoques – Le culte des saints catholiques au Kerala » in *Altérité et identité. Islam et christianisme en Inde*, Études réunies par Jackie Assayag et Gilles Tarabout, Paris, Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (coll. Purusârtha 19), 1997, p. 172-173.

¹⁸⁴ P. Chaput, 1997, p. 188.

¹⁸⁵ R. Bastin, "Saints, Sites and Religious Accommodation in Sri Lanka" in G. Bowman, *Sharing the Sacra – The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2012, p. 97.

and Muslims went to the site of Saint Anthony to receive special blessings. In 1740, an Indian-born Catholic priest, Father Anthony, planted a wooden cross to calm the sea and create a beach upon which local fishermen could dry their nets. Later, a statue of Saint Anthony was imported from Goa and installed at the spot. This statue seemed to possess the power of the saint to intervene in the daily life of people and solve their problems. Gradually, this religious site became popular with power or *haskam* and attracted people belonging to different religious background. A tradition was developed in which the first Tuesday of every month became special with thousands of visiting devotees. Masses were celebrated in Sinhala, Tamil and English. People stood in queue to touch the statue of Saint Anthony. B. Bastin observed that Saint Anthony's at Kochikade was similar to the popular plural pilgrimage church of Saint Anne at Talawilla where a Marian apparition occurred during the Portuguese period in 16th century.¹⁸⁶ R. Bastin affirmed that syncretism is "less explicit in Sri Lanka where shrines such as the St. Anthony church at Kochikade are heavily controlled by specific religious authorities, with clear lines of management as well as distinct ethnic and religious affiliations."¹⁸⁷

However, R. Bastin remarked that the Sivaite temple at Munnesvaram was special for its history of a shared site revealing its "capacity for different actions, both tolerant and intolerant, syncretic and anti-syncretic, to serve the formation and reformation of the religious domain."¹⁸⁸ The Munnesvaram temple complex was a site of highly religious interaction between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Saivites. Munnesvaram's main temple was run by Tamil Brahmin priests who followed a full Saivite ritual calendar, attracting many Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils. However, in earlier times, this site was a politico-religious center for Sinhala Buddhist villagers. The Buddhist revitalization movement denounced Munnesvaram's religious practices as being corrupt forms of pure Buddhism. But some Buddhists still used to go there for their religious practices. R. Bastin underlined that Munnesvaram was not only a site of Saivite and Buddhist interaction but also a site for Christians as Jesuit missionaries completed the destruction of the surviving Munnesvaram temple statue in 1606. The new Munnesvaram is revitalized with Saint Peter's church built over the temple site in the 1750s and Saivaite renovations in 1870s. As per

¹⁸⁶ R. Bastin, 2012, p. 99-100.

¹⁸⁷ R. Bastin, 2012, p. 100.

¹⁸⁸ R. Bastin, 2012, p. 103.

R. Bastin, it's the *haskam* or religious potentiality that matters in the site and he attributed the same kinds of process evident when John Paul II visited Sri Lanka in 1995.¹⁸⁹

The Buddhists in Sri Lanka wanted to boycott the visit of John Paul II in their country as the Pope had described Buddhism as pessimistic in a book published a few months earlier. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994) was written in response to a few questions asked by an Italian journalist, Vittorio Messori, in which Pope John Paul II voiced his concern about Catholics leaving the church to join other religions. John Paul II mentioned about the “negative soteriology” of Buddhism. He did not pay attention to the fact that “Buddhism is not all gloomy renunciation or flight from the world.”¹⁹⁰ With diplomatic talks, the Pope visited Sri Lanka and beatified the 17th century Goan missionary Joseph Vaz. However, many Buddhist monks did not participate in the different events of the Pope. Two weeks before the arrival of the Pope, a miracle occurred in south of Colombo where a statue of Mother Mary spoke to two children asking them to enter the church. Mary's eyes turned from blue-eyed European to brown-eyed Sri Lankan, associating herself with the local population. This miracle was much publicized in the media, attracting the attention of all people who sought the favour of the patron saint of Sri Lanka. R. Bastin underlined that it's the *haskam* that played a role in this situation to bring together all people in time of religious tension. R. Bastin also remarked that the unplanned visit of the Pope to the shrine of St. Anthony at Kochikade made an impact on the local population. “John Paul's act of recognition played out the logic of vision associated with Hindu and Buddhist religious potentiality.”¹⁹¹ The Pope associated himself with the local population and their regular religious activities. According to R. Bastin “Mary mediated the demonized Pope's entry to the country and the Pope then recognized Christian *haskam* in the form of the St. Anthony church, whose creation story and main statue also convey miraculous deterritorialization. The mediation was done in the form of the miracle of Mary's apparition and eye-colour change. The equivalence to a demonic status derived from John Paul's remarks about Buddhism as a negative soteriology as well as from his outsider status. The deterritorializing surrender by John Paul was completed when he prayed to St. Anthony. The result was a broad

¹⁸⁹ R. Bastin, 2012, p. 101-103.

¹⁹⁰ R. Bastin, 2012, p. 101-103 & 105.

¹⁹¹ R. Bastin, 2012, p. 107.

celebration of *haskam* or religious potentiality that served to defuse the sense of threat the visit had instilled.”¹⁹² R. Bastin did not hesitate to declare that the Vatican played a lot of politics to ensure that things went well during the Papal visit to Sri Lanka.

Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists have been sharing sacred spaces for worship, devotions, or for their own benefits of miracles and healings. In some parts of the world, saints or gurus of one religious tradition have been recognized by people belonging to another religious tradition. Feasts and festivals for special occasions gather people from different religious traditions. Considering all the above studies, I found that no such study had been done to analyse the situation at Saint Joseph’s Oratory, a prominent Catholic shrine, where people from different religious traditions visit. The new phenomenon at the Oratory needs to get greater attention of decision makers and pilgrims. The originality of my study focuses on the changing atmosphere at the Oratory, especially with the presence of Hindus and their performing of religious activities. I also focus on the views of the educators in faith who have been transmitting the Christian faith since the founding of the Oratory. My study highlights the place of new-generation immigrant Hindus and educators in faith at the Oratory, where local Québec French pilgrims prevailed since its founding.

In my study, I examine the transmission of Christian faith in an evolving context of inter-religious encounter at Saint Joseph’s Oratory. I acknowledge that there are many efforts undertaken at different levels of organization of the local and, the universal Church to transmit Christian faith in a changing world. However, I have certain questions to answer in the course of my research: Do the authorities at the Oratory update themselves with the present scenario of inter-religious encounters? What language and communication pattern do they use to transmit the faith in a multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic environment? Do the Hindus at Saint Joseph’s Oratory become closer to the Divine through their participation in various devotional and religious activities? Does the practice of *bhakti* help Hindus to associate them to the spiritual atmosphere at Saint Joseph’s Oratory where different devotional activities in line with Christian faith and tradition are promoted? Do Hindus hold on to Krishna *bhakti* or do they search for a

¹⁹² R. Bastin, 2012, p. 108.

new experience of Jesus *bhakti*? As Hindus have many *avatāras* in their religious tradition, are they attracted to the divine figures of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother Andre? How does the sharing of the sacred place Saint Joseph's Oratory bring hope to Hindus and Christians? All the above questions can be summed up in one. In the new demographics at the Oratory, how does the transmission of Christian faith continue, and to what extent, can the Hindus associate themselves with this faith?

1.4. Conclusion

The introductory chapter has given an overview of my concerns and pre-occupations in this research. I have observed the complexity of Hindu religious traditions, the diversity of the transmission of Christian faith from the beginning of Christian communities, and the sharing of sacred spaces in different parts of the world. I also indicated that sharing of the sacred space with Hindus is a new phenomenon at the Oratory.

Faith is fundamental to Christian and Hindu living. Faith means an unpredictable journey rather than a value of fixed content. Religious practices help people discover the capacity for growth in their faith. Laurence Freeman is right to say that "faith is mysterious because it is renewable energy of expansion on a self-transcending scale that runs from the personal to the cosmic."¹⁹³ The faith journey takes people to places that they may not have thought about and to practices that they may not have done before in life. New places and new practices might help people discover ever more of the mystery element of faith. That is why L. Freeman says that "when religion emphasizes belief rather than faith it may find it easier to organize and define its membership and those it excludes. It is easier to pass judgment. However, it will produce, at the best, half-formed followers. The road to transcendence is cut off, blocked by landfalls of beliefs as immovable as boulders, beliefs we are told to accept and do not dare to put to the test of experience."¹⁹⁴ If people do not have faith in what they are and what they do, the belief that they hold on to may not have much meaning. The belief of a person should arise from his faith experience that helps him become a person of integrity.

¹⁹³ L. Freeman, *First Sight. The experience of Faith*, London, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, p. XVI.

¹⁹⁴ L. Freeman, 2011, p. 9.

CHAPTER 2

2. SAINT JOSEPH'S ORATORY OF MOUNT-ROYAL

2.1. Introduction

Saint Joseph's Oratory is the biggest shrine dedicated to Saint Joseph in the world. It was founded by Alfred Bessette, who received the name Brother André at the time of his religious profession of vows. The shrine annually receives more than two million pilgrims and visitors. Some of them go to participate in religious and spiritual activities while others go as tourists. Those who come for the first time are marvelled by the gigantic structure with its art and architecture. Many people go back to the site when they get a second chance.¹⁹⁵ People go in groups and families. There are also individual visitors who go with various intentions of prayers. Frequent testimonies of healing are a reality at the Oratory.¹⁹⁶

Brother André's great devotion to Saint Joseph led him to build a chapel for Saint Joseph in 1904 that eventually became the biggest Basilica dedicated to Saint Joseph. The origin of this reputed church goes back to the mid-nineteenth century in France with the founding of the Congregation of Holy Cross, a religious institute with a special devotion to Saint Joseph. Educators in faith, the members of this Congregation, came to Canada in 1847. In 1869, they started a boarding school, known as Collège Notre Dame. During his life, Brother André made himself available to listen to people coming to the Basilica from all walks of life, and with varied intentions. The pilgrims found in him an attentive heart for their sorrows and their hopes. Brother André spoke about Jesus: His life, His suffering and His resurrection. He explained to people, in simple ways, how to live the Gospels. He invited people to pray with him and invoked God's blessing upon them. A man of great faith, giving his whole life to lead people to God, Brother André died on January

¹⁹⁵ M. Lachapelle, *Le message spirituel du frère André*, Mémoire en théologie, Montréal, Université de Montréal, 2001, p. 1. See also: A. Charron, « Nomadisme urbain et espace sacré : profil religieux des pèlerins de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal » in *L'Oratoire et sa mission*, Cahiers de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, No. 1, Montréal, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l'OSJ, Septembre 1996, p. 53; A. Charron, « L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, espace et fonction de l'Église de la ville, Un sanctuaire dans la mission urbaine » in *L'Oratoire et sa mission*, Cahiers de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, No. 1, Montréal, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l'OSJ, Septembre 1996, p. 9.

¹⁹⁶ E. Catta, *Le frère André (1845-1937) et l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal*, Montréal, Fides, 1965, p. 309-310, 436, 968, 1035.

6th, 1937, at the age of 91. A million people from different parts of the world came to pay tribute to him before he was buried at Saint Joseph's Oratory.¹⁹⁷ As at the time of Brother André, the people who go to the Oratory today seek a moment of peace, meditation, and spiritual solace.



Figure 1: Saint Joseph's Oratory of Mount-Royal

¹⁹⁷ Centre de recherche et de documentation, L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal, *Frère André disait souvent. Recueil de paroles de frère André rapportées par ses amis*, Montréal, Fides, 2010, p. 21, 53 & 175. See also: H.-P. Bergeron, *Brother André. The Wonder Man of Mount Royal*, Montréal, OSJ, 2007, p. 121-132; Centre de recherche et de documentation, L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal, *Official Canonization Album of Brother André*, Montréal, Fides, 2010.

2.2. Figure of Saint Brother André

In 1964, Étienne Catta has done an elaborate historical and theological study on Brother André and Saint Joseph's Oratory. He has been passionate in describing the life and vocation of Brother André, the evolution of the Oratory from its humble beginning.¹⁹⁸ The first part of his study is on Brother André's ancestry and the second part is on his youth with his entry to the Congregation of Holy Cross. Then, another section is on the development of the Oratory. Jean-Guy Dubuc underlined that Alfred came from a simple but a good family. The Bessette family members were hard working and reputed in their time.¹⁹⁹ In his research on the *spiritual message of Brother André*, Mario Lachapelle underlined that the members of the Congregation of Holy Cross wish to follow the example of Brother André. He noted that Brother André has not left many written documents but many people have written about him and his works at the Oratory. Therefore, it was not easy to know his spirituality. However, the confreres who lived with Brother André gave their witnesses on him. Some of the official papers of the canonization also exposed his life and activities. The religious articles and objects that Brother André used spoke about his way of life.²⁰⁰ M. Lachapelle described as follows : « Fragile de santé, le frère André travaille fort et dur. Homme de silence, il passe son temps à parler à Dieu. Lisant avec difficulté, il n'hésite pourtant pas à se laisser inspirer par certains livres. Vraiment, le frère André fut un homme peu ordinaire, un homme de contraste. Sa foi guide ses choix et sa volonté. Tout semble bon pour l'orienter vers Dieu. »²⁰¹ From the beginning till the end of his life, Brother André had poor health. Despite his poor health, he lived long. His stomach was troublesome. Micheline Lachance described how delicate was the health of Brother André towards the end of his life on earth. But he still gave time for his visitors who had many things to share with him.²⁰²

M. Lachapelle underlined that the spiritual message of Brother André is all about surrendering oneself to the *will* of God. It's experiencing God's love and getting transformed in life. God is

¹⁹⁸ E. Catta, *Le frère André (1845-1937) et l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal*, Montréal, Fides, 1965.

¹⁹⁹ J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, Fides, Montréal, 1996, p. 125-138.

²⁰⁰ M. Lachapelle, *Le message spirituel du frère André*, Mémoire en théologie, Montréal, Université de Montréal, 2001, p. 3-9.

²⁰¹ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 22.

²⁰² M. Lachance, *Le frère André – L'histoire de l'obscur portier qui allait accomplir des miracles*, Montréal, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2010, p. 355-366.

different from human beings but God is with human beings.²⁰³ « Pour le frère André, confesser sa foi en un Dieu qui est au ciel, c'est d'abord confesser sa foi en un Dieu qui ne peut être consigné à résidence et en un Dieu qui est au-delà de nos perceptions sensibles. C'est croire en un Dieu qui est plus intime à nous-même que nous-même, et cependant, radicalement Autre. »²⁰⁴ Brother André presented a God who was merciful and close to people. The God of Brother André was tender, generous and loving. The God of Brother André respected differences of people and gave a chance for everyone to enter in deeper communion with Him.²⁰⁵



Figure 2: Alfred Bessette (Saint Brother André)

²⁰³ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 43-49.

²⁰⁴ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 45.

²⁰⁵ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 54.

2.2.1. Childhood days of Alfred Bessette

On September 27, 1831, Isaac Bessette and Clothilde Foisy got married at Saint-Mathias Church. Isaac was 24 years old and Clothilde was 17. On August 9, 1845, Clothilde gave birth to Alfred who was frail and therefore got baptized privately in the next day in emergency by Father P. A. Sylvestre. Alfred's godparents were his uncle Edouard Bessette and aunty Josephite Foisy. Alfred's birth place was known as Saint-Grégoire d'Iberville, twenty-five miles east of Montreal. The parish in the village, founded in 1836, was known as Saint-Grégoire le Grand in the municipality of Saint-Grégoire d'Iberville and later named as Mont-Saint-Grégoire. Alfred was the eighth of twelve children in his family. Among the twelve children, two of them died at birth.²⁰⁶ Later, the Bessette family moved to Farnham, in the Eastern Townships, where, Isaac Bessette, carried on his trade as carriage worker. To earn more money, Isaac sometimes went out into the woods as a lumberjack. He died in the forest when a tree fell on him and crushed out his life. He was buried in the cemetery at Farnham.²⁰⁷ Clothilde Foisy was alone with ten children, of whom Alfred was sixth. Due to ill health, she also died when Alfred was twelve years old. On the death of his father, Alfred was taken care of by his uncle Timothée Nadeau at Saint Césaire de Rouville with whom he lived till fifteen years of age.²⁰⁸ Timothée was a strong, hard worker and generous but insensitive to other people. Alfred once remarked, "My uncle was a very strong man and he expected everyone else to be like him." Timothée was not unreasonable to Alfred as the latter had feeble health. Timothée suggested him to leave school and become a shoemaker. But Alfred was not a successful cobbler. Therefore, he went to work in a small local bakery.²⁰⁹

Despite his poor health, Alfred was a merry child. Poverty in his family did not take away his happiness. He had a lot of good memories of his mother. His mother, knowing that he was very frail, seemed to have more love and care for him than for the other children. She seemed to have kissed him more often compared to other siblings and she gave him more delicacies in secret. In the evening, when they recited rosary in the family, Alfred was next to his mother and followed

²⁰⁶ L. Boucher, *Brother André. The Miracle Man of Mount Royal*, Montreal, CSC Canada, 1997, p. 7-9. See also: M. Lachance, 2010, p. 31.

²⁰⁷ A. Hatch, *The Miracle of the Mountain – The Story of Brother André and the Shrine on Mount-Royal*, New York, Hawthorn Books, 1959, p. 32. See also: J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, Fides, Montréal, 1996, p. 25-36.

²⁰⁸ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 15-25. See also: A. Hatch, 1959, p. 33.

²⁰⁹ A. Hatch, 1959, p. 35.

the prayers on her rosary. Due to poverty and early death of his parents, he attended the village schools just for basic education. At the age of twelve, he started working as a bootmaker and baker. Later he worked in farms at Saint Césaire and in cotton mills in Connecticut. It is after having talked with Father Springer, his pastor at Farnham, Alfred decided to go to the United States of America for not being a burden for his relatives and friends. He hoped to relieve them and gain self-respect. He went to Connecticut to be with one of his friends and worked in a textile factory in Moosup. Then he worked in Hartford and Phoenix in different companies.²¹⁰

At the age of 23, he returned to Canada and became closer to Father André Provençal, the pastor at Saint Césaire. He was not rich except in self-knowledge. While he was in the United States, he kept communicating with Father Provençal who encouraged him latter to become a religious. Françoise Deroy-Pineau also narrated the struggles of Alfred Bessette during his young age till the time he entered in the Congregation of Holy Cross.²¹¹ In the same way, Bernard Ruffin and William H. Gregory observed that Alfred Bessette was considered to be misfit for doing anything as he had frail health. His childhood was filled with pain and agony.²¹²

2.2.2. Vocation to Religious life

From his young age, Alfred had great desire to become a religious. His pastor, Father Provençal was most solicitous about the education of youth. He used to dialogue with Alfred about his life and vocation. Alfred spent most of his spare time in the church with Father Provençal who was his pastor. Shortly after his mother's death, Father Provençal prepared Alfred for his first Communion. Father Provençal had a great devotion to Saint Joseph and he shared with Alfred his experience in prayer and stories about Saint Joseph. He described how Saint Joseph was tender hearted to take care of Mary and the Infant Jesus. The humble life of the carpenter was inspiring for Alfred. He also told Alfred how Saint Joseph was declared the patron saint of Canada in 1624.²¹³ He introduced Alfred to the Brothers of Holy Cross. At that time, Alfred

²¹⁰ E. Catta, 1965, p. 49-131. See also: A. Hatch, 1959, p. 32 & 45; D. Robillard, *Les merveilles de l'Oratoire, L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal 1904-2004*, Montréal, Fides, 2005, p. 31-34.

²¹¹ F. Deroy-Pineau, *Frère André – Un saint parmi nous*, Montréal, Fides, 2010, p. 16-35.

²¹² C. Bernard Ruffin, *The Life of Brother André, The Miracle Worker of St. Joseph*, Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 1988, p. 12-23. See also: W. H. Gregory, *Brother André of Saint Joseph's Oratory*, New York, The Knickerbocker Press, 1925, p. 9-24.

²¹³ A. Hatch, 1959, p. 37.

knew nothing about the Congregation of Holy Cross. However, he was impressed by the garb of the brothers in black habit similar to a priest's cassock with its Roman collar and a medal of Saint Joseph. At the suggestion of Father Provençal, Alfred stayed a few weeks with the brothers at the rectory at Mont-Saint-Grégoire. He estimated that the brothers were not enthusiastic about his wish to join the community because of his frail health. However, he started to learn the history of the Congregation with the help of some brothers. In October 1870, Father Provençal wrote a letter of recommendation for his young friend Alfred to Father Julien Gastineau who was the house superior and master of novices at the Hôtel Bellevue. He wrote: "I am sending a saint to your community." Alfred went to Montreal with the recommendation letter and on November 22, he presented himself at the Hôtel Bellevue. After several weeks of stay in the house with other candidates, Alfred was accepted as a novice. He made his novitiate at the Côte-des-Neiges and later at Saint Laurent when the novitiate was shifted there. From the time of his novitiate, in gratitude to his Pastor of Saint Césaire, Father André Provençal, he changed his name from Alfred Bessette to Brother André. He took his religious habit on December 27, 1870. In the same year, Pope Pius IX proclaimed Saint Joseph the Protector of the Universal Church. Alfred was joyful to enter in the community and serve God. There was a simple ceremony to welcome the postulants. Some authors described that it was an unforgettable moment for Alfred to hear the presiding priest at the ritual addressing him as follows, "Alfred Bessette, henceforth you will call yourself Brother André."²¹⁴

Brother André was a happy novice and tried to follow the teachings of Christ with the assistance of his counselor Father Gastineau. However, he was concerned about his poor health. His stomach was delicate and he vomited blood. The members of the Congregation of Holy Cross were divided in their opinion of keeping Brother André in the community as his health was poor. Some of them said that Brother André would be burden for the community and others said that he did small things with much care. At the end of the novitiate, Brother André was not accepted by the Provincial Council to make his religious profession as he had poor health. Brother André was greatly sad when the news was announced of his rejection. However, he did not give up his hope. He got a chance to present himself in front of Bishop Ignace Bourget who brought the

²¹⁴ E. Catta, 1997, p. 25-32.

Holy Cross religious to Canada. The bishop was visiting the religious community at Notre-Dame. Brother André timidly knocked at the door of the reception room where the bishop was alone. As Brother André narrated his story, Bishop Bourget listened to him and was deeply moved as the novice described his great love of God and his profound frustration that his dream of becoming a brother appeared shattered by his poor health. The bishop assured Brother André that he would be admitted to the religious profession. After the intervention of Bishop Bourget, the novice master, Father Amédée Guy, agreed to recommend Brother André to vows. The novice master said, “If this young man becomes incapable of working, he will at least be able to pray well.” On August 27, 1873, the provincial council met and Brother André was accepted to religious profession. His zeal and piety were appreciated by the provincial council. On February 2, 1874, on the feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, Brother André made his religious profession in the presence of Father Camille Lefebvre, provincial superior, in the Chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur at Côte-des-Neiges, at the age of 28. Thus, he became a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross.²¹⁵

2.2.3. Door keeper of Notre-Dame College

The first appointment of Brother André was at “Collège Notre-Dame” as the door keeper. He had a small office in the College. He used to stand there looking up at the rugged crest of the mountain across the road thinking what a wonderful place it would be for a shrine dedicated to Saint Joseph. He had a great zeal to do many works beyond opening the front door to visitors. As the number of brothers was less in the community, everyone had multiple functions to do. “As porter, he had to answer the doorbell and look for the brothers and the students who were called to the parlor or to the telephone. He had to awaken the brothers at 5 A.M, knocking at each door and saying the traditional “*Benedicamus Domino*” (Let us praise the Lord). After morning devotions and breakfast, he cleaned the reception room and the three long corridors. He ran errands to town and at noon went to the post office for the mail. Every Monday, he took the pupils’ dirty laundry to their respective homes and picked it up on Sundays. He also served as barber, and while cutting the hair of the youngsters, he tried to awaken in them the devotion to

²¹⁵ J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, 1996, p. 36-40. See also: A. Hatch, 1959, p. 43-56; G. H. Ham, *The Miracle Man of Montreal*, Fourth edition, Toronto, The Musson Book Company Limited, 1992, p. 7-10; L. Boucher, 1997, p. 33-39; D. Robillard, 2005, p. 18; F. Deroy-Pineau, *Frère André – Un saint parmi nous*, 2010, p. 42 ; W. H. Gregory, *Brother André of Saint Joseph’s Oratory*, New York, The Knickerbocker Press, 1925, p. 26-28.

Saint Joseph. They paid him a nickel a haircut and with his superior's permission he carefully put the money aside for the purpose of building his little shrine. During the evenings, he prepared the altar breads, made cinctures for the religious, repaired vestments and did other jobs."²¹⁶ Brother André did not eat much but he had good energy to do his works. Many times, he just ate a crust of bread dipped in milk and water. Many times, he fasted and did penance. He did his duty with maximum capacity while trusting in the Divine Providence.

In his busy schedule at Notre-Dame, Brother André found time for prayer. While he was at work and when someone came to replace him for short moments, he ran to the chapel at Notre Dame to pray. He used to kneel on the floor at the entrance of the chapel. "He found that the best time for prayer was late at night when all the confreres were asleep in bed. There in the darkened nave, lit only by the red glow of the oil lamp and the flickering votive candles burning before the statues, he often prayed for hours."²¹⁷ He also performed some mortification and did not take care of his health. Brother André got a few warnings from his physician because he was not taking care of his health. In the gradual course of time, the boys at Notre Dame, their parents and teachers discovered Brother André's simplicity and love of God. They talked to him about their struggles in life. He listened to them with a lot of patience and gave them hope. He also talked to them about his devotion to Saint Joseph.²¹⁸ Brother André used his spare time washing dishes and doing other small jobs. During his odd works, he continued his devotion to Saint Joseph and gained admiration of children and parents around him. He distributed medals of Saint Joseph to all people who prayed with him. Through his prayers, God touched the hearts and minds of many people. The fame of Brother André went out from Notre Dame to all over Canada and United States.²¹⁹ Some of his confrères in the community did not support him in his works. They did not agree that Brother André went out to visit many people. The life in the community was not always easy for him.²²⁰

²¹⁶ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 41.

²¹⁷ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 44.

²¹⁸ E. Catta, 1965, p. 184-204. See also: L. Boucher, 1997, p. 51; D. Robillard, 2005, p. 23-28; J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 41-50.

²¹⁹ G. H. Ham, 1992, p. 11-13. See also: A. Hatch, 1959, p. 59-65.

²²⁰ C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 26-38.

Many people who spent time with Brother André got a special experience of consolation and strength. Some of them even got healing when they prayed with him. “Sick and handicapped people began coming to the college hoping for a word of encouragement or the touch of the porter’s hand. Often, they went away healed. He gave them a medal of Saint Joseph and a little of the oil from the lamp burning in front of the statue of Saint Joseph. He rubbed an injured limb or a diseased chest with the precious liquid.”²²¹ When people heard about the healings taking place when they prayed with Brother André, there was an increase in the number of visitors to the porter. Some parents and teachers feared that their children would be affected by all the sick people going to see Brother André at the college. Others stood with him to spread the devotion to Saint Joseph. They supported him in his prayer and healing ministry.²²² Despite his poor health conditions, he worked hard welcoming pilgrims and people around him. He took time to listen to them and pray for them. It seems that his great devotion was not to Saint Joseph but to the Passion of Jesus! He liked suffering and people who suffered.²²³ Jean-Guy Dubuc also underlined that Brother André had a special concern for the suffering people. Meditating on Jesus’ Passion, Brother André understood the suffering of people around him. He found joy in giving without limit.²²⁴

2.2.4. Devotion to Saint Joseph

Saint Joseph is a discrete figure in the Bible. He is considered to be the *just* and *wise* man. In the Oratory museum, there is a beautiful exposition on the Holy Family. The artist has described Saint Joseph doing his role of accompanying Jesus and Mary. It is depicted that Saint Joseph died when Jesus took up his public ministry. In the imagination of the artist, Jesus gave his blessing to Saint Joseph at the time of his death. Mary was at the feet of Saint Joseph. E. Catta underlined that the silence of Saint Joseph revealed his mystery. «Le silence de saint Joseph enveloppe son mystère. Saint Joseph obéit, et c’est tout; mais c’est bien «tout» vraiment. Sa biographie, contenue en quelques versets de saint Matthieu, est «la plus courte qui ait jamais été

²²¹ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 51.

²²² L. Boucher, 1997, p. 52. See also: W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 32.

²²³ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 17-19.

²²⁴ J.-G. Dubuc, « Le frère André, un reflet de Jésus compatissant » in *Frappez et l’on vous ouvrira. La prière*, Cahiers de l’Oratoire Saint-Joseph, No. 2, Montréal, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l’Oratoire Saint-Joseph, Juin 1997, p. 60-80.

écrite.» Mais si le silence de saint Joseph fait partie de son mystère, celui-ci néanmoins, comme tout mystère de la foi, requiert l'attention de tout chrétien; il appelle les recherches de cette science du mystère qu'est la théologie.»²²⁵ E. Catta remarked that the devotion to Saint Joseph has not been popular in the initial periods in the Catholic Church. Some Fathers of the Church mentioned about Saint Joseph in their preaching that Saint Joseph was a discrete figure, always obedient and just. In the middle ages, it is through the religious congregations and monasteries that Saint Joseph got an important place in the Church. The Feast of Saint Joseph was inserted in the Roman calendar in 1474 by Pope Sixtus IV who was the ancient Superior General of the Franciscan Order. The Popes Innocent VIII and Clement VIII supported the movement for the Church in Rome. Finally, the decree of Pope Gregory XV in 1621 made the Feast of Saint Joseph obligatory for the universal Church.²²⁶

Joseph Dusserre remarked that it's from the 5th century that the origin of devotion to Saint Joseph started in the West. The Eastern Churches had already developed a devotion to Saint Joseph from the beginning of time. J. Dusserre said, «Du Ve siècle datent aussi, en Occident, les premières manifestations de la dévotion à saint Joseph. Mais elles sont encore timides et fort en retard sur ce que l'on trouve chez les Orientaux... Que cette dévotion ait joui d'un tel succès en Orient, est un autre fait qui ne doit pas surprendre. Il est en rapport avec la psychologie orientale naturellement si spontanée et si humaine dans sa piété. On ne pouvait se représenter Jésus-Enfant sans, du coup, apercevoir à ses côtés le bon Joseph... La piété occidentale n'acquerra que plus tard le sens de la dévotion à saint Joseph. Durant tout le haut moyen âge, rien ne le révèle.»²²⁷ Raymond Janin affirmed the same thing that the devotion to Saint Joseph existed in the Eastern Churches much before in the Western Churches.²²⁸ He said that the real devotion to Saint Joseph developed in the West much later. «En Occident, il ne se développa qu'assez tardivement, aux XVe et XVIe siècles, surtout grâce à l'influence de Pierre d'Ailly, de saint Bernardin de Sienne, de Gerson, de sainte Thérèse d'Avila et de saint François de Sales... Du IVe au VII siècle, la grande préoccupation des théologiens orientaux fut de prouver la divinité de N.-S. Jésus-Christ et de préciser les termes par lesquels il fallait l'exprimer, de manière à lutter efficacement contre

²²⁵ E. Catta, 1965, p. 1050.

²²⁶ E. Catta, 1965, p. 1-15.

²²⁷ J. Dusserre, « Les origines de la dévotion à saint Joseph » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, II, No. 1, 1954, p. 27-28.

²²⁸ R. Janin, « Le culte de saint Joseph en Orient » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, II, No. 1, 1954, p. 59-66

l'hérésie. Aussi ne se préoccupèrent-ils pas de déterminer le rôle que saint Joseph joua dans le mystère de l'Incarnation.»²²⁹ The first Saints to be honored were the Martyrs and then gradually different figures in the Bible were honored.²³⁰

J. Dusserre underlined that the devotion to Saint Joseph is a consequence of the devotion to the humanity of Jesus Christ. «La dévotion tendre à l'égard de saint Joseph est une conséquence de la dévotion à l'humanité du Christ qui, elle, caractérise la spiritualité du XIIe siècle et de la suite du moyen âge...L'initiateur de génie est saint Bernard...Pour saint Bernard, chaque détail de la vie du Christ provoque la tendresse. Il s'attarde surtout à l'enfance et à la Passion. Or, tandis qu'il médite les mystères de la crèche, il rencontre saint Joseph.»²³¹ From 12th century, Joseph was more spoken about in the teachings of the Church including Saint Thomas Aquinas. In 14th century, a solid doctrine was developed on Saint Joseph. The religious communities including Franciscans and Dominicans took interest in fostering the devotion to Saint Joseph. J. Dusserre underlined, «la dévotion à saint Joseph au XIVE siècle se fonde sur de solides bases doctrinales. Son premier docteur, si l'on peut dire, fut – ce qui n'avait pas encore été remarqué – Ubertain de Casale. Il donne véritablement, dans un chapitre de l'*Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, tout l'essentiel de ce qu'on appellera plus tard la théologie de saint Joseph.»²³²

The tradition of devotion to Saint Joseph in Canada goes back to 1624 with the patronage of the evangelization of Indians. Saint Joseph was popular in *Nouvelle-France*. In 1848, the month of Saint Joseph was celebrated in the Cathedral Church of Montréal. In 1855, Bishop Ignace Bourget desired to have a special chapel dedicated to Saint Joseph.²³³ In his article, Henri-Paul Bergeron described how the French preachers developed the devotion to Saint Joseph in 17th century. He underlined that the preachers took examples from the Fathers of the Church who spoke about Saint Joseph in their writings. There was also a great effort to compare the life of Saint Joseph with Blessed Virgin Mary. Like Mary, Saint Joseph also accomplished the *will* of

²²⁹ R. Janin, 1954, p. 59-60.

²³⁰ R. Janin, 1954, p. 61.

²³¹ J. Dusserre, 1954, p. 28.

²³² J. Dusserre, 1954, p. 29.

²³³ H.-P. Bergeron, « La dévotion à saint Joseph dans la vie spirituelle du frère André » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXIII, No. 1, 1995, p. 41. See also: E. Catta, 1965, p. 16-45; L. Boucher, 1997, p. 5.

God.²³⁴ In 1989, in his apostolic exhortation *Redemptoris Custos (The Guardian of the Redeemer)*, John Paul II elaborated the person and mission of Saint Joseph in the life of Christ and of the Church. He underlined that Saint Joseph was obedient to the call of God and the entire Church can now count on his protection as he remains a noble example for us.²³⁵

Francis L. Filas tried to elaborate the theology of Saint Joseph. He said, “Theology treats not only of God directly but also of all other things in their relationship to their Creator in so far as these relationships are known in the light of revelation. That is why we can properly define the theology of St. Joseph as a branch of theological knowledge which, being founded on revealed principles, studies the Saint in his position as virginal husband of Mary and virgin father of Jesus, together with all the graces and privileges that flow from this double office.”²³⁶ In the opinion of F. L. Filas, the theology of Saint Joseph will come under the branch of dogmatic theology because it is a subdivision of the theology of Mary, and Mariology. It is related to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The theology of Saint Joseph has to deal with the relationship of Joseph to Mary and his fatherly relationship to Jesus. The theology also should elaborate the graces, privileges and holiness that grow out of Joseph’s vocation as a foster father of Jesus. As per F. L. Filas, Josephite theology should develop his intimacy with Jesus and Mary while helping to establish a true devotion to Saint Joseph. F. L. Filas opined that Josephology or Josephite theology should help people to penetrate more deeply into the vastness of the mystery of the Incarnation and into the awesome meaning of Mary’s motherhood of God.²³⁷

From 1953, the *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, brought out important research studies on Saint Joseph.²³⁸ At the request of Roland Gauthier, the director of the research centre on Saint Joseph at the Oratory, Henri-Paul Bergeron accomplished a study on the devotion of Brother André to Saint Joseph. H.-P. Bergeron stated, « Dès sa plus tendre enfance, le frère André voue un culte tout spécial à saint Joseph. Il en fait son compagnon assidu et son confident pendant sa vie

²³⁴ H.-P. Bergeron, « Saint Joseph dans la prédication française au XVIIe siècle » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXVII, No. 2, 1979, p. 167-206.

²³⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, Vatican, Rome, 1989.

²³⁶ F. L. Filas, « Introduction to the Theology of St. Joseph » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, II, No. 2, 1954, p. 209.

²³⁷ F. L. Filas, 1954, p. 209-210.

²³⁸ E. Catta, 1965, p. 1053.

errante d'orphelin. Il chemine toujours la main dans celle de son grand ami qui le conduit dans une communauté religieuse ayant pour but l'imitation constante du patron des ouvriers. Cet amour, il s'efforce de le faire partager à ses confrères, aux élèves, aux visiteurs, aux malades. »²³⁹ In another article, R. Gauthier himself described how Brother André cherished his devotion to Saint Joseph before he founded the Oratory. As many authors said, he also affirmed that it's Clothilde Foisy, the mother of Brother André, who first introduced him to Saint Joseph.²⁴⁰ Bernard Lafrenière and many other authors who wrote on Brother André agreed that Brother André was devoted to Saint Joseph from his childhood.²⁴¹ Brother André identified with him as Saint Joseph was humble, silent and poor. Saint Joseph also was a carpenter just like Alfred's father. The patron Saint of the Brothers of Holy Cross also was Saint Joseph. For all these reasons, Brother André had a special devotion to Saint Joseph.²⁴² During his childhood, his companions at Saint Césaire used to say, "He's going crazy with his devotion to Saint Joseph." As he grew up, Brother André continued to spend hours in prayer before the statue of Saint Joseph. Even if some people and confreres laughed at him, he spoke constantly about Saint Joseph. He advised everyone who met with him: "Pray to Saint Joseph, and I will pray with you". Brother André advised people to do a novena to Saint Joseph. He prayed with confidence and perseverance during nine days to make a novena and he invited people to join him.²⁴³

For Brother André, Saint Joseph was next to God. It was clear for him that Saint Joseph did not replace God. Saint Joseph was a privileged guide to go to God and a great intercessor to obtain graces from God. As Saint Joseph lived in poverty and difficult times, he would understand people who lived in suffering and pain. Through the intercession of Saint Joseph, people got to know the divine *will* of God. The favours obtained through the intercession of Saint Joseph were signs of God's love and compassion for people. Brother André had unlimited confidence in the

²³⁹ H.-P. Bergeron, « La dévotion à saint Joseph dans la vie spirituelle du frère André » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXIII, No. 1, 1995, p. 40.

²⁴⁰ R. Gauthier, « La dévotion à S. Joseph chez le frère André avant la fondation de l'Oratoire du Mont-Royal » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXVII, No. 2, 1979, p. 208-224. See also: J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 107.

²⁴¹ B. Lafrenière, *Brother André – According to Witnesses*, Montréal, OSJ, 1990, p. 43-44. See also: D. Robillard, 2005, p. 28-30.

²⁴² J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 107-110. See also: C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 27; H.-P. Bergeron, « La dévotion à saint Joseph dans la vie spirituelle du frère André » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXIII, No. 1, 1995, p. 44; B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 104.

²⁴³ B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 77-81.

intercessory prayers through Saint Joseph to obtain healing. He told people around him that they could ask anything to Saint Joseph who would ask God to grant all favours. Brother André told many people that Saint Joseph had to be honoured on the mountain for the greater glory of God.²⁴⁴

Brother André wanted to imitate Saint Joseph in all his virtues. H.-P. Bergeron heard the testimonies of many people who knew Brother André and attested that Brother André followed Saint Joseph. He wrote about Brother André: « Il fut une image vivante de ce saint, non seulement par ses travaux mais par la pratique constante des vertus qui caractérisent le mieux le chef de la sainte Famille: l'humilité, la confiance aveugle en la Providence, le dévouement. Les témoins de sa vie se sont plu à faire ressortir ces vertus. »²⁴⁵ Through his devotion to Saint Joseph and promoting the same in his surroundings, Brother André insisted that people grow in faith. Having faith in God was primordial for Brother André. He spent a lot of time in prayer. His devotional activities included: devotion to Jesus, Mary, participation in the Holy Eucharist, doing the hour of Adoration, doing the Way of the Cross, meditating on the Passion of Jesus Christ and reciting the Rosary. He had devotion to different saints but Saint Joseph was his guiding light.

Mario Lachapelle underlined that for Brother André the devotion to Saint Joseph and Blessed Virgin Mary could not be separated.²⁴⁶ M. Lachapelle remarked that most of the books used by Brother André were all about the Passion of Jesus Christ and the life of saints. He had special devotion to the Holy Family, the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity.²⁴⁷ Jean-Guy Dubuc also underlined that Brother André's devotion was not only to Saint Joseph but also to other saints. The Passion of Jesus was so deep in his spirituality. It is the Passion of Jesus that nourished Brother André's prayer and motivated his actions. J.-G. Dubuc said, « Plusieurs témoins, au cours du procès de béatification, ont relaté le récit que leur faisait le frère André quand il se

²⁴⁴ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 31-34.

²⁴⁵ H.-P. Bergeron, 1995, p. 43.

²⁴⁶ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 20. See also: H.-P. Bergeron, 1995, p. 39-54.; R. Gauthier, « La dévotion à S. Joseph chez le frère André avant la fondation de l'Oratoire du Mont-Royal » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* XXVII, No. 2, 1979, p. 207-242.

²⁴⁷ M. Lachapelle, 2001, p. 22 & 35-41. See also: H.-P. Bergeron, 1995, p. 47-51; B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 104-119; A. Cousineau, « Le frère André et le culte de saint Joseph » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXIII, No. 1, 1995, p. 57-65; E. Catta, 1965, p. 517-539.

rappelait, ou reprenait, avec eux le chemin de la croix. Il pouvait alors parler pendant des heures, décrivant les quatorze stations avec l'expression physique de celui qui voit, et même qui ressent dans sa chair, les tourments de celui qu'il aime. Son amour de Jésus se portait moins vers le Christ ressuscité que vers le condamné en marche vers la mort. Il était, alors, compatissant avec Jésus : il souffrait avec lui dans tout son être parce qu'il savait, au fond de lui-même, que Jésus souffrait pour lui, avec lui. »²⁴⁸ Brother André liked to part take in the sufferings of people who went to him. He not only prayed for them but he associated himself with their life situations. He was compassionate, kind and merciful. Calling himself as the « petit chien de saint Joseph », he helped people love Saint Joseph and Jesus Christ.

2.2.5. Miracles at the Oratory

The Catholic Encyclopedia mentions that three features must characterize an event if it is to be regarded as miraculous: it must be “extraordinary”; it must be perceptible to the senses (thus excluding such things as conversions); and it must be produced by God in a religious context as evidence of the supernatural. In the opinion of Bernard Ruffin a “miracle” is generally perceived as a direct intervention by God in the natural world, an intervention which involves the suspension of the laws of nature, at least as they are commonly understood.²⁴⁹ The book of Numbers in the Old Testament describes a rebellion against Moses, as a result of which the Lord caused the earth to open and swallow the opponents of the leader he had set over Israel (Num. 16:30). This was certainly extraordinary; it was evident to the senses of all who were present; it was wrought by God as a demonstration of His power and presence, His approval of Moses, and His punishment of those who flaunted the rule of the prophet. Likewise, the miracles recorded in the New Testament are extraordinary signs of God. Jesus healed “all those who were sick” (Mt. 8:16) who approached him. Therefore, when Church speaks about miracles it indicates some visible action that is far above the laws and powers of nature. It is through God's intervention that a miracle can happen in the life of someone. W. H. Gregory said that “miracles are not

²⁴⁸ J.-G. Dubuc, « Le frère André, un reflet de Jésus compatissant » in Frappez et l'on vous ouvrira. La prière, Cahiers de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, No. 2, Montréal, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, Juin 1997, p. 62-64. See also: J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, Fides, Montréal, 1996, p. 142-149.

²⁴⁹ C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 81.

performed by the Heavenly powers to repair any defect in the scheme of nature as we know it but in answer to the prayers and petitions of suffering humanity.”²⁵⁰

Through the prayers of Brother André, many miracles took place for people. One of the earliest miracles was the healing of several victims of smallpox during the epidemic of 1874-75. It seems that Brother André also prayed for students at college Notre-Dame who were sick and they got healed. One boy was injured during the game and medical assistance was sought. Brother André seemed to have given this boy “first aid” and he was healed before the doctor arrived in the college.²⁵¹ Many people were healed when Brother André applied the oil of Saint Joseph and rubbed them with the medal of Saint Joseph. Seeking to divert attention from himself to Saint Joseph, Brother André was always exceedingly modest about the healings. “The world is foolish to think that Brother André performs miracles,” he told Azarias Claude. Brother André seemed to know which patients were going to be healed and which were not.²⁵²

Brother André used the medal of Saint Joseph to rub himself and he gave medals to thousands of people. Some of his confreres and people around him said that it was a superstitious practice and he made people believe in magic. For Brother André, the medal was a sign of faith and an expression of confidence in God. He also recommended the oil of Saint Joseph. He used to say, “Rub yourself with a medal of Saint Joseph and with Saint Joseph’s oil”. The use of oil is much prevalent in the Bible (Mark 6: 15). The apostles anointed many sick people and they got healed. “If one of you is sick, let him call the elders of the Church, and let them pray for him after anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” (James 5: 14). The oil and medal were two material things from the tradition of the Church that Brother André used to build up people’s confidence in God.²⁵³

Bernard Lafrenière collected the sayings of different people about Brother André. The witnesses of Brother André who saw him in action were thrilled to collaborate with him. Some wondered

²⁵⁰ W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 104-105.

²⁵¹ A. Hatch, 1959, p. 67-72. See also: G. H. Ham, 1992, p. 19; J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 50-58.

²⁵² C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 89. See also: G. H. Ham, 1992, p. 25-46.

²⁵³ M. Lachance, 2010, p. 37-52. See also: B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 81-87; J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 111-120.; C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 40-41.

how Brother André got such a power and energy to do things. With all the miracles that happened around him, Brother André remained to be humble and he never tried to attract attention to himself. He was convinced that a healing was good not only for the person who was healed but also for all those who hear about it. Brother André attributed all healings to Saint Joseph and God. “One day a man came to see Brother André and said to him, ‘When I invoke Saint Joseph, I never get anything. But when I ask you, then I get what I want.’ Brother André was so upset that he started trembling and quivering, and he showed the man to the door.”²⁵⁴ To him, what the man said was almost a blasphemy, as through a miracle could happen by human power. Brother André got angry for only one reason when people said he had a power to heal them. He corrected those who asked him to heal them or who credited him with a miracle. However, he wanted all the cures to be known and along with his friends, he displayed the crutches of those who had been healed. Brother André was not afraid to acknowledge and proclaim to others that miracles are signs of God.²⁵⁵

E. Catta affirmed that Brother André was a friend of the sick and suffering people. The healing of the sick was part of Brother André’s mission. He said, «L’ami de saint Joseph fut l’ami des maladies. C’est la guérison des malades qui fut à l’origine de l’Oratoire. La petite chapelle s’est offerte comme leur refuge, et le grand édifice ne se serait pas construite sans leurs douleurs et leurs recours. La vie du frère André, par vocation, fut donc ainsi vouée aux malades. Sa piété envers saint Joseph ne se sépare pas d’eux.»²⁵⁶ The sick and suffering people have a special place in the Bible. During his public ministry, Jesus healed many people who were sick. He admired their simplicity and faith. He invited the suffering people to experience God’s kindness and love. Brother André, the apostle of Saint Joseph, had a special concern for the sick. They visited him at the Oratory and he visited them in their houses.²⁵⁷

Brother André was humble in his ways of doing things. Laurent Boucher stated: “evidence of his humility is found in the way he carried out the work of God without any concern for the status of others and without attaching any importance to those who came to him. When called upon to

²⁵⁴ B. Lafrenière, *Brother André – According to Witnesses*, Montréal, OSJ, 1990, p. 29.

²⁵⁵ W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 110-130. See also: B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 60-61.

²⁵⁶ E. Catta, 1965, p. 591.

²⁵⁷ E. Catta, 1965, p. 590-622.

meet people of rank, he complied graciously without false humility.”²⁵⁸ Throughout his life in the community, he sought the last place. From the beginning as a door keeper, he enjoyed doing service to the people around him. He could barely read and write but he had mystical gifts and a special connection to God. He did not want to take any credit for the construction of the Oratory. He attributed all blessings to Saint Joseph and God. He was not happy with people who did not respect God. Sometimes, he lost patience and he was nervous with rash temperament. “He was particularly exasperated by persons who came to him out of mere curiosity. He rejected those who neglected prayer or ordered him to cure them. After such occurrences, he declared to some fellow religious or close friends, *I have again been impatient. Ah! If people could only realize that it is God alone through Saint Joseph Who works cures.*”²⁵⁹

In 1910, Émile Drouin from Québec, blind for two years, gave a testimony of having received healing at the Oratory and it was published in *La Patrie* of January 9th, 1910. He received his sight back after Brother André having applied oil on his eyes. Another healing was reported by Martin Hannon who worked with Canadian Pacific. He had an accident at work place and his legs were seriously injured. Doctor asked him to walk with crutches for six months. During his visit at the Oratory, Brother André applied oil on his legs and prayed. Brother André asked him to throw away his crutches and walk. He was healed and his photo and healing story were published in *La Patrie*.²⁶⁰ Gradually, the news spread out that many miracles happened at the Oratory. Newspapers reported about these miracles. The Arch-Bishop of Montreal was forced to investigate what was going on at the Oratory. Father Gilbert Français, the Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross met with the Arch-Bishop. At the request of the Arch-Bishop, Father Dion studied the matter and sent a detailed report of the activities of the shrine to him. It is said that from November 1909 to the spring of 1910, around 24,745 letters came to the Oratory and among them 112 claimed complete corporal cures, 4,329 expressed improvements in health and 313 were favors obtained.²⁶¹ Brother André’s days were long as he received visitors and pilgrims. He listened to their stories and sufferings in life. He prayed for sick people and they got healed. He visited their homes. He also visited sick people in the hospitals. Almost every evening

²⁵⁸ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 241.

²⁵⁹ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 244.

²⁶⁰ D. Robillard, p. 63.

²⁶¹ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 80-81. See also: M. Lachance, 2010, p. 78.

Brother André visited hospitals, nursing homes and private residences to meet with sick and troubled people. He was tireless to listen to people. Thousands of people came back to the Oratory to thank Brother André for experiencing healing. But Brother André attributed every healing to Saint Joseph and God.²⁶²

Bernard Ruffin also underlined that there were many testimonies of cures and miracles reported to Brother André between 1910 and his death in 1937. He said that there were about 400 cures a year. There were also so many cases of miracles that were not reported. Some of the miracles were well-investigated by the Oratory authority. After the death of Brother André, Father Bergeron interviewed many people who claimed to have received healing and miracles at the Oratory.²⁶³ In 1922, George H. Ham published his book titled “*The Miracle Man of Montreal*”. He supported Brother André in his works. He remarked that not only Catholics received miracles through the prayers of Brother André but also people who belonged to other Christian denominations.

2.2.6. Friends of Brother André

Brother André had several close friends who stood with him all along his efforts to build a Church in honour of Saint Joseph. Some of them were simple people and others were highly educated and reputed people in the society. They were attracted by the person of Brother André and his project of building a church in honour of Saint Joseph. Some of the names are worth mentioning: Jules-Aimé Maucotel, Emile Gadbois, Azarias Claude, Raoul Gauthier, Léopold Lussier, Joseph Pichette, Albertine Pichette, Dominic Cormier, Moïse Robert, Michel Trudel, Oscar Martin, Adélar Fabre, Arthur Ganz, Lionel Lamy, Joseph Israël Bessette, Zénon Lesage, Paul Corbeil, Francis Cornish, Antonio Valente, Salvator Marotta, Tom Callary, Connie Mack. For these people, Brother André was a friend, a counsellor and a model. They recognized God’s presence in him. They collaborated with him in his works and accompanied him to visit many places where he went as per the request of people.²⁶⁴

²⁶² J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 89-105. See also: D. Robillard, 2005, p. 62-67; C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 3-11.

²⁶³ C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 91.

²⁶⁴ J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 61-86. See also: B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 125-174; E. Catta, 1965, p. 703-728.

From 1912, Brother André retained Azarias Claude as a regular doorkeeper for his office. He was the one who generally drove the brother on most of his sick calls. After Brother André's death, he resumed his work at the shrine. He was not only the driver of Brother André but also he served as a guard in front of the brother's room above the first chapel. After the death of Brother André, he started distributing souvenirs and providing advice and encouragement to the sick and afflicted people who came to the Oratory.²⁶⁵ It is said that Brother André's life would not have been the same without his friends. His friends were his faithful collaborators. They took care of him when he was tired and surrounded him in times of need. Brother André was always in his community of Holy Cross. Though he lived in the community house, he did not have the same program as other Brothers. His schedule was different than the rest of the community members. For 39 years as a doorkeeper, he ate lunch and dinner before other community members. This was to make him available to students and teachers to answer their questions.²⁶⁶ D. Robillard also remarked that the friends of Brother André had determination to support him in his mission.²⁶⁷

Brother André was a friend to all people including poor, sick, afflicted, sinners, non-Catholics. Most of the non-Catholics were people belonging to different denominations in Christianity and Judaism. He was kind and compassionate to all people. "He was kind-hearted, but it was above all the love of God which led him to attend to the sick...He forgave his offenders, claiming for them human frailty and ignorance."²⁶⁸ He prayed for sinners and witnessed great conversions at the Oratory. He knew ways of encouraging the sinful people. He did not accuse them but won their confidence. He welcomed people who were not from his faith. Among many other non-Catholics, Colonel George Ham, an advertising agent of a railway company, became an admirer of Brother André. Non-Catholics not only came to the Oratory but Brother André went to their homes and visited them in the hospitals when they were sick. "A Catholic woman accompanied a non-Catholic woman to the shrine; the latter had a foot so badly infected that an amputation was imminent. *But I am a Protestant*, she admitted. Brother André replied gently, *That does not matter, Madam, leave your crutches and walk. Bring them home with you, if you remain cured*

²⁶⁵ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 115 & 121.

²⁶⁶ B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 125.

²⁶⁷ D. Robillard, 2005, p. 37-58.

²⁶⁸ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 246-247.

15 days from now, bring them back. The woman brought her crutches back. With her husband, she took religious instructions and both were converted to the Catholic faith.”²⁶⁹

2.2.7. Suffering and Death

In 1936, Doctor Lamy asked Brother André to limit his visits and activities due to his ill health. He suggested that Brother André be hospitalized as his health conditions were frail. Brother André agreed to it but he did not want to go to Montreal Hotel-Dieu hospital rather he preferred to go to Hospital of St. Laurent. He was transported to the hospital in an ambulance. Hospital of St. Laurent was run by the sisters of Hope. Sister Marie-Camille was the nurse in charge of Brother André. Brother André could not eat any more due to indigestion. He had terrible pain on his body.²⁷⁰ Gradually, he became weaker and on Wednesday, January 6th, 1937, Brother André passed away at 12:50 A.M. He had a blissful death. In order to thank God for the person of Brother André, Father Albert Cousineau recited the *Magnificat* with all people present at his death bed. The body was exposed for a whole week for veneration of the faithful. Despite the cold weather, people came in big number to pay homage to Brother André. Over a million people paid tribute to him. The news about the death of Brother André was announced in more than 375 newspapers throughout Canada and United States. Writers and journalists of different background and religion wrote about his virtues.²⁷¹

Archbishop George Gauthier requested that the heart of Brother André be preserved as per the European custom especially in Italy and France. As per the custom in Europe, the hearts of kings, army generals and benefactors of the nation were preserved. In biblical terms, the heart is the dwelling place of generosity, love, affection and commitment. Brother André was a man full of love and affection, generous to give his life to others and committed to his mission.²⁷² The heart of Brother André is kept at the Oratory in a vial filled with a preserving liquid. On 9th January, the funeral services took place in the Cathedral of Queen of the World and on 12th January in the Oratory. Two services were held because the crowd was too big that the Oratory

²⁶⁹ E. Catta, 1965, p. 642-655. See also: L. Boucher, 1997, p. 252-253.

²⁷⁰ C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 178-189 & 191.

²⁷¹ J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 15. See also: E. Catta, 1965, p. 909-938; L. Boucher, 1997, p. 224-235; A. Hatch, 1959, p. 161-172.

²⁷² B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 183.

could not contain the people. There was a big procession from the Cathedral to the Oratory with the coffin of Brother André. After the funeral services in the Crypt Church at the Oratory, his body was laid in the tomb. On his tomb, it was written *pauper, servus, humilis* (poor, servant, humble). Archbishop Gauthier said the last solemn prayers at the funeral as the cement tomb of Brother André was sealed. The tomb was later covered with black, polished granite, the gift of Prime Minister Duplessis.²⁷³

J.-G. Dubuc commented that like any other person, Brother André also was sensitive and fragile at the time of his death. « En fait, devant la mort, le frère André était un homme semblable aux autres humains voyant venir leurs derniers moments de vie : souffrant, soucieux, conscient de son corps, préoccupé de son entourage, comme tous ceux et celles qu'il avait reçus pendant quelque 50 ans. »²⁷⁴ Despite his saintly nature and works, Brother André was fully human. He was an ordinary man with extraordinary ways of doing things for people around him. J.-G. Dubuc also remarked that Brother André had certain mystical elements in him. “L'affirmation touchant la mystique peut surprendre : on s'entend pour reconnaître en l'homme une générosité exceptionnelle, un pouvoir d'intercession unique, une constante fidélité à la prière et à la mortification, une dévotion très grande en saint Joseph et un amour immense pour le Dieu souffrant. Mais la notion de mystique peut paraître excessive.”²⁷⁵ The mystical life is all about having an intimate relation with God. A mystic knows to enter into the heart of God and let God enter into his heart. Brother André seemed to have such a connection with God.²⁷⁶

2.2.8. Sainthood of Brother André

It was a great concern for many people including the members of the Congregation of Holy Cross about the future of the Oratory. When Brother André died, the construction of the Oratory was not complete. There was no one with the same charisma of Brother André. A few individuals pretended to replace Brother André to do the same work of miracles. For instance, in 1937, «un père du Saint-Sacrement de Québec, Rosaire Audet, se propose pour remplacer le

²⁷³ J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 14. See also: B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 184-189; A. Hatch, 1959, p. 175-182; D. Robillard, 2005, p. 183-196.

²⁷⁴ J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, Fides, Montréal, 1996, p. 18.

²⁷⁵ J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, 1996, p. 141.

²⁷⁶ J.-G. Dubuc, *Le frère André*, Fides, Montréal, 1996, p. 141.

frère André. Ayant visité les malades en compagnie de celui-ci – il l’a notamment vu guérir un communiste souffrant d’une crise de rhumatisme – il prétend connaître son secret. En répétant les mêmes gestes et en utilisant l’huile de saint Joseph, il croit pouvoir obtenir des guérisons comme le frère André. Le recteur Deguire refuse sa proposition et le cardinal Villeneuve, archevêque de Québec, prie le suppléant de cesser ses activités.»²⁷⁷ Cardinal Villeneuve asked the Oratory authority to continue the good works of Brother André by keeping up the heritage. He counted on the Holy Spirit to accomplish the works.²⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Azarias Claude, friend and companion of Brother André, continued to keep the door of Brother André’s room open and welcome visitors. He sold small relics of Brother André and contributed the money to the Oratory. Gradually, this custom was stopped. However, hundreds of thousands of people came to the Oratory on a regular basis. Those people who faced challenges in life knew that the Oratory was a place of solace and encouragement. Many people got back their lost faith and courage to live just by spending time at the Oratory.²⁷⁹

Soon after the death of Brother André, an informal investigation started for his Cause. Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau of Montreal sounded that Brother André’s sainthood would be both for the greater glory of God and the spread of devotion to Saint Joseph. From 1937, Father Henri-Paul Bergeron collected materials for building up a file for the Cause of Brother André. On 15th October 1940, Archbishop Charbonneau signed a document to start the preliminary investigation for the beatification of Brother André. Father Emile Deguire was appointed as the Postulator for the Cause of Brother André. Many people gave witnesses and promoted the Cause of Brother André. The first step in the process of beatification was to verify the reputation of the person for holiness. The file was opened in Rome on 22nd July 1950. The Pope John XXIII allowed the Cause of Brother André to be introduced in Rome on 9th November 1960 and thus Brother André was known as a “Servant of God”. Then, after much research and recognizing the heroism of the virtues of Brother André, the Pope Paul VI declared him “Venerable” on 10th June 1978. After the lengthy process of civil and apostolic trials and questions in Montreal and Rome, the Cause moved towards the beatification and later for Canonization. On 23rd May 1982,

²⁷⁷ M. Lachance, 2010, p. 375.

²⁷⁸ E. Catta, 1965, p. 965.

²⁷⁹ M. Lachance, 2010, p. 376. See also: L. Boucher, 1997, p. 328-329.

Brother André was beatified by the Pope John Paul II and on 17th October 2010, he was canonized by the Pope Benedict XVI.²⁸⁰

Brother André brought hope for all people. His life was an example of hope. He struggled from his childhood till the end of his life on earth with poor health. He had no education and no family to support him throughout his journey. He was not accepted by his confreres in the community. Despite adverse situations, he continued his life with much hope. He put his trust in God who called him to accomplish a great mission of accompanying thousands of suffering people. Today, Saint Joseph's Oratory is a second home for thousands of people coming from different parts of the world. It's a haven of reconciliation, prayer and peace.

2.3. Mission of Saint Joseph's Oratory

The mission of Saint Joseph's Oratory cannot be disconnected from the life and mission of Brother André and the charism of the Congregation of Holy Cross. In his article, André Charron took into consideration, the founder, his vision, his belongingness to the Congregation of Holy Cross. He underlined that the Oratory has a special mission. « Comme l'a montré un long procès canonique, bien que l'Oratoire soit au plan pastoral une institution approuvée et sans cesse encouragée par les évêques successifs, son statut juridique fait qu'il n'est la propriété ni ne dépend de l'administration diocésaine puisqu'il est fondé sur la mission spécifique et le charisme particulier d'un religieux assisté de sa congrégation, de laquelle relève le sanctuaire. Il manifeste donc dans l'Église locale une présence reliée à la tradition prophétique des religieux, complémentaire de la fonction du gouvernement ecclésiastique qui répond de la charge des communautés chrétiennes. Il manifeste encore une présence autre qu'ecclésiastique en gardant un lien direct au peuple chrétien de la ville, largement actif depuis ses origines, selon la structure du peuple laïc qui continue d'y entretenir un christianisme populaire. »²⁸¹ André Charron elaborated how the Oratory is a special Church in the city of Montréal and described the functions of the Oratory situated on Mount-Royal. He insisted on the local and international

²⁸⁰ D. Robillard, 2005, p. 269-291. See also: C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 199-206; B. Lafrenière, 1990, p. 191-195; A. Hatch, 1959, p. 185-214; J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 214-228; L. Boucher, 1997, p. 279-322

²⁸¹ A. Charron, « L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, espace et fonction de l'Église de la ville, Un sanctuaire dans la mission urbaine » in *L'Oratoire et sa mission, Cahiers de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph*, No. 1, Montréal, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l'OSJ, 1996, p. 18-19.

character of the Oratory while comparing with other big sanctuaries in the world. He was concerned about the urban ecclesiological and pastoral praxeological dimensions of the mission of the Oratory.²⁸²

As I noted in the section “devotion to Saint Joseph”, the figure of Saint Joseph has been important for the population in Canada. In the same perspective, A. Charron underlined that from 1624 when the French people arrived in Canada, Saint Joseph has been chosen as the protector of the new emerging Church. Hospitals and schools were named after Saint Joseph. Bishop Bourget wanted to name his cathedral under the patronage of Saint Joseph for attracting many pilgrims. A. Charron affirmed that the figure of Saint Joseph is familiar to the tradition of Church in Montreal.²⁸³ But the mission of Saint Joseph’s Oratory is the mission of Brother André.

Albert Cousineau was the Arch-Bishop of Cap-Haitien in Haiti and he was also the Superior of the Oratory from 1936 to 1938. He assisted Brother André in his last days of sickness and death. He considered Brother André to be his intimate friend in heart. In his letters, A. Cousineau wrote about the mission of Brother André and his devotion to Saint Joseph. « Le secret de la haute spiritualité du frère André, c’est, avec sa charité, son grand esprit de prière. À l’exemple de Jésus, après s’être donné, le jour, aux misères humaines, il se retirait dans sa chambre ou dans la première chapelle qu’il avait bâtie de ses mains, et là il priait tard dans la soirée, si ce n’était pas toute la nuit. »²⁸⁴ In the same perspectives, Bernard Ruffin said, Brother André’s “chief mission was to save men’s souls and to inspire them to righteous living. Bodily cures were sometimes a way of impressing an individual with the power of the Living God.”²⁸⁵ Brother André was a humble instrument of God and Saint Joseph. His mission was to invite the faithful to go to Saint Joseph: *Ite ad Joseph*.²⁸⁶

²⁸² A. Charron, 1996, p. 9.

²⁸³ A. Charron, 1996, p. 10.

²⁸⁴ A. Cousineau, « Le frère André et le culte de saint Joseph » in *Cahiers de Joséphologie*, XXIII, No. 1, 1995, p. 56.

²⁸⁵ C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 91.

²⁸⁶ C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 47. See also: A. Trottier, « La mission du Frère André » in *L’Oratoire*, 68/3, 1979, p. 4-7.

In her elaborated study, Denise Robillard described the evolution of the Oratory from its beginning till 2004. She underlined that the pastoral care is the central mission of the Oratory. She also observed that in today's context, the Oratory has certain pastoral challenges to form a team of dedicated men and women to continue its pastoral work in diverse areas. As of now, the pastoral care is extended through many services. They include, « l'exercice du ministère d'accueil et de compassion, l'éducation de la foi et l'accompagnement spirituel prennent diverses formes : célébrations eucharistiques, sacrement du pardon, bénédictions, liturgies de la Parole, prières avec les pèlerins, consultation, accueil au bureau général, présence sur le site. Aux tâches spirituelles s'ajoutent les exigences pour l'entretien et la mise en valeur de l'héritage du frère André. »²⁸⁷ To maintain all the services, the Oratory has a great job to do. Brother André was sensitive to the pastoral care of the people. The mission of the Oratory can be seen through its evolution and dream of Brother André coming true. The diversity of the population at the Oratory made it popular among all people. Functions of the Oratory cater to fulfill the needs of the time.

2.3.1. Evolution of Saint Joseph's Oratory

The mission of the Oratory is to fulfill the dream of Brother André in line with the need of the time. A. Charron credited the origin of the Oratory to Brother André and his informal leadership. Along with him, Brother André had a group of good lay people, friends ready to help him in his mission. The need of the time pushed the project further to institutionalize it in connection with the Congregation of Holy Cross and the Church in Montreal.²⁸⁸ In the initial stage, the dream of Brother André was to build a chapel for Saint Joseph. He and his friends worked hard to build the chapel. On 19th October 1904, the small chapel was inaugurated and blessed by the vicar general of Montreal Monseigneur Zotique Raciot in the presence of a good number of people and friends of Brother André. The celebration started in the college chapel with the blessing of the statue of Saint Joseph. Father Louis Geoffrion, chaplain at the Collège Notre-Dame presided the celebration and some students from the college sang at the celebration. There was a solemn procession with the statue from the college to the new chapel on the mountain. Many students, teachers, religious and dignitaries joined for the celebration. The vicar general was assisted by

²⁸⁷ D. Robillard, 2005, p. 423.

²⁸⁸ A. Charron, 1996, p. 13.

Father Benjamin Lecavalier and Father Louis Geoffrion. Saint Joseph was honored throughout the celebration. During the celebration, Brother André was not so visible. He was joyful and acclaimed the glory of God. His dream of building a chapel for Saint Joseph was accomplished through many hands.²⁸⁹

The first organized pilgrimage to the chapel was made in 1905 by men and women who were familiar with the work being carried on by Brother André. The second pilgrimage was under the leadership of Abbé Perrault from Cotes-des-Neiges Parish. As there was a big storm during the pilgrimage, people did not have enough space in the chapel. They started asking Brother André to build a bigger church.²⁹⁰ A. Charron underlined the progressive growth of the Oratory with the number of visitors and pilgrims. On 2nd August 1908, around 600 pilgrims gathered for prayer. The number of people going to the Oratory grew rapidly. On 6th August 1909, around 3000 people gathered for worship.

On 19th March 1909, for the first time, the Feast of Saint Joseph was celebrated at the Oratory with solemnity. Brother Datien, the organist of the college Notre-Dame, played the organ and the choir was composed of students, parents and friends. Father Léandre Perreault, the local parish pastor, presided the celebration. Father Elphège Grou, the steward from the college Saint-Laurent preached at the Mass. Thousands of people praised and thanked God for Saint Joseph. In the same year, Brother André was relieved of his duties as porter at the college and appointed official guardian at the Oratory. For the Feast of the Ascension, on 5th May 1910, Archbishop Bruchési granted permission to keep the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel on the mountain. In the same year, the construction of the rectory started and the work finished in 1912. It was a small rectory for 8 religious. Good number of people started coming to the Oratory as the devotion to Saint Joseph was promoted by the religious who resided in the rectory. Scapular of Saint Joseph was given to devotees. Students from different schools also came to take part in different celebrations.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ E. Catta, 1965, p. 241-254. See also: L. Boucher, 1997, p. 61-62; M. Lachance, 2010, p. 57-74.

²⁹⁰ E. Catta, 1965, p. 256-272. See also: W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 58.

²⁹¹ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 69-70 & 77-79.

The evolution of the Oratory was slow but steady. The Oratory administration became autonomous in 1913 and held its first meeting on 3rd November. As per the requests of many pilgrims, they wanted to build a bigger church on the mountain. A great number of benefactors were waiting to give donations to the Oratory for building a bigger Church. A plan was submitted to the provincial administration in Montreal and general administration in Rome of the Congregation of Holy Cross to approve such a project. The same project also was given to the Arch-Diocese of Montreal. Many people collaborated for such a project and in 1914 a contract was signed to build the Crypt Church. Brother André's dream came true with the decision of building a Church. The first stage was to build a Church with a seating capacity of a thousand people. Brother André was happy to see the work progressing and he spent much of his spare time overseeing the construction. He was enthusiastic and skipped meals from the community to spend time at the work site. He was also friendly with workers. On 16th December 1917, Archbishop Bruchési blessed the Crypt Church and the statue of Saint Joseph that was imported from Italy. The Church was called a Crypt because of its vault-like structure, supported by flattened arches, and its position at the foot of the Basilica. More than 1000 people gathered for the celebration. During the celebration, Brother André remained humble in the back seat just like when he was at the time of the blessing of the primitive chapel. For the next 20 years, Brother André chose that same humble seat in the Crypt when he participated in celebrations and spent time in prayers. Archbishop Bruchési always had a special concern for Brother André. On 20th April 1920, Archbishop Bruchési came back to the Oratory and spoke publicly about great things that happened in the humble shrine of Brother André on the mountain.²⁹² The fame of the Oratory may be seen from the great number of letters, more than 40,000 that Brother André received every year from different parts of the world. Many people received favours and healings from God through the intercession of Saint Joseph and prayers of Brother André. The astounding growth of the Oratory as a haven for the afflicted of the world can be attributed to the firm conviction among the faithful that Saint Joseph has chosen the site for manifesting his miracle working power.²⁹³

²⁹² L. Boucher, 1997, p. 57 & 90-91. See also: D. Robillard, 2005, p. 87-112; G. H. Ham, 1992, p. 54-55.

²⁹³ E. Catta, 1965, p. 273-288. See also: W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 67-68.

From 1922, the plans were made for the foundation of the Basilica. The public was informed of the plans with huge maps depicting the project. The great Italian Renaissance-style Church was to come up on the mountain behind the Crypt Church. On 31st August 1924, the blessing of the cornerstone of the Basilica took place in the presence of 35000 people. The news was spread out that wonders took place on the Mount-Royal with Brother André and Saint Joseph. Countless number of people started coming to the Oratory from different parts of the world. In 1930s, there were constrains to continue the construction work of the Basilica. Financial crisis and death of one of the architects, Mr. Alphonse Venne, dragged the construction. Meanwhile, Brother André's health declined too. In 1935, Brother André had poor health and he had to take rest for many days with Doctor Ubald Bessette's summer residence in Rowdon. From that time, Brother André was asked to slow down his work and visits. However, he continued his good works and he was fully active in serving the sick and the afflicted. In 1936, his 91st birthday was celebrated in big scale with newspapers all over Canada and the United States carrying news headlines about his celebration. Many reporters interviewed him. Brother André was the inspiration of the whole venture of the Oratory but he stood humble in the background. He was not involved in the decision-making process.²⁹⁴

The big dome was done in 1937 and from 1957; the access was given to the regular use of the Basilica.²⁹⁵ The celebration of the consecration of the Basilica took place on 17th October 2004. D. Robillard remarked the words of Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte when he started the celebration. « Aujourd'hui, le passé et le futur se rencontrent dans cette célébration. » During the celebration, the apostolic nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Luigi Ventura gave a golden rose flower to Father Jean-Pierre Aumont, the rector of the Oratory. It was done as a sign of extraordinary honour to the Oratory which is a place of special grace and hope. From 11th century, the Popes have blessed golden roses and given to significant persons and sanctuaries in order to honour and thank them for their greater services to Christianity. Saint Joseph's Oratory is the first sanctuary to receive such an honour in Canada.²⁹⁶ W. H. Gregory pointed out that the Oratory grew step by

²⁹⁴ L. Boucher, 1997, p. 102-110 & 215. See also: G. H. Ham, 1992, p. 55-56.

²⁹⁵ A. Charron, 1996, p. 11. See also: C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 48-64; A. Hatch, 1959, p. 75-85; A. Hatch, 1959, p. 130; D. Robillard, 2005, p. 13; J.-G. Dubuc, 1996, p. 177 & 187-204; D. Robillard, 2005, p. 153-180 & 213-238 & 343-390.

²⁹⁶ D. Robillard, 2005, p. 425-426.

step from obscurity to the world's greatest place of pilgrimage within such a short span of years, without any organized propaganda or publicity.²⁹⁷

2.3.2. Popularity of the Oratory in Montreal

Resuming the results of studies conducted in 1993 and 1995, A. Charron stated that majority of people frequenting to the Oratory are from Montreal (68% in 1993 and 54% in 1995). From a theological perspective, he underlined the local character of the Oratory but did not forget that the Basilica is an open public space.²⁹⁸ Further, he recalled the socio-historic organization of communities, parishes, basilicas and cathedrals under the umbrella of the Catholic Church. A. Charron noted down the ecclesiological importance of special places of cult with its specific devotions to enrich the faithful people. Recalling the functions of different basilicas in various cities, he remarked that Saint Joseph's Oratory has a similar and specific ecclesiological vocation. He said, « l'Oratoire est un espace non territorial dans l'Église locale et il en fait partie intégrante au plein sens ecclésiologique de la communauté chrétienne qui habite son lieu, Montréal. Il est indépendant du système paroissial. Il œuvre au plan ou selon la modalité de l'Église de la ville, qui est à l'échelle de la ville et de sa région comme géographie humaine et phénomène total de la vie collective. En tant que basilique, il est précisément un espace pleinement public, ouvert au tout-venant, destiné aux grands rassemblements populaires. »²⁹⁹ A. Charron understood the diverse needs of people going to the Oratory. He underlined the importance of keeping the place open for people who are in quest for the divine. Some people are in difficult times and they experience peace in the Oratory.

For A. Charron, the Oratory is a unique place. « Il est l'espace ecclésial accueillant les chercheurs de Dieu en leur condition de pèlerins, de gens de passage, dans leur marche vers l'essentiel, et les affligés en mal de restauration de leur corps, de leur être et de leurs relations. »³⁰⁰ People going to the Oratory feel comfortable to be there as they are not controlled by anyone. They have the mobility to do their religious practices. The Oratory keeps its sacredness and people respect the place. A. Charron noted that the people in urban areas do not

²⁹⁷ W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 3. See also: C. Bernard Ruffin, 1988, p. 207.

²⁹⁸ A. Charron, 1996, p. 14.

²⁹⁹ A. Charron, 1996, p. 18.

³⁰⁰ A. Charron, 1996, p. 18.

like to be controlled by the institutions for their prayers and religious activities. « L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph est précisément un espace religieux d'accueil et de gratuité dans la mobilité urbaine. Des gens choisissent d'y venir, à leur heure et à leur rythme, anonymes, et protégés par l'anonymat de la foule. Ils y viennent librement, sans la contrainte du contrôle social ou communautaire, pour satisfaire d'abord le projet personnel dont ils se savent ou se découvrent soudainement responsables. Un tel sanctuaire répond bien au nomadisme urbain des déplacements volontaires chez des croyants qui ne veulent pas se faire embrigader dans un quelconque engagement de communauté institutionnelle, qui préfèrent à l'encadrement des paroisses un endroit entièrement ouvert. »³⁰¹ At the same time, A. Charron underlined that the Oratory is a privileged place in the city for people to come in big number to participate in Masses and other celebrations. People come with conviction and faith to form community. Since a few years, there are less organized groups going from different parishes to the Oratory. Individuals come with their personal decision to take part in the celebrations. For many pilgrims, the Oratory is a modern place where people find spiritual energy as per their need and time. The Oratory accomplishes the mission of gathering people in the urban city.³⁰²

Speaking about the Church in Montreal, A. Charron showed how the Oratory gave special services to millions of people. Different departments and services at the Oratory took care of different needs of visitors and pilgrims. The Oratory offers exceptional liturgical celebrations that are popular and well attended by thousands of people every week. The counselling and reconciliation services along with special care for the sick and suffering people are known at the Oratory. The Oratory promotes art and culture with its varied activities, publications and researches. A. Charron appreciated the quality with which the Oratory maintained its services. For him, the Oratory is adapted to the needs of the town-dwellers of today.³⁰³

In the same line of thoughts, Jean-Marc Charron underlined the changing perspectives and attitudes of people who used to do religious practices in view of their personal salvation. In today's context, people look for maintaining their better health, physical security and personal

³⁰¹ A. Charron, 1996, p. 21-24.

³⁰² A. Charron, 1996, p. 23-25.

³⁰³ A. Charron, 1996, p. 43-48.

well-being. At the same time, he remarked that the Christian symbolisms and popular devotions are not dead. The religious sense of people is not lost in our time. He said, « Il persiste et tend même à un nouveau réveil sous des formes multiples et variées, empruntant quelques fois à la sensibilité psychologique ou aux traditions spirituelles d'autres cultures, puisant aux sources des mythologies archaïques ou innovant par des ritualités sauvages. Dans cette mosaïque religieuse, dessinée à l'image de nos sociétés plurielles, la tradition chrétienne se présente encore comme un lieu symbolique et rituel permettant aux hommes et aux femmes d'exprimer quelque chose de leurs désirs et de leurs angoisses quant à l'amour et à la haine, à la vie et à la mort, au bien-être et à la souffrance. »³⁰⁴

J.-M. Charron stated that Saint Joseph's Oratory is a privileged place that corresponds to the urban mentality of people today who look for a religious experience. Christians living in and around Montréal go for regular religious activities at the Oratory. In the context of reducing number of people in parishes, the Oratory still attracts thousands of people. J.-M. Charron said, « nous serions tenté de faire l'hypothèse que ce lieu religieux, de par la souplesse et la diversité des pratiques qu'il permet, correspond davantage à la sensibilité urbaine et moderne caractérisée par le morcellement des appartenances, l'affirmation de l'individualité, la sélectivité des signes et des symboles, la pluralité des pratiques. Le pèlerin, en effet, est libre d'aller et venir à sa guise, de participer ou non aux célébrations, de s'adonner à ses dévotions dans un espace de liberté et de créativité que ne permet pas la paroisse traditionnelle encore axée sur l'encadrement et la standardisation des pratiques de sa clientèle. »³⁰⁵ It is in this perspective that J.-M. Charron elaborated the rapport between sacred space and urban nomadism at the Oratory.

To better understand the pilgrims at the Oratory, J.-M. Charron analyzed 100 prayer intentions from the month of March in 1993 that pilgrims deposited in front of the statue of Saint Joseph at the Oratory. It is observed that there are more than 90, 000 prayer intentions deposited at the Oratory every year by people from different origin and background.³⁰⁶ J.-M. Charron underlined

³⁰⁴ J.-M. Charron, « Nomadisme urbain et espace sacré : profil religieux des pèlerins de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal » in *L'Oratoire et sa mission, Cahiers de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph*, No. 1, Montréal, Centre de recherche et de documentation de l'OSJ, Septembre 1996, p. 52.

³⁰⁵ J.-M. Charron, 1996, p. 53-54.

³⁰⁶ J.-M. Charron, 1996, p. 55.

that the prayer intentions at the Oratory revealed that the visitors asked for their specific needs through Saint Joseph and Brother André. Some of the needs included – family problems to be settled, health issues, work related concerns, spiritual and religious concerns. « Le pèlerinage à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, si tant est que l'on puisse encore parler ici de pèlerinage au sens classique du terme, se présente comme une pratique religieuse domestique et familiale où perdure quelque chose de la mémoire chrétienne transmise d'une génération à l'autre par le biais de dévotions populaires. Les pèlerins entretiennent une relation d'intimité et de confiance à l'égard de saint Joseph (48.8% affirme avoir une dévotion particulière) ou du frère André (43.3 %) qui s'exprime par des demandes précises concernant leurs conditions concrètes d'existence. »³⁰⁷ André Charron and Jean-Marc Charron expressed in the same wave length that the two figures of Saint Joseph and Brother André touched the hearts of many visitors at the Oratory.

2.3.3. Diversity of population at the Oratory

In 1999, a study was conducted to know what type of population visited the Oratory. Raymond Chenel and Jean-Guy Vaillancourt explored the diversity of the population at the Oratory, the reason why they visited the place and socio-religious motivations of people. They elaborated five categories for which people frequent the Oratory: the Oratory as a regular place of cult, the Oratory as a place of pilgrimage, the Oratory as a place of prayer, the Oratory as a place of reflection and the Oratory as a touristic place. There is no age, sex, linguistic, cultural and religious restriction for people to go to the Oratory. Everyone seemed to have found his space at the Oratory. R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt remarked that many youngsters going to the Oratory were tourists. They also noted down that those who went frequently to the Oratory were people with a university diploma, with a good education background. The pilgrims were more aged compared to tourists at the Oratory. One third of people seemed to be from different cultural communities.³⁰⁸ D. Robillard also stated that the studies conducted by COGEM at the Oratory confirmed the researches done by the University of Montreal in 1999. She said, « Le sondage réalisé à l'Oratoire par COGEM confirme le sondage fait par l'Université de Montréal

³⁰⁷ J.-M. Charron, 1996, p. 65.

³⁰⁸ R. Chenel et J.-G. Vaillancourt, « Le passage vers la modernité : Enquête sur les populations fréquentant l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph » in *Rapport final présenté à la Commission d'études sur l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph*, Montréal, Oratoire Saint-Joseph du Mont-Royal, 1999, p. 3-20.

en 1999. Le sanctuaire se présente comme un lieu privilégié de rencontre entre les générations : 18% des visiteurs ont entre 18 et 34 ans; 20 % entre 35 et 44 ans; 22 % entre 45 et 54 ans; 20 % entre 55 et 64 ans et 18 % des visiteurs ont plus de 65 ans. D'après les derniers sondages, il y a autant de femmes que d'hommes qui fréquentent l'Oratoire. Chaque année, plus de dix mille jeunes proviennent des milieux scolaires. Les communautés culturelles y sont aussi présentes et actives. »³⁰⁹

There are different socio-religious motivations for the visitors at the Oratory. R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt underlined that the clear majority of people (90%) who were consulted in their study believed in God. They expressed their faith in one way or the other at the Oratory by doing an act of faith. Many of them prayed for various intentions. The study showed that there were more women than men who expressed their faith. Those people who went to the Oratory for meditations and reflections did not necessarily take part in any official religious celebrations. The study also revealed that Saint Joseph was more popular among the visitors than Brother André. The French population seemed to know better Brother André, having bigger devotion to him, than the English population at the Oratory. The visitors from different cultural communities were in the process of discovering the saintly figures at the Oratory.³¹⁰

R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt also observed that majority of people visited the Oratory in a frequent interval. The Francophones seemed to have visited the site more frequently than the Anglophones. For some cultural communities, it was their first visit to the Oratory. The study underlined that out of two million annual visitors to the Oratory, half a million went for the first time to the site. There were temporal and spiritual attractions for people to visit the Oratory. Many people in the age group between 18 to 35 visited the Oratory for discovering the artistic beauty of the site. Most of the Francophones went to the Oratory for cherishing their devotion to Saint Joseph and Brother André. At the Oratory, most of the visitors were interested in the Basilica and the Votive Chapel. The Oratory Museum, Room of Brother André and exposition on Saint Joseph had less importance for visitors.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ D. Robillard, 2005, p. 424.

³¹⁰ R. Chenel et J.-G. Vaillancourt, 1999, p. 21-27.

³¹¹ R. Chenel et J.-G. Vaillancourt, 1999, p. 28-33.

R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt opined that the Oratory has a greater potential to expand and give better services. Without underestimating the services given at the Oratory, they suggested the Oratory to examine ways of improving its services. They remarked that the pilgrims and visitor department at the Oratory not only do things to cater to the groups but also gives attention to the individual visitor. They suggested that the less attractive things at the Oratory could be highlighted so that visitors who wish to profit out of them could do so. The study also suggested that the religious celebrations could have various forms to cater to the needs of visitors who do not like to take part in big celebrations. R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt also suggested that the Oratory could offer a program of catechism for those who frequent the site on a regular basis and are interested to have more religious studies.³¹²

2.3.4. Functions of the Oratory in diverse faith expressions

André Charron noted that the Oratory accomplishes diverse functions that help people to bloom in their lives. In his opinion the functions include a few domains like, « instruction, loisirs, beaux-arts, aide humanitaire, commerce, services professionnels, et encore lieux, moyens et ressources de caractère religieux. »³¹³ Those who want to profit from the services given, they have ample opportunities at the Oratory to grow individually or collectively. A. Charron also remarked that the Oratory has a function of welcoming people from different walks. People belonging to different age groups and various professional backgrounds go to the Oratory to meet their needs. People who have distanced from the institutional church and also some non-practicing Christians find their place at the Oratory. People belonging to different denominations and religions go to the Oratory. People from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds find their place at the Oratory. For the immigrants and the marginalized, the Oratory seems to be a special place.³¹⁴

R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt remarked that the Oratory established a functional synthesis between traditional and modern ways of practicing faith. «En effet, lorsque l'on fréquente une paroisse, celle-ci offre bien évidemment l'opportunité de prier en compagnie d'un certain

³¹² R. Chenel et J.-G. Vaillancourt, 1999, p. 34-39.

³¹³ A. Charron, 1996, p. 26.

³¹⁴ A. Charron, 1996, p. 37-39.

nombre de personnes. Cependant, dans la paroisse il existe une contrepartie que plusieurs n'acceptent pas : la pression intégratrice voire fusionnelle de la communauté. L'Oratoire, pour sa part, offre un peu le meilleur de deux mondes : une expression à la fois privée et collective de la foi, où l'individu peut sentir qu'il n'est pas seul sans toutefois devoir renoncer à son individualité. »³¹⁵ R. Chenel and J.-G. Vaillancourt opined that the Oratory played a big role in helping people to express their individual and collective faith. They remarked that the popularity of the Oratory would always attract people from all walks. However, they cautioned that the Oratory should not lose its mission of nurturing the faith of people who struggle with the realities of life. The accompaniment of people should remain as a priority at the Oratory.³¹⁶

D. Robillard observed that the Oratory has a greater project coming up to better avail services to all people. She counted on the moments of hope that the Oratory would bring to people from all walks. She said, « Les réaménagements envisagés sont conçus en fonction des besoins des visiteurs. Au pavillon d'accueil seront regroupées les salles de réunions et une aire d'exposition, munies des commodités pour les personnes à mobilité réduite. On y trouvera aussi un centre d'interprétation. Le carillon sera relocalisé pour favoriser une meilleure sonorité, la bibliothèque et le centre de recherche seront aménagés pour être accessibles au public. Quant au pavillon des pèlerins, il abritera les locaux de la pastorale, les salles de rencontres et de réunions, la cafétéria, la boutique des objets de piété et les bureaux administratifs. L'équipe des services pastoraux tiendra compte des besoins des clientèles multiethniques et multilingues et de ceux des jeunes et des familles. La diversité des démarches spirituelles y est prise en compte, des plus traditionnelles aux plus novatrices : eucharistie, confession, parcours spirituel, chemin de la croix, mais aussi groupe de réflexion, formation à l'accompagnement spirituel, préparation au mariage, activités pour ceux qui veulent renouer avec la pratique religieuse, célébration des vêpres animée par des jeunes, création de lieux propices à l'expérience de foi, etc. »³¹⁷

In the diversity of faith expressions, the Oratory has many functions to do. A. Charron elaborated some of the functions that the Oratory in the changing context of time and as a visible Church

³¹⁵ R. Chenel et J.-G. Vaillancourt, 1999, p. 42.

³¹⁶ R. Chenel et J.-G. Vaillancourt, 1999, p. 43.

³¹⁷ D. Robillard, 2005, p. 425.

situated on the mountain. In a secular city, the Oratory has a function of transmitting the sacred element to people who look for transcendence in life. He said, « l'Oratoire est un phénomène spirituel en lui-même. Il est un signe qui attire. Plus qu'un simple signe, il est un symbole, car il participe de cela même qu'il signifie : la manifestation d'un sacré événementiel, perçu comme don, touche d'une mystérieuse présence. Sa visibilité et son évocation, interpellantes pour les uns ou énigmatiques pour les autres, rappellent aux urbains, déjà au strict plan anthropologique, le phénomène religieux, voire la dimension religieuse de la vie. »³¹⁸ A. Charron opined that the Oratory projected a personalized sense of sacred in connection with the Covenant of God with humanity in biblical terms. The Oratory as a Catholic institution maintained its functions in line with the universal church. The cross installed on the top of the dome of the Oratory is visible to all people. The Oratory must maintain its function of evoking the God of Jesus Christ. A. Charron underlined that « l'Oratoire est un symbole ouvert sur l'évocation du Dieu de Jésus Christ. Il a donc ici une fonction prophétique. Il sert à dire ce dont il est le signifiant : le rappel de la relation au Dieu de l'Alliance avec les humains par la médiation de Jésus Christ. Ce Dieu qui s'est montré amour. Ce Dieu qui appelle à l'amour. C'est l'axe central du message de l'Oratoire, l'axe de toutes les autres figures et symboliques sacrales qui s'y déploient, et dès lors l'axe majeur de ses activités pastorales et culturelles. »³¹⁹

A. Charron affirmed that in line with the biblical values, the Oratory must give a special place for the suffering and sick people. The poor and abandoned people should find their home at the Oratory. Those people who are in physical, mental, social and moral misery should find a place of solace at the Oratory. He noted down that the two sacred figures at the Oratory, Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André, have authentically accomplished their exemplary life. Pilgrims go to the Oratory and honour these two figures. Devotions to Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André help pilgrims to participate in different religious activities at the Oratory. « Le pèlerin d'aujourd'hui aime honorer et invoquer un saint qui a su traverser l'expérience humaine, l'esprit accordé à l'Esprit de Dieu. Il a le même comportement à l'égard du bienheureux Frère André, vénérant son tombeau, ses reliques et sa présence en un endroit spécialement aménagé, garni

³¹⁸ A. Charron, 1996, p. 27.

³¹⁹ A. Charron, 1996, p. 28-29.

d'ex-votos remis pour faveurs obtenues. À Dieu, à Joseph, au Frère André, le croyant exprime des prières d'action de grâces et de demandes de faveurs. »³²⁰

In the opinion of A. Charron, the popular devotions have their place at the Oratory. He said that all people going to the Oratory may not have the same level of religious education. The faithful people are free to do their devotions without restrictions. Among other devotions, the veneration of the crucifix in the Crypt Church has a special importance at the Oratory. A. Charron said, « par ces diverses expressions de religion populaire en liberté, le croyant a un contact direct avec le sacré...le croyant y est acteur plutôt que spectateur. Il se plaît aussi à y laisser sa trace, à prolonger sa présence : il peut y allumer une lampe votive, déposer un billet d'intention, inscrire son nom au registre des visiteurs, laisser une offrande. »³²¹ Every individual has a chance to find his spiritual rhythm at the Oratory. The Oratory, being in the city, is accessible to all people. Unlike many other parish churches, the Oratory is open from 6:30 AM to 10:00 PM. Throughout the day, there is possibility to meet with a priest, a religious person or a pastoral agent. The ambiance of peace and silence at the Oratory caters to those who want to interiorize their spiritual life. While respecting the individual and personal spiritual voyage, the Oratory also gives ample opportunities for community gatherings with many types of celebrations. Believers have enough chances to come together to proclaim their faith.³²² A. Charron underlined that the experience at the Oratory that's in the city could be community building and emotional. The Oratory « permet, chez ceux et celles qui le fréquentent, de faire une expérience de communion émotionnelle, bien que ponctuelle et provisoire, et de faire une expérience de communauté relationnelle universalisante mais transitoire. Transitoire et en transit. D'un transit qui renvoie les chrétiens aux liens familiaux et sociaux à vivre dans le lieu global de la ville où s'établissent les échanges de toutes sortes, le travail, le commerce, les affaires, les activités culturelles, les loisirs, les relations professionnelles et d'amitié. »³²³

W. H. Gregory remarked that this kind of faith experience is not only for Catholics but also for people belonging to other denominations. He underlined that many non-Catholics come to Saint

³²⁰ A. Charron, 1996, p. 32.

³²¹ A. Charron, 1996, p. 34.

³²² A. Charron, 1996, p. 35-36.

³²³ A. Charron, 1996, p. 36.

Joseph's Oratory. In his opinion, "the earnestness of these non-Catholic pilgrims and their intimate knowledge of the shrine is impressive. In fact, their sincerity and reverence at times seems even greater than that of Catholics who all their lives have been familiar with the great devotions of the church. The ardent faith of these has often been rewarded in extraordinary ways."³²⁴ W. H. Gregory is right to say that people belonging to different religious traditions get special God experience at the Oratory.

2.4. Hindu population in Canada and at the Oratory

Indian population in Canada is comprised of Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In general, the immigrants have certain struggles in the initial years of their arrival in Canada. It takes time to get settled in a new country with its set of rules and laws. For many immigrants, it is not easy to get a good job. Some of them must upgrade their educational qualifications to get into their professional field. It is perceived that Indian Christians who immigrate to Canada have ample opportunities to practice their Christian faith as there are many churches in Canada. However, it is not the case with Hindus and Sikhs. There were not many Hindu temples and Muslim mosques in Canada. But now, the bigger cities in Canada have worshipping places for different faiths.

It is noted that most of the immigrants from India to Canada prefer to become Canadian citizens as they wish to settle down in their new country. They contribute to the economic growth of the country. Most of them (89%) speak one of the two official languages of Canada, either English or French. However, they prefer to speak their vernacular language at home. In 1991, 89% of Indian immigrants to Canada from the age group of 15 to 64 lived with their family members. Immigrants from India gave much importance for family life.³²⁵

The Vancouver Centre of Excellence promotes researches on immigration and integration in the Metropolis. In 1999, Harold Coward conducted a study on Hindus in Canada. He observed that the Hindus who came to Canada from 1960s as part of South Asian professionals were well received in Canada. However, the later groups of Hindu immigrants did not get the same

³²⁴ W. H. Gregory, 1925, p. 5. See also: D. Robillard, 2005, p. 126.

³²⁵ Government of Canada, *Profile India: Immigrants from India in Canada*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 1996, p. 4-6.

privileges and reception. H. Coward examined different elements of Hindus in Canada: migration history and current situation, the changing experience of Hindu worship and ritual, strategies of adaptation in sacred language and education, public policy issues, women, relations with the “old country”. He underlined that the city life has brought changes to Hindus’ traditional ways of doing marriage and funeral rituals.³²⁶

Before the 1960s professional immigrants, between 1900 and 1908 some Hindus came to Canada along with the Punjabi Sikhs, especially to British Columbia. By 1908, there were around 5000 South Asians in the region of British Columbia. The growing number became a threat for the local government authorities and therefore the immigration process was slowed down till 1950s. The professional independent immigrants in the 1960s mostly came from Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. In 1970s, Bengali Hindus came into Canada. They spread out across Canada and as per 1991 census, Toronto had most number of Hindus numbering 90,140. The other cities like Vancouver (14,880), Montreal (13,775), Edmonton (5,815), Ottawa (4,780), Calgary (4,155), Winnipeg (3,105), Kitchener (2,815), and Hamilton (2,800) also welcomed a good number of Hindus. Majority of immigrant Hindus were young couples and families with or without children. However, in the present time, it seems that the greater Toronto has got over 100,000 Hindus while the number of Hindus in Montreal is much lesser. Ethnic, linguistic and sectarian differences rise when the number of Hindus is more in an area. As the majority of Hindus is still first generation, it is not sure how the language and sectarian interests will go for next generation.³²⁷

H. Coward observed that Hindus, in general, were used to doing religious rituals at home and therefore when they immigrated to Canada, they were not affected by not having their public space of worship. In the initial stages of immigration, Hindus in Canada too continued to perform their religious rituals at home. It’s by 1970s that they started to think about having public place of worship like Hindu temples. By then, they also had visiting Hindu gurus from India who discussed about special celebrations of marriage and funeral rites to be conducted in

³²⁶ H. Coward, *Hindus in Canada*, Vancouver Centre of Excellence, Vancouver, RIIM, 1999, p. 1-2. See also: Government of Canada, *Profile India: Immigrants from India in Canada*, 1996, p. 1-4.

³²⁷ H. Coward, 1999, p. 3-4 & 9. See also: R. Choquette, *Canada’s Religions: An Historical Introduction*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2004, p. 394.

the community. One of the first Hindu temples in Canada was the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* of Vancouver, built in 1974 with multi-purpose centre for ethnic groups. Later, multi-purpose worship centres were constructed in Calgary, Edmonton and Toronto. In other cities, Hindus used to borrow churches or halls to gather for their celebrations. In 1983, the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* of Vancouver organized a national conference to establish a constitution for a Hindu Council of Canada. Some Hindu groups and sects did not appreciate the movement of unification under one umbrella. Between 1980 and 2010, a few Hindu temples were built especially in bigger cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Hindu priests were invited from India for performing religious duties in Canada. Permanent structures gave rise to the participation of Hindus in *pūjās* or rituals in the temples. Hindus belonging to different castes and groups did not hesitate to visit temples with certain amount of flexibility. *Mūrtis* or images of Ganesh, Shiva, Vishnu, Durga and Murugan were brought in from India to be installed in temples. Along with the Indian Hindus, the Sri Lankan Hindus joined for celebrations and festivals. H. Coward also noted down that the members from the Arya Samaj group, the followers of Dayananda Saraswati, in Toronto, did not like to have any image in their worshiping place. They preferred simple Vedic fire ritual performed by any member of the group. The members of Arya Samaj immigrated to Canada from India, East Africa and Caribbean. The rituals were conducted either in Hindi or English. Some of the chants were in Sanskrit.³²⁸

H. Coward elaborated that Hindus in Canada could not have same type of funeral rituals like in India. In India, the celebrations are conducted at home whereas in Canada it is not permitted. The funeral homes in Canada take care of the arrangements of funeral and a priest is invited to recite the prayers. The theological meaning of the celebration of Hindu funerals remains the same in Canada and India. But the practical elements had to be adjusted in Canada as physical burning of the body by *agni* or fire would not be seen and experienced by all who assist the ceremony. H. Coward stated that the physical experience of the devotee is not intimate in such changes of Hindu funerals in Canada.³²⁹

³²⁸ H. Coward, 1999, p. 4-8.

³²⁹ H. Coward, 1999, p. 9-11.

For Canadian Hindus, the learning of sacred language also underwent a change from that of Hindus living in India. In Canada, it became no more natural for Hindu children to learn sacred language and *mantras* or repeated prayers. In India, Hindu children learnt language and scriptural texts faster as they were part of family prayer, accompanied by parents and grandparents. The oral tradition of transmitting and learning the verses from the sacred texts of *Vedas*, *Upanisads*, *Bhagavadgītā* and *Rāmāyana* is still prevalent in India. Hindu immigrant children in Canada do not get such privilege of spending much time with their parents and grandparents. Most of their grandparents do not live in Canada. The urban life in Canada keep Hindu parents busy and they do not find enough time to spend with their children. As there are not many Hindu temples in Canada, the minority Hindus have no easy access for participating in *pūjās* conducted in temples. In this context, H. Coward observed that the Canadian Hindus adapted the name of a guru and just recited the name few times a day for replacing the *mantras* from sacred scriptures. This was a way of simplifying the prayer experience in daily life. For many Hindus in Canada, their guru has become the heart of their Hinduism. H. Coward did not appreciate this idea as it would make Hindus to be dependent on their gurus or priestly class and the traditional ways of practicing Hinduism would disappear.³³⁰ From another point of view, Robert Choquette observed that Hindus in Canada adapted to the new cultural and social customs of their host country. “So it is that they tend to gather and worship in their temples on Sundays, much like Christians do in their churches. Although Canada’s Hindus tend to marry along the same caste lines as they do in India, the custom is weakened by the egalitarianism of Canadian society. Despite the constraints of small numbers and wide dispersal, Canada’s Hindus endeavour to maintain their religious traditions by gathering together the faithful that share a similar spiritual way, by engaging in traditional devotions in their homes, and by receiving guest gurus (teachers or guides) and swamis (monks) from India and elsewhere.”³³¹

From 1980s, many Canadian universities gave courses on Hinduism. Hindu students and non-Hindu students were interested to do researches in different areas of Hinduism. This gave opportunities for young Hindus in Canada to discover further their Hindu tradition and culture. Speaking about the Hindu students in Universities, H. Coward remarked that the boys seemed to

³³⁰ H. Coward, 1999, p. 12-14.

³³¹ R. Choquette, 2004, p. 394.

get adjusted to the Canadian life faster than girls. Hindu parents seemed to control their girls. Mothers who stayed at home to look after the family and did not go out to do any job seemed to adapt slowly to the Canadian life. They wanted their girls not dating as they preferred for them to have arranged marriages like in India.³³²

H. Coward underlined that the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1990 catered to see the minority communities were respected in Canada. Knowing that Canada has its European Judeo-Christian heritage, the new immigrants were not put aside and considered to be foreigners. However, he pointed out that there are a few issues relating to Hindu immigrants in Canada when it comes to Canadian modern liberal democracy. Canadian laws consider the individual as autonomous whereas a Hindu self-identity is collective. Hindus in Canada prefer to keep their relations with their original country. They frequently visit their family members back in India and help them out in financial ways. Some first-generation Hindus prefer to return to India at the time of their retirement. To keep their cultural and religious life alive and active, immigrant Hindus in Canada keep organizing religious and cultural festivals in Canada, having invited reputed gurus and artists from India. H. Coward underlined that Hindus in Canada prefer to maintain their religious, political and cultural ties with India. However, he affirmed that the younger generation of Hindus in Canada will highly contribute to the Canadian society while finding their religious practices difficult in a secular culture and society.³³³

Nancy Nason-Clark and Cathy Holtmann undertook an interesting study on Canadian Hindu women by analyzing their religious and cultural perspectives and identities. They interviewed a few second generation Hindu women who study in different universities in Canada. They underlined that it was not easy to categorize Hindu religiosity and identity with the complex nature of Hinduism itself. They observed that in moving to Canada, Hindu immigrants became part of a racial, cultural, and religious minority that has changed the face of Canadian society, especially in large cities. Hindu women in Canada could not find any centralized religious authority and structure to do their religious practices. As per their study, Hindu women in

³³² H. Coward, 1999, p. 16-17.

³³³ H. Coward, 1999, p. 18-23.

Canada, be it first or second generation, preferred to remain Hindus and not get converted to another religion despite the lack of facilities to practice Hindu rituals in temples.³³⁴

For Hindu women, the religious, ethnic, and cultural aspects of their families of origin had a lot to do with their identity building. Hindu women in Canada gave much importance for family life that cherishes unity between generations. Regular *pūjās* at home helped them to foster their devotions to variety of Hindu gods and goddesses. Growing up in Canadian society, the young Hindu women and university students maintained certain ritual practices they learnt when they were young. In the absence of organized Hindu rituals in the temple, Hindus organized home-based rituals where many families went to one house to participate in *pūjās* or *bhajans*. Hindu women in neighbourhood developed a special bond and extended family atmosphere through such gatherings that always ended up by sharing a meal.³³⁵ Nancy Nason-Clark and Cathy Holtmann stated that “the glue that holds the Hindu Canadian communities together is located in the first generation’s social world. The parents of the second-generation women in our study have participated in establishing the ethno-religious communal activities and institutions, and their daughters have largely benefited from them. The young women have been enveloped by religious and cultural traditions without having to actively support them in order for them to continue. But while they have benefited from the work of their parents, their participation in the social worlds of their friends and Canadian education has made many of them somewhat critical of their heritage, although most of the Hindu women in no sense rejected it outright.”³³⁶

Studying the situation of 18 Hindu men in Canada who migrated from different countries, Shandip Saha and Peter Beyer remarked that Hindu men were less involved in their family religious and cultural traditions. However, the immigrants kept their relationship with home country and visited their native places whenever possible. The spiritual and religious practices of Hindu men depended more around their own personal interest than social network. S. Saha and P. Beyer underlined that “all the participants supported Canada’s multicultural policies and did

³³⁴ N. Nanson-Clark & C. Holtmann, “Perpetuating Religion and Culture: Hindu Women” in *Growing up Canadian: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists*, Peter Beyer and Rubina Ramji, (ed.), Montréal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013, p. 151-152.

³³⁵ N. Nanson-Clark & C. Holtmann, 2013, p. 153-155.

³³⁶ N. Nanson-Clark & C. Holtmann, 2013, p. 165.

not mention that they were the victims of institutionalized racism. None of them felt that they were being forced to capitulate to Canadian culture or to any other culture for that matter.”³³⁷ What mattered for Hindus in Canada were their personal experiences of growing up in a new country and context. They seemed to be comfortable in their social and religious circumstances.

Through my observations and conversations with Hindus, I would say that Hindu pilgrims at the Oratory come from all walks of life. I do not have statistics of Hindu visitors to the Oratory. However, I observed that they are regular visitors to the Oratory comparing to other non-Christian groups. In my study, I had more participants from first generation Hindus. They immigrated to Canada with their families and kids to settle down in the new country. Majority of Hindus going to the Oratory are originally from Sri Lanka or India. From their stories, I gathered that Hindus at the Oratory came to Canada in search of jobs and better settling down in life. They chose Canada for their new home to experience peace and prosperity. Most of the Hindu pilgrims at the Oratory were not rich. They were educated and worked hard to earn their living. They also contributed to the life of the local society.

When Hindus go to the Oratory, they prefer to go with their family members. Hindus at the Oratory seemed to have a greater family orientation. Hindu parents wished to support their children in education and bring them up with good values in life. The second generation Hindu pilgrims at the Oratory also had a great respect for their parents and grandparents. They praised the hardships that their parents have gone through while migrating to Canada.

Most of the Hindus who frequent the Oratory in a regular basis live in greater Montreal. They have chosen the Oratory as a special place of worship. Hindus also come from Toronto for special occasions and family pilgrimage. Those who come from Toronto make one or two trips per year. The first generation Hindus going to the Oratory seemed to do more pious activities than the second and third generation Canadian Hindus. Hindus born and brought up in Canada

³³⁷ S. Saha & P. Beyer, “A Dominance of Marginal Relations: Hindu Men” in *Growing up Canadian: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists*, Peter Beyer and Rubina Ramji, (ed.), Montréal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013, p. 190.

got used to the Canadian culture, customs and languages. However, they seemed to join their family members while visiting the Oratory.

2.5. *Ethos* of the educators in faith

The educators in faith are the members of the Congregation of Holy Cross and receive their charisma from their founder Basil Moreau who was an educator. During the first twelve years of his priesthood, Basil Moreau taught philosophy, theology and scripture. He was convinced of providing an integrated education with the classics and the catechism not being isolated from the discoveries of modern science. For Basil Moreau, the realities of the modern world had to be taken into consideration while striving to go with the teachings of the Church. In the aftermath of French Revolution, he had much concerns to revitalize the church and society. Basil Moreau insisted that the educators in faith prepare people and especially the students in schools to be members of society and people of God. For him, there was a connection between academic study and Christian faith. In 1849, Basil Moreau wrote to his members of the Congregation: “We can state the kind of teaching we hope to give even though we base our philosophy on faith, no one need fear that we will confine our teaching within narrow and unscientific boundaries. We will accept the discoveries of science without prejudice, and in a manner adapted to the needs of our times. We do not want our students to be ignorant of anything they should know...We will always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart. While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens for heaven.” (*Circular Letter 36*).

Basil Moreau was concerned about the needs of the time and he wanted to provide an integrated education for all people whom his followers served. He insisted on fostering gospel values, attitudes and good behavior as part of education. For Basil Moreau, the formation of hearts and minds of people was the most important aspect in education. His understanding of educating hearts and minds goes in line with Saint Paul’s instructions to Timothy. “Hold to the standard of sound teaching you have received in the faith and love that are in Jesus Christ. Guard the treasure of knowledge which has been entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Be strong, then, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from many

witnesses you must entrust and teach to faithful people. Then they will be able to teach others even as you have taught them.” (2 Timothy 1: 13-14; 2: 1-2). For Basil Moreau, mind and heart are closely associated. One needs the other for growth and sustenance. Therefore, it is vital to grow in knowledge and virtue. The educators in faith have to concentrate on integrity and wholeness while accompanying students and people around them.

Basil Moreau respected diversity of people in their ways of growing up. For him, educating hearts and minds also meant to respect the interdependency of people. In his book, *Christian Education*, Basil Moreau wrote: “You would be greatly mistaken if you imagined that all your students are alike in character and in conduct. Nothing is more varied than the works of Providence; and if it is true that two plants of the same family have, with their points of resemblance, differences more or less apparent and notable, it is no less true that in this gathering of students which is confided to you, there are no two who have the same mind and the same heart, or an exact resemblance...Conduct yourself with each one in the fashion most appropriate for that type of mind. Never forget that all the science of teaching is there, that all the success you will obtain will be in direct proportion to the efforts that you will have made to form your students.”³³⁸ Basil Moreau encouraged all his members of the Congregation to accompany people as per their need by knowing their situation.

From the time of Basil Moreau, the educators in faith took up responsibilities in Schools, Colleges and Parishes. They worked with different age groups and people belonging to different faith traditions. For example, the initial French missionaries who were sent by Basil Moreau to Bengal in 1853 (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) had to work in a non-Christian milieu. They had to live with Hindus and Muslims in small villages by accepting their hospitality, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. They were courageous educators in faith who dared to hope in the heritage of Basil Moreau. Studying the history of early missionaries in Bengal, David R. Syiemlieh underlined that the educators in faith had to tread through challenging situations while

³³⁸ B. Moreau, *Christian Education*, Le Mans, Julien Printing Shop, 1856, p. 10.

establishing the missions. A few of them died due to adverse climate, poverty, tropical diseases and epidemics. Some of them were victims of natural calamities.³³⁹

The educators in faith insisted that the students that come out of their educational institutions should become sensible citizens of the society who support humanity for advancement in all levels of life. In the heritage of the educators in faith, realism in education is rooted in the integration of knowledge and faith. Rooted in faith, every individual has to nurture self-esteem and dignity. The educators in faith catered to foster dialogue between faith and knowledge, faith and culture, faith and life experience. For the educators in faith, there are three elements in accompanying students and people: information, formation and transformation. Information is given to equip people in the given context of life. Formation includes intellectual, social and spiritual developments. Transformation comes with good values and quality of life. The educators in faith focus that every person in their care becomes an agent of transformation for building up better families, communities and society.

The Constitution of the Congregation of Holy Cross recalls to all followers of Basil Moreau to be “educators in faith to those whose lot we share, supporting men and women of grace and goodwill everywhere in their efforts to form communities of the coming kingdom.” (*Constitution 2: Mission*, paragraph 12). The educators in faith participate in the daily struggles of people. They accompany them in their faith journey, bringing them hope to live. The motto of the Congregation of Holy Cross is: *Crux Spes Unica* (The Cross our only hope). It originates from *Vexilla Regis Prodeunt*, an ancient liturgical hymn sung at vespers on feasts of the cross and during Passiontide. The hymn proclaims, *Hail, O Cross, our only hope (O Crux, ave, spes unica)*. Christian hope is all about trusting in God and growing in faith. The Good Friday experience of Cross is tuned toward the Easter hope of Resurrection. The educators in faith are supposed to be men with hope, transmitting their faith to all people. They are spread out in sixteen countries in the world. They come from different countries, cultures and linguistic background. However, their common heritage and mission unite them to live under the same roof. Despite their differences, they profess the same faith in God and live like brothers with the

³³⁹ D. Syiemlieh, *They Dared to Hope, The Congregation of Holy Cross in India*, Bangalore, St. Paul’s Press, 1998, p. 16-20.

same motto. They walk side by side in times of struggles and joy. Their life is supposed to be an example for all people whom they serve to grow in fraternity and love.

2.6. Phenomenon of religious pluralism

The Jewish people were supposed to fulfill the mission of proclaiming the true God in an environment of religious pluralism. In the early years of Christianity, religious pluralism was very much prevalent. Different religious practices and cults had to be encountered in spreading Christian faith. The Fathers of the Church had seriously discussed with various groups of people and adopted the right attitudes to hold Christian faith together. Later, Christianity had to encounter Islam that considered itself the true religion God willed on humanity. Islam was born in the milieu of religious pluralism. However, Jews and Christians kept their individuality and did not yield to the teachings of Islam. The expansion of Christianity and Islam met with other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Christianity grew, simultaneously, in the east and west. For instance, the apostolic tradition of Syro-Malabar Christians in India dates to the 1st century AD.³⁴⁰

In his encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II stressed the role of the Catholic Church in today's momentous and fascinating situation where people search for meaning in life amidst religious pluralism. He said that the "phenomenon – the so-called religious revival – is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself 'the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn 14: 6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life's meaning."³⁴¹ In my study, I saw the educators in faith take this element seriously and accompany people belonging to different faith traditions. Religious pluralism is present at the Oratory.

³⁴⁰ It is believed that Saint Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus established Christianity in the Malabar region in India. The Oriental Churches of Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankar have their roots in Saint Thomas apostolic tradition from the 1st century. Saint Thomas converted 7 Hindu Brahmin families to Christianity and they formed seven local communities and Churches in India.

³⁴¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome, Vatican, 1990, # 38.

2.6.1. Religious pluralism – a theological problem

Theology is *fides quaerens intellectum* or a faith-seeking understanding.³⁴² This requires that the process of theologizing must consider the reality of religious pluralism to discover the entire meaning of life. Theology is special because it deals with faith and intelligence. Every religion has its own theology. Nevertheless, Buddhists do not use the term ‘theology’ since they do not recognize the existence of God. Developing a “universal theology” that suits all people is an impossible task. Christian theology is entirely based on the soteriology proclaimed by Jesus Christ. However, the classification of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism is quite common in the tradition of Christian Churches.³⁴³ These distinctions, however, have been challenged over the years.

Exclusivism was an *ecclesiocentric* perspective in the Church. The axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* or no Salvation outside the Church was well known in the early Church. Pope Pius XII condemned this stance of the Church, and the Second Vatican Council opened up the Church to the world through *Lumen Gentium*. It is not the Church that is at the center of the mystery of Salvation but Christ himself. Jacques Dupuis describes the viewpoint of the Second Vatican Council as a radical “decentralization” of the Church that helps to “refocus” on Jesus Christ.³⁴⁴ Some theologians do not support the interpretation of Vatican II. For them, the mystery of Christ is understood in the mystery of the Church; in fact, both are complementary.³⁴⁵

The axiom *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is attributed to Saint Cyprian of Carthage. However, Saint Ignatius of Antioch was the first Father of the Church to have widely used this axiom. He emphasized the need for the unity of the Church and union among Bishops as a condition for all people to be in union with God in Jesus Christ. Saint Irenaeus considered that those who separated themselves from the Church were deprived of salvation. Origen of Alexandria, a

³⁴² Anselm of Canterbury, an early scholastic philosopher, affirmed this aspect of faith. His belief in the rational character of Christian belief led him to propose an ontological argument for the existence of God. See also: J. Bowker, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, London, Oxford University Press, 1997.

³⁴³ International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the World Religions*, Rome, Vatican, 1997. See also: *La documentation catholique*, No. 2157, Paris, Bayard, p. 312-332.

³⁴⁴ J. Dupuis, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris, Cerf, 1999, p. 153.

³⁴⁵ G. Comeau, *Grace à l'autre – Le pluralisme religieux, une chance pour la foi*, Paris, Atelier/Ouvrier, 2004, p. 49. See also: M. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 11-19.

known theologian and a Father of the Church, was also explicit that salvation was only possible in the Church. However, Cyprian of Carthage was more explicit than any other Fathers of the Church in his expression of the axiom. It is significant to note that the Fathers of the Church never attributed the axiom to any other people but Christians. The axiom was always a warning to Christians who were found guilty of grave sins of heresy and schism. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, most people accepted Christian faith,³⁴⁶ and the same axiom was applied to Jews and Gentiles. The affirmation of the axiom continued in the Church with Saint Ambrose, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Augustine.

Inclusivism was a *Christocentric* perspective in the Church. It simultaneously acknowledges both, the universal salvific will of God and the necessary mediation of Christ. All religious expressions of humanity are included, in one form or another, in God's project in which Jesus Christ is the principal form. All humanity is included in Christ, especially in his human nature of Word made flesh. There are many opinions about inclusivism, especially after the Second Vatican Council. Some theologians attribute Bible passages that promote inclusivism. Jesus said, "for whoever is not against us is for us." (Mark 9: 40). The Apostle Peter wrote of God: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). Cornelius believed in God before Peter preached to him the Word of God. (Acts 10: 1-48). "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'in truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'" (Acts 10: 34-35). In the Gospel of John, while speaking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus said, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews." (John 4: 22). This indicates an inclusivist belief that it is possible to worship the true God without explicitly knowing him. Later, when Jesus was asked about what to do to inherit eternal life, he narrated the story of the Samaritan and said: "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 25-37). During the Second Vatican Council, among other theologians, Karl Rahner was one of the strong advocates for inclusivism. He was concerned about the salvation of all people who never had the opportunity to listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He argued that it is God in Jesus Christ who reaches out to

³⁴⁶ F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*, New York, Paulist Press, 1992, p. 24.

the individual to save him in his journey of faith. He used the term “anonymous” to refer to all people who experienced the grace of God through Jesus Christ despite their religious adherence.³⁴⁷

2.6.2. Vatican II and theology of religions

Senior theologians like Jean Danielou and Henri de Lubac fought for a new attitude based on “fulfillment theory.” They argued that the entire humanity was included in Jesus Christ by the fact of the Word made flesh. From another perspective, theologians like Karl Rahner and Raimundo Panikkar argued that the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal Saviour, is present in the other religious traditions of the World. For them, the presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ in the other religious traditions is hidden and real, unbeknownst to the followers of those religions.

Jean Danielou – He asked about what Christianity had to say about the religions of the world that he encountered during his life. These religious traditions are ever more present in the modern era. He distinguished between the natural and the supernatural, or religion and revelation. For him, there were two categories: the non-Christian religions that belonged to the order of natural reason and the Judeo-Christian revelation that belonged to the order of supernatural faith. He affirmed that there were two covenants given by God and cosmic history. The historic alliance was the history of salvation limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition, and begins with the personal revelation of God to Israel through Abraham and Moses, and continues with the story of the chosen people, culminating in Jesus Christ and the Church. Danielou held that the cosmic alliance was equivalent to the manifestation of God in nature and was now commanded by the personal manifestation of God in history. It revealed the permanent divine presence in the creation.³⁴⁸

According to Danielou, all religions of the world, except the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, belonged to the order of “cosmic religion” as they corresponded

³⁴⁷ M. Ruokanen, 1992, p. 20-34.

³⁴⁸ J. Dupuis, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris, Cerf, 1999, p. 202.

to the “cosmic alliance.” This alliance, while being part of the divine plan for humanity and the world, represented the “pre-history” of salvation. Danielou believed that the world’s religions consisted of a mixture of truth and falsehood, light and darkness, and right and wrong behaviours, and that they were just human elaborations of knowledge of God obtained through the natural order. He claimed that they had no saving power as they just represented different expressions in various cultures, the aspirations of humans to an Absolute Being; Christianity was the universal means of salvation and the normative path. Jean Danielou emphasized on the mystery of Christ and the unique character of Christianity. He believed that in Christianity, there were two truths closely united with each other: the presence of God in the mysterious life of love called the Divine Trinity and our calling, in Jesus Christ (in Him and through Him), to participate eternally in this life. It is Jesus Christ, Son of God, who gives us salvation. Danielou opined that natural religions attested to a person’s movement toward God and Christianity attested to God’s movement toward man.³⁴⁹

Henri de Lubac – He underlined the singularity and uniqueness of Christianity when compared to other religions. Christianity brings salvation in, and through, Jesus Christ. De Lubac considered that Christianity alone affirmed that human beings had a transcendent destiny, and that it was a destiny common to all humanity. It was the same Will of God that manifested from the first creation to the final consumption.³⁵⁰ He maintained that Jesus Christ had come to fulfill all elements of truth contained in the religions and cultures of all peoples, and this was done through a dual movement of purification and assumption. Lubac wrote, « Il s’agit de penser, de croire que Dieu est intervenu dans notre histoire, nous apportant le seul principe capable de nous purifier et de nous unir à Lui, et qui n’est autre que Jésus Christ, indissolublement ‘révéléteur’ et ‘rédempteur’ ; et de penser ensuite, de croire que c’est l’Eglise, son Epouse, qui en est dépositaire, avec mission de le répandre, et que c’est par cette voie et par nulle autre que l’humanité entière parviendra à sa fin, rassemblée dans le Corps mystique. »³⁵¹ He observed that

³⁴⁹ J. Danielou, *Essai sur le mystère de l’histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1953, p. 113-116.

³⁵⁰ H. De Lubac, *Catholicisme – Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, Paris, Cerf, 1952, p. 107-110.

³⁵¹ H. De Lubac, *Paradoxe et Mystère de l’Église*, Paris, Aubier, 1967, p. 138.

humanity, before the Christian revelation, had received the seeds of the Logos and was able to know certain elements of the truth that fully manifested in Jesus Christ.³⁵²

For Lubac and Danielou, Christianity is a supernatural religion as the embodiment of God's grace in Jesus Christ. The supernatural is absolutely free from God and responds to the natural desire of human beings to unite with the Divine. The world's religions contain "seeds of the Word"³⁵³ and therefore Christianity unfolds their positive values. Jesus Christ is the only way to Salvation.

Karl Rahner – He gives a theological perspective called "anonymous Christians." How can we say yes to Jesus Christ even if we do not know him and find him anonymously? Rahner argued that « L'homme qui n'a pas encore rencontré le Christ dans une attestation historique explicite et procédant de là peut néanmoins le trouver dans son frère et dans l'amour qu'il lui porte, lui dans lequel Jésus Christ se laisse pour ainsi dire trouver anonymement, puisqu'il l'a dit lui-même : 'Ce que vous avez fait au plus petit de mes frères, c'est à Moi que vous l'avez fait' (Mt 25, 40), à lui qui vit sa vie dans les pauvres, les affamés, les prisonniers et les mourants. »³⁵⁴ For Rahner, every human being can encounter Jesus Christ. According to him, it was God who sought man and communicated himself to every human being, and man's response did not start with the religious traditions existing in the world, but with the quality of human life in its openness to the mystery and in its ability to receive the other in need, especially the poor and afflicted.

From another perspective, Rahner prudently acknowledged that religions could play a positive role in the salvation of their members in a social and historical context. He said, « Si une religion non chrétienne ne pouvait avoir d'entrée de jeu aucune influence positive sur l'histoire surnaturelle de salut d'un individu non chrétien, ou si elle était d'emblée privée d'une telle possibilité, l'événement du salut, dans un tel homme, serait alors pensé de façon totalement a-sociale et an-historique. »³⁵⁵ However, he also affirmed that « Nous n'avons pas à discuter ici des modalités concrètes selon lesquelles une religion non chrétienne peut avoir une fonction positive

³⁵² H. De Lubac, 1967, p. 121.

³⁵³ The theology of the seeds of the Word stems from Saint Justin Martyr.

³⁵⁴ K. Rahner, *Traité fondamental de la foi*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1983, p. 348.

³⁵⁵ K. Rahner, 1983, p. 351.

en faveur de la possibilité d'une foi proprement dite en la Révélation. »³⁵⁶ This is where we see that Rahner did not give a conclusion to the entire debate but left it for the theologians of religions to determine. Through his reflections of *a priori*, Rahner brings us to the presence of the mystery of Christ in other religions. It is based on these reflections that the Magisterium of Catholic Church moved prudently toward the recognition of the positive role that the religions in the world played in the salvation of their members. The International Theological Commission recognized this fact and stated that « Etant donné la reconnaissance explicite de la présence de l'Esprit du Christ dans les religions, on ne peut exclure la possibilité que celles-ci exercent, en tant que telles, une certaine fonction salvifique, c'est-à-dire qu'elles aident les hommes à atteindre leur fin ultime, même malgré leur ambiguïté. »³⁵⁷ In the words of the Commission, in the modern world marked by religious pluralism, the presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ is at work in the religions of the world through the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁸

According to Rahner, an anonymous Christianity is lived by members of other religious traditions in their faithful religious practices and respective traditions. Christian salvation reaches them anonymously through these practices and traditions. He maintained that anonymous Christianity meant that salvation in Jesus Christ was accessible to all humans. As per Rahner, they opened themselves to God's auto-communication that culminated in the whole event of Jesus Christ that signified the mystery of salvation in, and through, Him. He observed that this was not only realized through a simple invisible action of the resurrected Lord but also, in a mysterious way, through the intermediary actions of different religious traditions of the people.³⁵⁹ For Rahner, Jesus Christ was universal, and he was the savior of all men and women.

Raimundo Panikkar – Panikkar shined light on Christianity and Hinduism, two living religious traditions in the world and two cultures, Western and Eastern. He contributed a great deal to the Christological approach to religious pluralism.

³⁵⁶ K. Rahner, 1983, p. 352.

³⁵⁷ International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the World Religions*, Rome, Vatican, 1997. See also: *La documentation catholique*, No. 2157, 6 Avril 1997, Paris, Bayard, p. 325.

³⁵⁸ Joseph Doré affirms a similar reflection in his work. See also: J. Doré, « La présence du Christ dans les religions non chrétiennes. » in *Chemins de dialogue*, No. 9, 1997.

³⁵⁹ J. Dupuis, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris, Cerf, 1999, p. 220-221.

2.6.3. Indian theological experience at the Oratory

The theological reflections of Raimundo Panikkar, Kigdom oriented Christological reflections of Michael Amaladoss and Indian Christological analysis of Michel Fédou could bring some insights to my praxeological study at the Oratory. My study affirms that people having different faiths meet with each other in everyday life. Neither does the traditional environment of a Catholic Québec, where religion had a prominent role, exist anymore, nor does the milieu of the Vedas and Upanishads or orthodox Hinduism. Hence, an existential Christological approach would bring meaning to people's lives in their relationship with God and each other. Meeting another person belonging to a different faith tradition helps one to engage in a fraternal journey together in the quest for the Divine and for the path of salvation.

Raimundo Panikkar has always been marked by the double heritage of Catholicism and Hinduism. He has given many courses in India and taught in Europe and United States. A man of great culture, he wrote a considerable work which has tirelessly endeavored to build bridges between the East and West. His works emphasized on the hermeneutics of Hindu traditions. He tried to rethink the Christian mystery in the horizon of Eastern religions and he advocated “ecumenical ecumenism” and “intra-religious dialogue”. For R. Panikkar, the dialogue should go beyond the intellectual exercise of interreligious dialogue. It should be an experience which takes place at the very heart of the believer engaged in his own quest of the divine. R. Panikkar argued that there was a “living presence of Christ in Hinduism.”³⁶⁰ He believed that Jesus Christ was the “ontological meeting point” between Christianity and Hinduism; he did not belong exclusively to Christianity. Christianity and Hinduism belong to Jesus Christ but that belonging was seen in different ways.³⁶¹

R. Panikkar reflected on the relationship between *Brahman* (the Absolute, the Transcendent, the Unknown) and the One that the Hindu tradition calls *Īshvara*. He conceptualized this relationship in Christology. The figure of *Īshvara* does not represent a cosmic aspect of the divinity but rather its personal dimension. The figure of *Īshvara* is not assimilated to divinities that are the object of popular worship. The figure of *Īshvara* absorbs all the divinity, and it is this that devotees

³⁶⁰ R. Panikkar, *Le Christ et l'hindouisme – Une présence cachée*, Paris, Centurion, 1972, p. 11.

³⁶¹ R. Panikkar, 1972, p. 44. See also: R. Panikkar, *Le dialogue intrareligieux*, Paris, Aubier, 1985, p. 103-118.

ultimately worship through the diversity of their practices. It is the tradition of *Vedanta* that makes it possible to clarify the function of *Īshvara* in Indian thought. *Īshvara* is the revelation of *Brahman*, it is his personal aspect, he operates the creation of the world, he is the Lord who recalls this world to his origin and leads him to the knowledge of *Brahman*, he is the God who “descends” and manifests himself in the form of *avatāras*, he is at the same time distinct from *Brahman* and identical with him. Nevertheless, R. Panikkar acknowledged that the living Christ, to whom the Christians believe, cannot be placed exactly on the same level as *Īshvara* of the *Vedanta*. For R. Panikkar, the concept of *Īshvara* intends to indicate to Christians a relevant Christology to Hindus. Instead of presenting the history and historicity of Jesus Christ to Hindus, R. Panikkar drew attention of Hindus to the mediating function of *Īshvara* between the Absolute and the world. He wanted to make Jesus Christ intelligible to Indian philosophy and Hindus.

R. Panikkar emphasized that God always “inspired” mankind and Jesus Christ was already at work when the Indian sages transmitted their Scriptures. He referred to two authors in Christianity enlightened and justified their attempts in a similar ways. Saint Thomas Aquinas was not afraid to read and use Aristotle to develop Christian truth and mystery. Saint Paul discovered an altar among the Athenians with the inscription “to the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). In similar ways of Saint Paul, one can speak not only of the unknown God of the Greeks, but also of the hidden Christ in Hinduism. R. Panikkar elaborated that Hinduism was the starting point of a religion that culminated in Christianity. R. Panikkar maintained that Hinduism “already possesses the Christian seed” and it contained “the symbolism of the Christian reality.” He believed that the Christian mystery of resurrection was not an alien concept; rather it was for the entire human race.³⁶² R. Panikkar opined that the reality of the Christian revelation had to be disclosed to all people. He, however, cautioned that the Christian approach was not to forcefully thrust the mystery of Christ into the hearts of followers of other religious traditions, but was to propose, to announce and to make Jesus Christ available to all people.³⁶³

According to R. Panikkar, Christians and Hindus were fragments of one and the same faith with different levels of living it. He offered that the unity of the religions had to be discovered and the

³⁶² R. Panikkar, *Le Christ et l'hindouisme – Une présence cachée*, Paris, Centurion, 1972, p. 88-90.

³⁶³ R. Panikkar, 1972, p. 73.

veil of *Māyā* that separated them had to be rejected.³⁶⁴ For R. Panikkar, Jesus Christ was the most powerful symbol of the full human, divine and cosmic reality that he called ‘mystery’. He contended that although the symbol had other names, like Rama and Krishna, each name expressed the indivisible mystery of Jesus Christ and each one had an unknown dimension of Christ.³⁶⁵ R. Panikkar made a distinction between faith and belief. He stated that the content of faith, which he called ‘mystery’, was a relationship that humans lived with the transcendent and was common to all religions. He called this mystery a “cosmotheandric reality” to indicate the transcendence that humans experienced in the cosmos. R. Panikkar believed that, on the other hand, the content of belief systems consisted of various religious myths by which faith was concretely expressed.³⁶⁶

Michael Amaladoss took into account the conciliar traditions in the Catholic Church and helped to building up a Christology that would suit in Indian context of the presence of different religious traditions. His positions were sometimes seen as radically “theocentric”. He has written numerous articles on the theme of evangelization and dialogue, thus addressing the issue of Christological language in religious pluralism. M. Amaladoss argued that religious pluralism should not promote a “Christology from above”. Respecting other believers from other religious traditions requires that the “humanity” of Jesus be fully recognized. The person and the work of Jesus Christ should have its vital place while respecting the mystery of Incarnation. M. Amaladoss did not separate the divine and human natures in Christ. In the contemporary situation, people should confess the *divine will* of universal salvation and its realization in the paschal mystery. In Jesus Christ, the plenitude of God’s plan of salvation for the entire world is accomplished. But the history of salvation will continue until the time when God will be all in all. Recalling the Chalcedonian definition which affirmed the true humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ to be held together, “without confusion or separation”, M. Amaladoss observed that the Catholic tradition in the past privileged the divine nature of Jesus than the human nature. He drew attention to the various meanings of the name “Christ” as per usage: Jesus of Nazareth, the resurrected Christ or Christ at the end of time. It is by taking account of such diversity that

³⁶⁴ R. Panikkar, 1972, p. 45-46.

³⁶⁵ R. Panikkar, *The Unkonwn Christ of Hinduism – Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, London, Longman, 1981, p. 22-30.

³⁶⁶ J. Dupuis, *Vers une théologie chrétienne du pluralisme religieux*, Paris, Cerf, 1999, p. 229.

people can respect the various aspects of the mystery of Jesus Christ, and dialogue with other believers. According to M. Amaladoss, the universal action of Christ must not be limited to his historical dimension alone but should include all other divine manifestations in the history.³⁶⁷

The foundation of Christianity can be understood as an event of “covenant” through which God the Father, through the paschal mystery of Jesus, manifested his loving auto-communication to all peoples. The union of Jesus with God the Father signifies that the covenant manifested in Jesus has a “cosmic” meaning, and that it highlights other manifestations of the Divinity through different traditions of humanity. The approach of M. Amaladoss was between inclusivism and pluralism. Inclusivism did not mean that the Church should claim to annex the non-Christians to the historical particularity of Jesus in absolute ways. The mystery of God and Jesus Christ is truly universal and can therefore be communicated to every human being. Pluralism admits plurality of divine manifestations in human history but specifies that these manifestations come by the eternal Word incarnated by the Spirit. It is important to remark that M. Amaladoss, while affirming the plurality of divine manifestations in human history, did not think of it independently from the mystery revealed in Jesus Christ, but rather tried to understand it in his light.³⁶⁸

Michael Amaladoss took a practical approach as he underlined that the proclamation of the Gospel consisted in the works of justice and development, option for the poor and the oppressed. Indian Christology is not simply marked by the debate with religions but focused on the commitment of people to the values of the Kingdom. M. Amaladoss was set for creating an atmosphere of interreligious dialogue in the process of establishing the Kingdom of God.

Analyzing the Indian theological experience, Michel Fédou recognized that India has produced a great number of theologians in the past years. These theologians have worked among people of diverse faith orientations. M. Fédou underlined that Christianity in India has a long tradition. The

³⁶⁷ M. Amaladoss, *À la rencontre des cultures : comment conjuguer unité et pluralité dans les Églises ?* Paris, Atelier, 1997, p. 19, 29, 34, 37-38. See also: M. Fédou, *Regards asiatiques sur le Christ*, Jésus et Jésus-Christ 77, Paris, Desclée, 1998, p. 57-58.

³⁶⁸ M. Amaladoss, 1997, p. 49-5 & 79-88. See also: M. Fédou, *Regards asiatiques sur le Christ*, Jésus et Jésus-Christ 77, Paris, Desclée, 1998, p. 59-61.

missionaries from Europe, along with Saint Francis Xavier, have done a remarkable work to establish Christian roots in India, especially in Goa. However, they found that Syrian Christians were already implanted in India much before their arrival. M. Fédou acknowledged the apostolic tradition of Saint Thomas in India. The theology that developed in India also has a long history but it's in 20th century that many Indian theologians were given more chances in the universal theological discussions.³⁶⁹

M. Fédou remarked that Indian Christological movements started with Roberto de Nobili in 17th century who adapted a style of Hindu *brahmanic* life. De Nobili presented Jesus as a perfect Brahmin. Some of the western missionaries like Jules Monchanin and Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) also followed the Indian philosophical and religious traditions. In 20th century, some of the local Indian theologians insisted that an Indian Christology is apt for interreligious context in India. Brahmabandab Upadhyaya was one of the pioneers in Indian Christological thoughts, followed by Vengal Chakkarai and Aiyadurai Jesudason Appasamy. For V. Chakkarai, Jesus Christ was the only true *avatāra* fully divine and human. For A. J. Appasamy, Jesus and his works could be well associated with the *bhakti* tradition in Hinduism. He insisted that the religion of Jesus was aided for true communion of human souls with God. Pandipeddi Chenchiah related Jesus with the concept of *Shakti* or power so as to show that there was a new cosmic power in the world with the birth of Jesus. S. Jesudason integrated in his Christology the tradition of “*Om*” in Hinduism that recalls the presence of the ultimate Reality. Taking up the Johanic tradition of “eternal logos”, S. Jesudason recognized in Jesus Christ the “eternal *Om*” who has been always with God the Father from the beginning of time. Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass presented Jesus Christ as the central event in the entire human history and the presence of other religions are part of God’s plan. Therefore, he tried to integrate some of the Hindu rituals in Christian liturgy. M. Thomas Thangaraj was more tuned towards the concept of guru that could bring an original contribution to Indian Christology. For him, Jesus was a crucified guru unlike other gurus in India. Jacques Dupuis developed the theological thoughts that Jesus was a perfect *yogi*. According to J. Dupuis, Jesus was a true *yogi* in his ascetic way of fighting against all the evil and concentration to proclaim the Kingdom of God. J. Dupuis also

³⁶⁹ M. Fédou, 1998, p. 17.

spoke about the mystical experience of *advaitin* in Hinduism and Jesus as a perfect *advaitin* in whom there was an accomplishment of non-duality.³⁷⁰

Affirming that the religious diversity of Indian theological context could help other similar places in the world, M. Fédou cautioned that there are also difficulties for Christianity in India. He said, « dans cet immense pays coexistent des courants très variés et souvent divergents – depuis les courants les plus conservateurs, soucieux de maintenir strictement l’héritage de la catéchèse et de la théologie traditionnelles, jusqu’aux courants les plus résolument impliqués dans le dialogue interreligieux ou dans l’engagement social en faveur des pauvres et des opprimés. »³⁷¹ M. Fédou understood the social and economic struggles of India in which Christianity tried to find her way of helping people. All Christians in India are missionaries in the perspective that they are called to engage in social and cultural welfare of people. Christians in India announce the Good News and transmit faith but at the same time they are engaged in the welfare of poor and downtrodden people. Christian universities, colleges, schools, hospitals, care homes and orphanages are just examples for their services to all people in need. Majority people who gain services from Christian institutions are Hindus and people belonging to other faith traditions. However, Christians are sometimes considered to be foreigners in India by certain groups of Hindus. The minority Christians are not recognized for what they are in their own country and some of them even become victims of caste system.³⁷²

M. Fédou remarked that the difficulties of Christianity in India have made the Christian theologians to reflect more on developing a Christology that is suitable for the situation. He underlined that the Indian Christology has two major orientations. « Elle s’est d’une part efforcée de prendre en compte le contexte religieux de l’Inde et, tout particulièrement, la présence massive des traditions hindoues; elle a d’autre part cherché à dire la force libératrice du message de Jésus pour les pauvres et les opprimés du continent indien. »³⁷³

³⁷⁰ M. Fédou, 1998, p. 22-24.

³⁷¹ M. Fédou, 1998, p. 17.

³⁷² M. Fédou, 1998, p. 17-18.

³⁷³ M. Fédou, 1998, p. 18.

M. Fédou gathered that there are two types of beliefs in Hinduism: ‘theistic’, which involves belief in *avatāras*, or manifestations of the Divine, and ‘monistic’, which developed in the philosophical writings of Vedas and Upanishads. At the heart of these beliefs lies *Advaita*, or non-duality, which signifies the radical identity of the *ātman*, or self, with the ultimate, *Brahman*.³⁷⁴ Hindus believe that it is the same universal God who assumes multiple incarnations in different parts of the world bearing various names, such as Rama, Krishna and Jesus Christ! Hindus respect Jesus Christ as they do for the other *avatāras* in Hinduism. M. Fédou rightly remarked that Joseph Neuner, in his Indian theological research, made a clear distinction between the Hindu doctrine of *avatāra* and Christian doctrine of Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The two nature of Jesus Christ, fully divine and human, is a strange phenomenon for Hindu concept of *avatāra*.³⁷⁵

According to the traditional understanding of Hindu theism, incarnation is a divine “descent” into human world, a manifestation of the Supreme *Brahman* in human form. The purpose of this descent is to establish or restore *dharma* in the world and to destroy *adharmā*.³⁷⁶ Krishna is one of the best known *avatāras* representing the Absolute. However, his existence has no salvation-related historical value. Many Hindus are unconcerned about associating the life of Rama and Krishna with myths or historical notions of salvation. For Hindus, what matters is the presence and spiritual influence of the figures of the *avatāras* in their life.³⁷⁷ Christian theology differs in this notion of *avatāras*. The incarnation of Jesus is significant because he is the way to the Father, unique and universal. For Christians, the incarnation of Jesus signifies the personal entry of the Son of God into the history of humanity and the world. The “Word made flesh” was really and truly a human being. He became a member of the human family and lived like any other person. The book of Hebrews says, “For the high priest we have is not incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin.” (Hebrews 4: 15). Saint Paul’s letter to the Corinthians underlines Christian tradition and Kerygma. “The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself

³⁷⁴ M. Fédou, 1998, p. 20.

³⁷⁵ M. Fédou, *Les religions selon la foi chrétienne*, Paris, Cerf, 1996, p. 90-94. See also: M. Fédou, 1998, p. 20-21 & 28-29.

³⁷⁶ E. Easwaran, *The Bhagavadgītā*, California, Nilgiri Press, 4, 2009, p. 5-10

³⁷⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p. 230-231; quoted by Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ*, p. 349-350.

received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15, 3-4). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bring new meaning to all of humanity.

There are two concepts in Hinduism that are similar to Christian concepts: *satchitānanda*, which is similar to the Christian Trinity, and *avatāra* that is similar to the Christian incarnation of God. The *Nirguna Brahman* or the Absolute in Himself is *satchitānanda*.³⁷⁸ It is important to evaluate the concept of *satchitānanda* in the Christian theology of the Trinity. Christian tradition has used the same transcendental perfections of divinity to express the mystery of the three Persons in the Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When Christian and Hindu concepts are compared with each other, there may be a tendency to perceive the Father as *Sat*, or Being, the Son as *Chit*, or Consciousness, and the Spirit as *Ananda*, or Love. Moreover, Saint Augustine elaborated the theology of *mens, notitia, amor, et memoria, intelligentia, voluntas*.³⁷⁹ However, his analogy asserted the divine act of self-understanding that carried an immanent fruit, *verbum mentale*, the Son, and the divine act of love that produced an immanent fruit, *impressio amati in amante*, the Holy Spirit. This implied that the Son is begotten from the Father and the Spirit is the fruit of love between the Father and the Son. However, the Christian concept of the Divine Trinity cannot be compared with the Hindu concept of *Brahman*, since the *Upanishadic* Hindu tradition propounds that the *Brahman* is, at once, *Nirguna*, or transpersonal, and *Saguna*, or personal. *Brahman* is beyond human knowledge, since He is *neti, neti* or neither this nor that.³⁸⁰ Therefore, the notion of *satchitānanda* in Christian context can be understood as follows. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has been affirming that there are elements of truth and grace in every authentic religious experience. With this perspective, it could be confidently stated that Hindus have experiences of the divine Trinity in an implicit and “anonymous” manner. The Trinitarian God of Christians is present and active in their lives, too.

³⁷⁸ *Satchitānanda* is composed of three Sanskrit words: *Sat* is Being, *Cit* is Consciousness and *Ananda* is Bliss or Love. It presents three intrinsic perfections of the Absolute *Brahman*. The *Vedantic* theological tradition has formulated the combined expression *satchitānanda*. In the *Upanishadic* tradition, the three expressions are found separately.

³⁷⁹ Saint Augustin, *Confessions*, XIII, 11, 13. See also: Saint Thomas d’Aquin, *Summa Theologica*, I, 27, 3, 4 ; 37.

³⁸⁰ *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 2, 3, 6; 3, 9, 26; 4, 2, 4 ; 4, 4, 22 ; 4, 5, 15.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the true path that leads them to the Father. Jesus came into the world for all of humanity and, therefore, also accompanied all the members of other religions who seek the Absolute. The Pope Paul VI underlined that religions have an impressive heritage of religious texts and have taught generations of people to pray.³⁸¹ People belonging to different religious traditions can enter into the paschal mystery while emerging from their closed self to turn to God in prayer. Different religions can contribute to the way to salvation, but are not autonomous paths to salvation. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* underlines it: “Concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge Him as their saviour.”³⁸²

Dialogue is never easy when one has to hold on to one’s own faith knowing that the other has a distinct set of convictions and faith. In this situation, an experience of liberation might help one move forward. For instance, in India there is a pluralistic environment of the liberation of Dalits, women and tribes brought about by the promotion of their human rights; there are multiple movements of liberation. One can interpret Christianity on an inter-faith level to achieve the possible liberation of a community of people. Here, liberation implies the fullness of human nature, the cosmos and the Ultimate. This brings one to the hermeneutics of the liberation of religions that could help free them from their exclusivity, fundamentalism and claims of superiority and could eventually lead to true dialogue.

2.7. Conclusion

Saint Joseph’s Oratory is a Catholic shrine but it is not exclusively restricted to Catholics alone. People belonging to different religious traditions feel comfortable to visit the Oratory for various reasons. Brother André, the founder of the Oratory, welcomed all people with great compassion and care. In this chapter, I elaborated how the dream of Brother André came true with the collaboration of thousands of people around him. Humble and dedicated in his call to be a

³⁸¹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, # 53.

³⁸² Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation, Reflection and Orientation on Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, No. 29, Rome, Vatican, 1991.

servant of God, Brother André was an inspiration to all people who met with him. Despite struggles and difficulties in life from his childhood, Brother André never gave up his call and mission to be with God. His devotion to Saint Joseph gave him strength to continue the good works of accompanying people to God.

The evolution of the Oratory continued even after the death of Brother André. The educators in faith who are the religious family members of Brother André resumed the mission with much dedication. They were convinced that the mission initiated and developed by Brother André was supported by God's grace. Like Brother André, they respected the friends, collaborators and well wishers of the Oratory who came from all corners of the world and from different religious background.

In today's context of immigration and diversity, the Oratory welcomes more and more people coming from different parts of the world. Keeping up the traditional Catholic liturgical celebrations and catering to the needs of the local people, the Oratory remains a special Church in the city of Montreal. The diversity of population at the Oratory looks to be its richness in forming a human community based on love and fraternity. The Hindu population is comparatively new to the Oratory that Brother André may not have known. Keeping up to their ethos, the educators in faith remain sensitive to all people, including Hindus.

Religious pluralism is not a threat rather an enriching element for the pastoral context at the Oratory. However, the Oratory has a great responsibility in developing a strategy to cater to the needs of people belonging to different religious background. The Oratory needs to have people who are competent to accompany the pilgrims and visitors from different walks of life. The Indian theological experience could be an inspiration for the Oratory to create a harmonious interreligious community building.

CHAPTER 3

3. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. Introduction

My praxeological research is in the pastoral context at Saint Joseph's Oratory. The praxeological steps of observation, analysis, interpretation, intervention and prospective are followed in the study. I gave special attention to Christian-Hindu mutual enlightenment in the perceptions of religious practices. My empirical research gives some answers to the questions mentioned in the introductory chapter. I analyzed the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory and the ways of transmitting Christian faith by the educators in faith. In my interpretation of the practices, I examined the influence of devotional *bhakti* on Hindus who go to the Oratory. I examined the dynamism and challenge of the transmission of Christian faith in a multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-linguistic setting including the meeting between Christians and Hindus.

3.2. Pastoral praxeology as methodology

Praxeology is a science, and is also a methodology when applied in a scientific study. That is why Jean-Guy Nadeau underlined, « La praxéologie c'est une « science de l'action », à la fois « empirique et réflexive. » « La praxéologie constitue un discours réfléchi et critique (logos) sur la pratique, l'action sensée (praxis) dont elle vise l'amélioration en termes de pertinence, de cohérence et d'efficacité. Pastorale, elle s'intéresse à des pratiques animées par les enjeux fondamentaux de l'existence humaine, par la mémoire de l'esprit de Jésus-Christ. »³⁸³ This outlook is pertinent in the context of my research. Through my study, I intend to improve existing pastoral and religious practices at Saint Joseph's Oratory. The context of pilgrims coming from different parts of the world with their varied experiences and background is apt for my study.

³⁸³ J.-G. Nadeau, « La praxéologie pastorale : faire théologie selon un paradigme praxéologique » in *Théologique* 1/1, 1993, p. 70-100.

3.2.1. Observation

Observation is the first step in praxeology. In the 4th chapter of my study, I elaborate my observations at the Oratory. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, my life at the Oratory began with pastoral ministry and administering the Sacraments to faithful people who participate in different religious celebrations. As a newly ordained priest at the Oratory, I was enthused to work with Catholic community to enrich their faith life. While contributing to the life of people, I hoped to learn from them for my faith life. Within a few months of my engagements at the Oratory, I encountered people belonging to different religious background who frequent the sanctuary. Some of them shared their life experiences with me while others just asked me to pray for them.

When I started my work at the Oratory, I was the youngest priest (34 years old) among all religious working in the site. Many Christians and non-Christians were surprised to see such a young person presiding over big celebrations at the Oratory. Some of them even asked me whether I was a “full priest” as they always used to see priests with “gray hair” who were above 65 years old. I also observed that some pilgrims took time to approach me as they were not sure if I was a “full priest”. When they saw me frequently at the Oratory, they were confident to approach me and they rejoiced with me for my services and availability. I observed that the Indian community at the Oratory approached me faster as they sensed that I came from India. Some of them were happy to speak to me in Malayalam, English, Tamil or Hindi. They also told me that they never saw an Indian priest working at the Oratory. Among the Indian visitors at the Oratory, there were some Hindus and Sikhs. I listened to their stories at the Oratory. I also observed their participation in different devotional activities at the Oratory. This was the starting point of my research.

Jean-Guy Nadeau underlined that the observation « vise à dégager et à analyser les éléments-clés d’une pratique et à en identifier les forces et les faiblesses de la pratique. L’observation pose la question : qui est-ce qui fait quoi, pourquoi, quand, comment et pour combien ? L’observation trouve quelles sont les valeurs sous-jacentes à la pratique. Après le récit spontané de l’acteur de la pratique, l’observation l’aide à reconnaître les faits et les interrelations de sa pratique afin de

lui permettre de corriger des perceptions naïves quelconques. »³⁸⁴ With my observations, I wanted to scientifically study the religious practices of Hindus amid the transmission of Christian faith. I was also interested in the question, who does what, why, when, where and for how much.

3.2.2. Analysis

Analysis is the second step in praxeology. The 5th chapter of my study consists of analysis. I conducted 20 qualitative interviews: 15 with Hindus performing religious practices at the Oratory, and 5 with the educators in faith. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat have rightly said that “practical theology seeks after modes of practice and understandings that are true and faithful.”³⁸⁵ Observation is a crucial factor in praxeological pastoral theology. Through keen observations, I gathered several insights into the milieu of religious practices at Saint Joseph’s Oratory. Often, the prevailing significance of a practice is not evident unless the institution periodically analyses and evaluates it. In a systematic study, observations of practices are carried forward through careful analysis to arrive at ground realities.

I used *QDA Miner*, a qualitative data analysis software package, for coding, annotating, retrieving and analyzing the interviews. It helped me categorize collected data into structured information. In fact, *QDA Miner* gave me higher levels of computer assistance for qualitative coding, analysis, and report writing. I used computer assistance for coding with text search tools including keyword search, section retrieval and cluster extraction. Making use of the integrated statistical and visualization tools, such as clustering, multidimensional scaling, correspondence analysis and sequence analysis, I identified patterns and trends, explored data, described, compared and tested hypotheses. The report manager tool helped me store queries and analysis results, tables, graphs, research notes and quotes in a single location. It helped me organize findings and interpretations, and in the report writing process. The analysis software kept the entire process of analysis of qualitative interviews transparent and credible. With the help of

³⁸⁴ J.-G. Nadeau, « La praxéologie pastorale : faire théologie selon un paradigme praxéologique », *Théologique* 1/1, 1993, p. 70-100.

³⁸⁵ J. Swinton & H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London, SCM Press, 2006, p. 254.

QDA Miner, I prepared research findings in charts and used them in different chapters of my study.

3.2.3. Interpretation

Interpretation is the third step in praxeology and it has a bigger place in my study as I dedicated 3 chapters (6 to 8). In chapter six, I interpreted *faith and transmission*. In chapter seven, I interpreted *bhakti practice at the Oratory* and in chapter eight; I interpreted *the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles at the Oratory*. Interpretation is done with the help of some literature review. I tried to see theories that are already proposed by some authors regarding the transmission of faith, *bhakti* devotion and the symbols of water and fire. When I speak about the transmission of faith, it is all about the transmission of Christian faith and therefore most of the references are from Christian authors. *Bhakti* practice is all about Hindu devotions either in Hindu or Christian milieu. As my Hindu interview participants were immigrants from India, Sri Lanka and Canadians from immigrant parents from South East Asia, I did not interpret *bhakti* from a specific geographic perspective. The symbols of water and fire are interpreted from both Christian and Hindu perspectives. All my interpretations are connected to the life at the Oratory.

3.2.4. Intervention

Intervention is the 4th step in pastoral praxeology. After having observed, analyzed and interpreted a practice in pastoral context, the intervention suggests concrete ways to bring changes in the practice. Taking into consideration the official position of the Church, I made a confrontation with the hypothesis of the transmission of Christian faith at Saint Joseph's Oratory. I considered the ways in which the transmission is done, and the context of inter-religious expressions of faith. The intervention is pointed towards some practical and concrete suggestions for improving the pastoral life at the Oratory where there is sharing of sacred space.

3.2.5. Prospective

Prospective is the last stage in my pastoral praxeological study and it retains certain questions as follows. What kind of reception one expects from the other actors who are concerned about the project? What are the consequences, results, limitations and strengths of the study for a short and

long term? If the study attained some of the intentions, dreams and results, what will be the milieu of the practice in ten-year time? I also responded to some questions concerning the theologian who has done the entire research in the field. Does the research make an impact on the practical theologian? How does the researcher see the milieu of practice? How does the researcher see the other actors in the milieu? How does the researcher intervene in the milieu?

Pastoral praxeological study helped me to dialogue with the other, especially during the period of interviews. The process of dialogue continues during the intervention. I have no intention to impose my project study or the findings upon any person.³⁸⁶ My aim is to share my observations, interpretations of the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory to improve the pastoral contextual situation. The entire pastoral praxeological study made it clear to me that the intervention is not the first step to do if I want to improve the situation of a practice. It is important to go through the steps of observation, analysis and interpretation to reach the stage of intervention that would bring a change in the religious practices at the Oratory. The intervention is not only to change momentary small things but also to initiate a longer reflection process in the pastoral milieu. The entire process will be oriented towards the prospective for the future and continuity of the religious practices at the Oratory as a shared sacred space and the transmission of Christian faith.

3.3. Qualitative research interviews

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat underlined that the field of qualitative research is open-ended and has a broad range of perspectives: empirical, political, sociological, pastoral, gender-oriented, and narrative-based. This makes it difficult to tie down and define. For them, qualitative research is slippery and difficult to contain within a single definition but they said that the researcher needs to get a way of orienting himself within the field.³⁸⁷ However, they emphasized that the “knowledge of the other” occurs when the researcher focuses on an individual or group and explores, in-depth, the ways in which they view and interact with the

³⁸⁶ Here, I speak in first person singular because my experience at the Oratory as a Priest in the last 8 years taught me to work in a team. In big institution like the Oratory, I cannot take decisions alone. I need to suggest, propose, consult and act for any intervention. Team work and intervention will bring an effective result.

³⁸⁷ J. Swinton & H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London, SCM Press, 2006, p. 29.

world. This “knowledge of the other” feeds into practice and enables people to develop in-depth understandings of those whom they encounter and seek to understand.³⁸⁸ In my study, I examined what the Hindus were *actually* doing and what was that they *think* they were doing. In wrestling with this tension between perception and reality, I began to understand the complexities of the religious practices at Saint Joseph’s Oratory.

As I mentioned above, I chose to do 20 qualitative interviews. I found that it was useful to collect data from pilgrims involved in a religious practice and educators in faith involved in transmitting Christian faith. J. Swinton and H. Mowat have reasons to say that “qualitative research draws our attention to the crucial fact that human experience is inherently interpretative and polyvalent.”³⁸⁹ A religious practice could comprise of simple and complex elements. When the followers of a faith, religion or culture perform their practices, one can assume that they are well-informed of the implications and implicit meanings of the practice. However, when performed in a multi-religious and multi-cultural setting, the significance of the practice becomes complicated. The intentions of the various pilgrims taking part in religious practices at the Oratory are not readily apparent. A deeper qualitative research provided me some clarity.

3.3.1. Identifying candidates for interviews

Knowing that all Indians do not belong to Hindu tradition, I used the following criteria to select candidates for interviews.

- a) Identifying Hindus by their names registered in the electronic database at the Oratory.
- b) Identifying Hindus by careful observation of the appearance, gestures, and religious practices.
- c) Identifying Hindus by their gestures and religious practices that are different from Indian Christians.
- d) The initial contact was done either by telephone or email. A small dialogue with the person who came to the Oratory also helped in the first contact.

³⁸⁸ J. Swinton & H. Mowat, 2006, p. 33.

³⁸⁹ J. Swinton & H. Mowat, 2006, p. 254.

- e) As per the willingness of the candidate to participate in the research, an invitation letter was dispatched by email attachment or post. Then, the formula of consent was given to the interviewee for agreement and signature.

Knowing that all who work at the Oratory are not educators in faith and pastoral agents, I used the following criteria to select candidates for interviews.

- f) I studied the recent directory of the Oratory with all names of people who work in the institution.
- g) The educators in faith were chosen for interviews through an initial dialogue of aptitude. Then, the procedure (e) as above was followed to sign the formula of consent.

3.3.2. Knowing and selecting candidates

Prior to my study, I have been observing different gestures of Hindus at the Oratory. During summer, many Hindus come from Ontario and United States to visit the Oratory. While doing my duty in the Blessing Office, I had opportunities to speak with them. I visited *Murugan* temple in Montreal. It gave me a good experience to see how Hindus do their *pūjā*. When I lived in India, I have also visited different Hindu temples. In Montreal, I was invited to eat with Hindus either in their houses or restaurant. One of my Hindu friends invited me to visit his family member who was sick in Saint Mary's Hospital in Montreal. At my arrival in the hospital, he asked me to pray for his relative so that he would be healed. Back in India, I had many Hindu friends and they invited me for different occasions to share a meal with them. I was touched by their hospitality and respect. During my earlier years of formation in the seminary, I have done studies in Indian philosophy and Hinduism. When I started my research program in the University of Montreal, I did courses in Hinduism. Keeping the above elements in mind, none of my Hindu friends was selected as candidate. I did not want the candidates to be influenced by my familiarity and authority. I wanted to keep the anonymity and respect the random selection of candidates as mentioned above in the selection criteria of candidates.

I have been living with the educators in faith for about 25 years either in India, France or Canada. All the educators in faith follow the same charisma of their founder and congregation.

To become an educator in faith in the same tradition, I had to do 15 years of formation. The formation included secular and religious studies. While living with the educators in faith, it is common that they shared their experiences in pastoral ministry in different institutions. In Montreal, I had an enriching experience of listening to the educators in faith who work at the Oratory. All along my formation in the seminary in India and France, I graduated in theology that included courses in transmission of Christian faith. When I started my research program at the University of Montreal, along with the methodological courses in praxeology, I did a course in the transmission of Christian faith. I did not choose candidates from the educators in faith who lived with me in the same local fraternity to avoid familiarity that would influence the interview responses.

I sent out an official invitation letter to 50 Hindu candidates to know if they were interested to participate in the research. Out of 50 candidates, I received 36 responses. Out of 36 responses, 24 were positive to collaborate while 12 did not want to participate in the research. Out of 24 respondents, I chose 15 candidates and thanked all respondents for their willingness to take part in the research. The same procedure was repeated with the educators in faith. The official invitation was sent out to 10 candidates. Out of 10 candidates, I received all ten responses with nine positive and one negative. Out of 9 positive respondents, I chose five candidates and thanked all respondents for their communication. Every individual was respected in the process of selecting the candidates. Everyone had the right to accept or refuse my invitation to the research study that touched the life of the candidate. In the process of acceptance and refusal of the candidates, I was non-judgemental. Random acceptance of the candidates made me feel comfortable to interview them. I was not bound by any personal bias or relationship with the candidate.

3.3.3. Place and duration of interviews

Nineteen interviews were done in a closed room at Saint Joseph's Oratory. Aparna, one of the participants, did not want to come to the Oratory for doing the interview. After fixing an appointment, I went to her house to do the interview. Aparna is a Hindu and she lives alone in the greater Montreal. She is divorced and her children are grown up and do not live with her. When I reached her house, she was with another friend waiting for me. She had already prepared

some tea and snacks to welcome me in a pleasant atmosphere. She introduced me to her friend Shreeja and invited me to have some tea in Indian style. From her talks, I understood that Aparna came from a rich and noble family. For 30 years, she is settled in Canada. She asked me certain questions about my life and engagements here in Montreal. I revealed my identity as a priest working at the Oratory. After having tea, Aparna requested her friend to go away so that she could meet me alone. While having tea with Aparna, I gathered that she was gaining confidence in me. She wanted to know me a bit more before sharing about her.

With the permission and the signature of the participants on a written contract, nineteen interviews were video registered and one was audio registered. Aparna did not want her video to be taken. I took her permission to audio register her voice for transcription and she agreed to it. While doing the interview, Aparna was alone in her house and I think that it helped her to speak more about her. In all the interviews, the participants were extremely co-operative.

The duration of the interview varied from one participant to the other. Average duration of interviews is 60 minutes. In general, the interviews with Hindus had less duration than the interviews with the educators in faith. Here is an account of the duration of interviews with Hindus. Vinesh (41.44 minutes), Reshma (57.52 minutes), Kannan (51.82 minutes), Sangita (41.46 minutes), Manikkam (64.95 minutes), Nathan (43.37 minutes), Aparna (50.22 minutes), Kavita (65.66 minutes), Kapil (64.36 minutes), Pushpa (58.52 minutes), Maheshwari (68.87 minutes), Kumari (55.85 minutes), Bhavani (87.67 minutes), Shivani (51.57 minutes), Kalyani (28.37 minutes). Here is an account of the interviews with the educators in faith. Paul (59.06 minutes), Violaine (78.02 minutes), Marie (64.69 minutes), Pascal (47.57 minutes), Thomas (75.72 minutes).

3.3.4. Interview questionnaire

The interview questionnaire was given to every candidate prior to the interview. There were three sections in each questionnaire. The three sections of the questionnaire to interview Hindus included questions that were unique to the faith life, specific to Saint Joseph's Oratory and specific to the religious practices. The three sections of the questionnaire to interview the

educators in faith included questions that were unique to the faith life, specific to Saint Joseph's Oratory and concrete to Hindu-Christian Meeting at the Oratory. The three sections of the interviews mainly focused on personal faith journey of the participant, his life at Saint Joseph's Oratory and his Hindu or Christian religious practices. Numerous themes and concepts came out during interviews that I elaborate in different chapters of my thesis. Here I put down some of the major themes discussed: personal faith in God, religious rituals and practices at the Oratory, transmission of Christian faith, educators in faith and their heritage, question of sharing sacred space, divine figures in Christianity and Hinduism, Saint Joseph's Oratory as a sacred place, ambiance at the Oratory, expectations of Hindus from the Oratory, question of conversion, Catholic sacraments and sacramental, pastoral agents at the Oratory, *bhakti* devotion, sects and castes in Hinduism, *moksha* and salvation, *dharma*, regular devotions of lighting candles and using holy water, signs and symbols in Christianity and Hinduism, feasts and festivals in Hinduism and Christianity, Hindu temples in Montreal, Christian churches in Montreal, struggles of immigrants, the role of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André in the life of people, priests at the Oratory and in Hindu temples, miracles, healings, family and work related issues, relationships between parents and children, language and culture barriers.

The questions were helpful to develop a better dialogue with the interviewee. They were just guidelines and the discussion was not confined to the questions mentioned in the questionnaire. I maintained a certain amount of flexibility to help the participant to express what he wanted. During the conversation, the exchange and dialogue with the interviewee helped me go beyond the questions that were in the questionnaire. The qualitative interviews brought out terms and concepts that were not in my mind. The name and personal details of the interviewee are not revealed to anyone as part of confidentiality and ethics of the research. The interviews with Hindus were done in English to facilitate them in their participation. Some Hindu participants spoke a few words in Tamil as they could not express in English. I also gave enough time for those Hindus who became emotional and cried during the interview while narrating their life experiences at the Oratory. I was sensitive to the feelings of Hindus with regard to their faith and practices at the Oratory. The interviews with the educators in faith were done in French except for one interviewee who switched languages from French to English. I was attentive to the

concerns and pre-occupations of the educators in faith. After completing all 20 interviews, I transcribed them. As I already mentioned, the analysis was done with the help of *QDA Miner* and in praxeological strategies. Interpretation was based on emerging concepts, keywords and themes from the interviews.

3.3.5. Atmosphere of interviews

I had one-on-one interviews with all twenty people. The interviews were semi-informal with much flexibility for the participant to express his views. I kept in mind that the qualitative interviews would assume non-judgemental attitude towards the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in a familiar way than just following the questions. I gave more place for listening to the stories of personal life, family life and daily religious practices of Hindus and educators in faith. During the interviews, I was emphatic towards some of the Hindus who became emotional while sharing their personal faith stories. To keep the scientific nature of the study, I had to keep an emotional distance. Some of the participants asked me to pray for them.

The interviews helped me know in detail the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory and the strengths and limits of the educators in faith who exercise their ministry. In fact, one of the fundamental aspects of practical theological tasks is to evoke people's consciousness to previously hidden dimensions of everyday situations.³⁹⁰ It is in this complex situation that qualitative research was useful in my study. I used the interview results in pastoral praxeological analysis, interpretation and prospective while undertaking two specific practices at the Oratory.

If the interviews were too long, I had the intention of taking a break between each section in the questionnaire. As I mentioned above, none of the interviews took too long and I did not propose a pause during the conversation.

3.3.6. Description of participants

The interviews went very well. The participants reached in time and they respected the interview procedure. I noticed that some of the Hindu participants were tensed in the beginning but I made

³⁹⁰ J. Swinton, & H. Mowat, 2006, p. 16.

a special effort to make them at ease in the beginning by assuring them the anonymity of the interview. When I started dialoguing with them, they felt much more comfortable. The Hindu participants in the research came from different background. The educators in faith who participated in the research work at the Oratory. Some of them have more experience as per the number of years of their work at the Oratory. Here is a detailed description of the participants.

Vinesh has been a practising Hindu for many years. He hailed from Karnataka state in India. He appeared to be in his early 50s. Well educated man, he seemed to have a lot of experience in his life as he lived with different types of people. He came to Canada to find a better living condition and job. When he worked in Toronto, he was surrounded by Muslims and people belonging to different religious background. I sensed that Vinesh had few bad experiences with some of his Muslim friends as they tried to convert him to Islam. During the interview, Vinesh spoke a lot about Hinduism and Christianity. He liked to go different churches for his prayers. He came to the Oratory to spend time in prayer but he admitted that he had no discipline to go there regularly. He liked to spend time in prayer and read the Bible. He appreciated his life and religious freedom in Canada.

Reshma hailed from Tamil Nadu state in India. She appeared to be in her late 50s. Her parents were Sri Lankans and they moved to India when Reshma was small. She came from a middle-class family. From her appearance and conversations, I sensed that she had not done much higher education in younger age. Her father was a Hindu and mother was a Catholic. Born to mixed parents, she followed both traditions of Hinduism and Christianity. She used to go to Hindu temple with her father and to church with her mother. She remained to be a Hindu but liked to go to churches. When Reshma grew up she moved to Singapore for work. After a few years, she immigrated to Canada for rest of her life. She got married in Canada but now she is divorced. She has a son who lives in the same apartment. From her childhood, Reshma liked to go to churches. In Montreal, she goes regularly to Saint Joseph's Oratory as its her preferred Church. She pronounced that all her problems were solved when she prayed to God at the Oratory. She had a few stories of healings to narrate to me. While narrating her stories of healing, she also

cried. It took a few minutes for her to get back to the conversation. I sensed that Reshma was a very sensitive and emotional person.

Kannan hailed from a traditional Hindu family in Sri Lanka. He appeared to be in his early 30s. He seemed to be not much educated. He has been doing small jobs in restaurants and managing his life. He appeared to be a hard-working person. He wanted to help his family members back in Sri Lanka. He asked me to pray for him so that his immigration residential papers would arrive soon. When he was young, he used to go with his parents to Hindu temple for worship. Before coming to Canada, he lived and worked in Mexico. He is a new immigrant in Canada from 2009. It is in Mexico that he started going to the church for spending time in prayer. He did not see any Hindu temple in Mexico. In Montreal, Kannan discovered Saint Joseph's Oratory where he found haven of peace. He gives donation to the Oratory and participates in different religious activities. Among many practices, he lights candles at the Oratory. Kannan also shared his spiritual and religious experiences at the Oratory with his Italian colleagues at work. He showed me his key chain with Saint Joseph that he bought from Saint Joseph's Oratory gift shop. When I met with him, he was also thinking about his wedding. He took an oath to light 100 candles at the Oratory before his wedding. He was searching for a girl hailing from Sri Lankan family in Canada. He gave much importance for family values. During my dialogue with Kannan, I gathered that he did not know much about Christianity. He was more interested in doing simple devotional practices. However, he told me that he received Holy Communion when he was in Mexico and someone told him that it was reserved only for Christians. From then onwards, he does not go to take Communion even if he participates in the Mass.

Sangita hailed from Sri Lankan parents in Malaysia. She was born and brought up in Malaysia. She appeared to be in her early 60s. She is educated and she keeps researching about different religions. She is an immigrant in Canada for more than 20 years. She lives with her husband and her children go to see her regularly. Sangita goes to Murugan temple in Montreal and she also goes to different churches. One of her preferred place is Saint Joseph's Oratory. She does not share her experience at the Oratory with her family members. All her family members do Hindu rituals. Sangita feared that her family members would hate her if she shared much about her

personal faith experiences at the Oratory. They wanted her to go only to Hindu temples. For Sangita, she found much happiness in coming to the Oratory and spending time in prayer. She experienced peace in her personal life. She also liked to read the Bible. She did not take part in any religious celebrations at the Oratory but she did her own devotional practices.

Manikkam hailed from Sri Lanka. His family moved to Germany and lived there for 8 years. Then, along with his parents he came to Canada 23 years back. Manikkam appeared to be in his late 50s. He seemed to have not done much higher education. He does small jobs to make his living. He used to join his parents for *pūjā* in Hindu temples in Sri Lanka. They also prayed in their house. When he was young, the parents of Manikkam took him to Saint Antony's Church in Sri Lanka. As per Mnaikkam, it's a special Church where many pilgrims from different religious traditions gather. In Germany, Manikkam did not have any chance to go to Hindu temple. He used to occasionally go to Christian churches. Immigrating to Canada, Manikkam discovered Saint Joseph's Oratory. For him, it's a special place where he experienced God. He went to Saint Joseph's Oratory on every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. He also visited other churches in Montreal. Manikkam told me that he did not like to go to Hindu temple in Montreal. He wanted to become a Christian as he felt closer to Jesus. He became very emotional and cried when he shared about his faith. He also had some healing experience at the Oratory. He showed me a Divine Mercy picture of Jesus that was given to him by someone. He experienced God's mercy and compassion at the Oratory. It took a few minutes for him to come back to regular conversation.

Nathan hailed from Sri Lanka. He has been going to Hindu temples in his country. He immigrated to Canada 29 years back and Montreal has become his home. He appeared to be in his early 50s. From my conversation with him, I understood that he came from a poor family. He has a loving family with a wife and two children. He works hard to support his family. He has been doing small jobs. He spoke in broken English. When he was unable to express in English, he spoke in Tamil. Nathan was happy to find his partner in life who also hailed from Sri Lanka and studied in Montreal. Nathan has gone to Hindu temples in Montreal but he found the Hindu priests to be not true in their preaching. They always asked money from him and therefore he did

not appreciate them. Now, Nathan comes to Saint Joseph's Oratory every day. He has a special affinity to the site. He experienced miracles and healing at Saint Joseph's Oratory. For Nathan, Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André are strong people in a positive sense. He was extremely happy to meet with me and narrate his faith stories. Nathan participated in many religious activities at the Oratory, including attending the Holy Mass. Nathan said that he had a special connection with God as he came to the Oratory every day. He thanked God for all the blessings he received and he asked me to pray for him. He does not receive the Holy Communion. Nathan has no intention to convert himself to Christianity.

Aparna hailed from Karnataka state in India. She appeared to be in her early 50s. She came from a traditional Hindu family. As I mentioned earlier, I did not do her interview at the Oratory but I went to her house. Aparna is well instructed and educated lady who lives in a big house in greater Montreal. She has been doing executive jobs in Montreal. She has studied much about religions and shared with me her experiences. She did not like to have blind faith in God. Aparna told me the story of her son who was paralyzed. She also asked me why there is suffering in the world if God exists. While talking about her son who is in a special care home, Aparna became emotional. She said that no miracle can save him now. In India, Aparna studied in convent schools and prayed Christian prayers. But she also knows Hindu prayers. She goes to Hindu temple in Montreal when she feels like going there. In the same way, she goes to the Oratory when she feels like going to the church. She also goes to *Gurdwara* in Montreal which is a religious worship place for Sikhs. Aparna told me that she used religious services as per her convenience. For her, every religion has good and bad points. She said that the Hindu temple in Montreal has become a money-making institution. Those who pay more money get preference while performing *pūjā*. For her, it is important to separate money, power and religion. Aparna wanted to respect every religion. Aparna said that God is the same everywhere and in every religion. Expressions of faith are different. She liked to spend time in meditation and silence at the Oratory. For Aparna, experiencing peace is an experience of the Divine.

Kavita hailed from Tamil Nadu state in India. She is a devoted Hindu who has a beautiful family in Montreal. She lives with her husband, daughter and son. She appeared to be in her early 50s.

Kavita immigrated to Canada in the last 15 years. She offers *pūjā* to Hindu gods every day in her house. She also named some of the Hindu gods to whom she prayed for various purpose. Doing religious rituals was important for her to live a good life. She goes to Hindu temple every week with or without her family members. Every Tuesday she goes to Saint Joseph's Oratory to continue a tradition that she used to do in Coimbatore in India. She used to go to St. Joseph's Church in Coimbatore and she felt happy. From 7 years, she discovered Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal and she was happy to go there every Tuesday. She does some devotional practices at the Oratory. She touches the statues of saints and crucifix. Her prayers are composed of thanksgiving and asking for favours. She lights candle at the Oratory and climbs on her knees. For special occasions, the family members of Kavita go with her to the Oratory. Kavita does not forget to give donations to the Oratory when she goes there. Despite her devotional practices at the Oratory, Kavita seemed to be a strong Hindu practitioner at home and in Hindu temple.

Kapil hailed from Sri Lanka. He came from traditional Hindu family. He immigrated to Canada since last 25 years. He has been working in a company in Montreal. He appeared to be in his late 50s. Kapil spoke about his wife who inspired him to do fasting and to be religious. He has no children. Kapil and his wife are strict vegetarians. Before coming to Montreal, Kapil was in Iran. It was difficult for him to find strict vegetarian food in Iran as it was not always available. He goes to all three Hindu temples in Montreal along with his wife: Murugan temple, Amman temple and Ganesh temple. He discovered Saint Joseph's Oratory since last 10 years. Going to the Oratory gave him a heavenly experience. He told me that heaven must be lived on earth. As per him, the Oratory was a good place to pray. He did not join for any common celebration at the Oratory. He did his own devotional practices. He said that people pray in different ways but God has no difference. Kapil respected every person and every religion. In his house, he has pictures of all gods from different religions.

Pushpa hailed from Sri Lanka. She appeared to be in her early 50s. She is an immigrant in Canada in the last 25 years. She lives with her husband and she has a grown up adopted daughter. Pushpa is a devoted practicing Hindu. She does *pūjā* every day at home and she goes to Hindu temple whenever possible, at least 3 times a week. Pushpa is religious in every word she spoke.

She had a lot of faith. She prayed not only to Hindu gods but also to Jesus. She told me that she has a picture of Jesus at home. She goes to Saint Joseph's Oratory in the last 10 years. She preferred to go to the Oratory on Tuesdays. She bought prayer books from the Oratory and prayed through the intercessions of Saint Joseph. She gives regular donations to the Oratory. She shared her faith experiences at the Oratory with many of her friends in Canada and Sri Lanka. Pushpa was not frightened of people belonging to other religious traditions at the Oratory. She did her devotional activities as per her need. Prayer is the key word in her life.

Maheshwari came to Montreal when she was three years old. Her father is a Hindu and mother is a Catholic. Her parents hailed from India. She appeared to be in her early 20s. She is a University student who does her doctoral program in medicine. She did part of her medical schooling in England and resumed it in Montreal. Maheshwari preferred to follow her father's Hindu traditions at home. She used to go with her father to the Hindu temple. But she also was open to Catholic religion and went to churches with her mother. Maheshwari never wanted to convert herself to Christianity. She does not perform many religious practices in her personal life but she respects her parent's beliefs. She said that her father dominated at home when it came to religious practices. She and her brother joined him for prayers. Her father encouraged his children to do *pūjā* everyday. Maheshwari narrated her struggles when her father died of sickness. During the conversations, Maheshwari talked a lot about her father as she was attached to him. It took time for her to accept the fact that he left her. Maheshwari liked to go to Saint Joseph's Oratory for personal prayer and meditation. She liked to touch the feet of the crucifix and light candles. She received peace at the Oratory. All her frustrations went away when she spent time at the Oratory. Though she is not a Catholic, Maheshwari joined for the Mass at the Oratory. She liked to listen to the music and songs. Since she goes to the church from childhood, she knows what's going on in a Mass.

Kumari is born in Montreal and her parents hailed from Sri Lanka. Kumari and all her family members are Hindus. Kumari appeared to be in her early 20s. She studies in the University. She has a special devotion to Ganesh and Jesus. She told me that she makes prayers to both and she has their statues in her car. Kumari said that her mother was very religious but not her two

younger brothers. Kumari does not know much about her father as her parents are divorced. She goes to Hindu temple with her mother. She also observed that Hindu temples in Montreal are noisy. At the Oratory, she could find silence. Kumari did not see the importance of doing rituals to be with God. She came to the Oratory just to have a spiritual connection with God. When she was a child, she followed her mother to temples and churches but now she goes to religious places only when she feels like going there. Kumari respected every human being. For her, God is the same and God has many names.

Bhavani hailed from Sri Lanka. She is a practicing Hindu. She came to Canada in 1985 as a young girl and got married in Montreal. In 1984, there was a civil war in Sri Lanka and Bhavani came to Canada as a refugee. Her parents joined her in Canada in 1987. Bhavani looked to be in her early 50s. She is well educated and worked for some private company in Montreal. Her parents were devoted Hindus. Along with her parents, she did prayers at home especially on Tuesdays and Fridays. Bhavani has two children and she praised her children for having good values in life. Her children also respected parents and grandparents. She was not a frequent visitor to Hindu temple in Montreal but she preferred to come to Saint Joseph's Oratory. She believes that God is everywhere. It is in her heart that she found God. For Bhavani, God is one. She has friends from different religious background. Though she was not a regular visitor at the Oratory, when she went there she had a special experience of God.

Shivani hailed from Sri Lanka. She is a landed immigrant in Montreal in the past 24 years. She got married to a Sri Lankan man who lived in Montreal. She appeared to be in her late 40s. She is a hard-working person who works for a private company. She has been a practicing Hindu in Sri Lanka and in Canada. She has two children and she described them to be very good in conduct. She used to go to Hindu temple in Montreal along with her husband. It is her husband who took her to Saint Joseph's Oratory for the first time. She liked the place of prayer. In the last 6 years, she does not go to Hindu temple but she prefers to go to Saint Joseph's Oratory. She does many devotional activities in her own manner. She prayed for her family members who were sick and suffering. Sometimes, she did not spend much time at the Oratory due to lack of

time, but she went there almost every day. She wanted to learn more about Catholic life and practices but she had no intention to be converted to Christianity.

Kalyani is born in Montreal from Hindu parents from India. She is in her early 20s and she studies in the University. She does *pūjā* at home along with her parents. Kalyani does fasting every Friday as part of her religious practice. She gives much importance for her parents and respects them. As she is born and brought up in Canada, she has friends from different religious background. She also has many Catholic friends. Being different and seeing differences are natural for Kalyani. Sometimes, she asked herself why she did some rituals as part of her parents' practices. She went to Amman temple in Montreal along with her parents. Her father went to the Oratory at least three times a week. When she went to the Oratory with her parents or alone, Kalyani joined for the Mass but did not receive the Holy Communion. Kalyani knew that the Communion was reserved for Catholics. Kalyani received mental purification and satisfaction at the Oratory. When she went to the Oratory, she did not feel that she was a Hindu. She felt at home in the Oratory.

The above description of Hindu participants shows that there were more women (10) than men (5) participants. The age group varied from 20 to 60 years old. Most of them were in their middle age but there were three participants who were in their 20s. All the participants who came from India were from the southern part of India. The Sri Lankan Hindu participants spoke Tamil and that made a connection with Tamil Nadu state in south India. It was interesting to note that some of them lived in other countries before settling down in Canada. They also had experience of going to churches in their country of origin or adoption. Some participants were well educated with high jobs in Montreal and others managed with small jobs. They all seemed to be comfortably settled in Montreal. The second-generation Hindus born in Canada did their studies in good institutions or continued to do their research programs.

Now, I shall describe the educators in faith who participated in the research program.

Violaine is originally from Québec. She works as one of the directors at the Oratory in the last 2 years. She has a family with 5 children. She appeared to be in her early 50s. She has done studies in communication and theology but she has not been a regular practicing Catholic. However, the Catholic dimension of faith was important for her. She took part in religious celebrations as per her need. She has faith in God and she mentioned about the role of the Holy Spirit in her daily life. Violaine confessed that she was not directly in contact with pilgrims coming to the Oratory but she worked more in her office at the Oratory. As part of her work, she did a lot of writing about the Oratory. She told me that it's through her writing that she communicated with people belonging to different faith. She believed much in the divine mercy of God. For Violaine, it was important to welcome everyone without judgment. She also expressed her concerns about the insecurity of the people belonging to other religious background as she was not used to living with such people. It is by meeting with the other that she could know the other. She shared with me her positive experience of doing studies with people belonging to different Christian denominations.

Pascal is originally from Québec. He works with the pastoral team at the Oratory in the last 12 years. He is an educator in faith. As a priest, he liked to administer the Sacraments to people in need. He appeared to be in his early 70s. Pascal has a wide knowledge about various subjects and he holds a doctorate in theology. He is fluent in French, English and Italian. He lived and worked in India and Europe for a certain number of years. Pascal has been holding big responsibilities in his life and has travelled in different parts of the world as part of his responsibility. He respected different languages and cultures of people coming to the Oratory. He seemed to be a great leader and he holds a higher responsibility at the Oratory. He has a high authority at the Oratory and he coordinates many activities. He is both an administrator and a pastor. He told me that he liked to spend time with pilgrims and people coming from different background. He did not have any prejudice towards people belonging to another religious tradition. For Pascal, the Oratory is a place where people are accompanied as per need taking into consideration the faith journey of everyone. It was important for him to understand the rhythm of every person to accompany him in his faith. He spoke to me about the importance of promoting peace through interreligious meeting at the Oratory.

Grégoire is originally from Québec. He works in the pastoral team at the Oratory in the past 5 years. He appeared to be in his early 70s. He is an administrator and a pastor. He has done higher education in theology. He is fluent in French and English. He is an educator in faith. Grégoire has lived and worked in different parts of the world. He also lived in India for one year. He worked with the immigrant communities in Montreal. He holds a high authority at the Oratory and he is part of executing many activities at the Oratory. Grégoire also has travelled to different parts of the world as part of his responsibility. He is open to pilgrims coming from different parts of the world to the Oratory. For Grégoire, it is important not to be indifferent to people belonging to different religious background. During 10 years of his life, Grégoire taught history of religions to students in college. It is with great respect that he introduced different religious traditions to students and their parents. Meeting with the other belonging to another religion is always a fascination for Grégoire. As per him, people need to walk together without fear learning from each other.

Paul is an Indian priest working at the Oratory. He works with the pastoral team at the Oratory in the past 4 years. He is an educator in faith. He appeared to be in his late 30s. He has done his master program in theology. He has a wide experience of working in India, Europe and now in Montreal. He is fluent to speak 4 languages and it helped him to mingle with many pilgrims at the Oratory. He loved being at the Oratory. He told me that he has been engaged in the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory through administering Sacraments. His first duty seemed to be at the service of pilgrims coming to the Oratory. He was open to welcome people of different religious background while he was in duty at the Oratory. He told me that he met with many Hindus at the Oratory. He spoke to some of them in Tamil. Paul observed that Hindus had a great sense of the sacred and they respected all gods. For Paul, the Oratory is a great place of welcoming all sections of people. For him, the Oratory is a “mission territory”.

Marie hailed from Haiti. She works at the Oratory in the past 5 years. She appeared to be in her late 40s. As she is fluent in French, English and Créole, it was easy for her to communicate with more people. Marie is a landed immigrant in Canada in the last 20 years. She lives with her

daughter about whom she spoke to me. She loves her family in Montreal and back in Haiti. She is a devoted practicing Catholic. She has an important role at the Oratory especially for listening to people and responding to their questions. She told me that her work was fascinating as she spoke to people from different parts of the world belonging to different religious background. She did not impose her faith upon anyone but she helped people who asked her to accompany them. Marie seemed to have a lot of openness to all pilgrims and she respected everyone. She said that she was blessed to have a job at the Oratory. For her, it's a special place of God where people come to pray. Marie transmits Christian faith in her living and sharing with people in simple ways. She seemed to have a lot of positive energy in her to help people in need. She also spoke about the importance of social media in transmitting Christian faith. She used different social media to share her views and thoughts. She prayed for people who visited the Oratory.

As seen above, two women and three men educators in faith participated in the research interviews. Three participants were from Québec and two were immigrants. The immigrant educators in faith were younger than the local. All of them worked in the pastoral team at the Oratory. The three men participants were priests from the Congregation of Holy Cross and among them two were in high administration at the Oratory. Among the two women participants, one held a director's chair. Both were involved in communicating with pilgrims in an indirect way. Four participants were regular practicing Catholics and one was occasional practicing Catholic. All participants were highly educated. Four of them have done higher studies in theology. The educators in faith who were priests had a wider experience of working with people of different religious background in the field, in different countries.

3.4. Status of the researcher at the Oratory

In the introductory chapter I mentioned about my status as a religious Indian priest from the Congregation of Holy Cross. Hailing from Kerala state in south India, I have travelled across India and lived in 7 states before going to France for a sojourn of 7 years. When I lived with my parents in the village, I was accustomed with Hindu neighbours. I spoke Malayalam, my mother tongue, and did my schooling in the same language. It's after joining the community of Holy Cross at the age of 16 that I picked up English as my second language of communication. While

I stayed in Tamil Nadu, I picked up some broken Tamil. In Mumbai where I lived for three years, I could manage with English and some broken Hindi. In all other places in India, I spoke in English except when I lived with the tribal people in Tripura where I spoke to them in Kokborok, one of the tribal dialects. During my life in India, I should say that I had people from different religious background as my friends and neighbours. In Paris, I picked up French and resumed my studies in theology. I accomplished bachelor and master programs in theology in Europe. From the time I reached Montreal, I work in inter-cultural and multi-linguistic context at the Oratory.

3.4.1. Profile of the researcher at the Oratory

It is important to elaborate my profile, role and functions at the Oratory, my present situation and milieu, my proximity with the candidates interviewed and my level of authority in the institution where I work. During my first 6 years of stay in Montreal, I have been working as a priest in pastoral care. I used to administer Sacraments and accompany pilgrims in their spiritual journey. I also used to dedicate much time at the Blessing Office to welcome pilgrims and pray with them. I met with people coming from different countries and religious background. After completing six years, I was appointed as the Director for Pastoral Affairs at the Oratory. It involved a big responsibility with co-ordinating many pastoral and liturgical activities at the Oratory. I reside in the campus of the Oratory. Taking up new and bigger responsibility did not change my earlier functions of being with people, accompanying them and administering Sacraments. I conduct religious services at the Oratory in French, English and Malayalam. Pilgrims from different countries frequent me for various needs. As per their request, I visit houses of people and pray with them.

Twelve Hindus whom I interviewed were not known to me before. Only three of them (Nathan, Reshma and Kannan) were familiar to me as I had seen them doing some religious practices at the Oratory. I had no prejudice toward any candidate and I revealed to them that I was a priest in pastoral ministry at the Oratory. Ten of them told me that they had seen me conducting some religious services at the Oratory. I was dressed in civil while conducting the interviews. I took the position of a research student than a priest in official duty at the Oratory. I did not approach them with the religious authority that I hold at the Oratory. I did not want to influence any

participant by my position at the Oratory. For me, every participant was a unique person with his experience. During the interview, I observed that the Hindus had confidence to speak to me in detail about various factors in their life.

All the five educators in faith were known to me at the Oratory. They knew my status and position at the Oratory. They appreciated me for conducting such a research based on the actuality. They had full confidence in me and shared with me their thoughts on various questions.

As a practical theologian at the Oratory, my role is to continue listening to pilgrims and pastoral agents. I must note down the devotions and convictions of Hindus and educators in faith. I also have to help other pastoral agents in their efforts to accompany people around them.

3.4.2. Difficulties of the study

The topic of my research was not easy as it had two orientations: the religious practices of Hindus and the transmission of Christian faith. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, it was not easy to comprehend the complexity of Hinduism. Numerous schools, practices, castes, sects and customs of Hinduism could not be summarized in my research. The notion of *bhakti* itself is vast and it varies from North India to South India. It also has another flavour in Sri Lanka and in other parts of the world. Hindus immigrated and living in the Canada for a long time have a certain way of doing their religious devotions and Hindus born and brought up in Montreal have their ways of doing religious practices. All Hindu participants in my research were not from the same cultural, linguistic and geographic milieu. Therefore, the main uniting factor was their participation in religious activities at the Oratory. The educators in faith came from different cultural and ethnic background. Their perceptions varied with their experiences in the field. It was not easy to make a balance between the elements of anthropology, ethnography, theology of religions and praxeology.

The study was limited to Hindus and educators in faith at the Oratory. The structural framework of the Oratory, the manner of doing religious practices and transmitting Christian faith may not

be same in other sacred places where there are Hindus. I had limited resources to establish a statistical profile of the Hindu population in Canada and Québec.

3.4.3. Strengths of the study

The study dealt with the actuality in the biggest Church in Canada. The topic of the study is unique as there has been no research done about Hindu religious practices in a Catholic Shrine in Québec. The pastoral praxeological approach of the study has pertinence in the pastoral context of the Oratory. The appraisal of the transmission of Christian faith in the presence of Hindus brings a contribution to Québec and Canadian migratory demographic profile and changing religious habits. My study gave importance for inter-faith meetings in today's multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-religious context. Analyzing the religious practices of Hindus, my study envisaged respecting Hindu-Christian religious traditions, and expressing the solidarity with one another, to foster spiritual values in societies where people, coming from different religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds live together. The study envisaged to promote a selfless service to God as service to one's neighbour, to search for shared expressions of concern in areas troubled by religious misunderstanding and false propaganda against religion, and to promote mutual understanding. The study focused to bring spiritual solace to people who have left their homelands and who continue to search for greater meaning in their lives through Divine encounter. The strength of the study includes the awakening of spiritual quest in all people, who have distanced themselves from their faith journey, in search of the Divine.

3.5. General Objectives

The transmission of Christian faith has its origins from early Christian communities, and has never been ever disrupted. In our age, especially in bigger cities, the transmission continues in inter-faith settings. It is with this perspective that my study focuses on the transmission of Christian faith at Saint Joseph's Oratory where people from different religious traditions gather for various religious and cultural activities. The original interest in this study comes from my personal encounter with hundreds of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory, who share their faith experiences with me. As a Catholic Priest from India, I live and work at the Oratory and have the privilege to observe verbal and non-verbal communications, and unofficial participation of

Hindus at different Christian religious activities and devotions at the Oratory. My empirical experiences inspired me to systematically study the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory. Knowing that there are many traditions, customs, gurus, structures, stratifications, schools of thoughts, conceptions and paths leading to *moksha* or delivrance in Hinduism, I observe that *bhakti* gives more freedom for devotees to perform their rituals and religious practices at the Oratory. I observe that the ambiance of the Oratory permits Hindus to be free in their religious expressions.

The general objective of my thesis is to understand the new dynamics of the transmission of Christian faith at Saint Joseph's Oratory where pilgrims of various religious traditions feel free to come. I analyze the religious practices of Hindus in search of the Divine at Saint Joseph's Oratory. I examine their participation in devotional and liturgical activities by undertaking a praxeological method of observation, analysis and interpretation. My study is geared to show how, and on what basis, we can understand the encounter between two religious worlds, Christianity and Hinduism. In addition, I examine how Saint Joseph's Oratory can nourish the piety and devotion of Hindus. This praxeological research provides clarity about the meeting point between Christianity and Hinduism in the current context of the presence of Hindus in Quebec, especially at Saint Joseph's Oratory. My research highlights the dynamics and challenges of the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory, in Quebec, where the sacred space is shared.

3.6. Specific Objectives

I noted down various religious practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory while I study, in detail, two primary practices: the usage of Holy Water and lighting of candles by Hindus. I examined the usage of Holy Water in Christianity and the importance of *tīrtha* in Hinduism.³⁹¹ I elaborated the symbolism of light in Christianity and the symbolism of fire in Hinduism. The praxeological steps of observation, analysis, interpretation, intervention and prospective of the two practices helped me see the meeting point between Christians and Hindus, especially in their search for the Divine. It helped me underline the reciprocal illumination of two religions through

³⁹¹ In this study, *tīrtha* refers to water used for *pūjā* or prayer in Hindu ritual.

their religious practices.³⁹² I studied the ways in which the educators in faith continue to transmit Christian faith in a multi-religious and multi-cultural context. The specific objectives of my research are as follows.

- a) To observe, analyze and interpret the religious practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory.
- b) To study in detail two specific practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory: the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles.
- c) To suggest intervention methods and prospective in the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory.
- d) To elaborate the struggle, strength and transmission of Christian faith after the Second Vatican Council.
- e) To examine the positive and negative effects of the participation of Hindus in different religious activities at the Oratory.
- f) To interpret *bhakti* practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory.
- g) To underline the Christian-Hindu meeting point, sharing of sacred space and reciprocal illumination at the Oratory based on faith experiences.

3.7. Conclusion

The orientation of the study is clarified in this chapter of methodology and objectives. Pastoral praxeology and qualitative research produce ample ways of building up the research. The empirical approach is the most important element in my study. Careful observation can give a lot of materials for supporting the research. Different steps of praxeology and keen listening in interviews aided me to advance my research.

I gave much attention the non-verbal communication while observing in the research field and conducting interviews. The description of participants is a key element that helped me understand why they do certain things in the way they do. People say that the experience is the best teacher. Hindus and educators in faith whom I interviewed had a lot of experiences to share with me.

³⁹² A. Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology – The case for reciprocal illumination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005.

As a practical theologian, I continue to learn from the field. The steps of praxeology are to be repeated from time to time. The objectives of the research oriented me in the whole process of knowledge seeking experience while combining practice and theory.

CHAPTER 4

4. OBSERVATION OF TWO PRACTICES AT THE ORATORY: THE USAGE OF HOLY WATER AND THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES BY HINDUS

4.1. Introduction

Since a few years, there have been changes in the demographics at the Oratory. At the time of Brother André, visitors to Saint Joseph's Oratory were mostly Catholics, since it was an icon of Catholic Church in Montreal. At that time, most of the pilgrims were from Canada and the United States of America. Now, with globalization and immigration, there are many people from various denominations of faith and religious backgrounds coming to this place of prayer. People come from different parts of the world as, both, pilgrims and tourists. Religious tourism is also promoted in such places of harmony and peace. Among the pilgrims and tourists, I find a significant number of Hindus with extraordinary piety and devotion. During their visit to the Oratory, some of the Hindus seem to participate in a few of the religious activities at the sanctuary that are in line with Catholic tradition. Among many practices of the Hindus at the Oratory, I observe that they perform two primary practices: the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles.

My study takes place in the pastoral milieu at the Oratory. The definition of pastoral praxeology proposed by Jean-Guy Nadeau inspires us: « La praxéologie pastorale s'identifie comme une approche herméneutique des pratiques chrétiennes, visant à intégrer analyse empirique et discours critique (...) La praxéologie pastorale apparaît ainsi non seulement comme une pratique de recherche intellectuelle, mais d'abord comme une pratique de responsabilisation des sujets de l'action. »³⁹³ Praxeology is a branch of theology connected to the hermeneutical method. In a praxeological approach, there is a strong link between practice and theory.

³⁹³ J.-G. Nadeau, 1993, p. 80.

The founders of praxeology emphasized on the need to observe practices in a pastoral commitment: « Tais-toi, regarde, tu parleras après. » This is a key expression in praxeology. The stage of observation in pastoral praxeology helps improve pastoral practices of agents who are committed to pastoral work. There are five steps in praxeology: observation, analysis, interpretation, intervention and prospective. I would add that there are five keywords to consider in praxeological outlook: empathy, hierarchy, order, precision and factuality. Empathy helps us think about the recipients of any service. For example, in a communication, I use simple words so that the receiver understands the message transmitted. I make an effort to understand the ability of beneficiaries in order to reach out to them in the appropriate manner. Hierarchy is all about prioritization. I prioritize messages in the praxeological steps to help us organize our interventions. For example, I prioritize the initial message and additional messages. Order is all about keeping things arranged so as to build up the description of my observations. Precision helps me see the details of my observations and to describe them accurately. Factuality is all about collecting and developing data.

Observation is primordial in pastoral praxeology. I observe a practice that is not in the standard rule or one that poses a question. « L'observation vise à dégager et à analyser les éléments clefs de la pratique, à en identifier les forces et les faiblesses. »³⁹⁴ Observation helps me to appreciate and correct such a practice. « La découverte du sens et des enjeux d'une pratique ne relève pas seulement d'une démarche de réflexion, mais d'abord et avant tout de l'observation de la pratique et de la prise en compte des discours de ses acteurs. »³⁹⁵ I advance in observation by spontaneously narrating the practice and linking structural poles to it. The structural poles consist of the analysis of the action: who, what, where, when, how, how much and why. We use qualitative techniques in the study.

Observation has a significant role in pastoral practice as it helps me to care for the underlying values of every practice. J.G. Nadeau is of the opinion that the first criteria of validity for pastoral praxeology falls on scientific observation.³⁹⁶ There are five functions of pastoral

³⁹⁴ J.-G. Nadeau, 1993, p. 88.

³⁹⁵ J.-G. Nadeau, 1993, p. 89.

³⁹⁶ J.-G. Nadeau, 1993, p. 89.

practices³⁹⁷: elaboration of the sense of reality, elaboration of the identity of persons, elaboration of the relation to the Other, elaboration of the relation to the community and finally elaboration of the ethics. In this research, I am interested in studying all these elements in the practices of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles by Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory.

4.2. Structural components of the practice of the usage of Holy Water

There is a big container of Holy Water in the Office of Information and Blessing at the entrance of Saint Joseph's Oratory. The container is refilled at least four times a day and the water is blessed by a Priest or a Religious in duty at the Office of Blessing.³⁹⁸ Many pilgrims use Holy Water from the Oratory for their personal sanctification. Some pilgrims and tourists carry it home and use it for various purposes.

³⁹⁷ Jean-Guy Nadeau and Gilles Raymond have developed this classification. Olivier Bauer presents this classification in a dynamic perspective especially in his Course on Praxeology. See also: « Les cinq fonctions d'élaboration des pratiques » in *La praxéologie pastorale. Orientations et parcours*, Cahier d'études pastorales 5, tome II, Section des études pastorales, Faculté de théologie, Université de Montréal, 1987, p. 79-85.

³⁹⁸ Here is the rite for the blessing of water in the Roman Missal. "Almighty ever-living God, who willed that through water, the fountain of life and the source of purification, even souls should be cleansed and receive the gift of eternal life; be pleased, we pray, to bless this water, by which we seek protection on this your day, O Lord. Renew the living spring of your grace within us and grant that by this water we may be defended from all ills of spirit and body, and so approach you with hearts made clean and worthily receive your salvation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." Cf. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missal*, Ottawa, Concacan, 2011, p. 1443.



Figure 3: Holy Water container and bottles at Saint Joseph's Oratory

4.2.1. Principal actors in the practice with their characteristics and relations (Who)

The main actors of the practice are Priests, Religious, employees of the Oratory, pilgrims and visitors including Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs. As a Priest in pastoral care at the Oratory, I am engaged in the practice, too. The age group of the actors cannot be defined as people of all ages use Holy Water. I observe that there are more adults than children performing the practice and, among them; there are more women than men. When they come with their families and children, I notice that some parents help their children perform the practice. While some adults explain the significance of Holy Water, to their children, others make no such efforts. The actors of the practice come from around the world. From their informal conversations, I understand that Hindus perform the practice are from India and Sri Lanka. Most of them seem to be immigrants residing in Montreal, Toronto or the United States. In my observation, I notice that parents are accompanied by their first-generation North American children. The children taking part in the practice do not seem to be as devotional as their parents. It is mostly at the behest of their parents that the children take part in the practice. Many of them speak in Tamil, and some speak in Hindi or Punjabi.

My observations confirm that most of the Christian visitors use Holy Water without any hesitation as they probably know the meaning of the practice. Hindus and people with other religious backgrounds do not seem to be as comfortable, likely due to the unfamiliar location, even though they may regularly practice the use of water in their own religious traditions. The question, now, is whether these visitors to Saint Joseph's Oratory are merely acting out the practice by imitating the Christian pilgrims, or are consciously applying their religious traditions while using Holy Water at the Oratory.

I note the remarkable relationships between various actors. Firstly, there is the link between God and the person who uses Holy Water with faith. People who come in search of Holy Water believe it to be blessed and not just ordinary piped water. The container holding Holy Water is identified as such in both French and English. When the water is blessed in the name of God, the benevolence of God is invoked on the people who will use it. Secondly, there is the relationship between the Priest and the person who uses Holy Water. Understandably, the person who uses Holy Water knows that a Priest has blessed it. This establishes an indirect connection between the Priest and one who performs the practice. Thirdly, there is the possibility of a relationship being established between the person who carries Holy Water home and the family recipient it is intended for, such as a sick person who wants to drink Holy Water or sprinkle it on his body. This is a personal relationship – one person to another. If the same Holy Water is given to a few people in the family, the relationship then becomes communitarian. However, the person who uses Holy Water for various purposes remains the principal actor throughout practice.

Strain between the actors of the practice - I noted down in this study that there is a ritual prayer conducted to bless the water in conformity with the tradition of the Church. I observe that some Priests or Religious, who perform the blessing, do not conduct this ritual to bless the water. Either they make an impromptu prayer or they just fill up Holy Water container without making a prayer! Does the ordinary water added to the remaining Holy Water in the container make it blessed? Here, I observe a strain between conviction and consistency in the practice originating within the institution!

I also observe that some people who take Holy Water do not deposit money to pay for the bottles. They probably consider blessed articles from the Church as a gift from God and, hence, free. I also observe that there are others who deposit more money than required. These others probably wish to support the Oratory through additional donations. I observe that some Hindus, in groups, take Holy Water with a lot of consideration and piety; they chant a prayer while performing the practice. There are others who perform the practice on their parents' request or urging. For some actors, the practice holds lot of religious significance and personal conviction, but for others it is just a communitarian practice with no personal sincerity.

Practice and its impacts - The practice involves specific elements. An employee of the Oratory stocks empty bottles in a room near the Blessing Office. As and when required, a Religious at the Blessing Office makes the empty Holy Water bottles available to pilgrims and visitors, and a Priest, also at the Blessing Office, replenishes Holy Water container and blesses the water. Some pilgrims drink Holy Water, but others apply it on themselves, making a sign of the Cross. I discern an act of faith in the practice of taking Holy Water from the Oratory. In Catholic tradition, Holy Water is used to purify the self, evoking the act of Baptism that confirms one Christian. Through the practice, the actor establishes a link with the Divine and with other actors of the same practice.

4.2.2. History and aspects of the practice (What)

The practice at the Oratory has existed since its founding by Saint Brother André, who used Holy Water to bless the people who visited him. But the roots of the practice dates back to the origins of the Church and the sacrament of Baptism. The Baptism by John the Baptist is more in-line with repentance and conversion. The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the usage of water from the Jordan gives a new meaning for the usage of water in Christianity.

At the Oratory, the practice is infused with considerable piety. Whereas Holy Water symbolizes Baptism for Christians, it is not associated with religious initiation for Hindus. Holy Water does seem to play an important role in the religious rituals and practices of Hindus. I observe people

of all cultures and religious backgrounds performing the practice, and mainly Asians, Hispanics, and Africans among the young actors.

4.2.3. Intended uses of Holy Water (Why)

In general, Holy Water is used at the Oratory for the following purposes:

Blessing people - During Easter Vigil, water is blessed by the presiding Priest and sprinkled on people gathered for the occasion. Throughout the Easter season, the ritual of sprinkling Holy Water on people is repeated during the Penitential Rite at the start of Mass. Every Catholic Church has a fountain of Holy Water at its entrance. At the Oratory, I notice that some people, who know the Catholic tradition, deep their fingers in the fountain and make a sign of the Cross on their foreheads, while others, who do not seem to be Catholics, use Holy Water with other gestures. The latter either appear to imitate Catholics or seem to use Holy Water in their native religious traditions – they do not make a sign of the Cross but make a similar gesture.

Blessing objects - Holy Water is commonly used for blessing individuals, religious articles, houses, cars and other worldly objects. In the Catholic tradition, using articles that have been so blessed provides their owners a sense of security.

Consuming- I see that some people, both Christians and non-Christians, drink Holy Water at the Oratory. In informal conversations with individual pilgrims, I learned that some of them take Holy Water home to drink or to cook food.



Figure 4: Holy Water bottle with the explanation of blessing

4.2.4. Pattern of availability and use (When)

Holy Water is available for use from 9:30 AM to 5:15 PM on weekdays and from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM on weekends. Although it is available throughout the year, there are fewer people engaged in the practice during winter, restricted to locals from Montreal or habitual visitors to the Oratory. The Oratory is busy in summer with thousands of pilgrims and visitors, many of whom perform the practice. While the usage of Holy Water is a historical practice in the Church and not new to the Oratory, the practice among Hindus at the Oratory is a growing trend due to the increase in the number of Hindu visitors to the Oratory, coinciding with the immigration of larger number of Hindus to Canada.

The distribution of bottles for Holy Water, a comparatively recent practice, facilitates the use of Holy Water by more visitors. Though Holy Water is available at no cost, each bottle costs one

dollar, an increase from the 50 cents per bottle in 2013. The rise in cost may have helped the institution, but it does not seem to have affected the practice. However, some people seem to avoid paying for the bottles, especially children accompanying their parents.

4.2.5. Milieu of the practice – its strengths and limits (Where)

The practice takes place in a religious and spiritual setting, and is surrounded by a socio-cultural environment. The practice extends beyond the implicit traditions of the Church. The Blessing Office and the main entrance are micro-environments of the practice, within the Oratory, to which visitors have unrestricted access. Conversely, Queen Mary Road, Mount Royal and Montreal are the macro-environments of the Oratory.

The strengths of the practice are: blessings sought from God; protection against evil; self-purification; experience of peace; self-satisfaction; association with other people performing the practice; empathy and care for the sick and suffering; and inter-religious harmony.

The limits of the practice are: concerns regarding the cleanliness of Holy Water and/or its container – doubting if the water is potable; apprehensions about apparent strangers to the faith performing the practice – unease about not knowing their religious backgrounds; feeling deprived of larger bottles of Holy Water; unsure if a priest actually blesses Holy Water; and unaware of the significance of Holy Water in the Catholic tradition.

4.2.6. Modes of communication in the practice (How)

The characteristic modes of operation and participation are charismatic, democratic and communitarian. In the case of Hindus, the practice is a family affair; even though only one member performs it, the entire family bears witness with reverence. Often, parents permit their children to take the water while they observe with piety, and, at other times, parents take Holy Water and offer it to their children. Interestingly, communal participation appears to be part of a family's pilgrimage to the Oratory.

I notice the gestures that Hindus make while using Holy Water. There is a charismatic aspect in their practice: a small prayer or a gesture of piety. They sprinkle few drops of Holy Water on their head, forehead, eyes and face. Some also drink Holy Water. These customs or traditions seem to be symbolic, but they indicate a belief system. Hindus seem to communicate with their God or with themselves while performing the practice. Frequently, I hear them speak in Tamil, an ancient language of Southern India and Sri Lanka. Their utterances are mainly about God's grace, healing, and purification. Holy Water seems to bring them renewed vigour. Their piety during the practice is remarkable. Verbal and non-verbal communications of the Hindu pilgrims reveal the extent of their belief in the use of Holy Water from a renowned site of pilgrimage. It also speaks about the broadmindedness of Hindus in performing such a practice at a sacred location maintained by Christians.

4.3. Values behind the practice of the use of Holy Water

Hindus consider the practice of the use of Holy Water in high esteem. Holy Water seems to carry more significance than any other item from the Oratory. The Hindu pilgrims performing the practice may not be aware of the teachings of the Church, even though the practice, at the Oratory, is founded on it. Hindus receive the Holy Water with respect for God and the Oratory; their devotion in performing the practice plays a significant role in the entire process.

I notice that the religious atmosphere at the Oratory facilitates the Hindus to accept its Holy Water, since Hindus associate Holy Water with sacred spaces. They probably do not assign the same significance to Holy Water as Christians do, since they do not make the Christian association between Baptism and Holy Water. Rather, they probably associate the Holy Water with *tīrtha* – water sanctified during a *pūjā* (a prayer ritual in a Hindu temple) – imbibed by Hindu devotees. They commonly consider that receiving Holy Water, sanctified by a priest, bestows a blessing upon them. This implies that the practice is connected to God and human beings. Hence, there is a link between the following elements in the use of Holy Water by the Hindus: prayer; *pūjā*; blessing; water; *tīrtha*; temple; church; money; offering; workers; priests; Hindus.

4.3.1. Explicit and implicit objectives of the practice

The objectives are defined in terms of the institutional policies of the Oratory that are aligned with Catholic tradition. The use of Holy Water is one among many devotional practices available at the Oratory to pilgrims to aid them in their journey of faith.

The explicit objective of the use of Holy Water is to help Catholics in their journey of faith. However, Hindus visiting the Oratory also seem to imitate the Catholics in this practice. In both cases, there is a spiritual yearning to purify oneself with Holy Water. The ritual of using water involves initiative and action on the part of the one who practices it.

The implicit objective of the practice is to maintain a relation with God. For the Hindus, Holy Water in the Church is probably equivalent to the *tīrtha* they receive in a Hindu temple. While performing the practice some Hindus, perhaps, make a connection between Holy Water and the water of the Ganges considered sacred. Hindus seek Holy Water sanctified in a ritual. It becomes a tangible bond between God and people.

4.3.2. Attribution of meaning to the use of Holy Water

As per Catholic theology, a prayer of blessing transforms ordinary water into Holy Water by bestowing “sacredness” to the water. However, the sacredness may not be appreciated by all people as different actors may have varying belief systems. It appears that Hindus consider *tīrtha* from a temple sacred, and that sprinkling it over their body or imbibing it bestows them with healing. However, it is important to note that the rituals of blessing the water in a Hindu temple and at the Oratory are different. For some Hindus, the water from the Oratory is pure and potable, but for others it is not. I overhear their comments doubting the cleanliness of the Holy Water. Some Hindus seem to attribute the Holy Water with healing powers, while others consider it ordinary water taken from a sacred place. Some Hindus assign it spiritual value, while others ascribe a magical power to the Holy Water. Some Hindus want to carry it home to share it with others or to use it themselves for various purposes. This gesture extends the element of sacredness from the Oratory to Hindu households.

4.3.3. Explanation of personal involvement in the practice

As mentioned earlier, the actors of the practice include certain employees of the Oratory, Priests, Religious, volunteers, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims.

Most of the employees keep their distance from the practice. They merely do their job of arranging the bottles, and do not assign any religious connotation to the practice. They may even not be aware that there are Hindus who partake of the Holy Water. They do not directly involve themselves in the practice. They only feel obliged to do their tasks as part of their job.

The Priests and Religious perform their duties as ministers of the Church. Most of them know that Hindus, and people belonging to other religious traditions, observe the practice. While some of them seem to ignore it, others are concerned how to accommodate the Hindus. They may not find it easy to enter into a dialogue with people of other religious traditions in the Blessing Office, since there are many people waiting to meet with a Priest or Religious. However, I do observe that some Priests attempting a dialogue are unsure about the gestures Hindus make while carrying out the practice.

The primary duty of volunteers is to guide the pilgrims to the Office of Blessing where the Holy Water is available. Only some volunteers observe the practice. They take initiative to enter into a dialogue with the Hindus engaged in the practice. The informal communications result in cursory exchanges on Christian and Hindu religious practices. However, there is no profound conversation exploring the historical and theological significance of the practice.

Christians are concerned about the practice and, I assume, many of them are aware of the importance of the practice. It is interesting to observe parents and grandparents explaining to their accompanying children or grandchildren the importance of the practice. Here a dialogue is established to understand the practice.

Some Hindus act out the practice in the same manner as they do in Hindu Temples. Water is a familiar element in Hindu tradition. Hindus may not be surprised to encounter Holy Water at the

Oratory, since they are accustomed to the use of water in their *pūjās*. They are happy to use Holy Water at the Oratory while recalling the use of blessed water in Hindu Temples.

A few Sikhs also perform the practice at the Oratory. The Golden Temple – the most sacred Sikh institution, located in the heart of the city of Amritsar, in the state of Punjab, in the north-west of India – is surrounded by a sacred tank of water. Cleansing oneself in this basin of the Golden Temple is a customary ritual of Sikhs. There are tales of people getting healed by the cleansing. Interestingly, the Oratory is probably analogous to the Golden Temple for Sikhs living in Canada. The practice of the use of Holy Water may not be a novelty for Sikhs, since they probably attribute it to similar rituals rooted in their religious traditions.

I have not observed Muslims, visiting the Oratory, taking part in the practice of the use of Holy Water. They simply stroll around touring the site. They appear to refrain from or have misgivings about any religious practice at the Oratory.

The Oratory is one of the most famous places in Canada for tourists to visit. They seem to be impressed by the scale of the structure and its architecture. While some of them join guided tours organized by the Oratory, others go on self-guided tours. Most of them do not seem to be interested in the religious practices at the Oratory. However, some of them peep into the Office of Blessing, curious about the on-going practices.

As a Priest at the Oratory, I am a leading actor in the practice, too. As needed, I refill the Holy Water container and bless the water. I bless individuals, houses, vehicles and religious articles with Holy Water, performing as per the tradition and customs of the Catholic Church.

4.3.4. Explanation of collective involvement in the practice

Different groups engage in the practice of the use of Holy Water. I categorize the major groups as families with children, the sick and their chaperons, students and their teachers, and pilgrims with accompanying pastors or pastoral agents. I observe casual conversations between different groups engaged in the practice. The practice of the use of Holy Water at the Oratory unites

people from diverse backgrounds and with varied intentions. The relationship between the groups seems transitory due to their infrequent encounters at the Oratory.

People carrying Holy Water to their households expand the sphere of collective becoming. The primary actor who takes Holy Water possibly influences others around him. For instance, someone who brings Holy Water to a sick person in his house may establish a spiritual connection between the Oratory, the household with the sick person, and the person carrying the Holy Water.

When Holy Water is sprinkled on people during the liturgical celebration at the Oratory, an implicit relation is established among the people assembled. A shared prayer is recited by the Priest and all the people gathered are blessed in the name God.

4.3.5. Realities and challenges of group dynamics

Different groups come to the Oratory with various intentions. I note that some groups are pilgrims, and others are tourists with or without guides. The pilgrim groups participate in religious activities at the Oratory, whereas the tourist groups visit for sight-seeing only. While tourists want to mainly visit the Oratory in a systematic manner, starting at the entrance through to the exit, most pilgrims go right to the major locations of devotional practices. However, the fundamental reality is that both pilgrims and tourists come to the Oratory because it is a special place where they can find peace and contentment. Everyone seems to receive some spiritual or physical fulfillment by visiting the Oratory.

The Oratory is a landmark and symbol of Québec. It is an imposing structure in Montréal. The tourists and pilgrims visiting Montreal are naturally attracted to the Oratory due to its fame and splendour. Some visitors enjoy the art and architecture of the Oratory. They take time to visit the museum situated on the fifth floor. Others visit the beautiful gardens of the Oratory, especially during summer; the garden of the Way of the Cross is a favoured place for many.

Students from different schools may not take part in any religious activity at the Oratory and may only visit the Museum. The cribs from various parts of the world exhibited in the Oratory Museum attract many children, especially during Christmas time.³⁹⁹

Guided tours are offered in the Oratory at an affordable cost. Some tour groups come with their own guides who are familiar with the Oratory. Children's groups come with teachers who may be familiar with the place. The Oratory provides them with a guide on request. Pilgrim groups organized from different Parishes are led by their pastoral agents. Many of them have previously visited the Oratory. Those who visit in families seem to be less organized as they are not familiar with the site. They stroll around, take time to participate in different religious activities, and spend time in silence.

Every group coming to the Oratory seems to experience a certain level of contentment. I observe a lot of interaction among group members. Some people appear to wonder at the beauty of the place and others express their joy of seeing thousands of people praying together. Some local visitors are amazed by the diversity of international visitors at the Oratory.

The presence of the different groups makes the Oratory a "global village." I observe the intermingling of languages, cultures, customs, religious denominations, and traditions.

However, I also notice certain challenges in group dynamics at the Oratory. As mentioned earlier, while some people participate in religious practices, others merely observe. For instance, some people wish to attend a Mass and others do not prefer to. This is also evident among people of the same group: some members of the group want to take part in a religious practice, while others do not. This leads to internal strain in the group. Here, group leader plays a big role in keeping the group united, by proposing activities that appeal to all. In a group, people can have diverse convictions and beliefs. As per their beliefs, some people pay attention to the group leader or guide, though others do not. Those who have faith in religious matters appear to listen to the guide while he narrates the story of the faith of Brother André to them.

³⁹⁹ During Christmas time, we observe many organized tours to the Oratory Museum from different schools as part of their educational tour. Many families come to the Museum during Holiday Season.

At times, I witness conflicts of interest arising between pilgrims and tourists. Pilgrims are convinced of their belief. They want the Church aspect of the Oratory to be predominant. Tourists, on the other hand, are not concerned about religious practices because they are not practicing Christians. For example, while the pilgrims prefer to maintain silence at the different sites of the Oratory, the tourists may not acknowledge and respect this attitude. This fact calls for a certain degree of discipline on the part of the groups and respect for each other.

Formal and informal communications take place between different group members – some seem to get into short dialogues about the religious practices and other activities of the Oratory; while some make positive comments, others complain; a few appreciate the Oratory's grandeur and others wonder at its beauty; whereas several visitors dwell upon their faith in God, a few question God's existence. People watch others performing various religious practices. Some are inspired by others' practices and wonder if they could also observe the same practice. I notice some people trying to imitate others in their religious practices, like climbing steps on their knees or lighting candles in the votive chapel. In all these observations, I discern a personal initiative and effort to adapt to the ambiance of the Oratory and benefit from it.

Most groups choose to specifically visit the Oratory. The motivation and interest among the group members seems to be unambiguous. They receive religious, cultural and artistic gains in their visits to the Oratory. However, several Hindus groups, who come to the Oratory, seem to also take an interest in visiting the *Murugan* temple in Montreal.⁴⁰⁰ They create a link between the Oratory and the Hindu temple. In my interviews with Hindus, I will clarify the value that Hindus attribute to their visit to these two religious sites.

4.3.6. Elaboration of ethics

Taking part in the various religious practices at the Oratory brings a new meaning to the lives of Hindus pilgrims. Some of them convey their happiness, at the Blessing Office, by writing small notes and others express it orally. They seem to enjoy peace, serenity, and inner joy at the

⁴⁰⁰ The *Murugan* temple in Montreal was constructed in 1995. The famous temple feast is normally held in the month of October. Hindus visit Montreal in large numbers to take part in the temple feast.

Oratory. Personal and communitarian dimensions play big roles in the elaboration of ethics of the practice. Selfish and self-centered attitudes wither away as they become cognizant of others, whether family members or nearby strangers. For example, a candle is lit for someone who is sick and suffering, and the person lighting the candle prays for the suffering other. The use of Holy Water leads people to self-purification. When they carry Holy Water home, they think of others in need of blessings and cleansing.

From the institution's perspective, it wants to continue an ancient and valuable tradition of the Catholic Church. The staffs at the Oratory encourage the visitor's use of Holy Water. Holy Water reminds the Priests and Religious of their Baptism in water. I suggest that the effect of the use of Holy Water can be found in the increasing faith of the actors in the practice.

4.3.7. Elaboration of the Divine

Hindus consider the Holy Water as a sacred object. The symbolism of Holy Water reminds Hindus that the Divine is at their side. They feel connected to the Divine through their gestures and prayers while using Holy Water. I have observed that their conversation while using Holy Water is all about God. The unseen God becomes closer to them through their religious practice.

Some Hindus also speak about certain effects of Holy Water. They seem to have experienced healing through the usage of Holy Water. I did not hear Hindus attributing the healing to any particular God. It is important to underline that the usage of Holy Water is not limited in itself but makes Hindus think about their connectedness to the Divine.

4.4. Structural components of the practice of the lighting of candles

The practice of the lighting of candles or lamps is symbolic, not only in Christianity but also in other religious traditions. The concept of good and evil is associated with the notion of light and darkness, respectively. Christianity symbolizes light with Jesus, since he himself said that "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the

light of life” (Jn 8: 12). In the Actes of the Apostles we read “that the Christ would suffer and that the first to rise from the dead, and should show light to the people and to the Gentiles” (Actes 26: 23). The resurrection of Jesus is considered to be a proof for all Christians that he takes away all darkness and fills us with light. The prolog of John presents Jesus as the true light. “The Word was the true light that enlightens every man” (Jn 1: 9).

Saint Joseph’s Oratory has a votive chapel with ten thousand candles. Constructed in 1946, this chapel fosters the devotion of pilgrims. There are various icons of Saint Joseph, of different significance, installed in the chapel where candles can be lit to pay homage and for thanksgiving. I witness many visitors and pilgrims, despite their religious backgrounds, lighting candles and spending some time in the votive chapel in serenity and prayer.

4.4.1. Principal actors in the practice with their characteristics and relations (Who)

I note that the principal actors in the practice of the lighting of candle are Christians and Hindus, Priests, Religious and the employees of the Oratory, and visitors from all walks of life. There is no age restriction to take part in lighting the candles. Though the practice is performed mainly by adults, I do notice some adults encouraging their children to also participate. As in the practice of the use of Holy Water, I notice that immigrant parents come to engage in the practice accompanied by first-generation, North American-born children. The children do not take part in the practice with as much devotion as their parents.

I see that most of the Christians, as in the use of Holy Water, light candles without hesitation; they probably know the significance of the practice. Some Hindus seem to be at ease while lighting a candle in the votive chapel, while others prefer to observe and pray. The intention of Hindus lighting candles is not evident. In my interviews with the Hindus, I aim to query them on their intention.

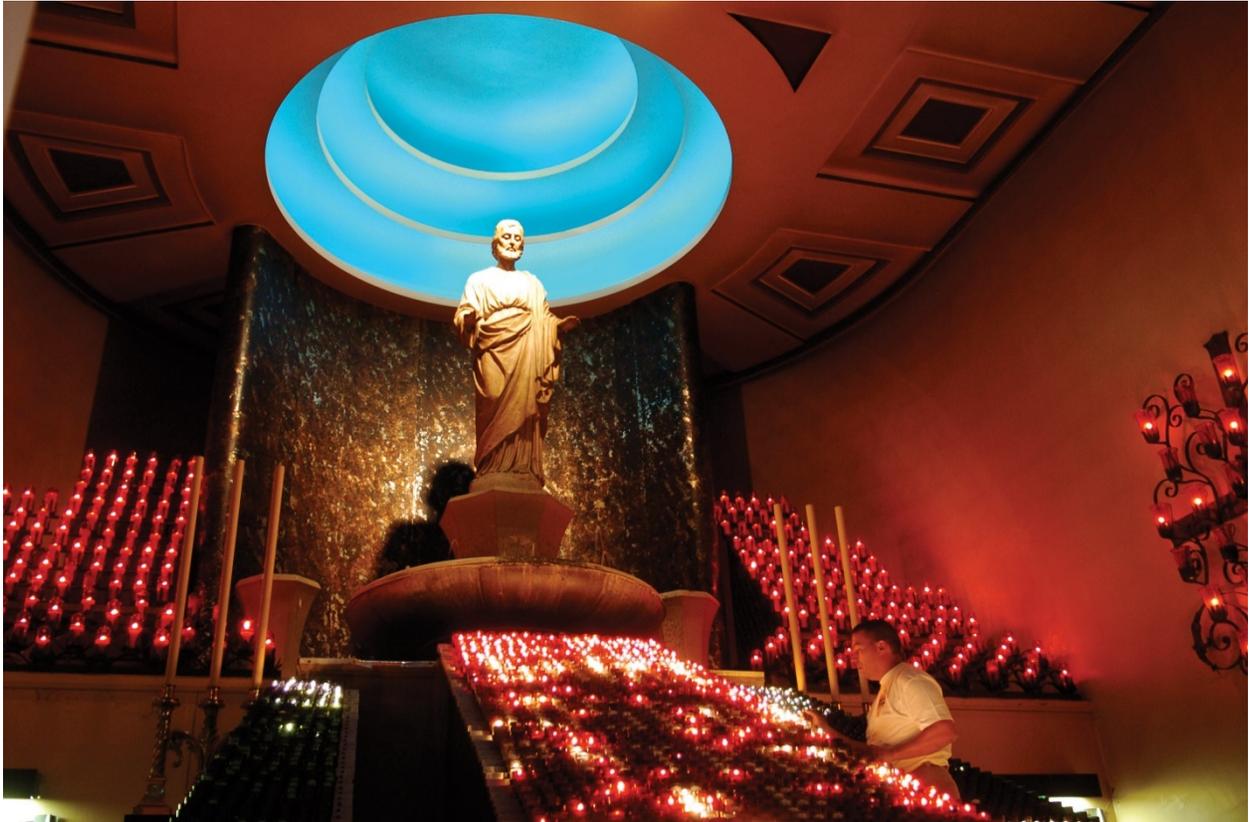


Figure 5: Main statue of Saint Joseph in the votive Chapel

I note good relationships between the various actors. The Hindus either recite the prayer proposed by the Oratory or engage in their own prayers in silence. Some of them make physical gestures while performing the practice.

4.4.2. History and aspects of the practice of the lighting of candles (What)

The lighting of the Paschal candle during Easter Vigil is common in Christian tradition, dating back to the fourth century. A new fire is lit and blessed at the Easter Vigil. A Priest sanctifies the Paschal candle with the following words: “Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha, and the Omega, all time belong to him and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age and forever. Amen.” Then the priest inserts five grains of incense into the candle in the form of a cross while praying “By his holy and glorious wounds, may Christ the Lord guard us and protect us. Amen.” The Priest, next, lights the candle from the new fire by uttering these words “May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts

and minds.” In Christian tradition, the Paschal candle is symbolic of the Risen Christ. Every time a candle is lit in a Church, Christians are reminded of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. They are called to be united with Christ.⁴⁰¹

The practice at the Oratory goes in line with the tradition of Catholic Church. In the initial years, only Catholics took part in the practice at the Oratory. Now, with visitors from all religious traditions, the practice is done by all people who wish to.

4.4.3. Intended use of candles (Why)

Hindus at the Oratory seemed to light candles for various reasons. I observed that some of them recited prayers while lighting candles. Some had to do thanksgiving to God while others had favours to ask. Christians have a long tradition of lighting candles in the Church.

We read in the book of Genesis that “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God divided light from the darkness” (Gn 1: 3-4). The Creator separated light from darkness. Light is used to describe God’s gift. In the book of Psalms, we read “many keep saying, ‘who will put happiness before our eyes? Let the light of your face shine on us” (Ps 4: 6). Again we read, “Yahweh is my light and my salvation whom should I fear? Yahweh is the fortress of my life, whom should I dread?” (Ps 27: 1). It’s repeated strongly in these words “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Ps 119: 105). Hence, light is used to recognize the presence of the Lord in the daily life of people.

The messianic proclamation of the Old Testament was fulfilled in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ ministry in Galilee fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah. “The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who lived in a country of shadow dark as death a light has dawned” (Mt 4: 16). Jesus himself is the light that illuminates the world so that people will walk in his light. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus illuminates the path of people as Zacharia’s hymn elaborates: “Because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has

⁴⁰¹ Congrégation pour le culte divin, *Missel Romain*, Paris, Desclée-Mame, 1977, p. 230-242. See also: A. Adam, *La liturgie aujourd’hui. Précis de liturgie catholique*, Luxembourg, Brepols, 1989, p. 243-244.

come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lc 1: 78-79). In the words of Simeon, Jesus became the light that enlightened the Gentiles and resulted in the salvation of Israel: “Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel” (Lk 2: 29-32).

The practice of lighting of candles is associated with the events after the death of Jesus. The angel who announced the resurrection of Jesus was surrounded by a bright light. “And suddenly there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow” (Mt 28: 2-3). The mission of Jesus continues with his disciples. They were called to spread the message of light to all people.

Religious worship and liturgy use the symbolism of light by the practice of lighting candles. This practice is seen both in the Old Testament and New Testament. “You will order the Israelites to bring you pure pounded olive oil for the light and to keep a lamp burning all the time” (Ex 27: 20). In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that the lights were lit even in prayer rooms. “A number of lamps were lit in the upstairs room where we were assembled” (Acts 20: 8). This tradition continues in our times where we light candles to initiate prayers in various communities of worship. The practice of the lighting of candles in the Church is symbolic, but it is based on the teachings in the Bible. Light invades darkness and death. Light brings hope in people’s lives.

4.4.4. Pattern of availability and use of candles (When)

The practice of the lighting of candles takes place at Saint Joseph’s Oratory from 6:00 AM to 9:00 PM. People light candles either on a regular basis or occasionally. While some pilgrims participate in the Sacraments of Mass and Confession, others come to the Oratory solely to light candles. I note that more visitors light candles on Sundays than any other day of the week.

I see more Hindus engaged in the practice during weekday-evening hours. They seem to come specifically to light candles and for no other practice. However, they perform the practice at all hours on weekends. Hindus who visit on weekdays seem to be residents of Montreal, whereas those who come during the weekends appear to be visitors from other regions of Canada.



Figure 6: One of the icons of Saint Joseph in the votive Chapel

There are candles that cost \$2, \$5 or \$10, depending on the size of the candle. The prices were hiked in 2013 from \$1, \$2 and \$5, respectively, which resulted in a drop in the practice for a while as many people resisted lighting candles. Over time, people previously engaged in the practice got accustomed to the new price and resumed their practice. However, I do observe some participants not contributing money.

4.4.5. Milieu of the practice with its strengths and limits (Where)

The practice of lighting candles, performed with devotion by pilgrims and other visitors, takes place in the religious ambiance of the votive chapel of the Oratory, which contains ten thousand candles. A life-size statue of Saint Joseph is situated at the centre of the chapel and eight icons of Saint Joseph placed throughout the chapel with various intentions of prayers.



Figure 7: A scene from the practice of the lighting of candles

Since there are no restrictions on participation, people belonging to various religious traditions take part in the practice. As seen in the above figure, a large number of people perform the practice while others look on. A few of the spectators also, eventually, take part in the practice, inspired by the peaceful and inviting ambiance. Some parents encourage their children to participate. Here the votive chapel is a micro-milieu, while the macro-milieu extends beyond the campus of the Oratory.

The strength of the practice is the participation by people from all over the world. The practice does not discriminate between religions, castes, or creeds. Though the practice at the Oratory has its origins in Christianity, it is not limited to Christians. The practice brings warmth and fragrance to the chapel as many candles burn at the same time, especially during winter. It is pleasant to observe people taking part in the practice with plenty of faith and devotion. The practice seems to bring happiness to the pilgrims.

The limitation of the practice is associated with the institution. Some people do not pay for the candles as they wrongly assume that everything available at the Oratory is free. When there is a rush of people performing the practice, the Oratory staffs is under pressure to clean the candlesticks and replace new candles. Staffs working on weekends or feast days have more work than those who work on weekdays or regular days. This leads to some uneasiness among the employees. The practice could also be considered limited in the pilgrims' expectations of witnessing miracles by just participating in it.

4.4.6. Modality of communication in the practice (How)

A written prayer in French and English is placed in front of every icon of Saint Joseph in the votive chapel.⁴⁰² I observe that some Hindus take time to read one of the prayers after having lit a candle, whereas others spontaneously utter some other prayer or perform some gestures. They speak in Tamil, Hindi or English. Some pray in silence and others recite prayers in a soft voice. Some Hindus place their palms over the flame and then cover their eyes with the palms. It is interesting to note the freedom with which the practice is done in an atmosphere of peace and serenity. Strangers, coming from various parts of the world, collectively take part in the same practice. The practice seems to hold a lot of significance for Hindus, which they perform with considerable enthusiasm.

4.5. Values sustaining the practice of lighting candles at the Oratory

I observe Hindus lighting candles with respect. It appears that the practice brings them joy. Many also perform the practice as families. I notice the communitarian element in the practice. After

⁴⁰² There are eight functions of Saint Joseph depicted in the votive chapel: Joseph, Solace in Suffering; Joseph, Model of Labourers; Joseph, Mainstay of Families; Joseph, Hope of the Sick; Joseph, Patron Saint of the Dying; Joseph, Protector of the Church; Joseph, Terror of Demons; and, Joseph, Guardian of the Pure in Heart. The functions are related to the daily life of people. For example, the first prayer on Joseph, Solace of Suffering, is: "Compassionate Joseph, one with us in our human condition, together with Mary and Jesus you experience exile, hunger and violence. Refusing vengeance, you choose mercy. Your forgiveness breaks the circle of violence. Through your goodness, God's hope for humanity is preserved. Joy is yours, for the Kingdom of God is your inheritance. Open our compassionate hands in times of war, famine and exile. Keep us from developing a victim's mentality, and make our pain a source of growth. Sustain us in fulfilling our responsibility of cultivating inner peace, joy and serenity. In your wisdom, counsel us to close all doors to bitterness, so that, watched over by God, we may dance for joy. Amen". Similarly, all the remaining seven prayers are also connected to people's situations in life.

lighting the candles, some Hindus kneel down to pay their respects to God. I wonder if Hindus pray through the intercession of Saint Joseph when they kneel down in front of his icon. It will be interesting to know if they solicit anything from Saint Joseph in return for their participation in the practice. Through my interviews with Hindus, I hope to form a better understanding of their expectations.

4.5.1. Explicit and implicit objectives of the practice

The explicit objective of the practice is in line with Catholic tradition. The biblical importance of the symbolism of light is known to Catholics. Light eliminates darkness. Jesus is the light that takes away darkness from humans. Therefore, the practice helps Christians in their faith journey. Hindus, probably, take part in the practice of lighting candles oblivious to its biblical importance. While some may imitate Christians, others possibly associate the lighting of candles at the Oratory with the lighting of lamps in Hindu Temples.

The implicit objective of the practice is aligned with the theology of darkness and light. Light brings hope in the lives of pilgrims and their dependants. For Hindus, lit candles in the Church could be perceived as *dīpa* or lamps lit in Temples. There is also *Dīpāvali*, the festival of light in Hinduism. Some Hindus may even associate the presence of thousands of lamps in a chapel to the festival of light.

4.5.2. Attribution of meaning to the lighting of candles

The material realities in the practice are: candles, money, votive chapel where the practice is done, statues and icons of Saint Joseph. The proposed prayer after lighting the candle adds significance to the practice. The movement of people in the votive chapel is another important reality of the practice. It brings life in the chapel as people see each other and they get inspired by the practice of the other. The movement also signifies that pilgrim people are always on a journey. Hindus, apparently, respect the sanctity of the chapel and of the practice. Hindus probably assign significance to the lighting of candles, with their special intentions and prayers, to obtain favours from preferred deities and Gods.

4.5.3. Personal involvement in the practice of the lighting of candles

The principal actors in the practice are: employees of the Oratory, Priests, Religious, volunteers, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and all other visitors who participate in it.

Among the employees of the Oratory, the sacristans manage the availability of candles. They order candles from suppliers and set them in front of the various icons and statues of Saint Joseph. They replace used-up candles and collect money deposited in the box. It is merely a job for some of them, with no religious connotation. Some of the sacristans are not even Catholics.

I observe that some Priests and Religious perform the practice. They probably light candles for themselves, or on behalf of people unable to come to the Oratory. Some Priests and Religious linger in the votive chapel to observe other people taking part in the practice. They may also spontaneously pray for the people performing the practice. Some perhaps wonder why Hindus and persons of other religious traditions take part in the practice.

Several volunteers' light candles and pray during breaks in their work. They also guide pilgrims and visitors when in need. I notice them also studying pilgrims lighting candles. A few Hindus get into conversations with the volunteers, enquiring about the Oratory and the importance of the number of candles in the votive chapel.

Most Christians seem to be aware of the practice's meaning. They appear to be reminded of Jesus, the Light of the World. Many of them read the prayer and meditate. Some of them witness people from other religious traditions lighting candles, and they seem to be taken aback at the diversity of religions mingling in the votive chapel. Most of them are accommodative and amenable to the new realities.

Numerous Hindu pilgrims seem to visit the chapel. A good number of them come with their families. A few parents help their children carry out the practice. They appear to perform the practice in a Hindu way, just as at their homes or in Temples. I observe them taking part in the practice with considerable reverence and devotion. Some of them are moved to tears and some spend time in silent prayer.

There are also a good number of Sikhs who light candles. They, too, involve their families in the practice. The Oratory seems to be a symbolic place for Sikhs. They appear to give importance to its sanctity and acceptance of all.

I do not observe Muslims performing the practice. However, I do notice the presence of some Muslims spectators of the practice in the votive chapel.

4.5.4. Collective involvement in the practice of the lighting of candles

There is a group dynamism observed in the practice of the lighting of candles. Families get united as parents and children take part in the practice together. Sick and suffering people are comforted when they see others like them also performing the practice. Pilgrims get nourished in their community spirit. People belonging to different religious traditions observe one another lighting candles and get inspired to take part in the practice themselves. A sense of spiritual harmony is created in the votive chapel. Mutual respect and a friendly atmosphere seem to uplift the place.

4.5.5. Elaboration of ethics of the practice of lighting candles

Many people revitalize their faith journey by performing religious practices at the Oratory. They seem to acquire new energy and positive spirit through silent prayers at the Oratory. Others find new energy by just observing people taking part in religious practices, especially the lighting of candles. Several express their joy in written comments and a few others gesture their contentment. Remarkably, they greet complete strangers visiting the Oratory.

I notice that people, who appear sad on arrival at the Oratory, seem to have become happy while departing; the visit has had a transforming effect on them. Some people console the sick and suffering and a few pray for them. The lighting of a candle for someone who cannot come to the Oratory shows that the flame of fraternity and love extends to all. This raises the possibility of going beyond one's own limited world to form a community of love and peace.

4.5.6. Elaboration of the Divine

The statue and the icons of Saint Joseph at the venue of the practice have great importance. I wonder if the figure of Saint Joseph plays a significant role in the lives of Hindus. When they light a candle at the Oratory, just as they do in Temples, their intention may be to please a deity according to traditions. There are many *avatāras* in Hinduism. Hindus can devote themselves to personal deities. In Hindu Temples or households, some religious practices are performed to entreat a deity for various favours. Thus, the intention of lighting candles may go beyond the explicit practice. There is a higher value attributed to the practice of lighting candles that persuades Hindus to be in constant touch with the Divine, and to receive all the favours that they believe they need in their life.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed in detail about the observance of two principal religious practices at Saint Joseph's Oratory. The use of Holy Water and the lighting of candles by Hindus form captivating occurrences in the Christian milieu of worship at the Oratory. Following the praxeological method of observation, I have studied the structural components and the values behind the practices. The sharing of the sacred place and the collective performance of the practices by Hindus and Christians is an eye-opener. The non-verbal communications and spontaneous gestures of Hindus and Christians enrich the scene. The institutional set up of the Oratory has minimal interference in the regular religious practices of faith-oriented people, even of non-Christian religious traditions. Christians perform the two practices as they probably know the significance of the practices in the Christian tradition. Hindus possibly take part in the two practices with their distinct motives and intentions. The field studies and interviews in this research will clarify some of the intentions and significances Hindus attach to the practices. The institutional set up of the Oratory guarantees the material aspects of the practices. The institution takes measures to ensure that it does not incur financial loss in the practices. The periodical hike in the price for candles and Holy Water bottles is one such step.

The individual and communitarian values of the practices are noteworthy. The mutual nourishment of individuals and families gives rise to a shared hope for a multi-religious and a

multiethnic place. The message of peace and serenity observed in the milieu of the practices encourages further exploration of the practices.

CHAPTER 5

5. ANALYSIS OF THE VISITS AND PRACTICES OF HINDUS AT THE ORATORY

5.1. Introduction

Praxeological analysis gives importance for human experience. Analysis is done based on what is observed and heard. The beginning point is human experience. Analysis verifies if the observed and heard facts are true. As I have done interviews with Hindus, I present some pertinent elements drawn from my interviews for further analysis of the visits and practices of Hindus at the Oratory. Every interview was a case study for me. Observing the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory and sitting with them to listen to what they do at the Oratory made me better understand them. Some of them also told me why they did what they did at the Oratory. Hindus who frequently go to the Oratory have certain ways of doing things and they have their positive and negative experiences. I analyze the general devotional practices of Hindus at the Oratory and underline the strengths and limitations of the practices.

In my interviews with Hindus and educators in faith, I maintained a certain amount of flexibility. This approach gave them enough freedom to express how they wanted. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, I used *QDA Miner*, a qualitative data analysis software package, for coding and analyzing the transcribed interviews. *QDA Miner* gave me higher level of precision in bringing out results in chart forms. I wanted to project the result in simple but in clear manner. I did the report writing after analyzing the transcribed data.

I have not organized all the analysed data and results under this chapter. As per pertinence, I used them in different chapters that follow. The qualitative interviews dealt with many elements and I found that the results of some elements were better to be in the sub-titles of interpretation. Some results of the analysis of the interviews with the educators in faith were used in chapter 9 that deals with the intervention and chapter 10 that deals with the prospective.

5.2. Visits of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

As already indicated in my observations, many Hindus regularly visit the Oratory. Several take part in different religious activities, and others are accompanying family members. While some arrive with specific prayer intentions, others visit as part of a regular routine.

5.2.1. Frequency of visits to the Oratory

As seen in the chart below⁴⁰³, among the interviewees, a majority of Hindus (6) come to the Oratory at least once a week, several (4) visit more than twice a year, a few (3) visit every day and the rest (2) come once a month.

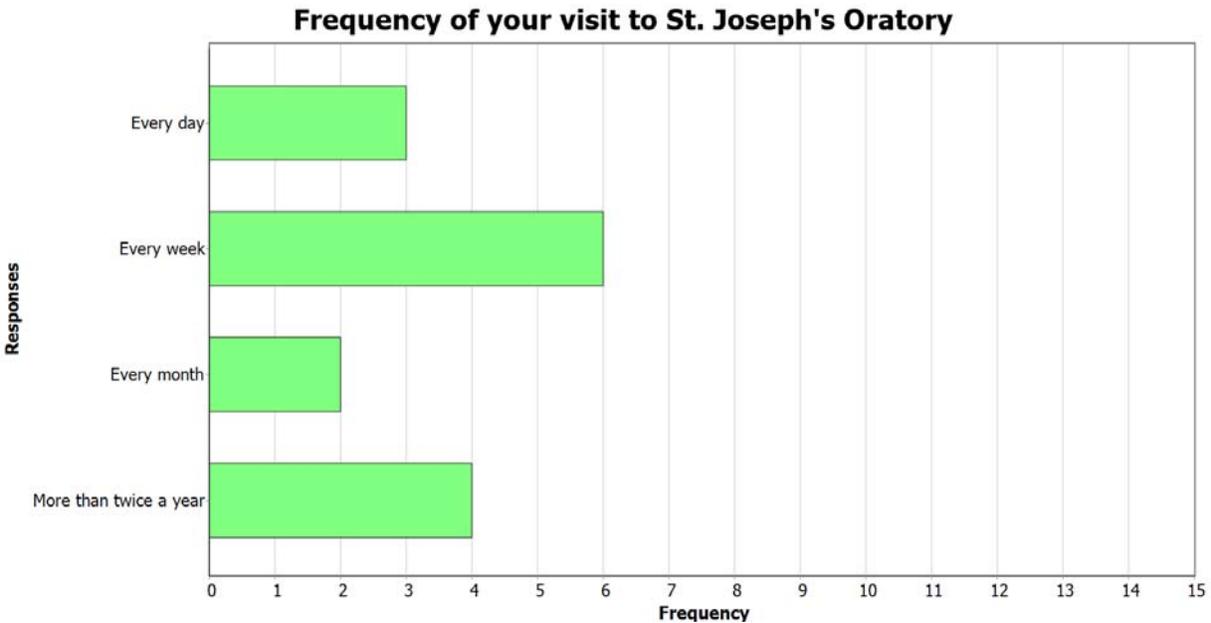


Figure 8: Frequency of the visit of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

Those who come every day or once a week are likely to participate regularly in various religious activities. As like Christians who go to the Church on every Sunday, Hindus seem to come on a regular basis to Saint Joseph's Oratory for performing their devotions.

⁴⁰³ I made the charts through the analysis tool QDA Miner (Qualitative Data Analysis). All charts in this study are multiple response charts. Some interviewees had more than one answer for the same question. As the interviews were qualitative, every question had a lengthy response. As I am unable to integrate all the lengthy responses in this paper, I have chosen the key words to synchronize the data, create charts and analyze the trend.

5.2.2. Hindus' expectations of the Oratory

Hindus do not have any expectations of the Oratory's administration. During the interviews with Hindus, I asked: *What are your expectations when you come to Saint Joseph's Oratory?* Although a majority of them replied that they did not expect anything from the Oratory, they indicated that they did receive whatever they had asked for at the Oratory. Vinesh said, "When you come to an important Church, you have that subconscious feeling – your mind wants. Something that you want, you ask for it. Brother André's tomb is here. Being in a holy place, you ask certain things." Reshma believed that she had received blessings from the Oratory as he said, "Blessing is the best thing that we receive here. I have no special expectation." Kannan declared that he had received all that he had wished for. He had also prayed for others. "I asked for a job and I got it. Whatever I ask, I get. Sometimes I pray for people who come and cry here. I pray for others. I see people who cry here. I think of them and ask God to help them. I feel sad when people cry. My heart is open towards them." Sangita had obtained peace at the Oratory. "I want to get peace. And I get it."

Manikkam, Aparna, Maheshwari and Kalyani just said that they did not expect anything from the Oratory, but did not elaborate further.

Nathan held that he had received miracles at the Oratory: "I get a lot of miracles. Whatever I ask, I get. I pray and God hears my prayer. In 1997, my wife came with problems in her passport. But, through my prayer, we got all things cleared. We had no problems of immigration." Kavita noted that he liked to spend time at the Oratory: "I do not have any expectations. I just want to spend some time here, praying and touching the statues." Kapil assigned importance to maintaining a religious atmosphere at the Oratory: "I don't expect anything. As long as it's going in a religious way, it's ok for me. I am happy when it is done in a religious way. It's a Church. The Church should be religious. I belong to another religion, but I respect the way people do things here. The religious atmosphere should be maintained." Pushpa also believed that she had received many blessings at the Oratory as his prayers were heard by God: "I do my prayers and other practices. I ask many favours from God. When my husband and my brother were sick in Germany, I used to come and pray here. I have received many blessings from here. I have

experienced healing for them. My prayers are heard by God. I am happy.” Kumari had received peace: “To live peacefully is my aim. I receive peace at the Oratory. I have no other expectations.” Bhavani came to pray at the Oratory: “I just want to come and pray. I am a Hindu so I don’t know many things in the Church. Sometimes, I write down my prayers and put it there. I also put some two dollars there at the candle place.” Shivani acknowledged the respect that she got from the people working at the Oratory. “I have no expectation. Sometimes, the door is closed at 9 PM and they even open it for me. People here know me, even the security. They respect me.”

The chart below shows the spread of responses of the Hindu interviewees. Some of them (5) expressed their desire to receive a God-experience at the Oratory. While a few wanted the Oratory to be maintained as a place of prayer, others prayed to God for favours, or expected to receive healing, peace, and blessings.

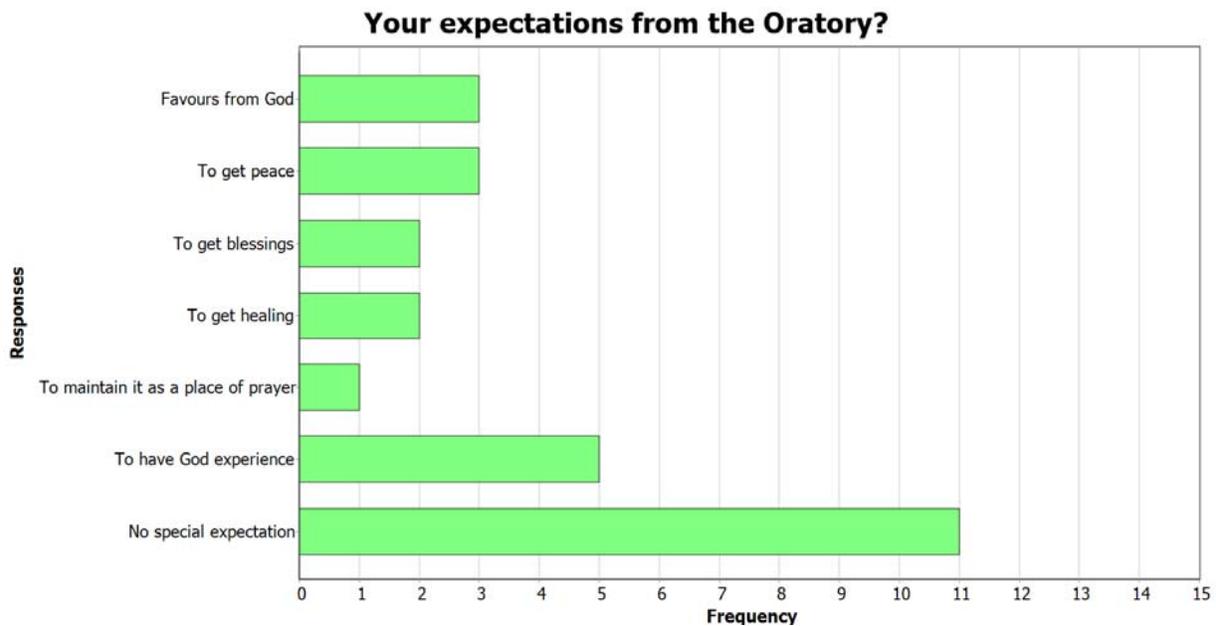


Figure 9: Expectations of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

In general, Hindus respect the milieu of the Church, and do not expect the Church to specifically cater to their religious practices. They walk into the Oratory as free people with no ties to the place. However, at the same time, they wish this location to remain a place of God bringing peace to all.

5.2.3. Gains from the Oratory

Though Hindus do not expect to receive much from the Oratory, nevertheless they appear to gain a lot visiting the Oratory. In the interviews, I posed the question: *What do you receive through your visit at Saint Joseph's Oratory?* Vinesh responded, "It's a very peaceful place. I get peace of mind. Coming from a country where there is persecution, it's a blessing for me to be here. You come here and it makes a lot of difference. I feel so happy. I have the freedom of religion." Reshma believed that she had gotten lot of graces: "I receive many graces. I get all that I ask." Kannan had an experience of peace at the Oratory: "When I come here I feel happy. I have more freedom. I have peace; I have inner peace." Sangita also had a similar experience of peace: "I get peace. I am happy."

Manikkam was more expressive as he added that he received Jesus: "I receive Jesus by coming here to the Oratory. I go for the Mass. Jesus comes to me. I receive the Word. I get a message every day. I learn to live by the Word. The world has a lot of problems. The Word helps me to be good. The prayers and songs help me to be good." Notably, Manikkam often participated in the religious activities conducted at the Oratory.

While Nathan maintained that he received peace and miracles, Aparna appeared to receive peace alone. Aparna narrated her misery: "My son is paralyzed since last eleven years. I have more faith in medicine than God. There is no treatment for him. His spinal cord is affected. That's why I wonder if God is punishing me. If so, why him and not me? He suffers; chest down – paralyzed. He is alone. He is doing fifth year residence. Once a month, I go there and do some grocery for him...If God is so good and powerful, then why should there be suffering? Why should my son be on the wheel chair? Initially when it (when the person got paralysed) happened to him, they (the family members of the interviewee) went to Saint Joseph. They lighted a candle and he opened his eyes. What is most important for me is the action of human beings. The people who are taking care of my son in difficult situation are godly like Mother Teresa of Calcutta."

Kavita replied that she got many favours from the Oratory: "I get a lot of favours from here. I pray the same thing in the Oratory and in Hindu temple. After coming to the Church, I can feel

that something is happening to me. The statues are special. My nerves go up while touching them.” Similarly, the ninth interviewee also responded having received favours from the Oratory: “I came here seven Tuesdays, and I got a good job. I wanted to come here for nine Tuesdays and make a prayer. Before completing nine Tuesdays I got a job. I believe in the power of God – if I ask anything here, I get it. I don’t ask unnecessary things, but if I ask I get it – I just come and thank God for all things. I believe in the power of God.”

Pushpa and Maheshwari stated that they received peace of mind at the Oratory. Pushpa said, “I receive peace of mind. My life goes good. When life is going good, I still come to thank God. I ask the Lord to be with me. I ask him to help us. I am always grateful to God. I have a lot of faith. Sometimes, I put on my light at home and do some prayers.” Maheshwari said, “I receive peace. Sometimes, I do come here when I am stressed, frustrated. I reflect on myself; I feel that it’s a good environment to bring everything into perspective.”

Kumari also stressed on receiving peace: “It is the peace of mind and bliss that I get. Definitely, that is what it is. I believe in miracles; when somebody is sick and doctors cannot do anything, there is still hope if we have faith in God. There are many stories about the sufferings of people and how they survive with miracles. There are many people who get healing. God is alive – there is something that science cannot explain; there is a Divine power above all.” Bhavani also noted having experienced peace at the Oratory: “I receive peace. I don’t know, may be, I ask God so many things. I pray for the people.”

Shivani expressed her concerns for her family. She comes to the Oratory recognizing the goodness of God: “I prayed for my family, for my children’s studies. I pray for many things. When we pray, we are a good family. My children are good...God protects us. Even in times of sickness of my husband, I prayed and he is healed. We get blessings. We come to thank God. I light a candle to thank God for blessings.” Kalyani indicated that he got his stress relieved at the Oratory. “It’s like a mental purification, satisfaction. Like sometimes, when you walk into the Oratory, you are stressed and when you walk out of the Church, you are no more stressed. I am

more relaxed. If I come alone I spend around half-an-hour. When I come with family, I spend one or two hours. I come with my father and he is slow. I go around visiting the Church.”

The chart below shows that Hindus receive many things from the Oratory. A majority of them (10) experience peace of mind through their visits, and others (5) experience happiness. Some receive blessings and graces, and miracles and healings. They feel free to walk into the Christian place of worship, but many do not attend Masses.

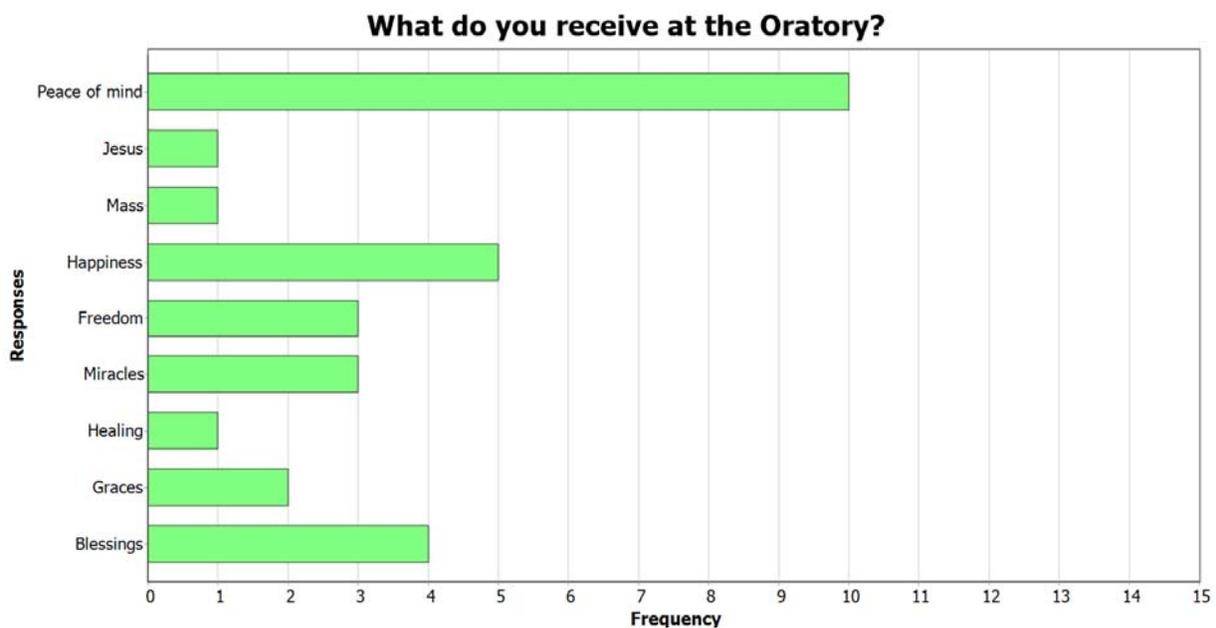


Figure 10: Gains of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

As mentioned earlier, the Oratory caters to the freedom of people of all religious backgrounds, with no restrictions. With the knowledge that Jesus came to establish peace on earth for all people, the Oratory Administration will want to maintain this Christian place as one where all people experience peace and happiness.

5.2.4. Positive and negative experiences of Hindus

Most Hindus (11) have positive experiences at the Oratory. They admire the place and the people working in the sacred place. Hindus consider the Oratory as a place of worship and thanksgiving.

While visiting the Oratory, they lean more towards to their religious aspirations than touristic interests. They (8) point out that it is a place of religious harmony and peace. They sense a God-experience at the Oratory.

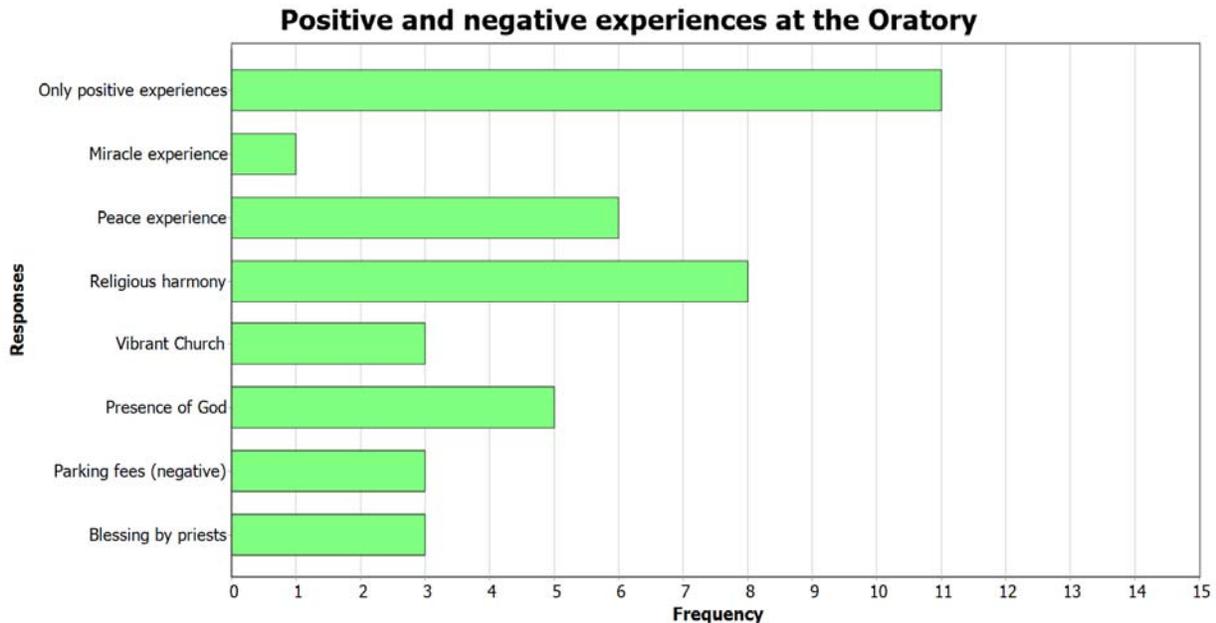


Figure 11: Positive and negative experiences of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

Since three years, the Oratory has been charging an entrance fee of \$5 per vehicle, which was previously free. The chart above points out that the only negative experience of Hindus is in connection with the new policy of parking fees. Visitors who regularly come for their devotions at the Oratory find it a hassle to be stopped at the entrance. The Oratory authority states that the new policy is only aimed at tourists and non-religious visitors, and that it is not intended for those who come to perform religious activities. However, the staff at the entrance often find it difficult to distinguish between pilgrims and tourists.

5.2.5. Reception at the Oratory

The satisfaction level of Hindus visiting the Oratory is high. Almost all of them (14) agree that they are received well at the Oratory. Hindus do not face any trouble or tension performing their religious practices.

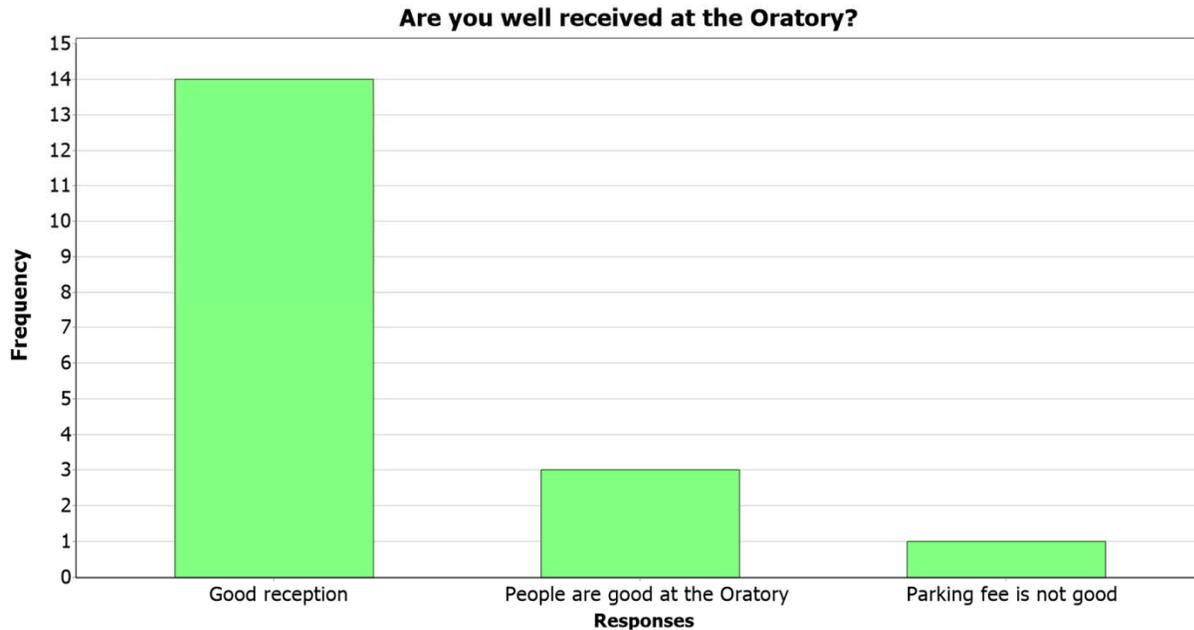


Figure 12: Reception of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

The chart above shows the high level of satisfaction among visiting Hindus. They are of the opinion that people at the Oratory are excellent and welcoming. Fourteen out of fifteen interviewees had positive views on the “exceptional” quality of reception at the Oratory.

5.3. Religious practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph’s Oratory

Hindus participate in many religious activities at the Oratory. The interviews reveal that physical gestures are important for Hindus while performing their devotions to God.

5.3.1. General devotional practices of Hindus at the Oratory

The chart below gives a general picture of the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory. Prayer is the key word in their devotional practices. A few Hindus (12) alluded to their prayer without mentioning any recipient God, while some (5) among them indicated that they pray to Jesus. The interviews revealed that some (5) talked to Saint Joseph and others (3) talked to Saint Brother André. There is a need to tell “someone” about the goings-on in their life; the “someone” is often a significant sacred figure like Jesus, Saint Joseph or Saint Brother André.

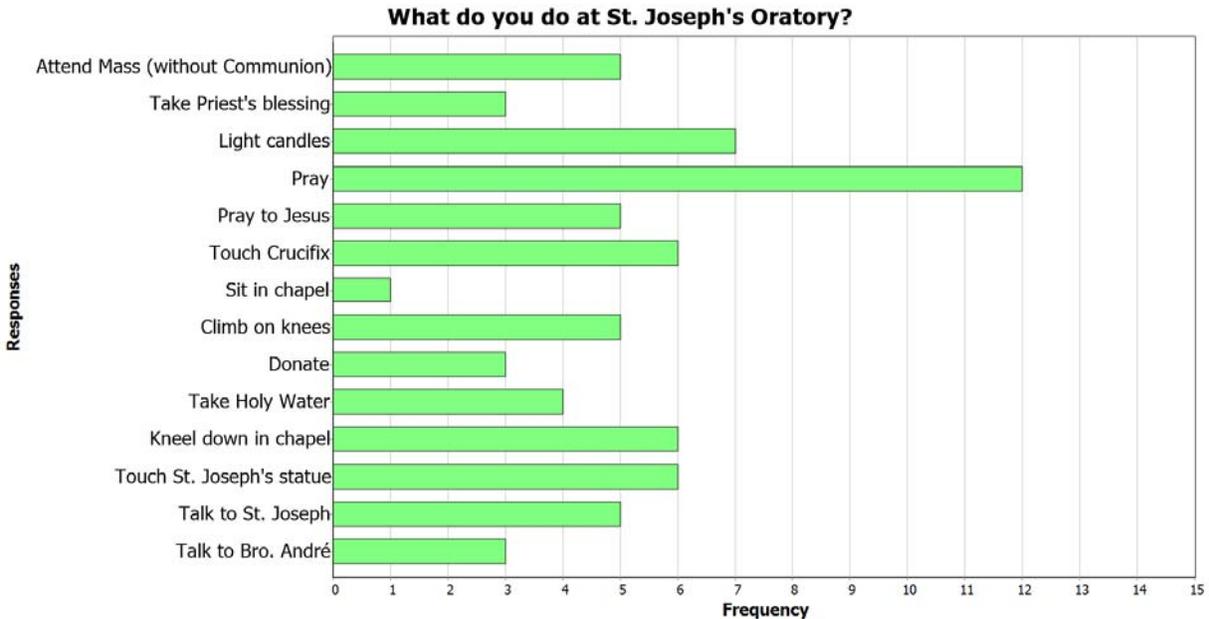


Figure 13: Religious practices of Hindus at Saint Joseph's Oratory

In their practices, Hindus touch the Crucifix in the Crypt and the statue of Saint Joseph. They visit the tomb of Brother André and climb the steps of the Oratory on their knees. They also kneel down in the chapel; take Holy Water and light candles. A few attend Mass but do not receive Communion. Listening to prayers and songs in any religious celebration brings them solace and spiritual nourishment. It is also interesting to note that a few of them go to the Blessing Office to receive blessings from a Priest. Some remember to donate a small amount for the services at the Oratory.

Praying, touching and kneeling derive from Hindu religious practices. Hindus consider that the well-being of their inner spirit is linked to the physical discipline in their religious practices. Regular prayer and kneeling down show the rigour in their religious practices. Lighting candles and touching the Crucifix and the statue of Saint Joseph illustrate the intensity of devotion in Hindus who come to the Oratory.

5.3.2. Hindu practice of *bhakti*

Most Hindu mythologies are built upon the premise of *bhakti*, *pūjā* (worship), *shuddhi* or *saucha* (purity, cleanliness), *dharma* (morality), *karma* (action), and *tapas* (austerity, discipline). *Bhakti* can be more than just “being religious”, since it can lead to *moksha* (liberation) from life’s addictions and even from the cycle of *samsāra* (rebirth). *Bhakti* has always involved a loving relationship with the divine.⁴⁰⁴ *Bhakti* is an ultimate expression of love and adoration centered upon the Divine. It is the primary engine of all spiritual progress, and of all spiritual practices undertaken to enhance the spiritual growth of a person.⁴⁰⁵

The *bhakti* movement gained momentum when the *Bhagavadgītā*⁴⁰⁶ gave it a prominent place with its focus on the adoration of Vishnu, in the person of Krishna. *Bhakti* helped devotees worship the Divine directly, and to experience His unconditional love. Different forms of *bhakti* such as the recognition of God’s involvement in human affairs, prayer (*nivedana*), symbolic offering (*archana*), and sweet recollections (*smarana*) play a role in everyday life. It is the notion of *shraddha* (faith), the companion concept of *bhakti*, which became a religious prerequisite of all forms of Hinduism.⁴⁰⁷

I asked a general question to Hindus about their *bhakti* practice: *Do you practice bhakti?* As the term *bhakti* is too common in Hindu milieu, the response was general too. But through another question, *what do you do at Saint Joseph’s Oratory?* I got to know the devotional activities of

⁴⁰⁴ G. Williams, *Handbook of Hindu Mythology*, California, ABC-CLIO, 2003, p. 82.

⁴⁰⁵ W. J. Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 51; See also: Yogani, *Bhakti and Karma Yoga – The Science of Devotion and Liberation through action*, Nashville, Tennessee, AYP Publishing, 2008; R. Singh, *Bhakti and Philosophy*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2006, p. 3. 26; W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 51-52; K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 211-212; D. Dimitrova, *Religion in Literature and Film in South Asia*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 70; K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 220.

⁴⁰⁶ The *Bhagavadgītā*, the sixth book of the Mahābhārata, is set prior to the eighteen-day battle at Kurukshetra. The hopes of the Pandava faction rest mainly on the martial and powerful Arjuna, the third of the five brothers. However, at the beginning of *Bhagavadgītā* we find the hero disconsolate and unwilling to wage war against his own family members, the Kauravas. At this moment Krishna instructs Arjuna on *dharma* (order, righteousness), the *Bhagavadgītā* (God’s song). Though the initial intention of the discourse is to persuade Arjuna that waging war is not necessarily an evil act, the full treatise goes much beyond this initial thesis, developing into a full exposition of belief and practice that has an immeasurable influence on the formation of Hindu *Dharma*. Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 12 of *Bhagavadgītā* give emphasis on monotheism and devotion to God as a spiritual path. The final verse of Chapter 6 marks a dramatic turn in Krishna’s teaching as he introduces the idea of a Supreme Deity who creates and controls the world and is able to deliver those who are devoted to him. This is central to Hindu *dharma*.

⁴⁰⁷ R. Singh, p. 26, 76-77.

Hindus. The chart below shows that many Hindus (10) practice *bhakti*. Most of them (6) have personal devotional practices that they perform either in the Hindu temple, at home or in the Oratory. In my interviews, when asked if they practiced *bhakti*, many Hindus responded in the affirmative, but some of them identified their personal devotions as *bhakti*. According to Hindus, *bhakti* can be practiced in any location endowed with a hallowed atmosphere.



Figure 14: Hindu practice of *bhakti*

My interviews reveal that Hindus cherish devotional practices on their spiritual journey. They like to spend time in prayer and worship. They are religious and God fearing. Hindus like to please their Gods through *bhakti* practices.

5.3.3. *Bhakti* practice at Saint Joseph’s Oratory

An analysis of Hindu *bhakti* practices at the Oratory, as presented by the chart below, shows that a majority (12) of them perform religious practices during their visits. Although many Hindus did not directly indicate that they practiced *bhakti* at the Oratory, they did state that they considered the Oratory as a special place to conduct their religious practices. Some Hindus perform their Hindu prayers (2) and others participate in Christian prayers (5).

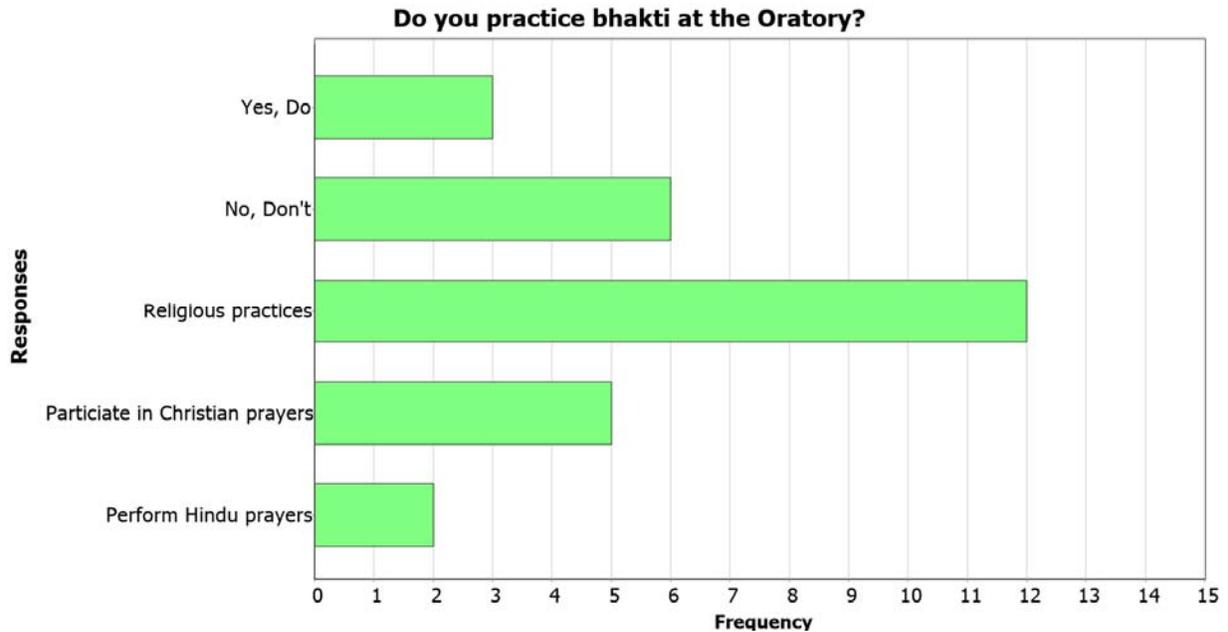


Figure 15: Hindu practice of *bhakti* at Saint Joseph's Oratory

The interviews informed me that many Hindus conducted religious practices at the Oratory that are aligned with their devotions and *bhakti*, only a few indicated that they performed actual *bhakti* practices at the Oratory, and a third participate in Christian prayers. I have already mentioned above the various religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory. Most of them are related to personal devotions or *bhakti*.

5.3.4. Practice of the lighting of candles at the Oratory

I already elaborated on my observations about the practice of lighting candles at the Oratory. Confirming my observations, the results of the analysis presented in the chart below show that most of the Hindus light candles at the Oratory.

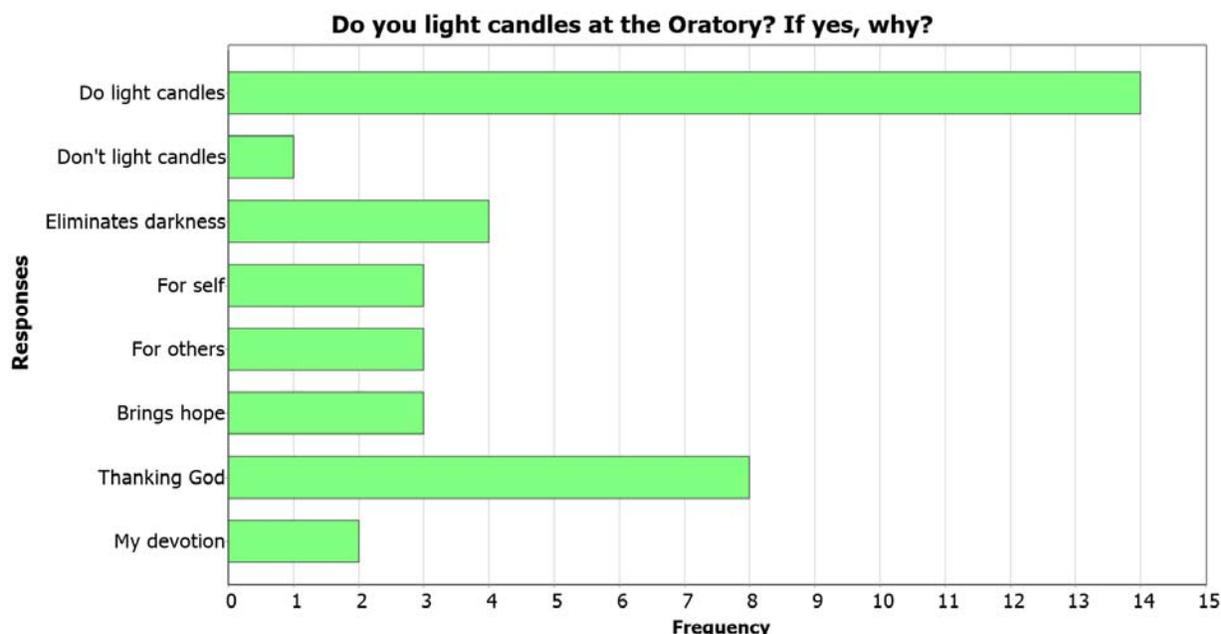


Figure 16: Hindu practice of the lighting of candles at Saint Joseph's Oratory

The practice of the lighting of candles is done to thank God for all the blessings received. Some Hindus consider light as a symbol of hope and that it removes darkness. A few of them light candles for other people who are sick and suffering or for those who are unable to come to the Oratory. Others light candles as part of their personal devotion.

My interviews with Hindus reveal that more than many of them (14) light candles, and more than half (8) do it to thank God. Hindus have a great sense of thanksgiving to God for any blessings they receive. The votive chapel of the Oratory is a conducive place for Hindus to perform their practice, due to its peaceful atmosphere and a sense of freedom, felt by people belonging to other religious traditions, in performing the religious practice.

5.3.5. Practice of the use of Holy Water

Another practice that I had observed at the Oratory was the use of Holy Water by Hindus. My interviews confirm that most of the Hindus take Holy Water from the Oratory and use it for various purposes. Many people use Holy Water to bless their houses and others use it to bless themselves. They sprinkle Holy Water on their forehead and body. While some of them drink

Holy Water, others make Hindu prayer gestures. Several Hindus have unwavering faith in the power of Holy Water since it is blessed by a Priest. They believe that the use of Holy Water purifies them and renews their life. The chart below reveals the responses of Hindus to the question: *Do you use Holy Water from the Oratory? Why?*



Figure 17: Hindu practice of the use of Holy Water from Saint Joseph's Oratory

My interviews reveal that many Hindus (12) take Holy Water from the Oratory. Over half of them (8) use Holy Water for blessing their houses. Close to half of Hindus (6) apply Holy Water on their body and over a quarter (4) drinks it. The major intent of the Holy Water is to protect and purify their lives. The faith orientation of Hindus is linked to the use of Holy Water.

5.4. Strengths and limitations of two practices

Self-purification has a greater value in the practice of the use of Holy Water. The desire to improve one's behavior motivates a person to partake of the Holy Water and to light candles. As many Hindus perform the practices at the Oratory, they create a community of pilgrims. Building a harmonious community is a strength which promotes peace in society. A thought, a word, a prayer done for someone who is unable to participate in the practice creates a brotherly bond in

charity; for instance, a person who takes part in the practice on behalf of the sick and suffering. Their choice of using Holy Water and lighting candles helps them stay connected to Saint Joseph, Saint Brother André and God. The transmission of faith is strength of the religious practices. The faith and devotion of Hindus, and their sharing of experiences with families and friends, inspire many people to discover the Oratory as a place of peace and harmony even for Hindus.

The attribution of magical powers to Holy Water is a limitation. The use of Holy Water and the practice of lighting candles does not bestow miraculous healing on anyone, however, faith in God can bring changes to people's lives. Hence, the Oratory should discourage Hindus from performing the religious practices if they assign magical powers to them.

5.5. Challenges in the use of Holy Water and the lighting of candles

Pilgrims do not have ultimate control over the practices of the use of Holy Water and the lighting of candles. For instance, Hindus and all other pilgrims have no control over the price hike of candles and Holy Water bottles. The Oratory does not consult pilgrims before making any decision that might affect them. In the interviews with Hindus, I got to know that many of them do not directly communicate with the Oratory Administration. They satisfy themselves with performing the practices for their personal, familial or communitarian benefit.

The Oratory does not conduct any objective evaluation in conjunction with the Hindu pilgrims. Christian pilgrims are more expressive with their comments and suggestions concerning any of the religious practices. They take their privileges and rights at the Oratory for granted as they feel that they belong. On the other hand, the Hindu pilgrims are not assertive as they believe, belonging to a different religious tradition, that it is not their place to comment. They satisfy themselves with the existing services provided at the Oratory, and do not demand for additional amenities. They are also unfamiliar with the organizational structure of the Oratory. In short, the Oratory Administration does not directly cater to the specific needs of Hindus.

5.6. Conclusion

From the observations and analyses in this chapter, I conclude that Hindus perform several devotions and religious practices at the Oratory during their regular visits. Although some Hindus avoid naming the religious practices *bhakti*, their devotions are, however, similar to it. Hindus like to visit the place they consider sacred. The religious practices attract them to the Oratory more than any other tourist attraction. Though they do not expect anything from the institution, they gain a lot through their visits and participation in the devotional activities. Hindus do not enter into direct conversations with the Oratory Administration but they gratify themselves by being in touch with the Priests and Religious at the Blessing Office, whom they greatly respect.

They do not limit themselves to the use of Holy Water and the lighting of candles at the Oratory; they also choose freely from many other practices. They respect Christian religious rituals and ceremonies. Some of them take part in certain liturgical celebrations, while others merely observe. They do not delve deep into the theological meaning of the religious celebrations but remain at the practical level, which seems to suffice for the spiritual growth in their journey of life. As they undergo Divine experiences in their lives, they also want to become agents of hope for all their family members. Hindus at the Oratory prove themselves to be peace-loving and community-oriented people.

CHAPTER 6

6. INTERPRETATION OF THE PRACTICES: FAITH AND TRANSMISSION

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will interpret the different Christian and Hindu perspectives of faith and transmission. Along with the theoretical framework of faith and transmission, I elaborate upon the results of my interviewees with Hindus and educators in faith. Interpreting the religious devotions of Hindus and educators in faith at the Oratory assures to be interesting. In the Catholic tradition, the liturgy and liturgical practices are part of the faith life. I will interpret how Hindus, as well as educators in faith, involve themselves in liturgical celebrations at the Oratory. I will also study the heritage, mission and engagement of the educators in faith who continue to transmit Christian faith at the Oratory.

The term faith has two distinct senses in Christian context. Firstly, it is applied objectively to the body of truth in the Creeds, in the definitions of accredited Councils, in the teachings of doctors and saints, and in the revelation contained in the Bible. It is founded on the teachings of Christ himself. Technically, it is known as “the faith believed in” (*fides quae creditur*). Secondly, there is a “subjective” faith that opposes the objective faith. It is the human response to Divine truth, inculcated in the Gospels. It is the childlike and trusting acceptance of the Kingdom and its demands, and known as “the faith whereby belief is reached” (*fides qua creditur*). Saint Augustin propagated a classic understanding of faith. For him, faith demanded an act of the will and was thus more than an intellectual notion. He defined it as “thinking with the giving of assent” (*cum assentione cogitare*). Peter Lombard explains it well by distinguishing its dual elements: “unformed faith” (*fides informis*) or pure intellectual assent to a proposition, and “faith formed by love” (*fides formata caritate*) or the developed faith.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁸ F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 595.

6.1.1. Perspectives of faith: Hindus and Christians

Wilfred Cantwell Smith is of the opinion that faith is something that goes beyond what is immediate, and for this reason it unifies the person. He illustrates two aspects of the personal sense of faith held by believers participating in cumulative traditions. First, the most profound subject matter for religious studies is the personal faith of individuals. Second, religious faith should be understood in the personal sense that individuals discover while participating in their external religious traditions. W.C. Smith recognizes personal faith as existential selfhood, and religious faith as existential selfhood induced by, and finding expression in, a religious tradition. Religious faith is the result of believers' existential interpretation of specific items in the diverse external cumulative traditions in which they participate.⁴⁰⁹ In either sense, there is an involvement of the person engaged in faith journey. This takes me to the point of W. Kasper where he argues "faith only exists as an action performed by a man who believes...The truth of faith can only be experienced in this personal commitment, in other words, in the act of faith."⁴¹⁰ The entire human existence is based on the fundamental act of faith which also reveals to us the meaning of all of reality.⁴¹¹ However, faith is not limited to only a single, unique mode of experience. The loss and destruction of religious faith for some people might be the liberation of faith from dogmatism for others. The diversity of faith experiences is today's reality. I agree with L. Freeman who affirms that "faith is human; it is the capacity of the human being for transcendence and love. It is not limited to a religion or even to a religious people as such."⁴¹²

Hindus openly display their faith without naming their supreme God. In my research, out of fifteen interviewees, fourteen gave a simple response that they believed in God. Only one said "yes and no" and entered into an elaborate explanation to underline that he did not have blind faith in God, but he preferred to have faith with reason. In modern times, many people would concur with this concept of faith in conjunction with reason. However, it is also important to note that there are elements that the human intellect cannot comprehend. For instance, there are supernatural elements attributed to the divine world, beyond human conception. In theological terms, it is called mystery.

⁴⁰⁹ W. C. Smith, *The faith of other men*, New York, Harper & Row, 1963, p. 26.

⁴¹⁰ W. Kasper, *An introduction to Christian faith*, New York, Paulist Press, 1980, p. 2, 73.

⁴¹¹ W. Kasper, 1980, p. 78.

⁴¹² L. Freeman, 2011, p. 98.

When the educators in faith, who transmit Christian faith at Saint Joseph’s Oratory, were asked the same question on their belief in God, they responded with conviction. As all of them have faith in God, they also recognized that it was a gift that they received from God himself. Unlike Hindus who did not name their supreme God, the educators in faith named their God, the Divine Trinity. The chart below shows that the educators in faith gave God a vital place in their lives.

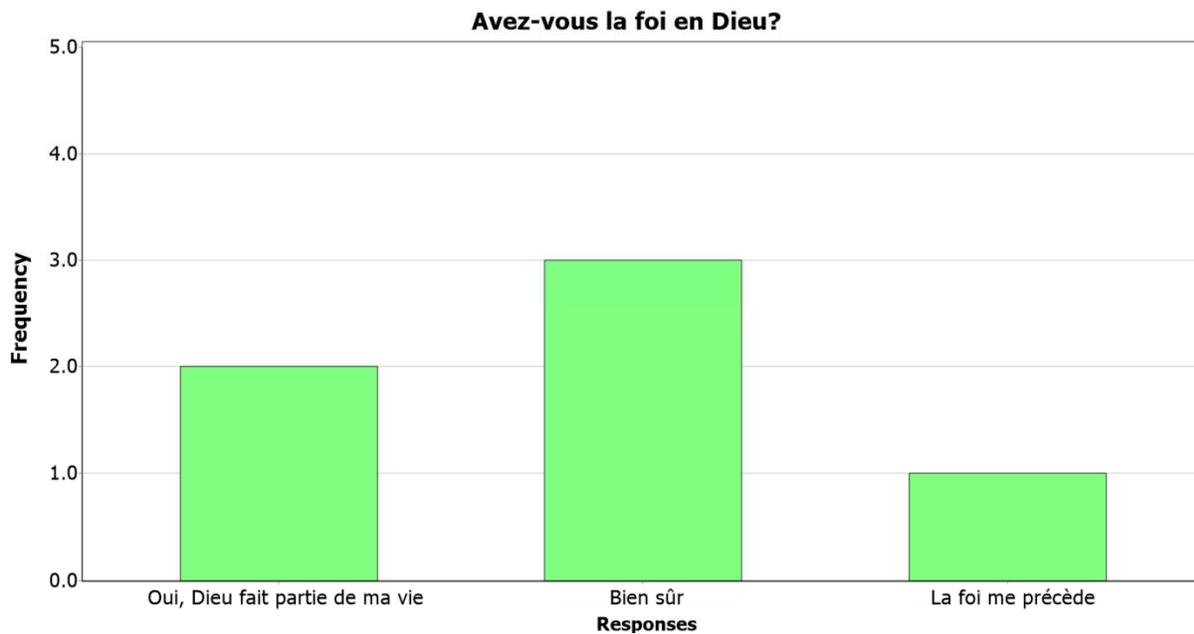


Figure 18: Educators in faith and their faith in God

My study reveals that all the five interviewees have faith in God. While three of them only responded that they had faith in God, two of them emphasised that God was part of their life. The educators in faith are convinced about their faith life.

6.1.2. Perspectives of transmission: Hindus and Christians

The verb transmit originates from Latin *transmittere* – *trans*: across and *mittere*: to send – which means “to send across”, “to pass on”, or “to transfer”. In the context of the study, it signifies “to convey from one person to another” or “to carry over from the past to the future”. Material artefacts, like goods and possessions, are transmitted from one location to another or from one generation to the next. Transmission also concerns intellectual knowledge, traditions, and

customs. Similarly, faith is also transmitted from one individual to the other, in the present or over time. All transmission processes reveal that we are not isolated human beings, but are connected to each other. J. Moingt rightly notes « le verbe transmettre évoque la *connexion* étroite de celui qui donne et de celui qui reçoit, comme lorsqu'on fait passer un objet de main en main, une rumeur de bouche à oreille, et la *continuité* réciproque entre l'obligation de donner et le droit de recevoir, comme lorsqu'un héritage passe de père en fils dans la même famille, chacun devant à son tour donner ce qu'il a reçu. »⁴¹³ The transmission of any sorts creates a connection and continuity between people over many generations.

The chart below reveals that many Hindus (12) transmit faith through different ways and in a nonspecific God. Some Hindus (6) share their God experience with other people, while others pray and do good deeds for people around them. Hindus are “God-centered” as well as “other-centered” people.

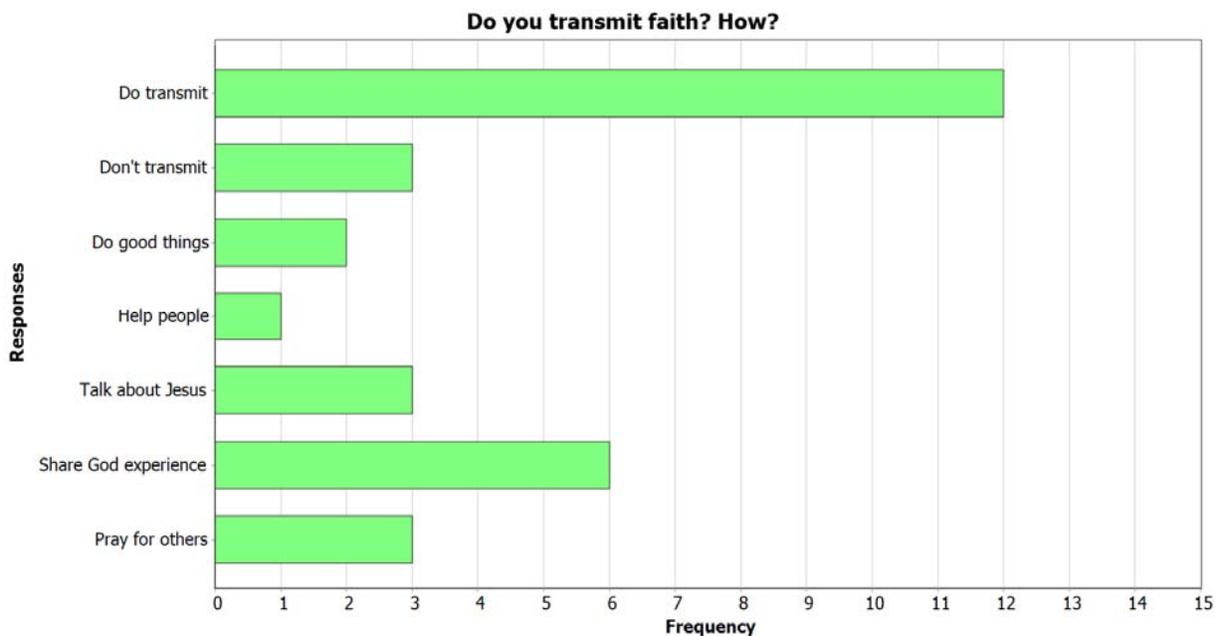


Figure 19: Transmission of faith by Hindus

The transmission of faith in Catholic tradition recalls the “traditional catechism” classes that every Catholic had to follow in Church or at school. In general, transmission of faith reveals the

⁴¹³ J. Moingt, *La transmission de la foi*, Paris, Fayard, 1976, p. 7-8.

dimension of *martyria* or service of the Word or the Prophetic Ministry. It also includes missionary efforts, liturgical preaching, and theological works. The catechetical mission is accomplished in the midst of *martyria*. Additionally, evangelization is considered a priority of the Church. In many documents, we see the binomial “evangelization and catechism.” In today’s context, this has evolved to “evangelization and mission.”⁴¹⁴ J.-M. Swerry underscores « penser la foi en termes de communication, c’est accepter la communication avec d’autres qui ne partagent pas la même foi: laisser la place à la pensée pour accéder à l’universel. »⁴¹⁵ After having studied the crisis of faith in individual, familial and societal life, he affirms that « il faut créer du langage neuf, inventer des paraboles, parler d’autre chose peut-être, parce que c’est un des aspects fondamentaux de la foi. C’est qui est premier, plutôt que la règle, c’est le don. »⁴¹⁶ Supporting J. Moingt, he affirms that in today’s post-modern setting we need to have a new language of faith to continue its transmission.⁴¹⁷ Educators in faith at the Oratory are supposed to be involved in the transmission of Christian faith.

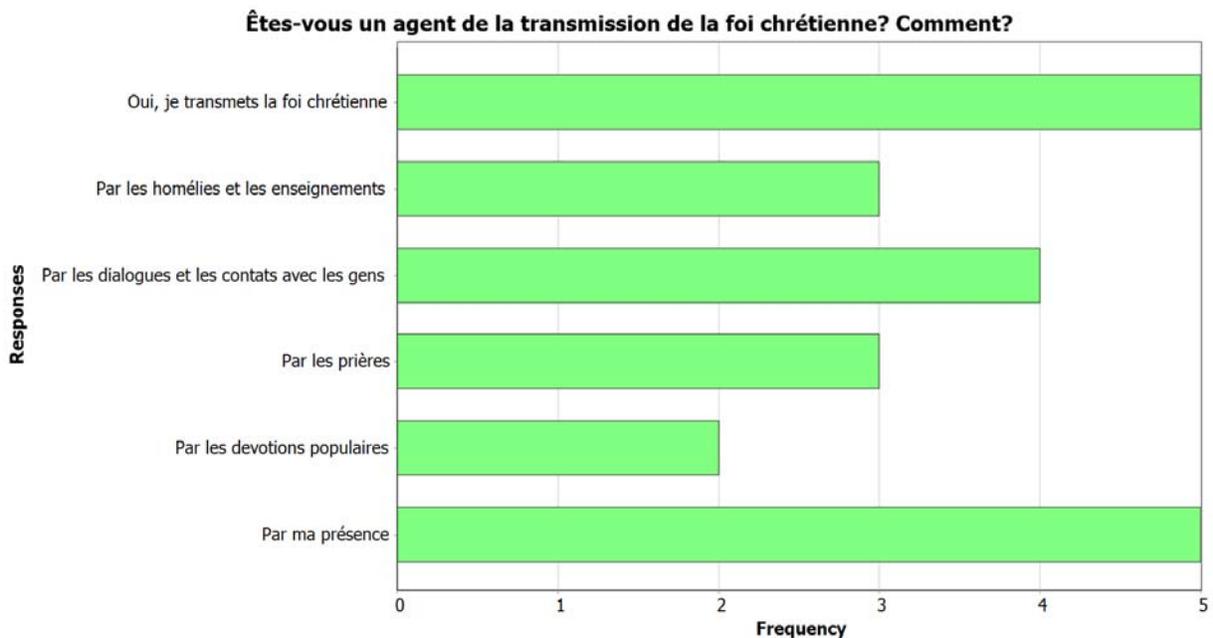


Figure 20: Transmission of Christian faith by the educators in faith

⁴¹⁴ E. Alberich, p. 90-91.

⁴¹⁵ J.-M. Swerry, *Transmettre la foi, est-ce possible? Histoire de l'Aumônerie catéchuménale 1971-1997*, Paris, Karthala, 2009, p. 201.

⁴¹⁶ J.-M. Swerry, p. 189.

⁴¹⁷ J.-M. Swerry, p. 167-199.

My research reveals that all the five educators concurred to having transmitted faith through their very presence at the Oratory. While some (4) of them transmit faith through dialogue and contact with pilgrims, others (3) do so through their homilies and teachings. While four of the five entered into dialogue with pilgrims and visitors, three prayed for them in their religious practices and liturgy.

6.1.3. Religious practices of the educators in faith

The educators in faith are involved in many religious practices in order to sustain their faith. At the Oratory, most of the educators in faith are Priests or Religious Brothers belonging to the same religious order. Though there are around 250 lay people employed at the Oratory, many of them are not directly involved in the transmission of faith.

As indicated in the chart below, most of the educators in faith perform their regular practices so as to sustain their faith. They do their daily prayers and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. They converse with God and participate in the Mass. Some of them spend time in silence and others do their spiritual or Bible reading. Some of them recite the Rosary and other devotional prayers.



Figure 21: Religious activities of the educators in faith to nourish their faith

My research reveals that all five interviewees pray regularly to sustain their faith. They did not specify the kind or duration of prayer. Three of them listened to the voice of the Spirit and acted as per their conscience with the intent of maintaining their faith, and two attended regular Mass and had dialogues with God. The interviews reveal that the educators in faith are ordinary people with a greater desire to grow close to God. The intensity of the practices among the interviewees varied. Regularity in their prayers helps the educators in faith share their prayer experiences with the pilgrims. Prayer is key to growing in faith as a seed is to grow into a fruit-producing tree.

6.1.4. Religious practices of Hindus to sustain faith

Hindus perform certain religious practices to sustain their faith, and, as confirmed in the chart below, they performed their regular prayers at the Oratory for the same. It is amazing to observe that some Hindus pray to Jesus, while others pray to a Hindu God. Some Hindus grow in faith by taking part in religious practices at the Oratory, while others go to Hindu Temples to perform Hindu religious practices. Participating in Mass helps some of them grow in faith. A few of them examine their conscience and fast as part of their faith life. Some Hindus cherish Christian ways of prayers and worship in their daily living. Although most of the Hindus at the Oratory are new immigrants to Montreal, they do not shy away from mingling with the local population. Some of the religious practices at the Oratory help Hindus integrate with the society where they live as they get accustomed to the local language and people.

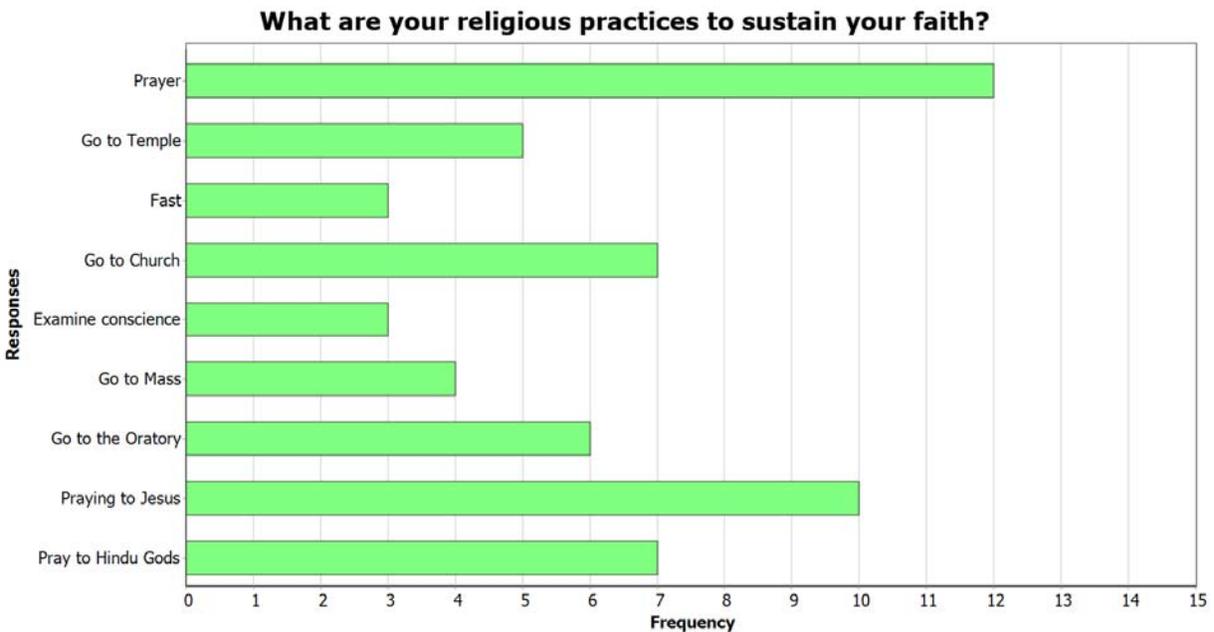


Figure 22: Religious practices of Hindus to sustain their faith

My study shows that many Hindus (12) did regular prayers in order to sustain their faith. Ten of them detailed their prayer habits by stating that they prayed to Jesus and six said that they visited the Oratory regularly. Going to Saint Joseph’s Oratory was part of the faith journey for six of them, and four participated in the Holy Eucharist. Putting together the five major practices of Hindus as indicated in the above figure, I can conclude that Hindus at the Oratory have a strong appreciation of Christian religious practices to sustain their faith.

6.2. Perspectives of Catholic liturgy and transmission of faith

The transmission of faith persists at the Oratory through liturgical celebrations. “*Leiturgia*”, the original Greek word for Liturgy, was used to mean “public work” of any kind, not only religious. But in the Septuagint, it is applied particularly to the services of the Temple. Today, the word liturgy refers mostly to all the prescribed services of the Church, including the canonical hours as compared to private devotion, and especially to the Eucharist as a chief act of public worship.⁴¹⁸ Paul De Clerck observes that the term liturgy could be confusing for ordinary people as it is

⁴¹⁸ F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 988.

often referred to the Eucharist.⁴¹⁹ He adds that the word liturgy seems to apply to clerics, and, hence, lay people distance themselves from liturgy.⁴²⁰ Catholic liturgy has its origin and development in the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Liturgy manifests in signs and brings about the sanctification of humankind. Through liturgy, Jesus Christ continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church.⁴²¹ Liturgy comprises of seven sacraments and many sacramental celebrations. The word sacrament derives from the Latin word “*sacramentum*” that is connected to the word “*mysterion*” in Greek which means “mystery.” The sacraments are the means by which Christians partake in the “mystery of Christ” (Col. 1: 26, Eph. 3: 4, 6: 19). The fundamental mystery is the Incarnation of Christ, and, depending on that, the Church, His Body, through which He communicates Himself to mankind. This communication is accomplished through certain symbolic acts interpreted by the Gospel and the response of faith.⁴²² Catholic Church proposes these celebrations in public and official manners that bring together all faithful people. Joseph Ratzinger says that the Church has the preoccupation of celebrating faith in the liturgy in a just, intelligent and worthy manner.⁴²³

The Sacramental are sacred signs with spiritual effects, resembling the Sacraments. They include a prayer accompanied by the sign of the cross and other signs. When the theology of the sacraments was defined and their number limited to seven in the 12th century, analogous religious practices, not considered to have been instituted by Christ, came to be known as “sacramental.” In contrast to the sacraments, which are held to convey grace primarily through the power of the rite itself (*ex opere operato*), sacramental do so *ex opere operantis ecclesiae*, that is through the intercession of the Church. Some are closely associated with sacraments (e.g. the blessing of baptismal water, holy oils, or the ring in marriage), and, through them, people are prepared to receive the principal fruit of the sacrament; through others (such as grace at meals or religious profession), various human activities are rendered holy.⁴²⁴

⁴¹⁹ P. De Clerck, « Liturgie » in *L'intelligence de la liturgie*, Coll. no. 4, Paris, Cerf, 1995, p. 13.

⁴²⁰ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 16.

⁴²¹ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome, Vatican, 2005, # 218-220.

⁴²² F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, 1997, p. 1435.

⁴²³ J. Ratzinger, *L'Esprit de la liturgie*, Genève, Ad Solem, 2001, p. 10.

⁴²⁴ F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, 1997, p. 1436. See also: *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 351-353.

In every celebration of liturgy, the salvific dimension of humans is underlined. Faithful people pray together and enter into communion with God. P. De Clerck would say that liturgy brings forth a new sense of the human existence. Through prayers, songs, symbols and rituals, there is an encounter with God and other persons. He affirms that liturgy in itself is intelligent and makes people intelligent as they participate in it.⁴²⁵ J. Ratzinger goes a step further when he emphasizes « l'existence de l'homme ne devient vie que si elle tire sa forme du regard qu'il porte sur Dieu. Le rôle du culte est précisément de nous faire entrer dans ce regard et de nous conduire à vivre de cette vie qui glorifie Dieu. »⁴²⁶ Through liturgy, humans establish a greater relationship with God who is the giver of life.

6.2.1. Catholic liturgy in relation to other disciplines

Liturgy and theology support each other in a mutual way. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*⁴²⁷ – the law of prayer is the law of faith – has been an underlying factor in liturgy. The Church believes as she prays. As per the teachings of Catholic Church, her faith precedes that of the believer who comes to participate in any form of liturgy. In any liturgical celebration, the Church acknowledges the faith handed over by the apostles and disciples. The teachings of Jesus and the entire salvation history are recalled in liturgy. The Catechism of Catholic Church underlines that liturgy is a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition, a central pillar of Catholic life and theology, to be treated with great respect and care.⁴²⁸ The Constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, remarks that liturgy accomplishes the redemption of humans.⁴²⁹

6.2.2. Relation between liturgy and theology

The study of liturgy is part of Catholic theological formation. It is a major course taught under the theological, historical, spiritual, pastoral and juridical aspects of the formation. All priestly and religious training include a detailed study of liturgy. The mystery of Christ and the history of

⁴²⁵ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 11.

⁴²⁶ J. Ratzinger, 2001, p. 18.

⁴²⁷ This adage has been formulated by Prosper Aquitaine, the secretary of Pope Leon, in the 5th century in order to respond to pelagians and semi-pelagians who denied the importance of God's grace and counted only on their efforts that would bring them to Christian faith and life.

⁴²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1993, # 1113 - 1124.

⁴²⁹ A. Flannery, *Vatican II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, New York, Costello Publishing Company, 2007, p. 117. See also: Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963, # 2.

salvation are treated in detail in the liturgical course.⁴³⁰ Just as the study of the Bible unfolds the salvation history, the study of liturgy unfolds Christian tradition. However, P. De Clerck remarks that « liturgie et théologie ne se situent pas sur le même plan de l'activité humaine. »⁴³¹ Theology is concerned with exposing various treaties of faith and liturgy is preoccupied with the practice of faith.

Liturgy and experience – Knowing the various elements of liturgy, it is important to mention that liturgy is not restricted to a theoretical level. It is all about experience. The participation of people in liturgy makes them what they are. For this reason, P. De Clerck has cause to say that « l'acte liturgique est toujours une création, car, en son unicité, il n'a jamais existé auparavant. Il n'exige cependant pas que tous les textes soient chaque fois nouveaux; en ce sens, il est plutôt une re-création, une manière de re-présenter des données humainement si profondes qu'elles peuvent rejoindre l'expérience d'un chacun. »⁴³² The very nature of liturgy is oriented toward inviting people to participate consciously and actively in every gesture. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Peter 2: 9) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.⁴³³

Liturgy and Bible – Catholic liturgy uses the Bible in various capacities. Readings from the Old Testament and New Testament are widely employed in any liturgical celebration. Liturgy is embedded in the biblical language. Liturgy of the Word has a vital role in the celebration of the Eucharist. Homilies are given as per the biblical texts of the day. The Word of God helps to unfold the entire mystery of the Eucharist. The accomplishment of the Word of God is in the person of Jesus himself (Luke 4: 21). Taking account of the connections between liturgy and the Bible, P. De Clerck remarks that the relation between theology and liturgy is dialectical. Theology does not need to dictate the content of faith to liturgy as the latter has the intelligence of faith. It is more appropriate that theology and liturgy go hand in hand keeping in mind the relation that both have got with the Scripture.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ A. Flannery, 2007, p. 124-125. See also: Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963, # 16.

⁴³¹ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 84.

⁴³² P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 123.

⁴³³ A. Flannery, 2007, p. 124. See also: Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. 1963, # 14.

⁴³⁴ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 63.

6.2.3. Relation between liturgy and ecclesiology

The connection between liturgy and Church is resilient. John Paul II, in his encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Eucharist in its relationship to the Church, explains this factor. The liturgy of the “Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life”⁴³⁵ and the Church draws her life from the Eucharist. “The Church was born of the Paschal mystery and the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding sacrament of the paschal mystery, stands at the center of the Church’s life.”⁴³⁶ The apostolic experience of the Church was always an experience of the local Church as it existed in a particular place. The fact that the Church always exists in a determined area is the fulfillment of its incarnational nature. The Church, like Christ, partakes in the human condition.

Koinonia – *Koinonia* or communion was an important element in the post-Pentecost communities. The source of communion is Christ himself. However, what is important for ecclesiology is the living communion or fellowship that takes place in the local Church. Jesus’s death and resurrection broke all barriers for people to gather in celebration. Every local Church manifests the one Church of Christ and thus shares fellowship with all other local Churches (Acts 2: 46, 4: 32). The Christian communion is not merely the establishment of a particular social order; rather it is the realization of the participation and insertion in an already existing reality of the mystery of Christ. The communion is expressed in the nature of the Church and, for this reason; all liturgical celebrations are connected to the life of the Church.

Unity and Universality – The Church proclaims, with awareness, her universality as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The collegial union is apparent in the mutual relations of individual bishops with specific Churches and the universal Church.⁴³⁷ The unity and universality elements are well emphasized by J. Ratzinger when he says that universality is a Christian feature.⁴³⁸ The communion of one local church with other local churches, and the whole church herself, is essential to their ecclesial identity. The missionary nature of the Church finds practical expression here. The Catholic Church keeps its doors open to all people, recognizing that the present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to the missionary work of the Church. In

⁴³⁵ A. Flannery, 2007, p. 15-16. See also: Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, # 11.

⁴³⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia. The Eucharist in its relationship to the Church*, Rome, Vatican, 2003, # 3.

⁴³⁷ A. Flannery, 2007, p. 31-33. See also: Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, # 23.

⁴³⁸ J. Ratzinger, 2001, p. 39-42.

this manner, today all people closely joined by various social, technical and cultural ties could also attain fuller unity in Christ.⁴³⁹

6.2.4. Physical gestures in liturgy

P. De Clerck highlighted « la liturgie nous fait prendre position ; des positions. La posture principale, la plus noble, celle qui est le plus liturgique, si l'on peut dire, est la station debout. Position de l'homme en sa dignité : les pieds sur terre, mais la tête levée vers le ciel. C'est la posture normale de la prière commune, où tout l'être est tourné vers Dieu. »⁴⁴⁰ It is true that every liturgical celebration, especially the Eucharist, assigns postures with a vital role. We stand during a celebration to represent the resurrection of Christ, sit to assume the attitude of listening, kneel down with respect or penance, prostrate to show our total surrender, and move in a procession to demonstrate our walk with Christ.⁴⁴¹

The five senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch are utilized generously in liturgy. Using the senses, the entire body is active in a liturgical celebration. P. De Clerck goes to the extent of stating that our five senses contribute to liturgy.⁴⁴² He affirms that « la liturgie est une action à accomplir plus qu'un problème à comprendre. La liturgie n'est pas cartésienne. »⁴⁴³ For him, liturgy is not something that is to be analyzed primarily, but to be experienced. « L'attitude première ne consiste pas à l'analyser, mais à la laisser parler et à l'écouter, avec sympathie. Comme on le fait pour des œuvres d'art: l'essentiel n'est pas de les disséquer et d'en disserter, mais de les contempler, de les écouter, de laisser naître l'émotion. »⁴⁴⁴ When we assume this attitude, we enter into new vigour and creativity to discourse with liturgy; here lies its intelligence. Liturgy is more corporal than intellectual.⁴⁴⁵

⁴³⁹ A. Flannery, 2007, p. 1. See also: Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, # 1.

⁴⁴⁰ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 48.

⁴⁴¹ The praxeological study with Hindus reveals that they too use bodily gestures in their prayers and worships. I shall discuss about it in detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁴² P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 55-62.

⁴⁴³ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 55.

⁴⁴⁴ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 25.

⁴⁴⁵ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 62.

6.2.5. Light, music, culture and space

The symbolic use of light is an integral part of Catholic liturgy. Candles are placed at significant places in the Church, chapels, and shrines.⁴⁴⁶ There is a custom of lighting the candle before the start of any liturgical celebration. A candle flame is perpetually lit in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and candles are even lit to venerate Saints. The Easter Vigil celebration starts with a symbolic celebration of light which holds profound meaning associated with Jesus's death and resurrection. Songs and music have a vital role in Catholic liturgical celebrations. Liturgical chants accompany actions carried out during the celebrations, including psalms, hymns, canticles, acclamations, litanies and antiphons. Instrumental music is played as per local customs, with the vision of integrating liturgy into the specific environment. Liturgy flourishes and permeates people's lives as they sing and play music. Cultural elements add meaning to liturgy. The enculturation of liturgy is more often seen in oriental liturgical traditions. Liturgy uplifts people's lives. It wants to bring about dynamic change in the lives of people.⁴⁴⁷

Space is another prominent element in liturgy. Catholic liturgy is conducted in Churches, chapels or reserved places. There is a fundamental respect accorded to the place where liturgy is performed. The sanctity of the place is vital for celebrations. Studying the history of Christianity and other religions, J. Ratzinger maintains that the Church is not merely a place for functional gathering, but is a sacred place of worship.⁴⁴⁸

6.3. Concept of Christian initiation

Christian initiation is performed to introduce a person to the Christian community. It is the community that takes initiative in effecting this new relationship. The individual is introduced into the community by going through separation, instruction, and assimilation. *Separation* denotes death of the former state; in other words, total conversion. The same is stated in the Gospel of Mark 1:5, where John the Baptist preaches the Baptism of Repentance. Here, repentance implies change in the entire person of the individual. *Instruction* is given to learn

⁴⁴⁶ I observed that the votive chapel at the Oratory is adorned with 1000 candles. Many Hindus light these candles.

⁴⁴⁷ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 131.

⁴⁴⁸ J. Ratzinger, 2001, p. 53-63.

Christian life. Christian initiation in the early Church began with Catechumenate, in which the catechumen was introduced to Christian doctrine and faith. This instruction was centered on creed and the new way of life. *Assimilation* is to welcome someone into the new community. To be human is to relate to one another. To be Christian is to be part of God's people. Assimilation into the community is linked with both rights and duties. Speaking about the catechumenate experience and Sacraments of Christian initiation, P. De Clerck observes « l'initiation prene fin lors de la vigile pascale, par la célébration des trois sacrements de baptême, de confirmation et d'eucharistie. Les deux premiers ne peuvent être réitérés; mais le troisième se répète. C'est dire que l'initiation s'achève...sur une réalité qui ne s'achève pas. »⁴⁴⁹ It implies that assimilation in people continues even during their participation in liturgical celebrations. The adaptation of liturgy to changes in environment is crucial, while simultaneously preserving the various liturgical traditions and teachings. The transmission of faith continues to take place in the given setting.⁴⁵⁰

6.3.1. Baptism

Baptism is the beginning of the Christian way of life. Primarily, it consists of the rejection of the old way of life. The Biblical roots of Baptism begin with the circumcision rite of Judaism and the worshipping rite of the priests, especially Aaron and his sons (Exodus 40: 12-15). In the New Testament, it would be the Baptism of John the Baptist (Matthew 3: 1-12) and the Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3: 13-17). However, the classical text of Baptism is considered to be the letter of Paul to Romans (Romans 6: 1-11). Paul sees the baptized person as sharing intimately in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Hence, the Easter Vigil is considered to be the appropriate time for Christian initiation. The Holy Spirit is the gift of Jesus to the apostolic community and the Church. The Spirit is the principle of transformation and renewal. This renewal is revealed in the rebuilding of the community. Baptism is effected through the action of the Spirit transforming the believer into the likeness of Jesus and sealing a new identity on the person.

⁴⁴⁹ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 10-11.

⁴⁵⁰ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 133.

6.3.2. Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation is the symbolic action in which the Church prays for enriching a baptized person with the special potency of the Holy Spirit. The roots of Confirmation are found in the New Testament texts on Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 35, 3: 22, 4: 1, 4: 14) which reveal the two-fold nature of the Spirit: it comes spontaneously from the Father through the Son, and is given by the Father to the person who gets confirmed in the context of the re-orientation of one's life. The classical text in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8: 14-17) forms the foundation of the sacrament of Confirmation. It reveals that Apostles bestow the Holy Spirit by laying their hands on the recipient. The liturgy of Confirmation is always performed in association with the liturgy of Baptism⁴⁵¹.

6.3.3. Eucharist

The liturgy of the Eucharist transforms those within the Church into a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit. At the same time, it fosters their power to reveal Christ, to present the Church, to those outside the Church as a sign of hope to all nations. Universality is the hallmark of the liturgy of the Eucharist. J. Ratzinger emphasizes that « célébrer l'Eucharistie, c'est rendre un culte qui embrasse ciel et terre dans la glorification de Dieu. La liturgie chrétienne n'est jamais un événement organisé par un groupe particulier, un cercle ou une Église locale. Dans la liturgie, le mouvement de l'humanité vers Dieu et celui de Dieu vers les hommes se rejoignent dans le Christ, qui veut nous réunir et réaliser l'unique Église, l'unique assemblée du peuple de Dieu. Ainsi, tout se répond : l'horizontalité et la verticalité, l'unicité de Dieu et l'unité de l'humanité, dans la communauté de tous ceux qui adorent en esprit et en vérité. »⁴⁵² In the liturgy of the Eucharist, we participate in the entire salvation story of Jesus Christ who helps us strive for our salvation.⁴⁵³

The term Eucharist derives from the Greek word "*eucharistia*" which means thanksgiving. Jesus gave thanks to his Father at the last supper with his apostles. The Synoptic gospels present this

⁴⁵¹ It is to be noted that the Eastern Catholic Church administers all three sacraments of Christian initiation at once through only one liturgical celebration.

⁴⁵² J. Ratzinger, 2001, p. 41.

⁴⁵³ A. Flannery, 2007, p. 117-118. See also: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, # 2.

meal as a Passover festive farewell meal. The founding texts of the Eucharist are contained in the New Testament (Matthew 26: 26-29, Mark 14: 22-25, Luke 22: 14-20 and 1 Corinthians 11: 17-29). These texts were used as liturgical formula by early Christian communities. The liturgy of the Eucharist enables the celebrating community to propagate the meaning of the “breaking of bread” beyond the Church. Eucharistic community is the one here and now, open to the presence of the Lord and his Spirit. Hence, the Christian initiation into the new way of life, which began in Baptism and strengthened in Confirmation, reaches its perfection in the Eucharist. The Eucharistic celebration enables a person to encounter the challenges of initiation by overcoming all barriers and endowing a deeper meaning to Christian life.⁴⁵⁴

6.4. Growing in faith through religious rituals and practices

I believe that faith is a gift received from God. As I underlined in this study, both Hindus and educators in faith perform many religious practices to sustain their faith. I have mentioned above that the Catholic liturgy is composed of many rituals and practices. The entire being of a person can be involved in the participation of any liturgical celebration. However, people are free to choose to participate or not.

6.4.1. Christian perspectives of growing in faith

My study reveals that the educators in faith strongly agree that it is possible to grow in faith by participating in various religious rituals. The chart below shows that all the educators in faith (5) strongly agreed that religious practices help people grow in their faith. People express their faith through religious rituals and practices. The educators in faith (4) underlined the importance of applying the entire body and spirit in any religious practice in order to receive the most spiritual growth from the practice. It is not only words but gestures (2), too that are key to a beneficial religious practice.

⁴⁵⁴ It is to be noted that Hindus do not have access to any Sacrament but yet visit the Oratory. Some of them knowingly, or unknowingly, are inspired to participate in the celebration of any Sacrament. I have seen some Hindus attending Masses without receiving Communion.

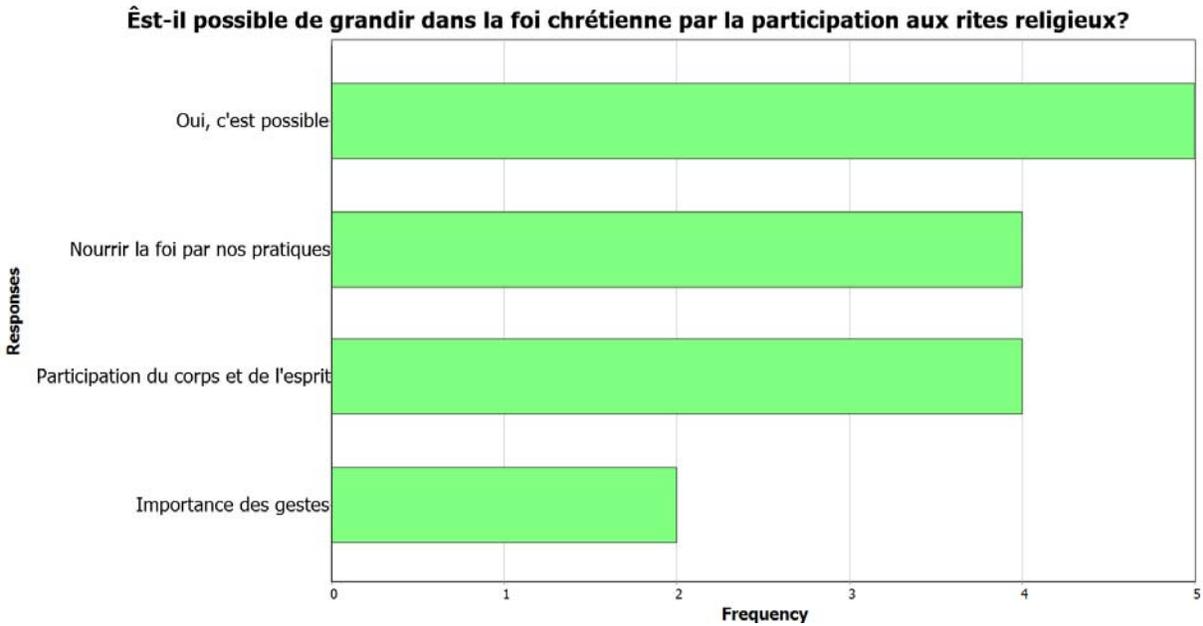


Figure 23: Growing in Christian faith through rituals – educators in faith

6.4.2. Hindu perspectives of growing in faith

My study reveals that most of the Hindus (11) at the Oratory grow in faith through their religious practices and rituals. While some Hindus (8) carry out rituals at Saint Joseph’s Oratory, others do so in Temples (4) or at home (3). Those who perform their religious practices and grow in faith at the Oratory, greatly appreciate their time there.⁴⁵⁵ However, some Hindus do not grow in faith (3) through the religious practices, since they feel obliged to take part because they are in a group or with their family members; they do not want to displease the other members.

⁴⁵⁵ I believe that Hindus at the Oratory do not care much about the God concept. For many of them, God is just “One”. As they remain to be Hindus, they can pray to the “One” who is God and that “One” is found at the Oratory. Hindus do religious practices at the Oratory because they believe in God. During the course of my research, I noticed that Hindus are “God-fearing” in a positive sense.

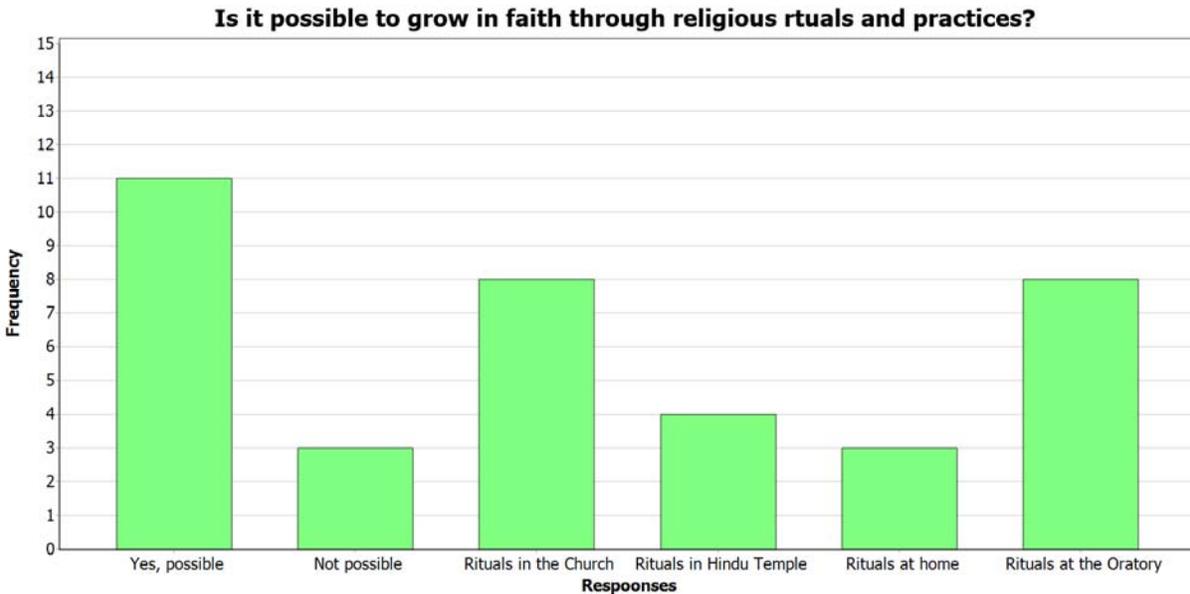


Figure 24: Growing in faith through religious practices and rituals – opinion of Hindus

6.5. Mission of educators in faith

The beginning of the mission is from God. The mission is God’s own, and educators in faith are just collaborators in the mission. Jesus chose his disciples to follow him in his mission. The disciples needed to have certain amount of courage to follow Jesus. There were instances when the disciples were tired and lost sight of the mission. However, Jesus encouraged and reinvigorated them in times of struggle. Likewise, in today’s context, educators in faith receive strength from God to carry on the mission. They are also supported by other people. Mutual encouragement helps sustain the mission. Success in the mission is linked to the crucial factors of identity and attitude of the educators. What the educators accomplish endures in the mission. Who they are signifies the integrity and testimony of their lives as disciples, and how they are suggests the honesty and kindness of their relationships. It is not through mere words that the educators accomplish the mission but through their sincere acts of charity and compassion.

In 1974, Paul VI underlined the above elements in his address to the laity saying, “modern men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers; and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” We remember genuine, kind and compassionate people who

touch our hearts and minds. The quality of the presence of the educators, among all people, has a lot to do with the mission. The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross puts it right when it states, “we go in mission to those whose lot we share...not just as servants but as neighbours” (C2: 12-13). In troubling and challenging situations, the educators cannot do much in the mission but their presence makes a difference as all the educators can do is stand at the foot of the cross. Their compassion, kindness and presence will bring hope for all.

Basile Moreau, the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, was a visionary. Despite the challenging times in the Church in France, after the French Revolution, he courageously engaged himself in the transmission of Christian faith. He understood that there would be no transmission without committed individuals who live their faith. Faith is transmitted from one generation to the other. The “Sermon on the Mount” and the “Last Supper Discourse” were at the heart of Moreau’s teachings. He enlightened his seminarians and confreres that Jesus communicated the essential message of his teachings through these lessons. The focus of the Sermon on the Mount is the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 1-12), and that of the Last Discourse is the parable of the Vine and Branches (John 15: 1-8). The Beatitudes are a summary of the teachings of Jesus. In the Beatitudes, there is a blessing pronounced for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness or justice. Joel Giallanza, who studied the writings of Basile Moreau, interprets Moreau’s zeal as a hunger for the mission. God wants us to desire for justice and peace in the world. The parable of the Vine and Branches is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus as it is intended to nurture the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. “I am the vine; you are the branches; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15: 1). The key word in this parable is “remain.” Jesus wants to remain with us, and he invites us to remain in him. There is a mutual relationship between Jesus and all people. We live in him, and he lives in us. When this mutual relationship happens, we bear fruit for others. Basile Moreau would say that only in prayer does this intimate relationship build up. People need to spend quality time with Jesus, meditating upon his Word. It is in prayer that faith revives, hope nourishes, and love rekindles. Prayer is an essential element of zeal. Prayer helps people to be in communion with God and people.

6.5.1. Educators in faith at Saint Joseph's Oratory

Many educators in faith work at the Oratory for extended periods of time. Unlike secular Priests who are transferred frequently from one Parish to the other, Religious Priests and lay collaborators minister at the Oratory for several years. My study reveals that four among the five educators in faith had worked at the Oratory for more than three years; the fifth educator had worked there for more than ten years.

6.5.2. Activities of the educators in faith at the Oratory

The chart below shows that most (4) of the educators in faith at the Oratory spend their time meeting pilgrims and visitors. They accompany people and listen to them. There are also some (3) who provide counselling service. Most (3) of the Priests engage in administering Sacraments. One educator works in the Communication and Publication department at the Oratory.

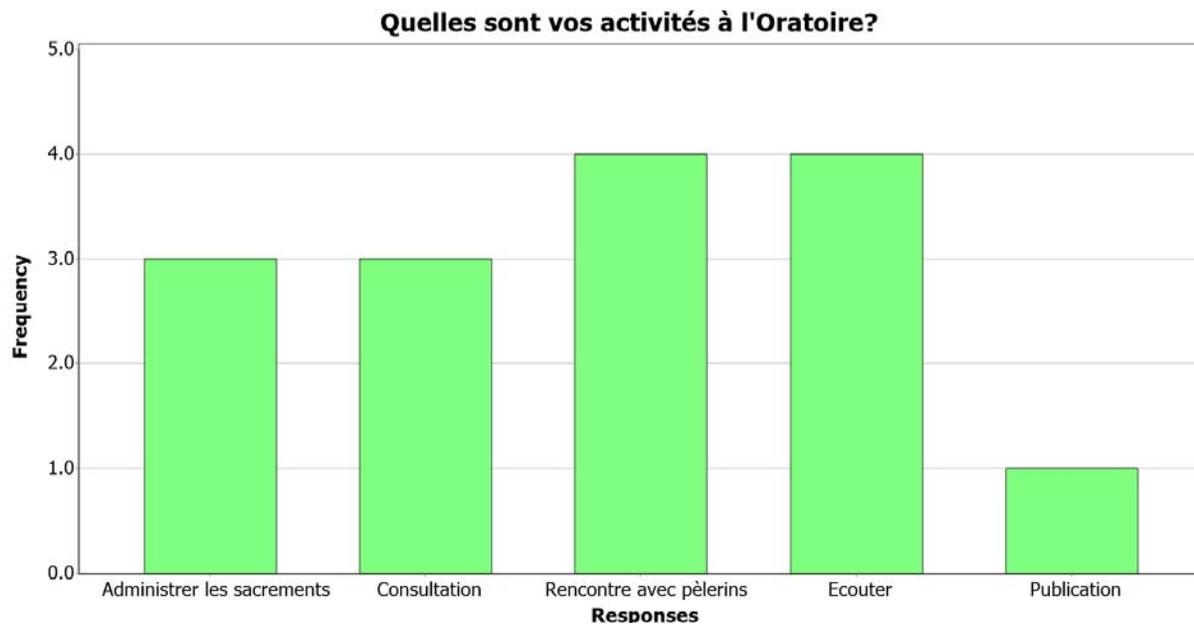


Figure 25: Activities of the educators in faith

6.5.3. Transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory

The chart below reveals that most (5) of the educators in faith at the Oratory consider it a privileged place for the transmission of Christian faith, one of the missions of the sanctuary. The founder of the Oratory, Brother André, invited people to discover the life of Jesus. As he prayed for people, he also invited them to get closer to God through their religious practices and devotions. He established simple dialogue with all types of pilgrims. The sick and suffering had a special place in his heart. He also visited families of pilgrims and prayed with them. Brother André transmitted Christian faith in humble and simple ways. The dialogue between educators in faith and pilgrims is a key factor in the transmission of Christian faith.

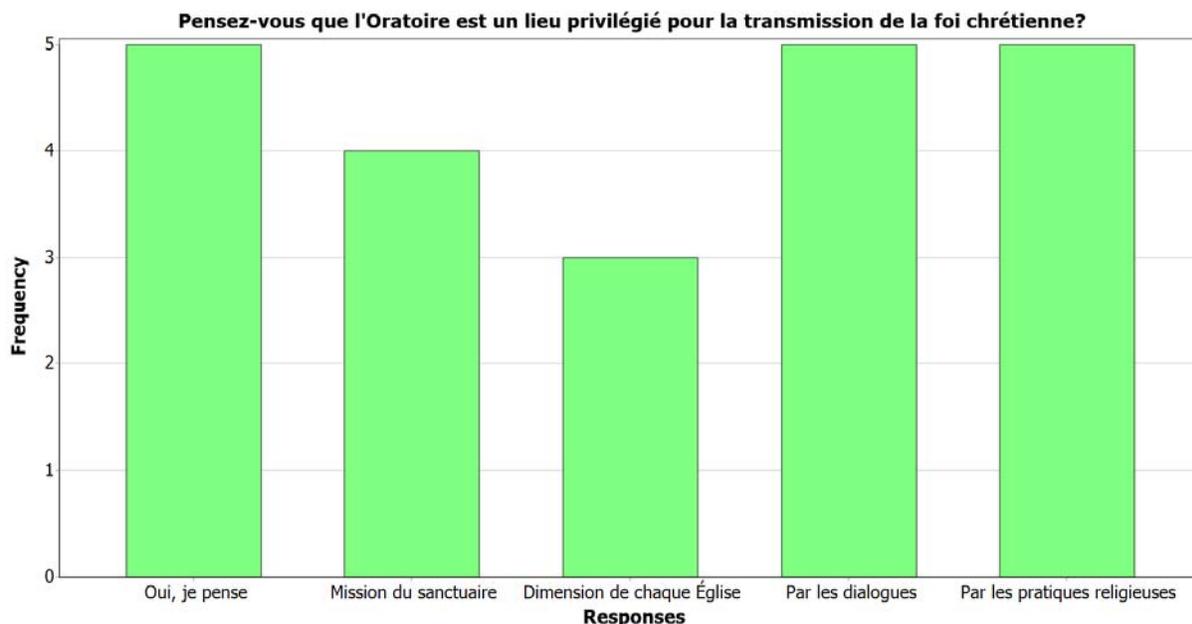


Figure 26: Oratory as a privileged place for the transmission of Christian faith

All the five educators in faith unanimously opined that the Oratory was an exceptional place for the transmission of Christian faith. All of them agreed that it was vital to speak to pilgrims and visitors, though they did not clarify how to get into a dialogue with pilgrims. Continued presence of educators in faith is needed to assure the transmission of Christian faith.

6.5.4. Heritage of Basile Moreau at the Oratory

As already mentioned, Basile Moreau had undertaken the mission of Jesus with great zeal. He was an educator in faith, and wanted all the members of his Order to also be educators in faith, to bring hope and light to all people. At Saint Joseph's Oratory, the Religious and lay people work together for the same mission started by Saint Brother André, who belonged to the Order of Basile Moreau. From the chart below we see that the educators have varying opinions about the heritage of Basile Moreau. Most of them stated that they were in solidarity with the community of Holy Cross. In the perspective of Quebec as a Catholic region of the mission, some of the educators decried that we do not live in the same social and religious setting of Moreau's time. While some educators considered Moreau an inspiration, others did not even know him.

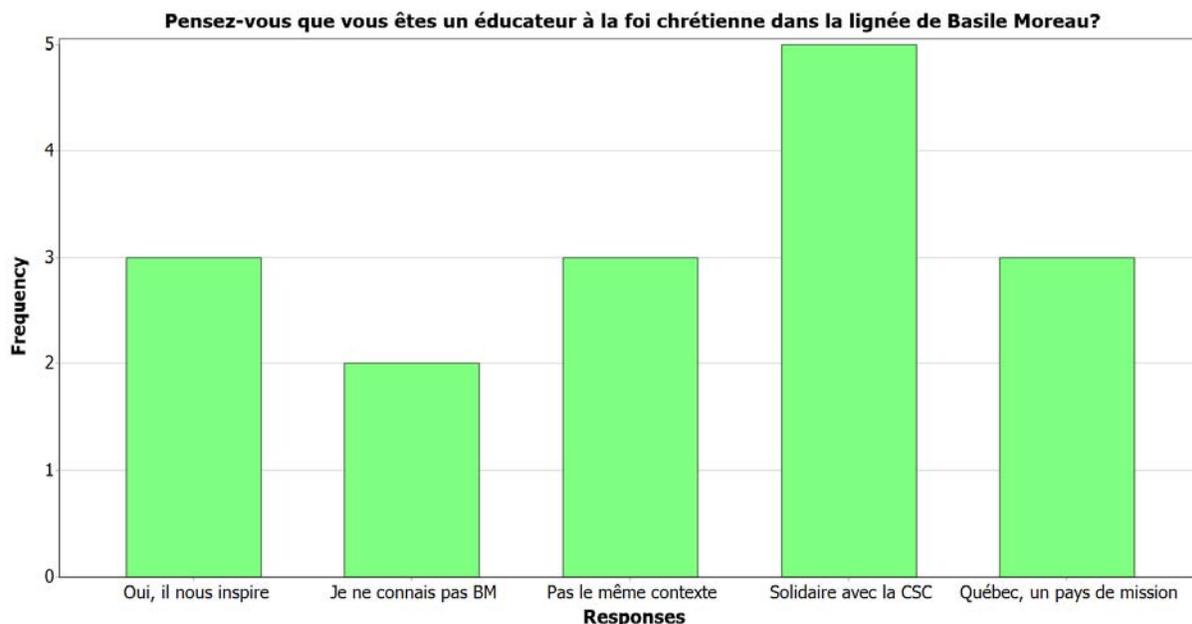


Figure 27: Educators in Christian faith in the heritage of Basile Moreau

All five interviewees were in solidarity with the Congregation of Holy Cross that was founded by Moreau. The lay people working at the Oratory may not know much about Basile Moreau's heritage as he was not a well-known figure in Québec; all pastoral agents recognize Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André as personalities of repute. Three of the five educators agreed that the

circumstance of the mission now is different from that during Moreau’s time. Three of them affirmed that Basile Moreau was an inspiration to the mission.⁴⁵⁶

6.5.5. Transmission of faith by Brother André

The chart below shows that the educators in faith had many things to say about Brother André. They acknowledge that he transmitted Christian faith in various ways; he was a man of God, and his God was a living God; he prayed to God through the intercession of Saint Joseph; he had great faith in God, and he helped people discover God; and he shared his faith in God with all persons he met at the Oratory.

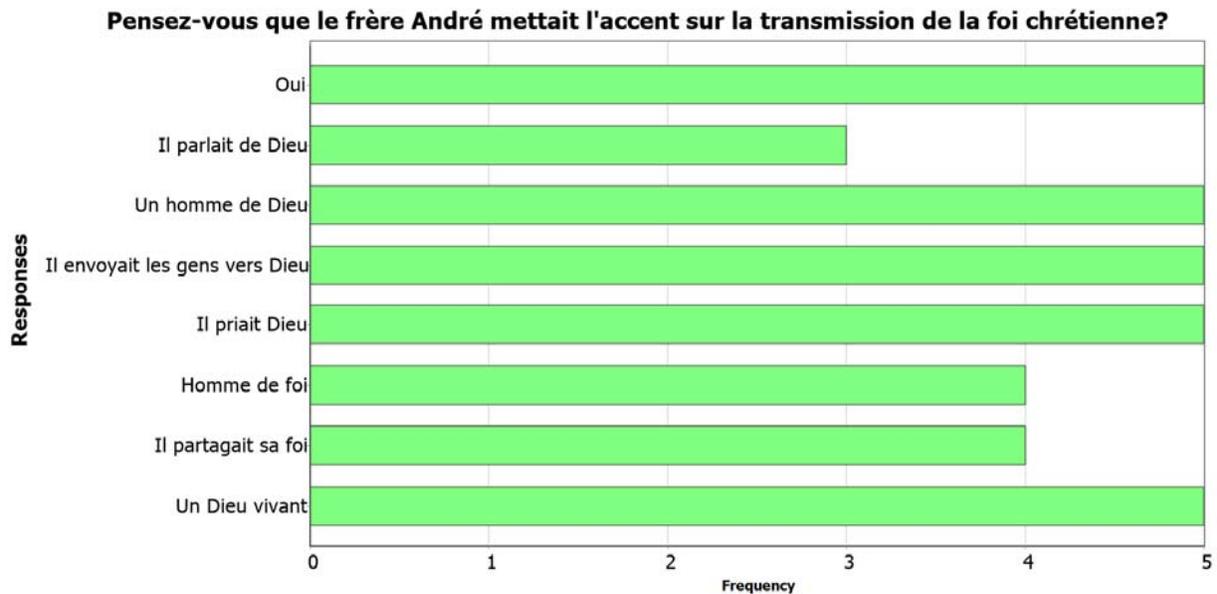


Figure 28: Brother André and the transmission of Christian faith – educators in faith

The educators in faith were unanimous in their opinion about Brother André. They all (5) agreed that Brother André transmitted Christian faith and was a man of God, he helped people discover

⁴⁵⁶ I would conclude that the Priests and Religious will have to constantly conscientize the lay educators in faith, if the Oratory has to preserve the heritage of Basil Moreau. The lay educators in faith are in line with the heritage of Saint Brother André who is the founder of the Oratory. Brother André received his inspiration from Basil Moreau, the founder of his Order.

God and spoke to God through Saint Joseph. The educators in faith want to preserve this heritage of Brother André as they welcome pilgrims and visitors, interact with them and accompany them on their journey of faith.

6.6. Diversity of faith expressions

The pattern of communication has a vital role in the transmission of faith. The imposition of dogmas and rules upon people, in our times, would not help in the transmission of faith. Joseph Moingt underlines the existence of the plurality of language applied in the expression of faith. Common people may not always understand ecclesiastical language. For effective communication, the language of faith needs to be lively.⁴⁵⁷ Christian faith is not merely some set of ideas, but is based on the life of Jesus, the central figure in the history of Salvation. F. Bousquet would say that the transmission of faith does not pertain to some prescribed procedure, but is rather related to a Spirit. Hence, the importance of communication pattern in the transmission of faith. The process of transmission has to take the whole aspect of the speaker–receiver association into consideration. The key roles involve the humility of the speaker, the respect for the receiver, the modality of interventions and the facility of understanding.⁴⁵⁸ André Fossion insists on the role of the transmitter, or speaker, of faith to convey in a manner that promotes faith. Inspired by Roman Jakobson, he speaks about six factors in communication of faith: context, transmitter, message, receiver, contact and code. For R. Jakobson, each element gives birth to a different linguistic function.⁴⁵⁹ In the perspective of communication in public places, besides A. Fossion, Anne Fortin also adopts the famous model of R. Jakobson.⁴⁶⁰

In my view, it is vital to recognize that the transmission of faith, an art of our times, takes place with determination and choice. It needs courage, creativity and great effort. Olivier Bauer

⁴⁵⁷ J.-M. Swerry, p. 191-193. See also: J. Moingt, *Pour penser la foi dans les langages d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Fayard, 1980, p. 33-40.

⁴⁵⁸ F. Bousquet, « Prendre au sérieux, en théologie en acte de discernement. » in *Sur la proposition de la foi*, H.-J. Gagey & D. Villepelet, (Dir.), Paris, Atelier, 1999, p. 168.

⁴⁵⁹ A. Fossion, *La catéchèse dans le champ de la communication : ses enjeux pour l'inculturation de la foi*, Paris, Cerf, 1990, p. 25-43. See also: R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1963, p. 213-214.

⁴⁶⁰ A. Fortin, « Faire circuler la parole dans l'espace public. » in *Précis de théologie pratique*, G. Routhier et M. Viau, (Dir.), Montréal, Novalis, 2004, p. 297-305.

emphasizes the importance of applying six senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and proprioception⁴⁶¹ – to be creative in the transmission process. He is convinced that Christian theology needs to be concerned with the six senses. However, the question of “how to do it” is to be explored. For O. Bauer, Christianity has always expressed itself through tastes, smells, words, music and images. According to him, a communal approach to choosing tastes, odours, textures, sounds and images are necessary to transmit the Gospel.⁴⁶² Integrating his experience of preaching in different parts of the World, O. Bauer strongly recommends that preaching should not be limited only to the ears, but should also be oriented towards the diversity of sensorial perceptions. Preaching to the five senses results a creative outcome despite the limits of perception.⁴⁶³ Verbal and non-verbal, creative communication in the transmission of faith will certainly enable dynamic dialogue in the multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural settings of our times.

6.6.1. Diversity of Catholic life in Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council opened the gates of Catholic Church to the entire world. The representatives of the Council, who came from different parts of the world, reflected together to adopt the teachings of the Church to the needs of the time. Knowing that the world has changed, and that the needs of people change, Vatican II invited greater participation by the laity in the life of the Church. The development of a “horizontal Catholicity”, connecting across all those who call themselves Catholic, brought in a new dynamism to the Church. The fraternal dialogue with separated Christians and the Church’s spiritual awakening unfolding across countries were key decisions of the Council. We have observed that the result of mutual stimulation between multiplicity and unity was part of the Church’s vital self-fulfillment.⁴⁶⁴ The Council emphasized the importance of keeping faith alive through various religious practices adapted to different

⁴⁶¹ Proprioception is the body’s ability to sense movement within joints and joint positions. The brain integrates information from proprioception and from the vestibular system into its total sense of body position and movement.

⁴⁶² O. Bauer, « Du beau, du bon...du bon Dieu » in *Lumen Vitae*, Volume LIX/2, 2004, p. 149-159.

⁴⁶³ O. Bauer, « *L’essentiel est inaudible aux oreilles.* » in *Études Théologiques et Religieuses*, Tome 76/2, 2001, p. 213-227.

⁴⁶⁴ J. Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, New York, Paulist Press, 1966, p. 26-27.

cultures.⁴⁶⁵ The Council called for a new understanding of the structure of the Church and how she related to the modern world. It called for new ways of celebrating the sacraments, new developments regarding the collegiality of Bishops, a broader understanding of diversity and pluralism.⁴⁶⁶ The Council underlined that faith remained alive in those who were simple at heart and who passed on the torch of hope to future generations.⁴⁶⁷ The decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* on ecumenism brought the Catholic Church into the modern ecumenical movement in an exceptionally striking and lasting way. The “universal brotherhood” of Christians became a firm ecumenical conviction rooted in the recognition of the oneness of baptism.⁴⁶⁸

The diversity of the Vatican II delegates, from different parts of the world, brought in richness to the universality of the Catholic Church. The people of God living their faith in various ways, while proclaiming the same teachings and beliefs, gave a new face to the entire Church. The acceptance of using vernacular languages in liturgical celebrations revolutionized the Catholic Church. The centralized and latinized Church wished to become more decentralized and people-oriented. The expression of faith by ordinary people using different gestures, body languages, and their native music and dances gave the entire liturgical celebration a new outlook in various parts of the world. The inculturation of Catholic religion in individual countries and regions became more evident after Vatican II. As a result, the transmission of faith had greater scope in bringing in considerable hope into the lives of people.

6.6.2. Catholic faith and religious traditions in Vatican II

In Christian tradition, with the arrival of Jesus, the Jewish people had lost their special place as the people of God. Those who accepted Jesus Christ as their savior became the new people of God. Christians believed for many years that salvation for people belonging to other religious traditions, including the Jewish people, was only possible through their conversion to

⁴⁶⁵ Inculturation of Catholicism was one of the central points of Vatican II. Decentralization of the Catholic Church gave rise to possibilities in performing religious celebrations in vernacular languages and integrating them into the specific culture of a people.

⁴⁶⁶ M. Lavin, *Vatican II – Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution in the Catholic Church*, Toronto, Novalis, 2012, p. 160-168.

⁴⁶⁷ J. Ratzinger, 1966, p. 262.

⁴⁶⁸ E. I. Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II – Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, New York, Paulist Press, 2005, p. 104-107.

Christianity. The strained relationship between Christians and Jews was a concern for the Council fathers. At this point, Christian scholars, including the reformed theologian Karl Barth, Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, and the Jesuit biblical scholar Cardinal Augustine Bea, contributed to a renewed understanding of God's covenant with the Jews.⁴⁶⁹ Their work on a schema entitled "Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" was mainly intended to progress the relationship between Christians and Jews. However, when the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* was approved by the Council, many council fathers observed that people "are being drawn closer together, and the ties between various peoples are becoming stronger" (NA 1). The Church teaches "one is the community of all peoples, one their origin ... one also is their final goal" (NA 1). The declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions significantly opened up the Church to all religious traditions, not only to Jewish customs.⁴⁷⁰

Keeping in mind the importance of the transmission of Christian faith to all people, the Second Vatican Council acknowledged that "from ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power that hovers over the course of things" (NA 2). There is a certain religious sense in people belonging to other religious traditions as some of them recognize a Supreme Divinity and even a Supreme Father. A particular reference was given to Hinduism and Buddhism where people have profound spiritual insights. Other religious traditions aspire to encounter the restlessness of the human heart by proposing "ways" and giving rules of life, teachings and sacred rites (NA 2). *Nostra Aetate* invited the members of the Church to enter into dialogue and collaboration, as done by people of other religious traditions. It is "through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as sociocultural values found among these men" (NA 2). The Council strongly affirmed that Catholics "cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God" (NA 5).⁴⁷¹ With this declaration, the Catholic Church opened up wider to

⁴⁶⁹ R. Gaillardetz & C. Clifford, *Keys to the Council – Unlocking the teaching of the Vatican II*, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2012, p. 182-183.

⁴⁷⁰ E. I. Cassidy, 2005, p. 125-128.

⁴⁷¹ E. I. Cassidy, 2005, p. 129-131.

the practical realities of various religious traditions. Promising collaboration with, rather than the condemnation of, other traditions brings hope to all people.

Bringing all religious traditions into the framework of the salvation history, *Nostra Aetate* echoes the perspectives laid out in the Council's teachings in Chapter 2 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Based on a biblical study, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that all people of faith belong or are related to the people of God in different ways. They include the members of Catholic Church (LG 14), other baptized Christians (LG 15), and "finally all of humankind, called by God's grace to salvation" (LG 13, 16). *Lumen Gentium* makes a particular connection between the three Abrahamic religions, in recognition of their common foundation of faith in one Creator God, without overlooking the fact that all people belonging to various religious traditions are in search of meaning in their lives.⁴⁷² Christians are convinced that Jesus Christ is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, and the answer to all our quests. *Gaudium et Spes* underlines that Christ is "the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humanity, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations" (GS 45). Jesus is at work in the lives of all who respond sincerely to God-given aspirations. Further, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* state that "grace is active invisibly" in the hearts of all people of goodwill (GS 22 et LG 16).

In this study, I have elaborated how the Hindus at Saint Joseph Oratory aspire to become closer to Jesus. Many of them pray to Jesus and get in dialogue with the educators in faith. The educators in faith explain to Hindus the Christian ways of worship. While some Hindus take part in Christian religious practices at the Oratory, others continue to perform both Christian and Hindu practices.

6.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elaborated the perspectives of faith of, both, Hindus and Christians, and I have explained the religious practices of Hindus and the educators in faith. A deeper study of the perceptions of Catholic liturgy and transmission of faith has aided us to see how the Christian milieu facilitates Hindus to grow in their faith. I have also explained the mission of educators in

⁴⁷² R. Gaillardetz, & C. Clifford, 2012, p. 183-185.

faith. Keeping the heritage of their founder Basile Moreau, the educators continue to transmit Christian faith with renewed vision and acceptance. The Second Vatican Council inspired many educators in faith to renew their mission and liturgical celebrations.

All liturgical celebrations, be it a Sacrament or a Sacramental, are done in the faith of the Church. One's living faith motivates one in participating in any liturgical celebration. Faith is a gift given by God, and yet it is nourished by what we hear and do. The profession of faith is an underlying factor in every liturgical celebration. It is the faith of the Church that is celebrated in the liturgy. Those who participate in any liturgical celebration put themselves into the faith of the Church.⁴⁷³ Hence, most of the liturgical celebrations are done in the community. J. Ratzinger connects the perspectives of faith to an historical outlook observing that « la foi chrétienne est reliée à un moment historique précis: celui de l'incarnation, origine du christianisme, qui lui confère à la fois son universalité et sa contingence...toute acculturation liturgique doit donc nécessairement prendre en compte l'ampleur à la fois cosmique et historique du symbolisme de la foi chrétienne, ancré dans les actes de Dieu. »⁴⁷⁴ Liturgy is life-giving as it is connected to God and other people present in the community. While participating in liturgy, we receive support from, and experience an encounter with, God and other participants. It also gives hope to live as dignified humans. Every liturgical celebration is an act of love as it is connected to the entire salvation history and mystery of Christ.

Liturgy helps people go beyond themselves. It is oriented toward transcendence. According to P. De Clerck the liturgy « ouvre notre vie sur plus grand qu'elle-même, elle l'alimente et la mène vers une transcendance, tout au moins, sinon vers le Père. Elle offre, selon les mots du psaume à propos de la Parole de Dieu, la lumière de mes pas, la lampe de ma route » (Ps 118: 105).⁴⁷⁵ J. Ratzinger agrees in the terms that the liturgy, in all its humility, has a greater perspective. As people participate in liturgy, it helps them live in intimate union with God and in harmony with

⁴⁷³ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 106.

⁴⁷⁴ J. Ratzinger, 2001, p. 88.

⁴⁷⁵ P. De Clerck, 1995, p. 114.

others, and orient them towards a future filled with hope. Liturgy gives people an experience of heaven on earth. The past, present and future are incorporated in the liturgical celebrations.⁴⁷⁶

Faith and transmission are lively realities in the multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious context of the Oratory. Various religious and liturgical celebrations inspire pilgrims and visitors in their faith journey. They experience the Divine through their participation in the celebrations.

⁴⁷⁶ J. Ratzinger, 2001, p. 14, 48-50.

CHAPTER 7

7. INTERPRETATION OF *BHAKTI* PRACTICE AT SAINT JOSEPH'S ORATORY

7.1. Introduction

As I have mentioned in the introductory chapter of my study, there are many ways to liberation and *moksha* in Hinduism. *Bhakti* is one among the four *mārgas* categorically developed in the 19th century. My praxological enquiry starting with the first step of observation pushed me to choose *bhakti* than any other *mārgas* for further analysis of the religious practices of Hindus. For me, *bhakti* devotional practices seemed to bring meaning to the life of Hindu visitors at the Oratory. I do not intent to say that all Hindus at the Oratory practice *bhakti* or they do not follow any other *mārgas* in their Hindu living. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I am conscious that *bhakti-yoga* or *bhakti-mārga* has multiple faces in north and south India. It could have another flavour in Sri Lanka and Canada. Likewise, I noticed that *bhakti* practice has its own flavour at Saint Joseph's Oratory.

The word *bhaj*, from which *bhakti* originates, is mentioned in the Vedas.⁴⁷⁷ *Rigveda* contains numerous hymns to several Gods. *Bhakti* as an attitude of love, devotion, friendship and reverence is present in these hymns, indicative of innocent human relationship to divine names, such as *Varuna* (water), *Agni* (fire) and *Indra* (thunder). *Indra-bhakti* or *Varuna-bhakti* is common in some hymns of *Rigveda*.⁴⁷⁸ *Brahmins* enjoyed a prominent status in the time of the Vedas due to their orientation towards, and performance of rituals.⁴⁷⁹

Bhakti continues to be upheld in the Upanishads with an ethical and thoughtful attitude. The Upanishads are a development of the *āranyakas*. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* expounds a

⁴⁷⁷ The Vedas comprise several categories of literature like *samhitās*, *brāhmanas*, *āranyakas* and later *Upanishads*. See also: K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 47.

⁴⁷⁸ C. Lala, *Philosophy of Bhakti*. Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1989, p. 3. See also: K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 182; R. Singh, 2006, p. 26.

⁴⁷⁹ S. Anand, *The Way of Love – The Bhāgavata Doctrine of Bhakti*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996, p. 74. See also: C. Lala, 1989, p. 3.

fully developed Shiva-*bhakti*.⁴⁸⁰ It is said that the Upanishads are the finest flowers of Vedic thought. All orthodox schools of Hinduism look up to the Upanishads as their supreme authority. *Upanishadic* age is the age of prophets. The law of *Karma* and rebirth became one of the fundamental elements of Hindu philosophy during this time.⁴⁸¹

It is said that Vyasa wrote the *Purānas* and *Mahābhārata* to render the Vedas comprehensible to ordinary people. The *Purānas* and *Ithihasa* (history, like the *Mahābhārata*) explain the implicit meaning of the Vedas, and both are revealed and, ultimately, identical scriptures. *Purānas*, which are chronicles of oral traditions, were influenced by the epics (*Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata*), Upanishads, *Dharma* literature and ritual texts.⁴⁸² The earliest reference to the *Purānas* is found in *Atharva Veda*.⁴⁸³ The *Purānas* are more popular than the Vedas because they can be studied not only by *Brahmins* but also by women and *Shūdras*. The *Purānas* are classified into three: *Sattvika*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. *Sattvika Purānas* deal with the greatness of Krishna. Among the *Sattvika Purānas*, the highest place of authority is assigned to *Srimad Bhāgavata Purāna*, which is a revealed scripture and is called *Samādhi Bhāshā* of Vyāsa. It is a synthesis of all the scriptures. The main purpose of this scripture is to propagate *bhakti*. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* highlights that the utterance of the Lord's name ultimately destroys all sin.⁴⁸⁴ The *Purānas* contain many constituents that deal with social and religious practices of popular Hinduism; for instance, ritual baths, pilgrimages, fasts and vows.⁴⁸⁵

Philosophical and religious teachings were written in cryptic *sūtras* (compositions) which invited many interpretations. Vyasa composed the *Vedānta sūtras* to logically interpret the principal conclusions of the Upanishads. *Vedānta sūtras* imply *bhakti* when they refer to the highest *Brahman*.⁴⁸⁶ Narada and Shandilya *Bhakti sūtras* are written exclusively on *bhakti*. In Narada *Bhakti sūtra*, *bhakti* is defined as supreme devotion or intense love of God. Shandilya defines *bhakti* as infinite attachment to God. According to Narada, *bhakti* entails offering all activities to

⁴⁸⁰ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 183. See also: R. Singh, 2006, p. 77.

⁴⁸¹ C. Lala, 1989, p. 4. See also: G. Flood, 1996, p. 40.

⁴⁸² G. Flood, 1996, p. 109.

⁴⁸³ S. Anand, 1996, p. 75-78.

⁴⁸⁴ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 186. See also: C. Lala, 1989, p. 1; S. Anand, 1996, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁵ G. Flood, 1996, p. 110. See also: S. Anand, 1996, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁶ C. Lala, 1989, p. 5.

God and inducing a feeling of extreme restlessness and misery at the slightest lapse in the contemplation of God. Narada *bhakti-sūtras* were written to harmonize all preceding views written on *bhakti*.⁴⁸⁷

In the epic age, theistic elements were developed around the great Gods Vishnu and Shiva. The organization of temple worship was one of the characteristic features of religious development during this period. The great epics are the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Rāmāyana*, every character is a devotee of Rama. Lord Rama is said to be propitiated only by *bhakti*. *Dāsya bhakti* of Hanuman, Bharata and Lakshmana, *vātsalyabhakti* of king Dasharatha and queen Kausalya, and *kāntabhakti* of Sita are remarkable. Similarly, in the *Mahābhārata*, Pāndavas are the ideal devotees of Krishna. Whenever they confronted calamity, Krishna rushed to their help. *Vātsalyabhakti* of their mother Kunti, and *sākhyabhakti* of Arjuna, Yudhisthira, Bhima and Draupadi are noteworthy in the *Mahābhārata*.⁴⁸⁸

The *Bhagavadgītā* is one of the best known and the most authoritative texts in Hinduism, and is known to be one of the jewels of the world's philosophical, religious, and literary masterpieces.⁴⁸⁹ R. C. Zaehner underlines that "it was the *Bhagavadgītā* that set in motion the transformation of Hinduism from a mystical technique based on the ascetic virtues of renunciation and self-forgetfulness into the impassioned religion of self-abandonment to God."⁴⁹⁰ The *Bhagavadgītā* is a passage from the *Mahābhārata*, and is a short work consisting of eighteen chapters. It has two broad approaches: one looking back to the Upanishads, based on the ideas and practices of early *yoga* teachings, and the other focusing on the worship of a gracious God who will intervene in this world on behalf of his devotees when moved by love and compassion for them. The *Bhagavadgītā* is a work of synthesis comprising of the transcendentalism of the Upanishads, the theism of the *Bhāgavatas*, and the dualism of *Sāṅkhya* – the Impersonal Absolute of pure thought and the personal *Īshvara* of religious emotion.⁴⁹¹ Historically, *bhakti* as a means to liberation makes its first appearance in the *brahminical*

⁴⁸⁷ C. Lala, 1989, p. 5.

⁴⁸⁸ D. Kinsley, *Hinduism*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1982, p. 24-25. See also: C. Lala, 1989, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁹ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 77. See also: R. Singh, 2006, p. 51.

⁴⁹⁰ R. C. Zaehner, 1962, p. 134.

⁴⁹¹ C. Lala, 1989, p. 7.

tradition in a muted form in the *Shvetāshvatara Upanishad*, and more explicitly in the *Bhagavadgītā*.⁴⁹² G. Flood points out that in the *Bhagavadgītā* *bhakti* is projected as a way of salvation. The orthodox *brahminical* idea that only the twice-born have access to liberation gets modified with *bhakti* in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Through devotion, men, women and children get to the state of *brahman* and enter the Lord through his grace.⁴⁹³

As I have mentioned above, the *Bhagavadgītā* assigns a lot of importance to *bhakti*. Krishna, as an *avatāra* of Vishnu, assumes the status of God. *Bhakti* is, therefore, related to serving Krishna. However, it is to be noted that the *Bhagavadgītā* merely transforms existential *bhakti* to theistic *bhakti* without denying its existential role. The transformation of the relationship between Arjuna and Krishna in the *Bhagavadgītā* is indicative of Vedic *bhakti* changing into theistic *bhakti*. Their friendship turns into a bond between man and God.⁴⁹⁴ R. Singh rightly notes that some scholars of the 19th century viewed the *Bhagavadgītā* as heralding a new *bhakti* religion, a devotional faith, distinct from the so-called *Brahmanism* and its *Vedānta* philosophy of attribute-less *Brahman* and *ātman*. Consequently, these scholars created an artificial dichotomy between devotional and non-devotional Hinduism, as well as between *bhakti* religion and philosophical doctrines. According to him, these speculations are untenable because traditionally *bhakti* is a practice and not a doctrine.⁴⁹⁵

7.2. Perceptions of *bhakti*

Previously, I have noted that *bhakti* has been varyingly interpreted in the different Hindu scriptures and traditions, and conceived with diverse nuances. Now, it will be interesting to see how Hindus at the Oratory perceive *bhakti*. I shall observe some of the themes and categories of *bhakti* owing to the different natures of devotees at the Oratory.

⁴⁹² W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 51-52.

⁴⁹³ G. Flood, 1996, p. 126.

⁴⁹⁴ R. Singh, 2006, p. 76-77. See also: S. Anand, 1996, p. 74.

⁴⁹⁵ R. Singh, 2006, p. 104.

7.2.1. Perception of *bhakti* by Hindus at the Oratory

For Hindus at the Oratory, *bhakti* is the practice of unconditional love with a transcendent element instilled in it that leads a person to *moksha*. The offerings of *bhakti*, the gifts of love, are most valuable to the Bhagavan, or God.⁴⁹⁶ It is not the size or the value of the gift but the sentiment of giving that is important. Offering, adoration and the urge to give are natural aspects of *bhakti*. The path of *bhakti* is not elitist; it is open to all. Not just *Brahmins*, or priests, but people from other *varnas*, or castes, even those who are *shudras*, or from the lowest caste, can practice *bhakti*. Every human, without prejudice, has access to the practice of *bhakti* as a means to move toward *jñāna*, or the realization of God, and *moksha*, or salvation.

The chart below shows that many of the Hindus (10) interviewed ascribed *bhakti* to any religious devotion, and understood some of the devotional practices at the Oratory. They believed that *bhakti* was a recurring religious practice intended to lead one to God, and it helped them in their faith journey. Most of the Hindus (9) openly acknowledged that they were devoted to several Gods. While for some of them *bhakti* is the worship of a God, for others it is a faith-related activity. Some Hindus (4) declared that they did not know anything about *bhakti*, though they came to the Oratory for prayers and worship, while others admitted that it was hard to define *bhakti*.

⁴⁹⁶ *Bhagavān* is considered to be the Godhead. *Bhāgavata* means “in a relationship with *Bhagavān*.” Therefore, the *bhakta* or devotee is sometimes called *bhagavata*. *Bhagavān* is the singular, ultimate manifestation of divinity that is most loving and intimate. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Krishna is the Godhead, who is most loving. The word *Bhagavān* means one who possesses *bhaga* that is fortune, wealth, blessings; hence its usual translation is the “Blessed One.” The term *bhaga* also means “portion,” and thus *Bhagavan* also means the one who allocates proper portion or fate to every creature. *Bhagavān* is thus the grand disposer of one’s fate, wealth, and blessings. It seems that the earliest pilgrims of *bhakti*, called *bhagavatas*, worshipped Narayana, a name of Vishnu, later known as Vasudeva. *Bhagavatas* seemed to oppose Vedic values, especially the caste system.

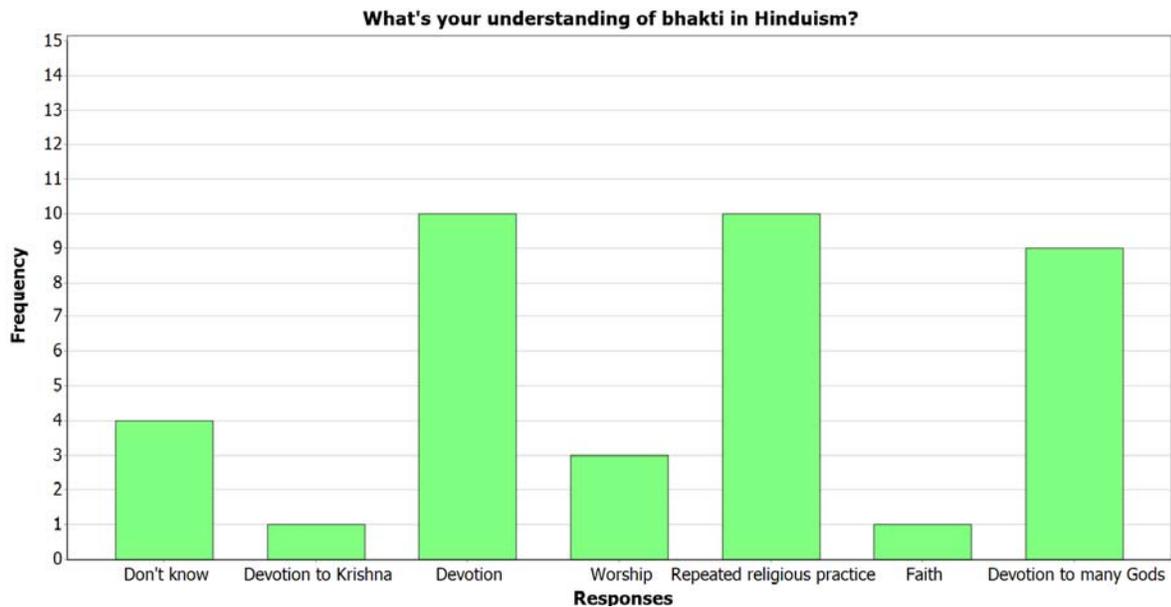


Figure 29: Understanding of *bhakti* by Hindus at the Oratory

Although, the Hindus who come to the Oratory probably have a superficial understanding of the various interpretations of *bhakti* in Hinduism, they certainly are rooted in their devotional practices. They direct their devotion to their personal God by offering their prayers to other Gods. Though they come to the Oratory for regular devotions, all their Gods are not found at the Oratory.

7.2.2. Perception of *bhakti* by educators in faith at the Oratory

The educators in faith also perceive that *bhakti* has something to do with Hindu devotion. Most of the educators do not know much about *bhakti* and Hinduism. Many of them have just observed Hindus participating in various religious activities at the Oratory. However, they did not venture to converse with the Hindus. Unfamiliar traits and language barriers have deterred them from taking initiative to enter into dialogues with Hindus.

From the chart below, I note that the educators recognized that *bhakti* was connected to the religious devotions of Hindus. From their readings and observations, they pointed out that *bhakti* practice opens the hearts of people to God. Many of them said that *bhakti* had something to do

with an individual's body. The educators in faith observed that the Hindus at the Oratory used different parts of their body in prayer and worship. *Bhakti* practice might help Hindus experience God's divine love and compassion.

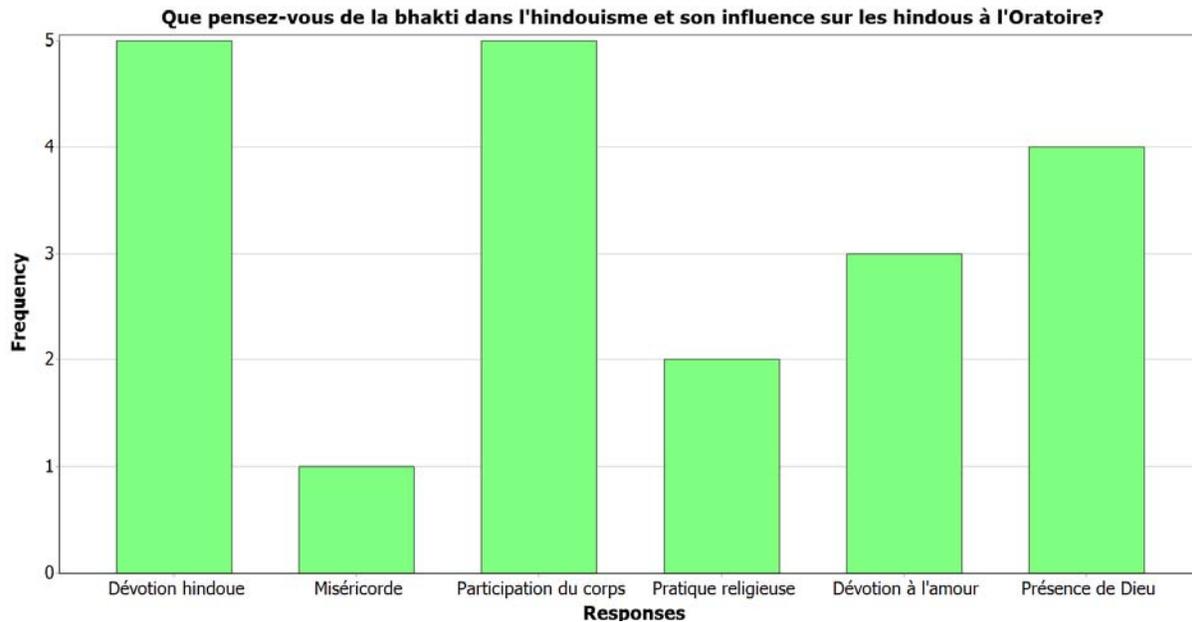


Figure 30: *Bhakti* in Hinduism and its influence on Hindus – educators in faith

My study reveals that all the educators (5) in faith consider *bhakti* a devotional practice. Setting aside the theoretical aspect of *bhakti*, Hindus gain happiness in daily life through the practice of *bhakti*, aligned with their prayer life. Hinduism, just as in Christianity, might encompass different approaches to prayer. Praying in a religious and sacred place carries more meaning for Hindus. All the educators (5) in faith confirmed that the Hindus at the Oratory used vastly diverse parts of their body in their devotional practices. Some (4) of them underlined that *bhakti* helped the Hindus open their hearts to God. While three of them said that *bhakti* was a devotional love, two of them mentioned that the Hindus took part in different religious activities simply because of their *bhakti*. One educator saw that *bhakti* was connected to divine mercy or compassion.

It is interesting to note, through the study, that the educators in faith had little idea about the practice of *bhakti*. However, they are good observers. Though they do not enter into a dialogue

with the Hindus who participate in different religious activities, they do underline the importance of involving the entire person in building a deep relationship with God; both body and spirit of an individual needs to be involved. The educators acknowledged that the Hindus at the Oratory strove to be closer to the Divine.

7.3. Devotions to divine figures

Hindus at the Oratory seemed to have devotions to divine figures or saints at the Oratory. Among them, Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André have a special place. Discussion on devotion to saints and *avatāras* came up during my interview. From Christian perspective, saints are different from *avatāras*. In general, the Christians say that a person is not born a saint but he becomes a saint. The exemplary and heroic life of a person leads him to sainthood. In the Catholic Church, there are many criteria for a person to be canonized, including some miracles obtained through the intercession of the person. Hindus in India do not call *avatāras* as saints. *Avatāras* are incarnations of God in different forms and during various periods of history. Rama and Krishna are the most popular *avatāras*. There are ten *avatāras* of Vishnu in Hinduism. The main purpose of *avatāra* is to re-establish *dharma* in the world. When there is a rise of immorality, God manifests in an *avatāra* to establish righteousness. The *Bhagavad* incarnates himself, sends forth himself, as an *avatāra* in human form, out of love for humanity. It is a two-way love: humans love God, and God loves and cares for mankind.⁴⁹⁷ Therefore, *avatāra* is the belief in the repeated descents of God in a visible form with the intent to save people. Whenever humanity finds itself in particular difficulty, God manifests visibly to help humans. Krishna, God incarnate, says in the *Bhagavadgītā* “Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bhârata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create incarnate) Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.”⁴⁹⁸ S. Anand underlined that the “most powerful self-revelation of God is found in His coming down to be with us, in His *avatāras*. However, in order to respond to God’s offer of love man needs His assistance, His grace.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ R. Singh, 2006, p. 65.

⁴⁹⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, chapter 4, 7-8, New York, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948, p. 154-155.

⁴⁹⁹ S. Anand, 1996, p. 52.

Analyzing the *Bhagavata Purāna*, he said that the *kathā*, or story, of the *avatāra* is not only pleasant, but also infinitely purifying. The *avatāra-kathā* leads man to the highest devotion to the Lord and helps him eventually to attain his ultimate destiny.⁵⁰⁰

Sri Ramakrishna teaches that it is the same universal God that assumes different forms in incarnation: diving in the ocean of life he manifests himself here as Rama, there as Krishna, somewhere else as Christ! Similarly, Vivekananda exhorts that let us find God not only in Jesus of Nazareth, but in all the great Ones that proclaimed Him, in all who have come after him and in all who are yet to come.⁵⁰¹ The vast majority of Hindus accept that Jesus is an incarnation of God, but they do not accept Him as the unique and perfect incarnation of God. They respect Him as a great master or guru.

7.3.1. Understanding of *avatāra* by Hindus at the Oratory

The graph below shows us that most of the Hindus at the Oratory believe that an *avatāra* is a manifestation of God. They consider an *avatāra* as real and associated with life. For some of them, Krishna was an *avatāra* and for others Jesus was an *avatāra* of God. They believe that Jesus died for people. Hindus acknowledge that there is no other God who died for the people. Learning the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, Hindus are attracted to him because he suffered for the entire human race through his death. He brought peace and joy with his resurrection. A few of the Hindus opined that *avatāras* come to earth to bring peace on earth.⁵⁰² It is interesting to note that for some Hindus, Saint Joseph was an *avatāra* of God. In general, for Hindus, any saintly figure is an *avatāra* of God.

⁵⁰⁰ S. Anand, 1996, p. 52.

⁵⁰¹ S. Vidyatmananda, *What Religion is in the Words of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta, Advait Ashrama, 1972, p. 325.

⁵⁰² Marcelle Saindon studied how Buddha fascinated the devotees of Vishnu and he became one of the *avatāras*. It is not clear how and when Buddha came into the picture of ten *avatāras*. Some people say that it's in seventh century that a few Hindus considered him to be one of the *avatāras* of Vishnu. It's by tenth century that Hindus in many parts of India accepted Buddha as an *avatāra*. As a matter of fact, Buddha as an *avatāra* is more associated with destruction of the world to reconstruct it. *Kaliyuga* with all its confusion is attributed to Buddha *avatāra*. See also: M. Saindon, « Le Buddha comme *Avatāra* de Visnu et le mythe de Raji » in *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 47, 2004, p. 19-20 & 41-42.

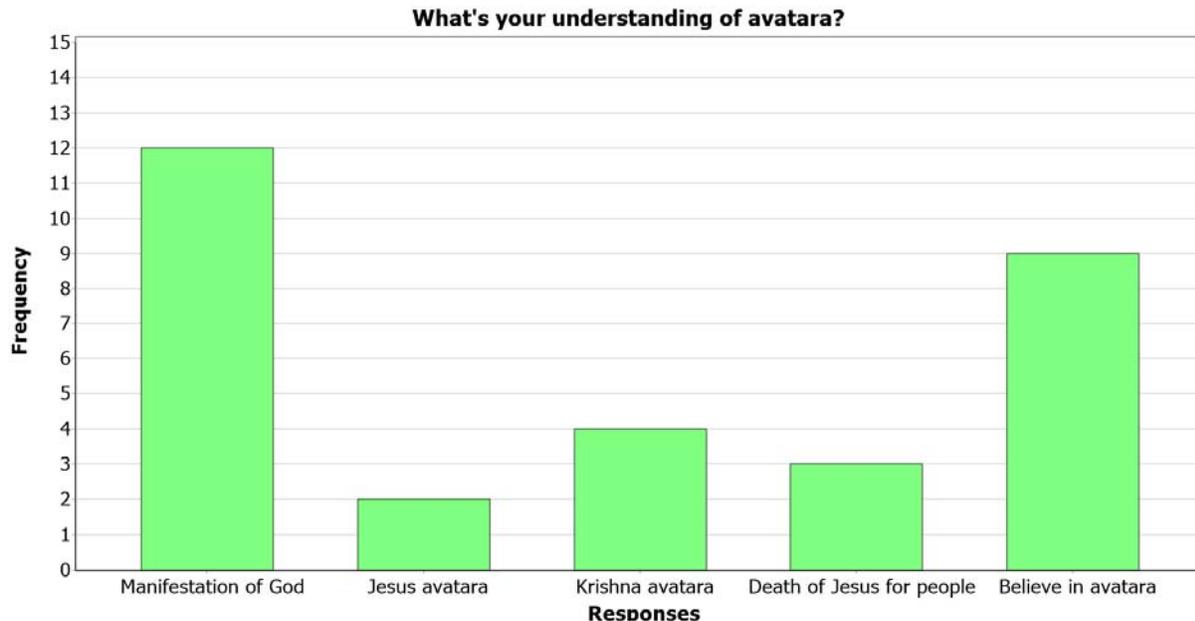


Figure 31: Understanding of an *avatāra* by Hindus

My study reveals that most of the Hindus (12) believe that an *avatāra* is a manifestation of God. Some (9) believe in any *avatāra* of God. While four said that Krishna was an *avatāra* of God, three said that Jesus was also an *avatāra* and died for the people, which make him quite different from Krishna. Hindus at the Oratory appreciate the figure of Jesus, who, they believe, can transform their lives.

7.3.2. Understanding of *avatāra* by educators in faith

The educators in faith at the Oratory recognize that every religion has its specific nature. The figure below reveals that most of the educators in faith highlighted that the Hindus at the Oratory were attracted by the divine figures. They held that the Hindus had a tendency to consider Christian saints as *avatāras* in keeping with Hinduism. Some of the educators in faith explicitly stated that an *avatāra* was an incarnation of God as seen in Hinduism. They also mentioned that Krishna was a known *avatāra* in Hinduism. The educators believed that an *avatāra* manifested to help humans. They, however, considered it important to distinguish between *avatāras* and saints.

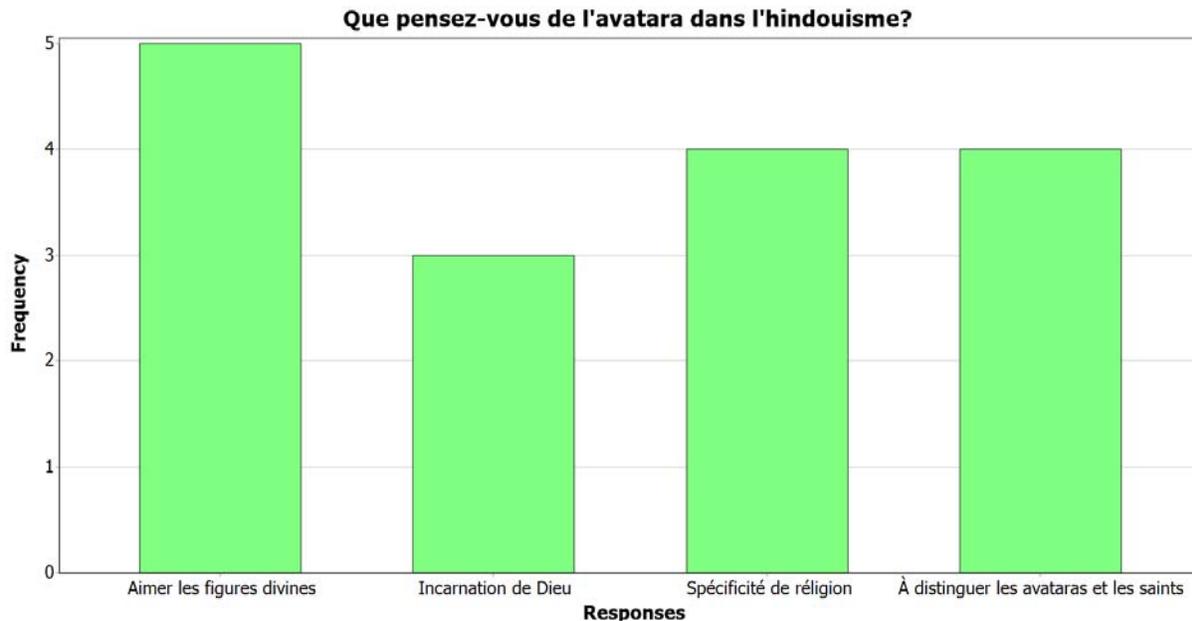


Figure 32: Understanding of an *avatāra* by educators in faith

My study reveals that the educators in faith are unanimous in their opinion concerning three things: all (5) of them agreed that every religion had its particular nature, and an *avatāra* was an incarnation of God according to Hinduism; and most of them (4) pointed out that the Hindus were attracted by divine figures irrespective of the religion associated with the icons. They attributed this as one of the reasons that many Hindus came to the Oratory for regular prayers and worship. A few (3) of them made it clear that it was essential to distinguish between an *avatāra* and a saint.

7.3.3. Divine figures of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André

The diagram below shows that Hindus at the Oratory assign positions of importance to Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André. Many Hindus consider Saint Joseph to be a father figure. They respect him as a friend, and pray to him for protection. Hindus have great *bhakti* for Saint Joseph. Some Hindus have *bhakti* for, and pray to Saint Brother André. It is remarkable that some Hindus consider Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André as their personal *avatāras* and God!

They seem to obtain miracles and favours through the intercessions of these saints at the Oratory. It is one of the reasons why they regularly come to the Oratory. Hindus, who come to the Oratory, share their faith experience with their family and friends. They accompany others to this place of worship and prayer. They help others discover the divine figures of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André.

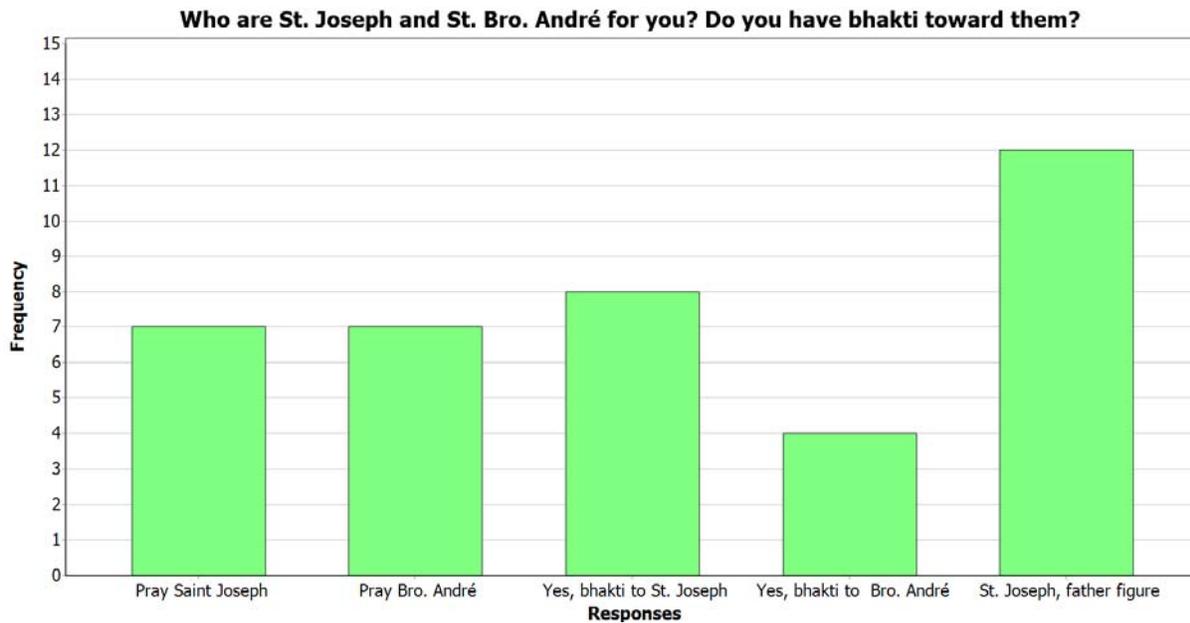


Figure 33: Figures of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André for Hindus

My study reveals that of the fifteen Hindus interviewed, twelve attributed Saint Joseph a father figure. Eight out of the fifteen Hindus have *bhakti* for Saint Joseph and seven of them pray to him. When it comes to Saint Brother André, seven out of fifteen Hindus pray to him and four have *bhakti* towards him. The responses make it clear that Saint Joseph is more prevalent among Hindus than Saint Brother André. It is true that the patron of the Oratory is Saint Joseph and he was universally known much before Saint Brother André. The figure of Saint Brother André is new to many Hindus.

7.3.4. Jesus *bhakti* at the Oratory

In my study, I have noted that Hindus have various religious practices at the Oratory. In general, Hindus are attracted to divine figures and sacred places. The graph below indicates that Hindus, who come to the Oratory, nurture Jesus *bhakti*. They pray to Jesus and consider him their personal God. At the same time, many of them have a tendency to foster Krishna *bhakti*. Some Hindus differentiate Jesus from other Hindu Gods. A few Hindus have *bhakti* for Saint Joseph and others have *bhakti* for Saint Brother André.

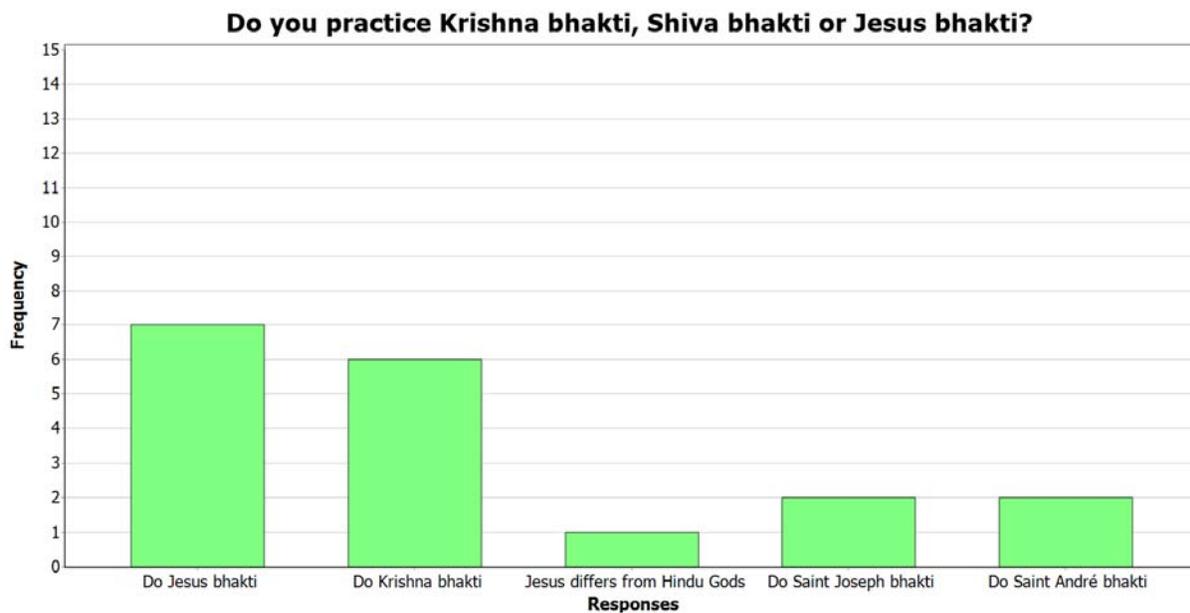


Figure 34: *Bhakti* at Saint Joseph's Oratory

Hindus do not like to displease any God. They happily receive favours given by any God. They do not shy away from knocking at the door of any divine person! Respecting any divine figure is part of Hindu living.

My study indicates that out of the fifteen interviewees, seven people practice Jesus *bhakti* and six of them practice Krishna *bhakti*. Two of them had *bhakti* for Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André. Only one of the fifteen interviewees believed that Jesus was different from any Hindu God. The above figure illustrates the lack of unanimity in the responses of the Hindus. All of

them do not come to the Oratory to conduct their Jesus *bhakti* practices. It seems that Hindus are concerned with the regularity of religious practices during their time at the Oratory. They choose the Oratory as a sacred site to perform their religious practices directed at their personal deities, be it Jesus, a Saint or a Hindu *avatāra* or deity.

7.4. *Pūjā* at the Oratory

Hindus conduct their *pūjā* in many ways. In the introductory chapter of my study, doing the literature review, I underlined that Hindu worshiping patterns cannot be codified or restricted certain forms. Hindus make numerous offerings to please their deities. G. Flood has cause to say that “Hindu ritual occurs in the home, in the temple, at wayside shrines, at places of pilgrimage such as the confluence of sacred rivers, and in specially constructed pavilions.”⁵⁰³ He further underlines that ritual precedes theology, and various theologies have been built upon the basis of rituals and make sense only in the context of ritual traditions.⁵⁰⁴ Physical gestures are important to Hindus in their rituals and devotional practices. My interviews with Hindus revealed that they use many gestures in their prayers at the Oratory. Their body and mind are both involved in while doing *pūjā*.

Pūjā is a Sanskrit word which loosely translates as ‘worship’, and is performed privately in homes and publicly in Temples. It is a prayer that is carried out with much devotion to please one or many divinities. It involves the offering of vegetarian food, water, lit lamps, flowers and incense to a deity. It is mainly the worship of an image according to *Agamic* scriptures. In private homes, *pūjā* is performed in a simple manner, whereas in Temples, *pūjā* might be elaborate with the chanting of *mantras*, or sacred verses, by the *pūjāri*, or temple priest, while icons are bathed, dressed and adorned. Ringing of bells, banging of drums, burning of incense are standard procedures in a *pūjā*.⁵⁰⁵ Notably, in a significant change in religious practice from the Vedic, through the late *Puranic*,⁵⁰⁶ to the modern times was the gradual replacement of *yajña*, or

⁵⁰³ G. Flood, 1996, p. 198.

⁵⁰⁴ G. Flood, 1996, p. 199.

⁵⁰⁵ G. Flood, 1996, p. 208-209.

⁵⁰⁶ It is believed that the *purānas* are composed between 3rd and 10th century.

sacrifice by *pūjā* as the primary form of worship. The official Vedic worship did not make use of images, but popular religion was certainly not entirely identical with Vedic orthodoxy.

Purānas, *Samhitās*, *Āgamas*, and *Tantras* have taken over a good deal of Vedic terminology and regulations and combined them with material from other traditions. In today's context, almost every Hindu household has its *mūrti*, or sacred idol, of a personal deity, and daily *pūjā* is offered to worship divinity. *Pūjā* could represent the devotion of an inferior being to a superior one. The deity who is worshiped does not depend on the devotee's offering. The latter has a need to be in relation with the deity.⁵⁰⁷ *Pūjā* consists of sixty-four individual ceremonies; in daily ceremonies at home, only some of them are usually performed. These are *āvahana*, invitation of the *Ishta devatā* (personal deity); *āsana*, offering a seat to the deity; *pādya*, offering water to wash the feet; *arghya*, offering water for washing the hands; *ācamanīya*, offering water to rinse the mouth; *snānīya*, water for a bath; *vastra*, leaves for clothing the deity; *yajñopavīta*, offering a sacred thread; *chandana*, sandalwood paste; *pushpa*, flowers; *dhūpa*, incense; *dīpa*, a lighted lamp; *naivedya*, offering cooked food; *tāmbula*, a betel nut; *dakshinā*, some money; *namaskāra*, a solemn greeting; *pradakshinā*, circumambulation; and *mantrapushpa*, scattering a handful of blossoms before the image, reciting some honorific mantras. Each gesture is accompanied by appropriate mantras, varying from sect to sect.⁵⁰⁸

The key components of *pūjā* are ritual sequences, such as *darshana* (auspicious viewing) and *ārtī* (offering of light), which may also be discrete acts of worship. Through the recitation of particular mantras, and the sounding of bells, drums, and other instruments, a typical sequence begins with establishing the presence of the deity, its awakening or bidding (*āvahana*), and ends with its dismissal (*visarjana*). In between, the god or goddess, in the form of the *mūrti*, is treated as an honoured guest; the aim is to please, entertain, and win favour by serving with offerings and rites (*upacāra*). These may include bathing the image, dressing it, fanning it, anointing it with sandalwood, offering it food, water, flowers, *tulasī* (holy basil) leaves, *kumkuma* (vermilion), incense, and other substances, all accompanied by the chanting of mantras, *kirtanas*

⁵⁰⁷ D. Kinsley, 1982, p. 107.

⁵⁰⁸ T. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, California, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971, p. 110. See also: K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 155-156.

or *bhajans*.⁵⁰⁹ The offerings appeal to the five senses of smell, sight, hearing, touch and taste. By making offerings during *pūjā*, the devotee seeks to gain favour from the deities, though often the rites are performed just as an act of devotion. The blessing of the deity is received by the devotee in the form of a *tilaka* – a mark between the eyes made of red *kumkuma* or yellow sandal paste representing a third eye – or through the *prasāda* given at temples, which usually consists of blessed foodstuff or holy water.⁵¹⁰

Pūjā is different from the concept of *yajña* that was developed from a theology of sacrifice. *Yajña* in Vedic tradition is an act that has intrinsic power, and exercises compulsion, not only over a natural phenomenon but also over the *deva*, or associated God, without requiring the God's cooperation. *Yajña* is more comprehensive than a *deva*; it supersedes the power of the *deva*. There is a businesslike atmosphere in Vedic sacrificial religion. Every desired object has its specified sacrifice; every sacrifice has its price. *Devas* are believed to depend on the *yajña*. Offering sacrifices was part of *dharma*, of the established world order and the specific social order.⁵¹¹ *Pūjā* replaced Vedic sacrifice, *yajña*, as the core ritual. Unlike the Vedic *yajña*, which was performed solely by priests, and was often undertaken for the purpose of propitiating the Gods and maintaining the natural order of life, *pūjā*, in its simplest form, can be performed by anyone, and is most often an expression of gratitude and honour rather than of placating a deity. The popularity of *pūjā* was increased further after the *Bhagavadgītā* sanctified it as the core element of *bhakti*, a legitimate path to God, when Krishna declared that he would accept any offering, however humble, if that offering was made in the spirit of devotion (*Bhagavadgītā* 9.26).⁵¹²

7.4.1. Make-up

Hindus do not forget to do themselves up when they go to a Temple for *pūjā*. They wear *tilaka* on their forehead, *tulasī* beads on their neck and flower garlands on their hair. In the *Padma*

⁵⁰⁹ W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 245-246.

⁵¹⁰ D. Cush, C. Robinson & M. York, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 632.

⁵¹¹ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 149-150.

⁵¹² D. Cush, C. Robinson, & M. York, 2008, p. 632-633.

*Purāna*⁵¹³, there is a statement describing how a *Vaishnava* (devotee of Vishnu) should decorate his body with *tilaka* and beads. The devotees who decorate themselves purify the world, and everywhere they dwell they beautify that place.⁵¹⁴ Likewise, Hindus at the Oratory are well dressed, and they ensure that the children accompanying them, if any, are well dressed, too. Their appearance seems to indicate their respect to their God. Hindus also revere sacred places of worship.

7.4.2. Singing, dancing, and clapping

Hindus express the fullness of their devotion and joy by singing, dancing and clapping. They believe that their sins are forgiven when they sing, dance and clap before a *mūrti* of Krishna.⁵¹⁵ For Hindus, chanting and glorifying the Lord is the ultimate activity of a living entity.⁵¹⁶ As we know, Hinduism celebrates several festivals. Hindu festivals in India are celebrated in a grand manner. During the festival season, one can witness the joy of people in their songs, dances and ovation on the streets of India. This has now become part of Indian culture, and people belonging to other religious traditions also join Hindus in such expressions of joy. When we look beyond religion in performing a religious practice, we dispel barriers between religions, cultures, and languages. Hindus at the Oratory magnanimously join in Christian singing during the Eucharistic celebrations.

7.4.3. Bowing down and *padayatra*

Bowing down is a traditional Hindu gesture. It is a sign of respect that a Hindu makes, especially to elders, divine persons or God. In the *Naradiya Purāna*⁵¹⁷, one sees the element of bowing down and offering of respect to a deity. Someone who offers respects to the deity by bowing

⁵¹³ The *Padma Purāna* is one of the major eighteen *Purānas* in Hinduism. It is considered to be an encyclopedic text, named after the lotus in which Brahma appeared, and it includes sections on Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti. The composition date of *Padma Purāna* is not known and there seems to have many versions of *Padma Purāna*. Some of the contents of *Padma Purāna* are about pilgrimages.

⁵¹⁴ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 74.

⁵¹⁵ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 75.

⁵¹⁶ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 80.

⁵¹⁷ The *Naradīya Purāna* consists of two Sanskrit Vaishnavism texts. One among the two is a minor *Purāna* and the other one is a major *Purāna*. They discuss various *avatāras* of Vishnu. There are various versions of *Naradiya Purāna* texts.

down will get closer to the abode of Krishna.⁵¹⁸ Hindus at the Oratory show this sign of respect when they encounter Priests and Religious. They also bow down in front of *mūrtis* or statues.

Pādayātrā, journey by foot, is done to accomplish a pilgrimage. Some Hindus take vows to go on pilgrimages on foot. In India, pilgrims journey on foot for months to reach their destinations. Persons who attempt to visit the holy pilgrimage sites, like Vrndavana, Mathura or Dvaraka, are glorified. Through such travels, they pass over the “desert” of material existence. In Vrndavana, Mathura and Dvaraka, it is the norm for all devotees to visit the various Temples situated there. People get sanctified by embarking on pilgrimages.⁵¹⁹ However, most of the Hindus at the Oratory come from within Montreal. Apart from climbing the steps at the Oratory, they do not engage in much walking.

7.4.4. *Archana and japa*

Archana, a short *pūjā*, is done with flowers, incense, and other elements to adore the Lord, and it involves physical movements that helps one to liberate oneself from all evil things.⁵²⁰ Some Hindus perform *archana* during formal religious celebrations, and others do it in personal, informal ways. Some Hindus at the Oratory engage in individual *archana* while praying to Saint Joseph. With flowers in their hands, they do *archana* at the statue of Saint Joseph or the tomb of Saint Brother André.

Japa is recitation of various Hindu prayers repeated several times a day. It comprises of chanting a *mantra*, or hymn, softly and slowly. The same mantra, when chanted loudly, is called *keertana*. For example, the *mahā-mantra* (*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*) could be recited slowly or loudly. In the *Padma Purāna*, it is said that the paths to liberation, and even heavenly happiness, at once open up for any person chanting the holy name, softly or loudly.⁵²¹ Hindus do *japa* at the Oratory. From our interviews with Hindus, we gather that they recite prayers that are meaningful

⁵¹⁸ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 76.

⁵¹⁹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 76.

⁵²⁰ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 78.

⁵²¹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 81.

to them. Some of them do not chant Christian prayers, at the Oratory, but their Hindu recitals and *japas*. The conducive atmosphere of the Oratory helps them properly carry out their *japa*.

7.4.5. Eating *prasādam* and drinking *tīrtha*

Eating *prasādam* is part of Hindu ritual. *Prasādam* is a blessed sweet or any food item that is distributed by the Priest at the end of any *pūjā* or prayer. *Prasādam* is shared among the participants, regardless of their status in social hierarchy. *Prasādam* bestows the deity's power and grace to the recipient. Usually, *prasādam* takes the form of a piece of fruit, cooked rice, water, or sweets. Some of the *prasādam* items are also flowers, ornaments from the image of the deity, *kumkuma* or sandalwood paste, *bhasma* or ash.⁵²² A person, which honours and regularly eats the *prasādam*, will remain attached to the Lord. When Hindus go to a Temple, they always receive *prasādam*, and may also bring it home for family members unable to go to the Temple.⁵²³ Hindus who participate in the Mass in the Oratory, envy their Christian coparticipants, who receive the body of Christ in the form of the blessed host. I have noted in my study that the Hindus who regularly visit the Oratory do not receive the Holy Communion even if they participate in the Mass. They know that the Communion is reserved for Catholics. Nevertheless, some Hindus who do not understand the importance of the Eucharist receive the Holy Communion assuming it to be *prasādam*. They are happy to receive the blessed host at the end of a Mass just as they receive the blessed *prasādam* at the end of a *pūjā*. Hindus easily equate the Holy Communion to *prasādam*. However, at the Oratory, during the English Mass on Sundays, I hear the announcement that the Holy Communion is reserved for Catholic worshippers. The same is not announced for the French Masses.

Theologically, *prasādam* is a term expressing the free choice or action, of a deity or power, to favour a devotee with the means to liberation (e.g. knowledge), or liberation itself. This idea that the liberation of the individual ultimately depends not on their actions (*karma*), but on a power beyond them, characterized as 'grace' (*prasāda*) appears in the *Katha-* (2.20f) and *Shvetashvatara-Upanishads* (3.20; 6.21), and the *Bhagavadgītā* (e.g. 18.56, 58), and is

⁵²² T. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, California, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971, p. 111. See also: W. J. Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 242-243.

⁵²³ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 85.

subsequently taken up by various theistic devotional movements. It probably receives its most sophisticated theological treatment in the *Vishishtādvaita* of Ramanuja and in the works of the Sri Vaishnava theologians who follow him.⁵²⁴

Tīrtha is blessed water used in Hindu *pūjā* in the Temple. *Tīrtha* is consumed by Hindus since it contains a purifying and life-giving element. Water holds great significance in Hinduism.⁵²⁵ Taking a bath in the water of the Ganges removes all sins and impurities. Many Hindus make their pilgrimage to the Ganges just for a holy bath. In this study, I observed Hindus using Holy Water from the Oratory. While Christians use Holy Water being aware of all its importance, the Hindu pilgrims probably use it to go along with the Christians! Holy Water does not become *tīrtha*, but it becomes a tangible means of religious encounter. There is an encounter with the Other of another religious tradition and the Other who is Ultimate. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will provide an elaborate interpretation of the practice of the usage of Holy Water.

7.4.6. Burning incense and touching *mūrti*

Burning incense is part of any Hindu *pūjā*. Devotees themselves bring incense to the temple as offering. For Hindus, it is essential to burn offerings to the Lord. The smell of the offering purifies the devotees. All material contamination will go away when they smell the incense.⁵²⁶

Mūrti has a special place in the life of Hindus. Touching the feet of the deity is common in Hinduism. It helps one to become closer to God through self-surrender.⁵²⁷ At the Oratory, Hindus go around touching different statues and images of saints. Hindus also touch the crucifix in the Crypt Church. The chart below shows that Hindus at the Oratory do many physical gestures while performing religious practices.

⁵²⁴ W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 243.

⁵²⁵ T. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, California, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971, p. 111.

⁵²⁶ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 86.

⁵²⁷ A. C. Bhaktivedanta, 1970, p. 87.

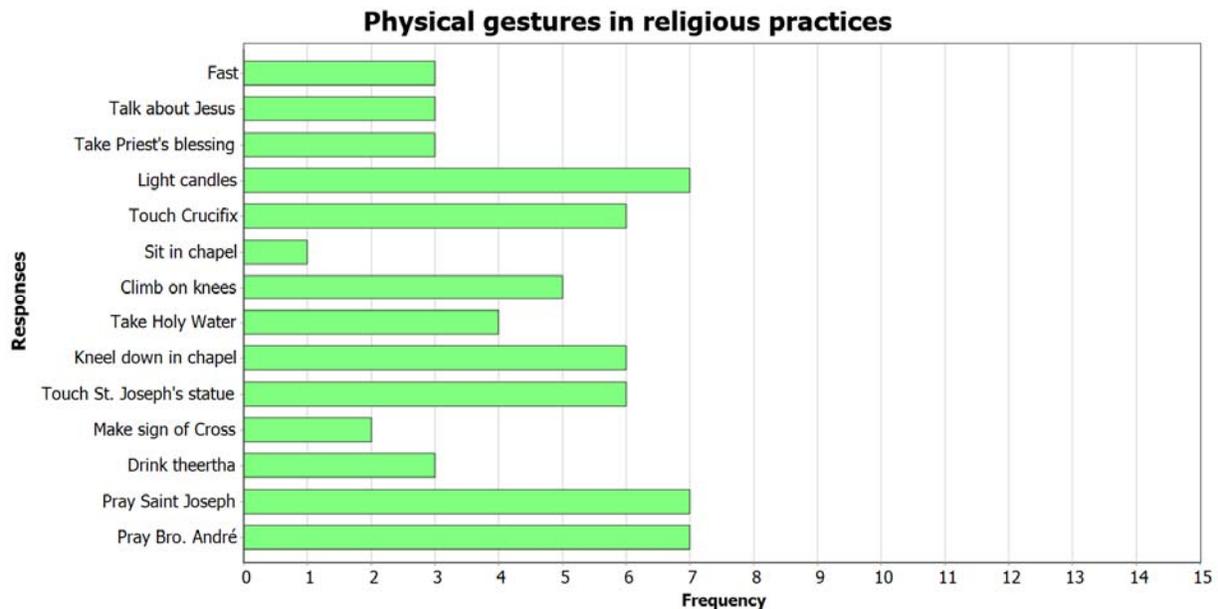


Figure 35: Physical gestures of Hindus while performing religious practices

7.4.7. Lighting candles

The symbolic usage of *Dīpa* has a greater meaning in Hinduism. In every Hindu *kathā* or story, one can hear that light conquers darkness. It is mentioned in the Upanishads: *Asato mā sad gamaya, tamaso mā jyotir gamaya, mrityor mā amritam gamaya*: from non-existence lead us to existence, from darkness lead us to light, from death lead us to immortality (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.3.28). I mentioned that *Dīpavali* is the festival of light that is celebrated by many Hindus. In the following chapter of this study, I will discuss in detail about the practice of the lighting of candle by Hindus at the Oratory.

7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have interpreted *bhakti* religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory. I conclude that it is not easy to put all Hindus through the same pipeline. The words of Francis Clooney are quite remarkable in this sense. “One of the first lessons India teaches us is that we must expand our sense of self. Even in ancient times, some Hindus went so far as to understand the self as the greatest, simplest, and most complete of all realities. What I know about myself in daily life only

hints at a much deeper, more everlasting inner self: self, my mere and ordinary self, gives an inkling of the original and supreme self which is the source of everything else.”⁵²⁸ It is true that most Hindu mythologies are built upon the practice of *bhakti*. Through the religious practices, Hindus want to go beyond their self where they find lasting bliss. There is a connection between *pūjā* worship, *shuddhi* or purity, *dharma* or morality, *karma* or responsibility, and *tapas* or austerity. G. Flood rightly said: “the sacred is regarded as divine power manifested in a variety of contexts: Temples, locations, images and people...The sacred in Hinduism is mediated through innumerable, changing forms which bear witness to a deeply rich, religious imagination, centred on meditation and transformation.”⁵²⁹ *Bhakti* is more than just “being religious,” since it can lead to *moksha* through *samsāra* or the cycle of rebirth. This sense of liberation is often connected to an afterlife with a personal supreme God. It is a question of loving relationship with the Divine. People have to be wise to discover God. True wisdom exists today as it existed in the past. A wise Hindu would suggest that one would not need to worry about the past. What is essential is to live today in a peaceful manner. God is just close to people now as he was to people yesterday.⁵³⁰ The four *mārgas* in Hinduism that I have mentioned in this chapter are ways to keep continued connection with God. For Hindus at the Oratory, *bhakti mārga* has a greater place in their life.

Hinduism is unique among other religions in the world as its diversity and flexibility attract many people today. It has not been a text-based religion and scriptures do not have the same status like in other major religions. Many people describe Hinduism as *sanātana dharma*, the eternal tradition or religion. Its’s to stick on to the idea that its origins lie beyond human history and its truth have been divinely revealed and passed down through the ages in the most ancient of the world’s scriptures, the *Veda*.⁵³¹ Many Hindus at the Oratory have never read the Upanishads, *Bhagavadgītā* or other Hindu texts. They are mostly concerned about their daily religious practices inherited from their older generation. There is no easy definition for Hinduism and Hindu religious practices. The diversity of religious practices of Hindus brings richness to their life. There are varieties of God, *avatāras*, spirits and supernatural beings for whom Hindus

⁵²⁸ F. Clooney, *Hindu Wisdom for all God’s Children*, Oregon, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005, p. 17.

⁵²⁹ G. Flood, 1996, p. 9-10.

⁵³⁰ F. Clooney, 2005, p. 112.

⁵³¹ K. Knott, 1998, p. 5.

perform *pūjās*. Though Hindus believe in one Supreme Deity, yet they offer prayers, *bhajans* and rituals to worship sacred images and divine figures.

What is important for this reserach is to make a conclusion from different thinking patterns in Hinduism so as to identify and understand the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory. The notion of *sanātana dharma* is more fitting for a Hindu to identify himself as a Hindu. A Hindu can be identified in his dynamic existence and character. I underlined that Hinduism is not a static but a dynamic way of life. My field study at the Oratory and interviews with Hindus reveal that Hindus are not static in creed, rituals, and practices. I think that Hindus hold on to the notion of openness, evolution, non-historicity, religious tolerance and non-acceptance of the eternal revelation. To certain extent, these elements make them be a Hindu and come to the Oratory for doing their religious practices.

CHAPTER 8

8. INTERPRETATION OF THE USAGE OF HOLY WATER AND THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

8.1. Introduction

Water is essential part of the daily living of human beings. It has been considered as an important element in many sacred religious celebration and meal. For Christians, the holy meal of the Eucharist, having roots in the memorable Passover meal, uses water as part of the celebration. Water is important in Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Hindus use water for the sacred *pūjā* in the temple and at home. Water from the holy rivers and pilgrimage sites is sacred for Hindus.⁵³² Many religions consider water as a powerful cleansing property, and it is used as a primary object of purification. In some faiths, ablution became part of the ritual before any celebration. Ablution or ritual bathing involves the act of washing away physical and spiritual impurity. Nathaniel Altman underlined that ablutions “involve the washing of hands, face, mouth, or other body parts, or can involve immersing the entire body in a lake, river, or ritual bath.”⁵³³ He stated that ritual cleansing can encompass many aspects of our being such as physical, emotional, mental and spiritual purification.⁵³⁴

John Swinton and Harriet Mowat underlined that “Christian practices are a reflection of the Church's attempts to participate faithfully in the continuing practices of the triune God's redemptive mission to the world.”⁵³⁵ In the chapter dedicated to the observation of religious practices at the Oratory, I noted down that the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles have predominant place in the shrine. Christians, as well as Hindus, use Holy Water and light candles at the Oratory. There are three major themes that could be associated with the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles at the Oratory: needs of self-purification; needs of

⁵³² N. Altman, *Sacred Water – The Spiritual Source of Life*, New Jersey, Hidden Spring, 2002, p. 55-59 & 111-113. See also: B. Berger, *La formidable puissance de l'Eau Bénite*, Paris, Cristal, 2008, p. 12.

⁵³³ N. Altman, 2002, p. 125.

⁵³⁴ N. Atman, 2002, p. 126-127.

⁵³⁵ J. Swinton & H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London, SCM Press, 2006, p. 24.

healing and quest of the Divine. These themes are connected to greater search for forgiveness, meaning of life and desire to come back to self to be with the Divine.

Hindus, taking Holy Water from the Oratory or lighting candles, have a lot of faith in their practices. They touch their eyes and head with Holy Water. Their conversations are concerned with healing, pardon, purification and getting connected to the Divine. Holy Water from the Oratory seems to bring a new dynamism in the lives of Hindus.

For Catholics, the very act of taking Holy Water reminds them of the Sacrament of Baptism. The baptismal water is a symbol of purification and rebirth. Two essential elements of the Baptism are immersion and emersion. Through immersion in water, the person is symbolically dead and through emersion in water, the person symbolically receives a new life in Christ. At the moment of Baptism, those who open their hearts receive many graces from God.

The Christian tradition of the usage of light as a “symbol of life” is remarkable from the beginning of Christianity. Jesus’ words “I am the light of the world” (John 8: 12) bring meaning to all those who light candles in Churches. When people light candles, they associate themselves with Jesus, the Light of the World. At the Oratory, the practice of lighting candles brings meaning to the daily life of Hindus.

In this chapter, I will elaborate the importance of Holy Water in Christianity and *tīrtha* in Hinduism. The interpretation of the symbolism of light in Christianity and *Dīpavali* in Hinduism will enrich my inquiry. I will elaborate the perspectives of Salvation and *Moksha* respectively in Christianity and Hinduism. The relation with the Absolute will be a major concern in my interpretation.

8.2. Spontaneous interpretation of the usage of Holy Water

Water is an essential part of life. A normal human being cannot survive without the usage of water in his daily living. Water is one of the four essential elements of nature along with earth, air, and fire. Water gives life, it sustains and cleans. Human body thirsts for water as it is

essential for all bodily processes. “Water regulates our temperature, transports nutrients and oxygen to every cell and is essential for the elimination of toxins.”⁵³⁶ St. Francis of Assisi in his *Canticle to the Sun* says that water is “humble, precious and chaste.” Major civilizations in the world believed that water was a gift from the Divine and many cultures protected sources of water such as wells, springs, lakes, and rivers.⁵³⁷ Bernard Berger stated that “eau sacrée, celle que l’on a bénie est un vrai trésor.”⁵³⁸

For Hindus, the water in the Ganges is sacred. Taking bath in the river Ganges at least once in a lifetime is considered to be heavenly. Hindus, who can afford to make a pilgrimage, prefer to go to the Ganges and others get bottled water from there to use it for *pūjā* at home. Holy Water or Sacred Water is symbolic for Hindus. My interviews revealed that most of the Hindus take Holy Water from the Oratory. Some of them drink it while others apply it to their body. Some people carry Holy Water to their household and others carry it for those who are sick.

8.2.1. Holy Water in Christianity

In the Old Testament, the Creation story narrated the importance of water. The divine wind swept over the waters. “God said, ‘let there be a vault through the middle of the waters to divide the waters in two.’ And so it was. God made the vault, and it divided the waters under the vault from the waters above the vault.” (Genesis 1: 6-7). The story continued as God said, ‘let the waters under heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear.’ (Genesis 1: 9). Certain Biblical references are directed to the primordial waters that “were commanded to bring forth living creatures” and to the Tree of Life in Paradise that was fed by four sacred rivers. The water flowing out of Jerusalem described in Zechariah 14: 8 symbolizes the outpouring of God’s life in the waters beside the temple where Jesus proclaimed himself to be a “fount of living waters” (John 7: 37).⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶ N. Altman, *Sacred Water – The Spiritual Source of Life*, New Jersey, Hidden Spring, 2002, p. 11-12.

⁵³⁷ N. Atman, 2002, p. 39.

⁵³⁸ B. Berger, *La formidable puissance de l’Eau Bénite*, Paris, Cristal, 2008, p. 6.

⁵³⁹ N. Altman, 2002, p. 16-17.

The Exodus story of the Jewish people from Egypt was done by the power of miracles from God. During their pilgrimage, water played a significant role especially when they crossed the Red Sea and when they drank water from the rock of Mount Horeb. Water was part of many religious ceremonies in the Old Testament. It was the same with Jesus who used water in various occasions: his baptism in the Jordan, wedding at Cana, conversion of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well and healing of the blind man.⁵⁴⁰ Early Christians mostly followed the Jewish example of using the water for cleanliness. In Catholic Churches, water blessed by a Priest transfers his blessing to the faithful people.⁵⁴¹

The Easter Vigil celebration demonstrates that Catholics give much importance for Holy Water as it is related to their salvation story. During the celebration, water is blessed by a Priest and sprinkled upon the entire faithful people. This practice underlines a theology of new life in Christ through the baptism. When Catholics enter into the Church, traditionally they touch Holy Water and do a sign of the Cross. This practice stresses the need for self-purification; healing and quest for the Divine. B. Berger underlines that the baptism water has six essential elements: death, liberation, purification, incorporation, alliance and sanctification.⁵⁴² All these elements are found in the theology of baptism.

N. Altman affirmed that “for early Christians, baptism did not only signify a spiritual birth, but also symbolized the mystery of eternal life in which the individual “died” to his present existence in order to be reborn into a new life of at-on-ment with Christ and God.”⁵⁴³ During the adult baptism, the profession of faith is done to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God. Baptism gives rebirth and forgiveness of sin. The baptized person is united to the Mystical Body of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. “Unless a man be reborn again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3: 5). Three times immersion into the water meant that the person was baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ Ingeborg & H. Obereder, *Eau bénite et autres moyens de salut*, Suisse, Éditions du Parvis, 2012, p. 13-14.

⁵⁴¹ H. Theiler, *Holy Water and Its Significance for Catholics*, New York, Pustet & Co. 1909, p. 10-11.

⁵⁴² B. Berger, *La formidable puissance de l'Eau Bénite*, Paris, Cristal, 2008, p. 25-27. See also: H. Theiler, *Holy Water and Its Significance for Catholics*, New York, Pustet & Co., 1909, p. 37-39.

⁵⁴³ N. Altman, 2002, p. 171-172.

⁵⁴⁴ N. Altman, 2002, p. 172.

The usage of water in the Bible indicates to a higher reality. A careful analysis of the passage of Matthew 3: 1-17 would be apt. The usage of water was primordial in the baptism given by John the Baptist, and the symbolic usage of water lead to a higher reality. The baptism of John the Baptist was geared towards conversion, self-purification, and healing. John's baptism prepared people to encounter the One, who was to come. "I baptize you in water for repentance, but the One who comes after me is more powerful than I, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Mt 3: 11).

Matthew had difficulty with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist just because Jesus seemed to be subordinate to John the Baptist, having the need to be forgiven of sins and converted. It made Matthew to protest, and it came in the words of John the Baptist himself. The scandal was abolished as John the Baptist said: "it is I who need baptism from you, and yet you come to me!" (Mt 3: 14). John the Baptist publically placed Jesus as superior to him. Matthew resolved the underlying problem with the response of Jesus to John the Baptist: "Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that uprightness demands." (Mt 3: 15). The episode of the baptism of Jesus at Jordan was done to accomplish the Will of God. It revealed the importance of recognizing the connection between Baptism and Salvation by proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah.

By using the water from Jordan to baptize Jesus, John the Baptist recognized the importance of this water that he had been using for the baptism of conversion. However, with the baptism of Jesus, this same water became a symbol of new life. The water of Jordan helped all people to witness the manifestation of God and therefore discover God! "...the heavens opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him." (Mt 3: 16). The voice from heaven was not addressed to Jesus but to people gathered around him as it said: "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on him." (Mt 3: 17). These were the words of God the Father to introduce his Son to all people. The identity of God the Father was revealed as one who loved his Son by giving him all favours. The whole episode of the baptism of Jesus revealed the Trinitarian God. There was a perfect communion of the three Divine Persons. Letting behind John the Baptist, the Trinitarian God took the first place in the baptism of Jesus. The Pharisees,

Sadducees and people gathered around John the Baptist discovered the Divine intervention at Jordan. John the Baptist was in a state of adoration and admiration. Those who were at Jordan became the eye witnesses of God's intervention. They formed a community of believers receiving the message of John the Baptist based on conversion, self-purification, healing and encountering God.

The theological outlook of the baptism of Jesus and the usage of the water from Jordan highlighted that the encounter of people with God is more important than the usage of water from Jordan. In a similar way, the purpose or the end result of the usage of Holy Water should have a greater significance for Hindus at the Oratory. Just as John the Baptist used the water from Jordan to help people prepare themselves to encounter the Trinitarian God, Holy Water would be a means for Hindus to encounter God.

In my earlier chapter, I stated that almost all Hindus used Holy Water from the Oratory. The chart below shows that all the educators in faith also used Holy Water. For them, Holy Water was a symbol of purification. Four out of five of them said that the living water is a symbol of life. Three of them insisted that the usage of Holy Water reminded them of their baptismal renewal.

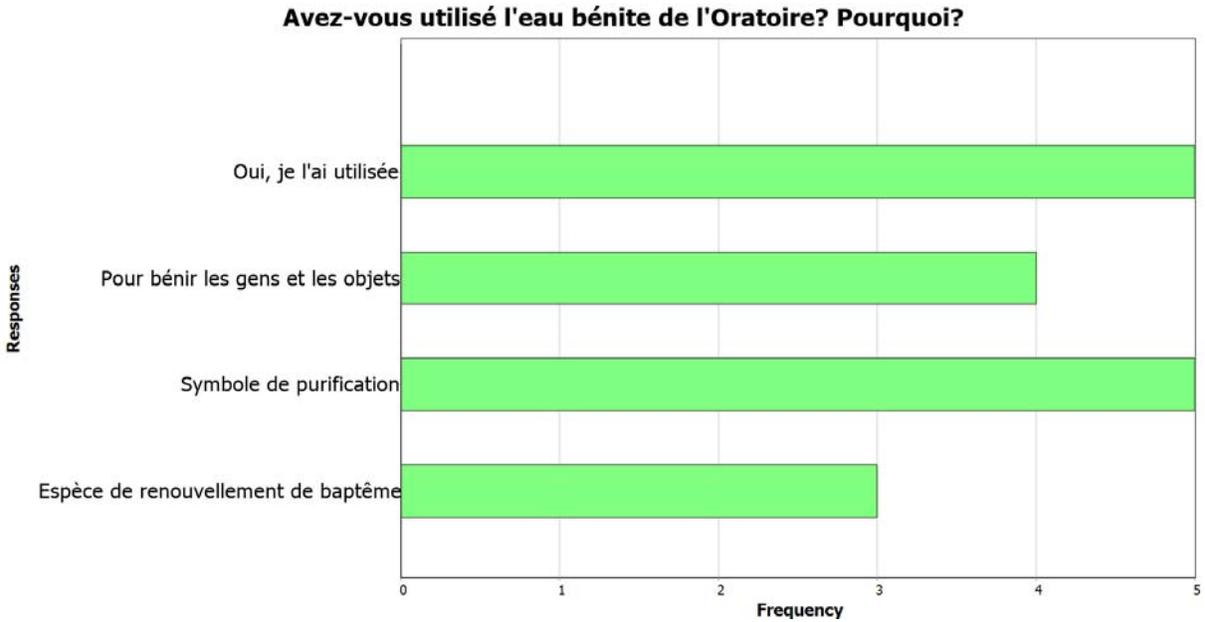


Figure 36: Usage of the Holy Water by the educators in faith

All the educators in faith think that the practice of the usage of Holy Water is good to motivate people in their faith journey. As in the chart below, they want to encourage pilgrims to do such practices as the faith journey is not simply intellectual. All of them agreed that the emotions and gestures help people move forward in the journey of faith.

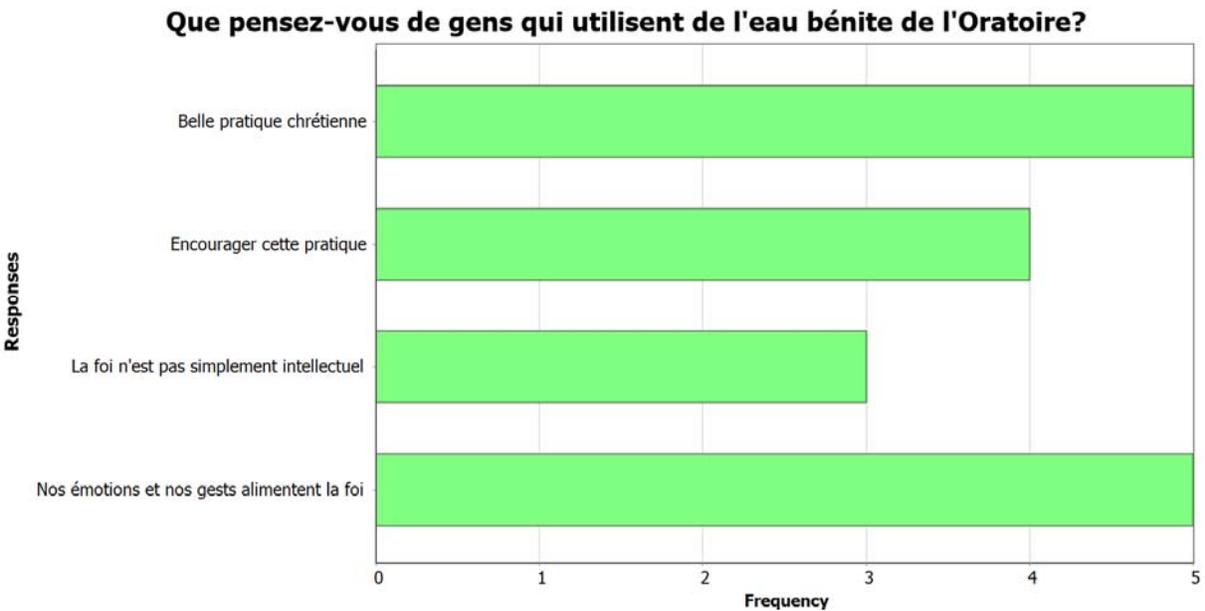


Figure 37: Usage of the Holy Water by people at the Oratory – educators in faith

8.2.2. Relevance of the interpretation with realities and actors

The material reality of the story is *water*. The description of the clothing of John the Baptist with camel hair and leather belt capture the attention of people. His food was locusts and wild honey. When it comes to relational realities, the dialogue between Jesus and John the Baptist is important. The relationship between water and baptism, spirit and dove, voice and heavens are to be noted. In the whole episode, the author of this passage wants to give greater importance to Jesus, who descends into the water of Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist.

The actors in the episode are: John the Baptist, Pharisees, Sadducees, Jesus, Holy Spirit and God the Father. John the Baptist gives baptism by inviting people to conversion. He prepared the people for the coming of Jesus. He makes himself small by giving a greater place for Jesus. His identity is seen as the precursor who came to prepare the way for Jesus. The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to receive baptism from John the Baptist. They were to go through a conversion of heart. Their identity is seen as rebellious and stubborn people. Jesus took the initiative to come to John the Baptist to be baptized. He wanted to join the people who received the baptism of John. Jesus' identity is revealed by John the Baptist as he said: "It is I who need baptism from you." His identity as the Son of God is confirmed twice; first by the Holy Spirit who descends upon Jesus as a dove, and then by the voice from the Father "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him." The Holy Spirit came down on Jesus, and all the people gathered at the time of baptism. The identity of the Spirit is revealed as the communion between the Father and the Son. God the Father pronounced the words at the time of the baptism. His identity is revealed as one who loves his Son by giving him all favours.

In the whole episode, there was a representation of the Triune God. The relationship between the three divine persons was equal and there was a perfect communion between them. John the Baptist took a secondary role in the entire episode. The Pharisees, Sadducees and other people who came to receive the baptism from John, discovered more about God's intervention in their lives. They became witnesses of the Trinitarian God and thereafter believers in that God. They experienced conversion, healing and purification of themselves through their encounter with God. John the Baptist was in a state of awe and adoration. The interpretation of this text helps to

see the connection between God and human beings. Jesus associated himself with all people at Jordan. John the Baptist wanted to make a community of believers in God.

8.2.3. *Tīrtha* in Hinduism

Tīrtha, which means water in Sanskrit, is a place where is a well, lake, river, pond or sea. The water from a pilgrimage site is considered to be holy. *Tīrtha* also means crossing or river ford or making a pilgrimage. K. Klostermaier remarked that “as the Supreme becomes concretized in space and time through images and festivals, so his grace becomes localized at the *tīrthas* forever, intensified at certain times but always available to the pilgrims. There are thousands of recognized *tīrthas* in India.”⁵⁴⁵ Hindus like to do pilgrimage, and they take a *snāna* or bath in the water at the pilgrimage site. It has something to do with cleansing of sin especially when it is done in the seven sacred rivers: the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Godavari, the Narmada, the Indus, the Kaveri and the Saraswati. Hindu pilgrimage is called *tīrthayātrā* that is an act of devotion to carrying out a vow. It is believed that the tradition of bathing in the Ganges goes back to 634 C.E. As per Hindu belief; the Ganges purifies everything that it touches. “Pilgrims come to the river believing that bathing in it will cleanse them of their sins and will allow them to take one step closer to freedom from the cycle of birth and death, to a blissful state known as *moksha*.”⁵⁴⁶

Subhadra Sen Gupta underlined that “a *tīrtha* is a Hindu place of pilgrimage, a sacred space resonant with purity and goodness.”⁵⁴⁷ He states that the *Saptapurīs* or seven important places of pilgrimage are in connection with the supreme liberation of Hindus. The seven places are Kashi, Kanchi, Mayapuri, Ayodhya, Mathura, and Swaravati. Hindus like to go at least to one of these locations during their lifetime so as to attain *moksha*. Going to *tīrthas*, worshipping God in the Temples and bathing in holy rivers will liberate them from their sins, and they will be better off in the world of *samsāra*. He also affirmed that water was essential for Hindus in their temple cult or *pūjā*.⁵⁴⁸ Speaking about *tīrtha*, Klaus Klostermaier underlined that “in all those places there is

⁵⁴⁵ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 282.

⁵⁴⁶ N. Altman, *Sacred Water – The Spiritual Source of Life*, New Jersey, Hidden Spring, 2002, p. 136. See also: S. S. Gupta, *Theertha – Holy Pilgrim Centres of the Hindus*, New Delhi, Rupa & Co., 2001, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁷ S. S. Gupta, 2001, p. 1.

⁵⁴⁸ S. S. Gupta, 2001, p. 2-4.

constant routine worship going on and thousands of *pūjāris* are busy performing rituals on behalf of, and for the benefit of, those who pay the sums specified for each particular form of worship.”⁵⁴⁹ In this age of secularization and Westernization, a greater religiosity, and another reality could be noticed in Hindu milieu of *tīrthas*.⁵⁵⁰ There is a general custom that Hindus drink the water that is used for *pūjā*.

The chart below indicates that all the Hindus at the Oratory have used Holy Water that they get from a Hindu temple after having attended a *pūjā*. Many (7) of them put *tīrtha* on their forehead and body. They think that the blessed water has a purifying element in it. The same concept can be attributed to Holy Water that is at the disposal of pilgrims at the Oratory. Some of the Hindus may not differentiate *tīrtha* from the Temple and Holy Water from the Church.

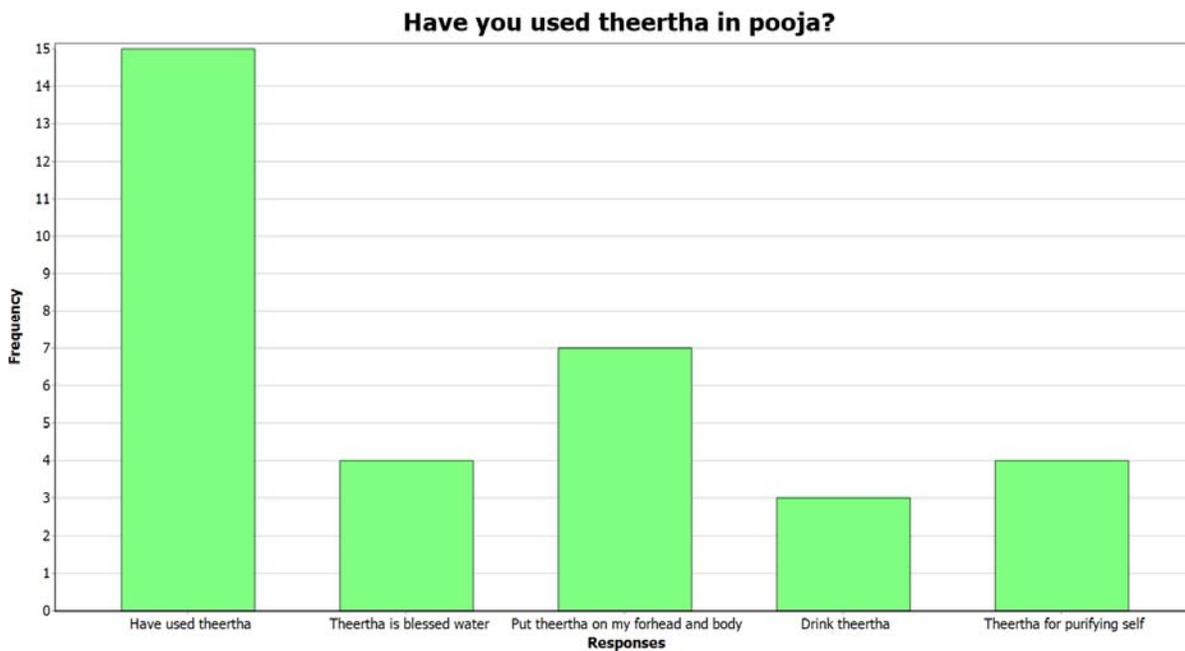


Figure 38: Usage of *tīrtha* by Hindus in Hindu Temple

⁵⁴⁹ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 287.

⁵⁵⁰ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 287.

8.2.4. Convergences

For Christians, taking Holy Water is an efficacious ritual with its significance and for Hindus, taking *tīrtha* significant. The usage of Holy Water in Christian rituals and Hindu *pūjā* make water special for them. Christians and Hindus desire to purify themselves through the use of Holy Water. At Saint Joseph's Oratory, certain Hindus imitate Christians who do the practice. For both Christians and Hindus, the underlining element of the practice of the usage of Holy Water is the need for blessing, healing and desire to be closer to the Divine.

8.2.5. Divergences

The practice of taking Holy Water in a bottle is a Christian tradition. The water that falls into a bottle also reminds Christians about their baptism in water.⁵⁵¹ Many Christians know that there is a theology of rebirth in the usage of Holy Water. The faith of one who does the practice is primordial in the whole process.

As mentioned above, Hinduism gives greater importance for water. The ritual of washing oneself and purifying his body is vital for Hindus who participate in *pūjā* in the temple and at home. Hindus take a bath in pure water before going to the temple for *pūjā* or before performing it at home.

8.3. Practical elements of the use of Holy Water

Water is a common property. Water is considered as a free commodity even when there is scarcity. Many times, the cost of water is not recognized, but the cost of capturing, treating and transporting water is taken into consideration. Water is used in vast quantities in different parts of the world for various purpose. Water as a resource has major six characteristics. *Water is ubiquitous*: there is no place on earth where human beings live without water. *Water is a heterogeneous resource*: it exists in different physical states. *Water is a renewable resource*: contaminated or salty water can be purified. *Water may be a common property*: it is available to

⁵⁵¹ Earlier in this chapter, we have seen the Christian tradition of the usage of water especially in the Sacrament of Baptism.

all without direct charge for use. *Water is used in vast quantities*: the usage of water exceeds the total amount of any other single resource. *Water is very inexpensive*: this is one of the reasons why water is used in abundance.⁵⁵²

Keeping in mind the general perspectives and characteristics of water, people attribute another meaning to it when water is blessed. Holy Water is considered to be a sacramental in the Church. In general perception, Sacramental is sacred sign that possesses the power to produce certain effects on human beings through the medium of the Church. « Les sacramentaux sont des signes sacrés qui possèdent le pouvoir de produire des effets surnaturels. Ils n'ont pas ce pouvoir en eux-mêmes, ils le doivent à l'intercession de l'Église. »⁵⁵³ Ingeborg and H. Obereder affirmed that it was important to know the details of Holy Water as a sacramental. « Connaître l'eau bénite ne veut pas dire savoir qu'elle existe. Mais c'est connaître sa nature, ses éléments, son origine, son usage et son action. »⁵⁵⁴ They insisted that Holy Water did not become holy without the blessing of a Priest. « Elle ne devient bien sûr eau bénite que par la bénédiction du prêtre. »⁵⁵⁵

In the context of the Oratory, I underlined that both Hindus and educators in faith use Holy Water. Hindus mostly use Holy Water for their purification and healing, and they carry it for their family members. The educators in faith rarely use Holy Water for themselves but they use it for others. Hindus are not concerned about the theoretical part of the usage of Holy Water. They do not seek the ritual for blessing the water. For them, what is most important is the sacred place from where they get *tīrtha*. Kapil stated: “From the Hindu Temple, we get Holy Water. We do not take it home, but we put it on our body. We take a bath with Holy Water. When I take Holy Water from the Church, I put it on my head, on my eyes and forehead. It is our Hindu practice.” For this person, the place from where water is taken is significant. The usage of Holy Water is part of their pilgrimage, and they experience the presence of God through this religious practice.

⁵⁵² D. Speidel, L. Ruedisili, & A. Agnew, *Perspectives on Water – Uses and Abuses*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 4-5.

⁵⁵³ Ingeborg & H. Obereder, *Eau bénite et autres moyens de salut*, Suisse, Éditions du Parvis, 2012, p. 9.

⁵⁵⁴ Ingeborg & H. Obereder, 2012, p. 13.

⁵⁵⁵ Ingeborg & H. Obereder, 2012, p. 13-14.

8.3.1. Religious devotion and piety

Christians and Hindus have different religious devotions and piety. When I analyzed the devotional activities of Christians, I gathered that they were mostly based on the teachings of the Church and Creed. In his Encyclical letter, Pope Pius XII affirmed it clearly that the private and interior devotion of individuals do not neglect the august sacrifice of the altar and the sacraments. Devotions and pious practices are not strictly connected to the liturgy, but they help people to repent and come back to God. The devotional activities are praiseworthy because they promote good virtues and increase the faith in people. Genuine devotion and pious activities lead people to God through humility, repentance, and amendment.⁵⁵⁶ Devotional activities help Christians to adore and worship a single God in three divine persons. Christians proclaim the magnanimous role of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their lives. In adoration and thanksgiving to God, Christians do devotional activities that are proposed by the Church. The usage of Holy Water comes under one of the devotional activities of the Christians. The availability of Holy Water in every Church is a proof that it's usage is encouraged by the Church authority.

In the case of Hindus, the above discussion is void. In my interpretation, I cannot state that there is an official teaching concerning the use of *tīrtha* in Hinduism. Hindus do not relate their devotional and pious activity with any Creed or teaching. Hindus might want to glorify God through their usage of *tīrtha*. However, they do not proclaim God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The usage of Holy Water reminds Hindus that there is something similar in their religious tradition, and the practice is for good. They may not be even reminded of the *Trimūrti*, i.e. Brahman, Vishnu, and Shiva! In this way, Hindus have a practical difficulty of not knowing the full meaning and importance of Holy Water taken from the Oratory.

⁵⁵⁶ Pius XII, *Mediator Dei, Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on the Sacred Liturgy*, Rome, Vatican, 1947, # 32.

8.3.2. Power attributed to Holy Water

In Catholic tradition, Holy Water is used for different rituals of blessing. It also figures in the ritual of exorcism. The ritual of preparing Holy Water is connected to exorcism.⁵⁵⁷ Catholic prayers of blessing project that there is much power invested in Holy Water. Some believe that the spiritual effects of Holy Water is superior to the corporal impact. The usage of Holy Water concerns the health of body and soul. Holy Water seems to chase away the unclean spirit in people.⁵⁵⁸ Bernard Berger attributes healing power to Holy Water: « L'eau peut aussi guérir. La guérison s'approche alors de la purification dans un même élan de foi salvatrice. L'eau qui guérit nous amène à l'eau qui purifie, qui lave les péchés, à celle du baptême. Celle du fleuve où Jean le Baptiste annonce déjà le Salut. Elle porte toute l'histoire du Jourdain, toute la mémoire du peuple élu. Elle est aussi l'eau bénéfique du printemps, du renouveau qui annonce un changement radical dans la vie, le temps, les mentalités. »⁵⁵⁹ Some Catholics believe that water received from various shrines and pilgrimage sites has supernatural power for healing. For instance, the water from Lourdes in France is popular in Catholic circle.

In my interviews with the educators in faith, I remarked that some of them attributed power to Holy Water. Paul said, "Water is always a sign of purification. We are washed in the water. All that is not good is washed. When there is darkness in life, Holy Water helps. To chase away the dark things in life, Holy Water is helpful." Marie used Holy Water to clean her house and she said : "généralement en entrant c'est un symbole de purification...j'ai souvent par habitude les fins de semaine, un samedi le week-end je nettoie ma maison, j'encense la maison et j'envoie de l'eau bénite..." Thomas underlined that Holy Water is symbol of life and growth : « ...ce n'est pas de la magie, l'eau bénite qui nous renvoie au baptême de Jésus et à toutes les utilisations qu'il a pu faire...c'est le symbole de la vie de Dieu qui fait qui est source de croissance. »

⁵⁵⁷ Here is a traditional prayer that we find in Catholic Prayer Books for the blessings. "God, Who for the salvation of the human race has built your greatest mysteries upon this substance, in your kindness hear our prayers and pour down the power of your blessing into this element, prepared by many purifications. May this your creation be a vessel of divine grace to dispel demons and sicknesses, so that everything that it is sprinkled on in the homes and buildings of the faithful will be rid of all unclean and harmful things. Let no pestilent spirit, no corrupting atmosphere, remain in those places: may all the schemes of the hidden enemy be dispelled. Let whatever might trouble the safety and peace of those who live here be put to flight by this water, so that health, gotten by calling Your holy name, may be made secure against all attacks. Through the Lord, Amen."

⁵⁵⁸ H. Theiler, *Holy Water and Its Significance for Catholics*, New York, Pustet & Co., 1909, p. 25-29.

⁵⁵⁹ B. Berger, *La formidable puissance de l'Eau Bénite*, Paris, Cristal, 2008, p. 14-15.

It is interesting for us to note that Hindus attributed power to Holy Water from the Oratory. It is clear from the response of Hindus for the question *why do you take Holy Water from the Oratory*. Manikkam said: “I take Holy Water, I carry it home, I spray Holy Water in my house, it is special water, it is blessed. It can purify, and there is a special power.” For Reshma, this power comes from the person who blesses it: “Priests bless the water, so it is holy...every priest is special, his blessing is special...we have to see that priests are like god...Catholic priests have given them to God, to Jesus.” For Kapil, Holy Water has curing power. He was much influenced by his wife who brought Holy Water from the Oratory for him. He said: “We do take Holy Water. My wife always takes it. When I feel sick, she puts Holy Water on me and I get cured.” Maheshwari spoke in the same line: “I feel like sometimes if somebody is ill, Holy Water has an effect. Especially when my father was ill, we used it every day at the hospital. I was there...I am a medical student, and I understand the signs. However, sometimes, medicine has its limitations, at that time you are hoping some divine intervention. Sometimes I feel that science cannot do everything. Sometimes miracles happen.” Shivani went further as she mentioned that Holy Water had the power to chase away evil. “I believe in Holy Water...We get special power by using Holy Water. I drink Holy Water. I put it on my head. When we use Holy Water, the evil spirit will go.”

Christians and Hindus attribute a certain amount of power to Holy Water. The usage of Holy Water brings purification to Christians and healing to Hindus. It is tangible, purifying and reminding people of the presence of God. At many times, usage of Holy Water is a pleasant experience.

8.3.3. Magical element in the usage of Holy Water

Nathaniel Altman states that “water has been a powerful factor in healing since time immemorial.”⁵⁶⁰ Bernard Berger goes in the same line of thought by just adding that water from special pilgrimage sites brings a special effect on human beings. The usage of Holy Water brings healing to certain persons.⁵⁶¹ The Bible has many healing stories related to water. In the Old

⁵⁶⁰ N. Altman, 2002, p. 146.

⁵⁶¹ B. Berger, *La formidable puissance de l'Eau Bénite*, Paris, Cristal, 2008, p. 15.

Testament, Naaman was asked by Elisha's messenger to wash himself in the waters of the Jordan River. "So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2 Kings 5: 10, 14). At the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, there is healing story. Jesus came upon a sick man lying near the pool and healed him both physically and spiritually. (Jn 5: 1-18). In general, it is considered that water is therapeutic and it gives comfort and relaxation.⁵⁶²

However, at the Oratory, by attributing power to Holy Water, it is important to note that Holy Water does not have any magical power to heal anyone who is sick or chase away the evil spirit. The author of healing is God himself. In faith, Christians believe that the Holy Spirit can chase away the evil spirit of any form. From my interviews, I have gathered that some Hindus inclined to attribute extraordinary power to Holy Water from the Oratory.

Some of the educators in faith cautioned about the magical element in the usage of Holy Water. For the question, *que pensez-vous de gens qui utilisent de l'eau bénite de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph*, Paul said: "there are people coming from Toronto just for Holy Water from the Oratory." They travel far to get Holy Water from the Oratory as they think that this water is special and miraculous. He also mentioned: "Holy Water is sacred in any religion. It is as per faith that water becomes holy." However, he clearly said: "it is not miracle water." It is not Holy Water that works miracles. The educators in the faith have a significant role to instruct people about the usage, meaning and purpose of Holy Water. Pascal and Thomas agreed that an awareness program should be worked out on the usage of Holy Water. Thomas underlined that faith is not only something intellectual but it comes through various practices like the usage of Holy Water. « Je pense que la foi chrétienne passe par ces choses là, c'est d'excellents moyens d'éducation de la foi si on leur apprend comment bien les utiliser...pour que la foi ne soit pas uniquement quelque chose d'intellectuel, il faut qu'elle devienne, la foi, quelque chose qui passe au niveau de nos émotions et quelque chose qui passe au niveau de nos comportements et de nos gestes, la foi s'alimente et s'exprime par nos gestes et par l'utilisation de grands symboles... »

⁵⁶² N. Altman, 2002, p. 147. See also: B. Berger, 2008, p. 1-20.

In the prospective of this research, I need to consider creating an awareness program for pilgrims at the Oratory.

8.4. Transmission of Christian faith by the usage of Holy Water at the Oratory

My study reveals that Hindus spread the news among their friends that the Oratory is a good place to visit. They receive a cordial welcome even if they belong to another religious tradition. They let know their friends that Holy Water, Saint Joseph's Oil and other religious articles are available for all people. They also tell their friends about miracle stories by using Holy Water.

8.4.1. Transmission by blessing of Holy Water

The blessing of Holy Water is done by a Priest or a Religious. He recites an official prayer of the Church or a spontaneous prayer to do the blessing. The effect of the blessing is supposed to go to all people who use Holy Water. The Priest who prays for others transmits his faith to people who become part of the practice.

8.4.2. Transmission by distribution of Holy Water

The distribution of Holy Water is done in small bottles. Many people carry a few bottles to distribute to their family members. For some of them, it is a souvenir from the Oratory. Pilgrims who carry Holy Water from the Oratory become agents of the transmission of faith. They share with their family members what they live at the Oratory.

8.4.3. Transmission by consumption of Holy Water

I mentioned that some Hindus drink Holy Water from the Oratory. For them, it is part of their tradition to consume *tīrtha*. At the end of a *pūjā*, *tīrtha* is distributed by the *pūjāri*. Hindus believe that drinking *tīrtha* brings goodness and healing in their life. I think that at the Oratory, Hindus drink Holy Water to get physical and inner healing. They share their experience of drinking Holy Water and getting healed. They become agents of the transmission of faith.

8.4.4. Monetary aspects of the usage of Holy Water

Holy Water is free of cost but the bottles are sold. I noticed that the pilgrims prefer to buy an empty bottle from the Oratory rather than bringing one from their house. By promoting the usage of Holy Water and by providing bottles, the institution gets a certain amount of profit. The employees who deal with bottles at the Oratory are not concerned about who uses Holy Water for what purpose but how much money comes in through the selling of bottles. I think that the Priests and Religious are more concerned about “who” and “how” of the usage of Holy Water.

8.5. Spontaneous interpretation of the lighting of candles

Many religions promote the lighting of candles while performing prayers and worships. Light is a common symbol in religions around the world. In general, the notion of good and evil is associated with the symbol of light and darkness. In my interpretation, I explain how the usage of candles in Christianity and Hinduism influence the pilgrims at the Oratory. Passing through the Old Testament and New Testament, I underline the importance of light in Catholic Liturgy. I also elaborate the significance of *ārtī* and *Dīpa* in Hinduism. I will underline how the transmission of faith takes place through the symbolic usage of candles at the Oratory.

8.5.1. Symbolism of light in Christianity

In the book of Genesis, we read “God said, let there be light and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God divided light from darkness. God called light day and darkness he called night. Evening came and morning came: the first day.” (Gn 1: 3-5). The Creator separated light and darkness. Light was used to describe God’s gifts. In the books of Psalms, it is written: “Many keep saying, who will put happiness before our eyes? Let the light of your face shine on us.” (Ps 4: 6). Psalm 27 states: “Yahweh is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear?” (Ps 27: 1). Psalm 119 says: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” (Ps 119: 105). The symbolism of light is used to recognize the presence of God in the daily life of people.

The symbolism of light announced the messianic time. In the book of Isaiah, it is written: “Arise, shine out, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen on you. Look! Though

night still covers the earth and darkness the peoples, on you Yahweh is rising and over you his glory can be seen. The nations will come to your light and kings to your dawning brightness.” (Is 60: 1-3).

The messianic proclamation of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. For instance, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ ministry in Galilee fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. “The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those who lived in a country of shadow dark as death a light has dawned. From then onwards Jesus began his proclamation with the message, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand’.” (Mt 4: 16-17). Jesus himself is the light that illuminates the world so that the people will walk in his light. Luke emphasizes that Jesus illuminates path for people. The Canticle of Zechariah expresses how Jesus lights the path for all people: “Because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Lk 1: 78-79). In the words of Simeon, Jesus became the light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for the people of Israel. “Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel.” (Lk 2: 29-32).

During his mission and public life on earth, Jesus helped people to come to the light. In the story of the healing of the blind man (Jn 9: 1-40), Jesus makes a comparison of light and darkness. The blind man was healed by his submission to the light. In the transfiguration story of Jesus, his clothing was associated with light. “There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as dazzling as light.” (Mt 17: 2). The transfiguration event gave courage to the troubled disciples who were thinking about the death of Jesus. It gave a foretaste of the resurrection of Jesus.

The mission of Jesus continued with his apostles and disciples. In his encounter with Jesus, Paul received this mission of announcing the Good News. “I shall rescue you from the people and

from the nations to whom I send you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light..." (Acts 26: 17-18). Paul understood the importance of inviting people to the Light, Jesus.

The Resurrection of Jesus is understood as his capacity to take people away from darkness to fill them with his light and life. In the Actes of the Apostles it is written: "That the Christ was to suffer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he was to proclaim a light for our people and for the gentiles." (Acts 26: 23). The prolog of John presents Jesus as the true light. "What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men, and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. A man came, sent by God His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world." (Jn 1: 4-9). In the prolog, John gives superiority to Jesus. In the same Gospel, Jesus declares himself as the light of the World. "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8: 12).

The symbolism of light continued after the death of Jesus. The angel who announced the resurrection to the disciples had a bright appearance. "His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow." (Mt 28: 3). The light was present in every apparition of Jesus to his disciples. For instance, in the Damascus story of Saul, it is said: "It happened that while he was traveling to Damascus and approaching the city, suddenly a light from heaven shone all round him." (Acts 9:3).

The early Christians were invited to walk in the light keeping a safe distance from the darkness. Peter invoked it in his book: "But you are a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a people to be a personal possession to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9). The celebration of Christian baptism demonstrates the importance of the symbolism of light. "You were darkness once, but now you are light in the Lord; behave as children of light, for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and uprightness and truth." (Eph 5: 8).

Both in the Old Testament and New Testament, the religious worship and liturgy use the symbolism of light. In the book of Exodus, it is written: “You will make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand must be of beaten gold, base and stem...You will also make seven lamps for it and mount the lamps in such a way that they light up the space in front of it...” (Ex 25: 31-40). The importance of burning light at all time is underlined in Exodus. “You will order the Israelites to bring you pure pounded olive oil for the light, and to keep a lamp burning all the time. Aron and his sons will tend it in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain hanging in front of the Testimony, from dusk to dawn, before Yahweh. This is a perpetual decree for all generations of Israelites.” (Ex 27: 20-21).

In the New Testament, the symbolism of light is much present. For instance, in the Acts of the Apostles, it is mentioned: “On the first day of the week we met for the breaking of bread. Paul was due to leave the next day, and he preached a sermon that went on till the middle of the night. A number of lamps were lit in the upstairs room where we were assembled...” (Acts 20: 7-8). For any religious celebration, candles and lamps are lighted to show the presence of God. This tradition continues in our time with the observance of the Easter Vigil.

The celebration of the Easter Vigil begins with the blessing of the fire. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are highlighted throughout the celebration. The lighting of the Paschal candle from the new fire symbolizes the Light, Christ. The prayer recited during the lighting of the candle is meaningful.⁵⁶³ The fire represents the mystery and presence of God himself in the midst of his people.

The forty days preparation for Easter reaches its culmination with Easter Vigil celebration. The time of penance is over and joyful time starts with the resurrection of Jesus. It is a passage from darkness to light. The Risen Christ gives his light to all people. The prayer recited during the

⁵⁶³ Here is the traditional prayer : Vienne donc, Dieu tout-puissant, l’abondance de ta bénédiction sur ce cierge allumé; agréé, maître invisible, l’hommage de cette clarté nocturne; que le sacrifice embrasé que nous t’offrons en cette nuit nous rende sensible de façon éclatante la splendeur de ta mystérieuse présence, et que partout où sera transmise la flamme sacrée de ce feu mystique s’enfuie la malice mensongère du démon et éclate la puissance de ta majesté. See also : A. Chavasse, *Le sacramentaire gélasien*, Paris, Desclée, 1958, p. 102-105.

celebration has a lot of meaning.⁵⁶⁴ In Catholic tradition, during the Easter Season, the Paschal candle is lit for every Eucharistic celebration. This is to remind the faithful people that the Risen Christ is present in the daily life of people. In the whole celebration of the Easter Vigil, the new fire symbolizes our eternal life in Christ. The *Alpha* and *Omega*, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, represents that Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end.

8.5.2. *Ārtī* and *Dīpa* in Hinduism

Practice of the lighting of candle is much present in Hindu religious celebrations in temples and households. In the introductory chapter of this study, I underlined the importance of *ārtī* and *dīpa* in Hindu *pūjā*. Doing *ārtī* is a common tradition in Hindu religious practice. It is honoring the deity with *dīpa*. *Ārtī* is one of the sixteen *upacāras* or offerings made during *pūjā*. It typically involves the worshipper, or a priest, taking an oil lamp with five wicks, or a single-flamed camphor lamp, and circling it in a clockwise direction in front of the image of the deity. Further actions, such as the sounding of handbells and other instruments, and hymn singing, may accompany *ārtī*, but it is the circling of the flame that has come to be considered both the climax and the defining component of Hindu *pūjā* – so much so, that the terms *ārtī* and *pūjā* are effectively synonymous. In a temple, a number of *ārtīs* will take place each day. The worshipper wants to get a *darshana* or vision of the deity by doing *ārtī* and *pūjā*. At the end of the celebration, the *prasādam* is given to the worshippers as they pass their hands through the flame, and then touch their eyes or heads with their fingerprints.⁵⁶⁵

I mentioned earlier that *dīpa* in Sanskrit literally means lamp or light. *Dīpa* is used during *pūjā* in Hinduism. As I explained in the introductory chapter, *dīpa* is also seen in association with *Dīpavali*. During *Dīpavali*, Hindus light rows of small oil lamps, placed in houses, temples, and on rivers to dispel the darkness on the night preceding the new moon. The festival, especially the

⁵⁶⁴ “Therefore, O Lord, we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honor of your name, may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night, receive it as a pleasing fragrance, and let it mingle with the lights of heaven. May this flame be found still burning by the Morning star: the one Morning Star who never sets, Christ your Son, who, coming back from death’s domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity, and lives and reigns for ever and ever.” See also: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missel*, Ottawa, Saint Joseph Communications, 2001.

⁵⁶⁵ W. J. Johnson, 2010, p. 25-26.

lighting of the lamps itself, is now most widely connected with the return of Rama and Sita to Ayodhya at the end of their exile, and thus the restoration of divine order and light over demonic disorder and darkness.⁵⁶⁶ It is also associated with Laksmi, the auspicious goddess of wealth, good fortune, and household prosperity, especially amongst the traders and business people of western India, for whom the festival marks the beginning of the new financial year. In modern India, *Dīpavali* is an important commercial festival as well, accompanied by the exchange of gifts and ubiquitous firework displays.⁵⁶⁷ When propitiated with gifts at this time, God and spirits will assume human form to visit the earth.⁵⁶⁸

Dīpa also underlines the existence of light and darkness in the life of every person. There is a constant fight between light and darkness. The lighting of *dīpa* in every household, accompanied by a prayer, removes the darkness. Friends, families and neighbours distribute sweets; and clothing, cash, and other gifts are presented to both domestic and public servants.⁵⁶⁹ The celebration of *Dīpavali* shows considerable regional variation, such as in Bengal, where devotional emphasis centers on the goddess Kali.⁵⁷⁰

8.5.3. Convergences

Light brings joy and life both for Christians and Hindus. Knowing that Jesus is the light of the world, Christians symbolically give a greater place for light in all religious celebrations. Light keeps away the darkness. *Dīpa* is light for Hindus that is used in most of the religious celebrations. The notion of good and evil is much prevalent in Hindu mythology. Good and evil are mostly associated with light and darkness. Hindus at the Oratory use candles as they see the positive side of the symbol of light.

⁵⁶⁶ Y. Bonnefoy, *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1981, p. 80. See also: M. Parker-Rock, *Diwali – The Hindu Festival of Lights, Feasts, and Family*, New Jersey, Enslow Publishers, 2004, p. 13-15.

⁵⁶⁷ W. J. Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 107.

⁵⁶⁸ J. Stutley, & M. Stutley, *Harper's Dictionary of Hinduism – Its Mythology, Folklore, Philosophy, Literature, and History*, New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1977, p. 79.

⁵⁶⁹ M. Parker-Rock, *Diwali – The Hindu Festival of Lights, Feasts, and Family*, New Jersey, Enslow Publishers, 2004, p. 28-29.

⁵⁷⁰ D. Cush & C. Robinson & M. York, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 202.

8.5.4. Divergences

Christian usage of the candle has a deeper meaning and theology when it comes to the paschal candle and the celebration of the Easter Vigil. The mystery of salvation is connected to the lighting of candles by Christians.

Hindus do not connect their lighting of candles to *Moksha*. Though *Dīpavali* is associated with the lighting of candles, there is no deeper theology that is connected to the salvation story.

8.6. Transmission of Christian faith by the lighting of candles at the Oratory

I mentioned that the votive chapel in the Oratory contains ten thousand candles. Christians and Hindus light candles with different intentions in their mind. The image below shows that the context and set up of the votive chapel is quite decorative with various types of candles. It attracts many people, some as practitioners and others as observers.



Figure 39: A Scene from the votive Chapel at the Oratory

8.6.1. Transmission by touch

Pilgrims take initiative to light candles at the Oratory. There is no written rule that people have to light candles to obtain favours from God. In the praxeological analysis, one dares to say that a person takes steps to do an act that is meaningful and brings an excellent result for him. For lighting candles, one uses his hands and makes a sign of the cross or any other sign as per his religion to express his devotion to Saint Joseph or God. In the image below, it is obvious how people take effort to light a candle. There is a movement of the hand and body to do the act. The whole self of the person is involved in the practice. As the practice is done in the Church, Hindus respect the manerism of the practice. Knowingly or unknowingly, there is a transmission of faith in the whole process of touching and lighting the candle.

The picture below captures our attention as the adult helps his children to light the candles. The action of the practice is done together. The man does it with much faith and he transmits his faith to his children.

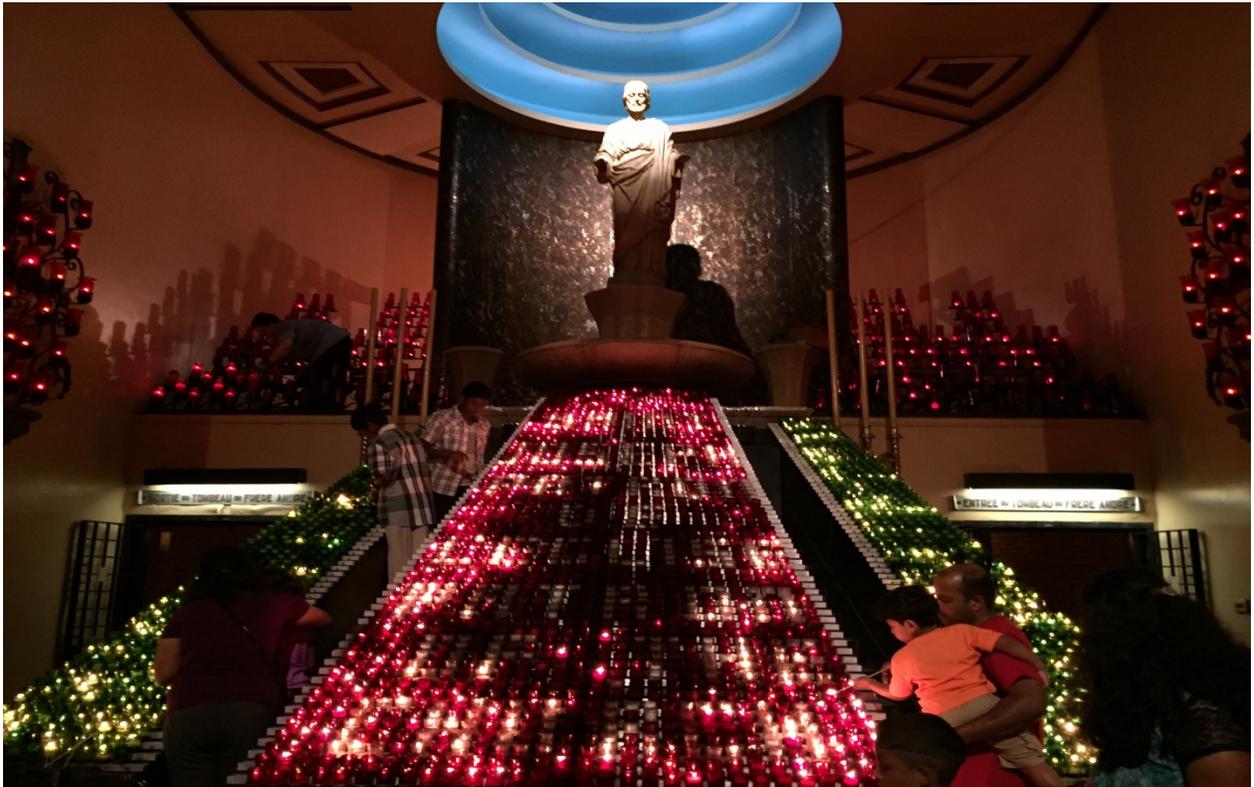


Figure 40: A scene of the lighting of candles by Hindus

8.6.2. Transmission through body movements

In the votive chapel, in front of the statue of Saint Joseph, the candles are arranged in such a way that people will have to climb steps to light candles. There is a movement in the act of lighting candles. When people want to express their faith, they need to take efforts. Though faith is a gift given by God, it does not grow when the personal effort is not done. Likewise, Hindus seem to make efforts to grow closer to Saint Joseph and God by their participation in the sacramental of lighting candles. The action of climbing up and stepping down reminds Christians of the traditional baptism during which they had to step down to the water and climb up after having plunged into the water. A new life is received by the baptism and Christians try to ascend to God through their prayers and worship. Similarly, Hindus seem to get a new level of satisfaction after having lit the candle at the Oratory. The whole effort and movement that they have done bring a certain amount of contentment for them. The picture below indicates how Hindus take efforts to climb up the steps to light candles. They grow in their faith as they believe that God accepts their religious practice.



Figure 41: Descending and ascending to light candles

8.6.3. Transmission by desire

Mountain is a privileged place to encounter God. Jesus went to mountains to have privileged time with his disciples and Father in Heaven. The time spent on the mountain was precious for Jesus. This was also true in the experience of the disciples at the time of the transfiguration of Jesus. “Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. In their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light.” (Mt 17: 1-2). The disciples who were with Jesus on the mountain desired to remain there for a long time. Due to their life realities, they had to get back to the daily affairs. However, they always cherished the experience of the transfiguration. Some theologians say that the transfiguration experience was a kind of resurrection experience for the disciples. They experienced vitality and newness in life.

The pilgrims who climb the mountain of Mount-Royal to go to the Oratory desire to have a God-experience. In tangible ways, when they participate in various religious activities, they get some sorts of God-experience. Hindus, through their religious practices at the Oratory, desire to have God-experience, and they receive God’s favours as they put their faith in him. The religious practices help Hindus transform themselves and return home with the intention of coming back to the Oratory. The image below shows the concentration and meditative atmosphere with which a man lights the candles.



Figure 42: Meditative lighting of candles

8.6.4. Transmission by encountering people and cultures

Pilgrims and visitors belonging to various religious traditions encounter at the Oratory.⁵⁷¹ They do the same religious practice of the lighting of candles in the votive chapel. Some Hindus feel at ease with associating themselves with different cultures and religions. The Oratory caters to Catholic religious practices in line with Québec culture. Hindus readily accept and associate themselves with this religion and culture. On the long run, many Hindus take part in Christian feasts and celebrations like Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and Saint Joseph's Feast. The encounter of cultures and religions transmit faith in the context of the Oratory. The image below

⁵⁷¹ The area where St. Joseph's Oratory is situated has a lot to do with different cultures, ethnic groups, and languages. Multi-ethnic background surrounds the vicinity. Immigrants coming from different parts of the world settle down in Côte-des-Neiges area, and they are amazed to see the beautiful Church where they have access, going beyond their language, culture, and religion. In sociological perspective, religion is a set of myths, rituals, dogmas and institutions. Religion is not necessarily separated from a global culture. However, every culture has its myths, rites, and institutions. In general, Asians do not separate religion from culture. For instance, in India, religion and religious practices are part of the culture. God, religion, and belief system are part of the daily living realities of people in India who have a strong sense of culture, music, dance, films and folklore.

shows that people belonging to different traditions and cultures getting involved in the religious practices in the votive chapel at the Oratory.



Figure 43: Encountering people while lighting candles

8.6.5. Transmission by sight

Hindus, who come to the Oratory for the first time, observe the happenings and religious practices in the votive chapel. Some of them are accompanied by their family members, relatives, and friends. The manner in which the candles are arranged in the votive chapel attract many people to the site. The colored candles give a pleasant look for eyes. The prayer written at the side of the icons and statues inspire them to recite a prayer.

The picture below is one of the icons in the votive chapel. It indicates that Saint Joseph is the model for workers. There is a prayer written below the icon. Many people who have work related problems make a prayer by lighting a candle. They look at the icon where Saint Joseph is at work. They also believe that the candles are lit to honor him who is a model for all workers.

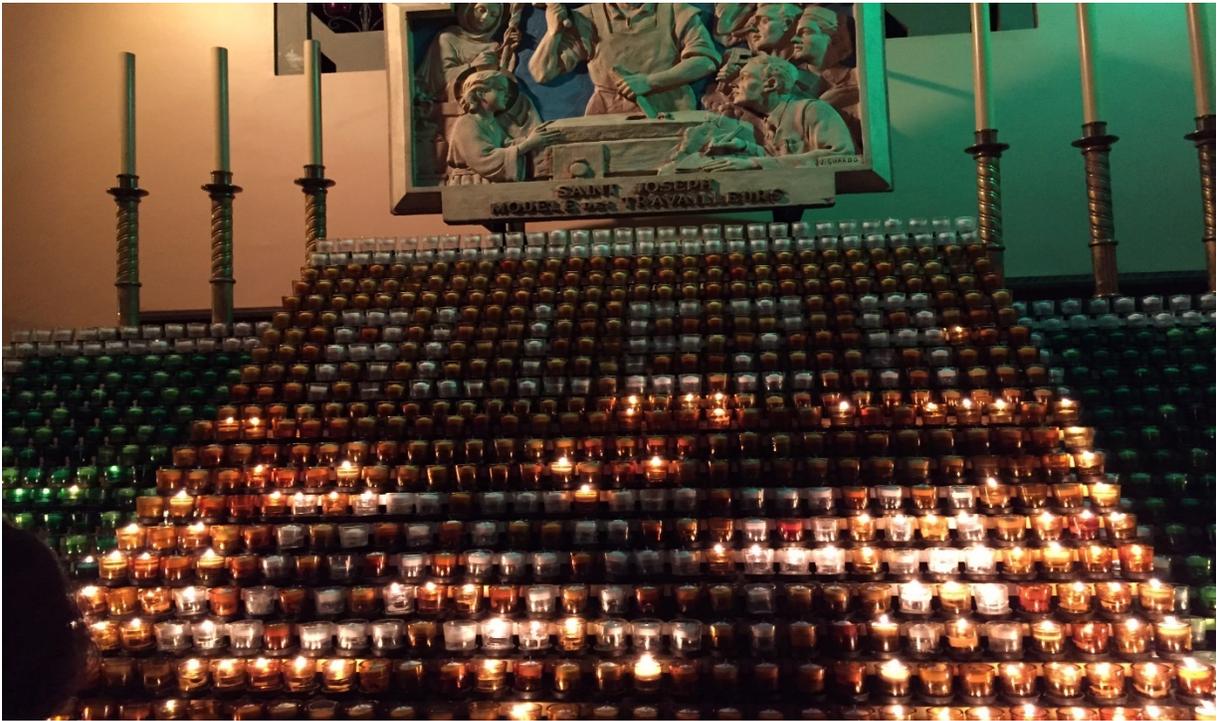


Figure 44: Candles of different colours

8.6.6. Lighted candle in the oil of Saint Joseph

Saint Joseph's Oil from the Oratory is famous not only in Canada but also in different parts of the world. Brother André advised the pilgrims to use the oil of Saint Joseph along with a medal to rub on the body parts for healing from pain and other illness. The oil was burnt in front of the statue of Saint Joseph and distributed in bottles to those in need. The tradition continues even today as thousands of oil bottles are sold out every week from the Oratory. Hindus watch the candle burning in the oil, and then they get inspired to buy the oil. Some of them ask Priests and Religious about the significance of the oil from the Oratory. The picture below shows someone engaged in such a religious practice that transmits Christian faith.



Figure 45: Lighted candle in the oil of Saint Joseph

8.6.7. Lighting candles to obtain favours

Hindus light candles at the Oratory to associate themselves with the Divine. Though they have multiple divine figures, yet their prayer and worship go to the Creator. Ultimately, they believe that God is all powerful and almighty. They also believe that God is present in a place like Saint Josephs's Oratory where many people come and pray every day.

In my interviews, a few Hindus shared their experiences of divine power in their lives through their participation in various religious activities at the Oratory. Some of them obtained favours and miracles from God through Saint Joseph. For the question, *Do you light candles at Saint Joseph's Oratory? If yes, Why?*, almost all of them gave an affirmative response. Kapil said: "I do it for my work that things go well. I also light a candle for general life. I do it for health. Saint Joseph prays for the health." Pushpa elaborated: "I light eight candles here. I go to different spots and light candles. One is for work, one for my brother, one for my family, another one for two

families, another one for the travel, another one for healing when we are sick...when I light candles, I want to thank God. I also ask for favours. I pray for family protection and job protection.” Hindus obtain favours by lighting candles at the Oratory.

8.6.8. Monetary aspects of the lighting of candles

From the point of view of the institution, the Oratory gets a certain amount of money by promoting the culture of lighting candles. Though there are no supervisors to see if pilgrims put money for the lighting of candles, yet it is written how much money is expected for every candle. As I mentioned earlier, the price hike for the candles reduced the practice of the lighting of candles for a period of time. However, the practice picked up its momentum as time passed.

8.7. Perspectives of Salvation or *Moksha*

The kerygma of Christians is based on the salvation story of Jesus. St. Paul puts it clear: “I want to make quite clear to you, brothers, what the message of the gospel that I preached to you is; you accepted it and took your stand on it, and you are saved by it, if you keep to the message I preached to you; otherwise your coming to believe was in vain. The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures.” (1 Cor 15: 1-3). Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God. His teaching was based on God’s love, forgiveness, compassion, and justice.

Christians who participate in various religious activities at the Oratory are reminded of the whole salvation story that Jesus announced by his life. They discover the magnanimity of God through various religious practices. It is in and through Jesus that Christians are saved. “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you be saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have been raised either, and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith.” (1 Cor 15: 12-14). St. Paul stated the centrality of focusing on Jesus Christ while announcing the message of salvation. Jesus himself spoke many times about his death and resurrection. He

taught his disciples about his connectedness to the Father and the Spirit. Jesus revealed the Trinitarian God to his apostles and disciples. His mission was save all people from their sins.

The Absolute for Christians is the Trinitarian God. Jesus is the Son of God, the manifestation of God on earth to give life in fulness to all people of good will. Therefore, when Christians light candles at the Oratory, they are reminded of the salvation story in and through Jesus. They know that Saint Joseph was the foster father of Jesus. Though the candles are lit in front of the statue of Saint Joseph, the prayers are addressed to the Trinitarian God. Saint Joseph intercedes for people who go to him. In Catholic tradition, the Saints intercede for people who pray through them. Saints have lived an exemplary life, and they are with God. By their life examples, they help people to come closer to God.

In Hindu tradition, *Moksha* is not based on the life story of someone. There is no God in Hinduism who died for the people to save them. The salvation story in Hinduism is different from that of Christianity. The concept of *Trimūrti* is much prevalent in Hinduism but different schools hold on to various dogmas and paths to attain *Moksha*. The concept of *samsāra* encourages Hindus do many good *karmas* in their life journey to attain *Moksha*.⁵⁷² For Hindus, participation in religious practices is also part of doing good things. As I mentioned earlier, they desire to thank God for their life, and they want to offer prayers and sacrifices. At the Oratory, Hindus respect Jesus and Saint Joseph when they light candles. They believe that Jesus and Saint Joseph are heavenly figures.

8.7.1. Journey from Darkness to Light

Christians and Hindus light candles at the Oratory. When Christians light candles they remind themselves of the paschal mysteries of Jesus. They reflect on the passage from the Old Testament to the New Testament. There are many passages in the Bible that speak about moving from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality, from death to life and from sickness to health.

⁵⁷² S. S. Gupta, *Theertha – Holy Pilgrim Centres of the Hindus*, New Delhi, Rupa & Co., 2001, p. 6-8.

From my interviews, I gathered that Hindus, through the lighting of candles, desire to make an introspective journey in their life. They want to go from darkness to light. For the question *why do you light candles at the Oratory*, many Hindus responded their desire to be in the light. Kannan said: “I like to pray while lighting candle. God has given us light to take away our darkness.” Kavita underlined: “when I light a candle, I feel good...the light takes away the darkness.” Kumari stated: “the candle helps us get away from darkness.” Bhavani also made a comparison between light and darkness. “When there is darkness there is also light. The heart is lighted when the candles are burnt.” For Shivani “candle is a good symbol of happiness.” Lighting a candle helps one to be with God. Kalyani said: “the candle represents our presence in the Church.”

It is interesting to note that Hindus get a special God-experience by the lighting of candles at the Oratory. They want to have their presence left at the Oratory as they receive God-experience from there. Manikkam stated: “I light candles. I light it because God is light. Jesus is light. Light brings hope in the darkness. Light destroys darkness. When I light candles, I give myself to God. Like a candle burning and giving light to others, I want to give myself to God and others...I want to be in communion with God and people. I light candles and in that light all people are united.” Manikkam seemed to have a lot of in-depth understanding of the practice. His thoughts were in connection with Christian theology. His religious practices and life at the Oratory helped him to know better Christian life and grow in Christian faith. Hindus at the Oratory receive Jesus’ light while lighting candles.

8.7.2. Confrontation of the hypothesis

The interpretation of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles by Hindus at the Oratory takes my research further to consolidate, reject and transform certain elements of the practices. The purpose of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles is important as it brings healing, hope, inner peace and solace for people. The symbolic usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles go beyond their external appearance of signs. The practices call for inner conversion, purification, healing and discovering the Divine. In this perspective, the symbolic usage of Holy Water and the practice of the lighting candles have a greater meaning.

I mentioned above that there are different ways of transmitting Christian faith through the participation in the religious practices. The search for the Divine continues while doing the practice. No one knows the entire mystery of God in a span of time as it is unfolded in the daily living of people. Christians and Hindus search for the Divine, to have a full experience of the Divine. By nature, human beings turn to the Divine, for higher realities in life.

While doing various religious practices as part of their desire to be closer to the Divine, some Hindus meet with others who go through the same road. The pastoral context at the Oratory caters to such an experience for people coming from different religious traditions. Despite their differences, they walk side by side. There is a greater communion between human beings while trying to have communion with God. Hindus and Christians do their religious worship while respecting the religious atmosphere of the site. Prayers, devotional practices and fraternal dialogue are the medium through which they encounter each other. The shared sacred space aids them raise their souls to the Divine while having communion and harmony among them.

8.8. Conclusion

Hindus respect sacred and religious places and they are part of Hindu spirituality. Through their participation in religious activities in the sacred places, Hindus become closer to the Divine. K. Klostermaier affirmed that “Hinduism has always reserved the highest respect for those who made religion their profession.”⁵⁷³ Despite the respect that Hindus give to all religious people and practices, one has to be cautious about the manner in which religious practices are done. My study shows that pastoral praxeology helps in the process of analysis and interpretation. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat are right to say, “When a practice loses its dynamic and becomes merely technique, it ceases to be faithful. Of course in reality, all practices are carried out imperfectly. Indeed, practices can easily become distorted and even evil. One of the main critical tasks of practical theology is to recognize distorted practice and to call the Church back to the theological significance of its practices and to enable it to engage faithfully with the mission of God.”⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ K. Klostermaier, 2007, p. 262.

⁵⁷⁴ J. Swinton, & H. Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London, SCM Press, 2006, p. 24-25.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the importance of the usage of two Christian symbols: Holy Water and the lighting of candles. I have underlined that Saint Joseph's Oratory is a privileged place for Christians and Hindus to do both the practices. Both Christians and Hindus use water for their religious celebrations. Nathaniel Altman is right to point out that water has a cleansing quality. "Water has been called the universal solvent because it dissolves more substances than any other liquid...water, whether as liquid or stream, is naturally in continuous movement, which allows it to constantly interact with everything around...when we wash our hands, brush our teeth, take a bath or shower, clean the dishes, or do the laundry, most of us take water and its amazing cleansing abilities completely for granted."⁵⁷⁵ Water is a powerful cleanser and purifier both for nature and human body. Water cleans nature and surroundings. It cleans our bodies from impurities and contamination. When water is blessed in a religious celebration, it gets the significance of Holy Water.

The Christian tradition of using Holy Water has a long history from the time of Jesus. I underlined in my study that different religions use water for their rituals and ceremonies. I noted down that Holy Water at the time of baptism and *tīrtha* at the time of *pūjā* bring greater importance for Christians and Hindus in their respective religious traditions. Both in Christian and Hindu traditions, the usage of Holy Water is connected to the salvation story or *moksha*. My study reveals that, among many religious practices, Hindus at the Oratory associate themselves with Christians through the usage Holy Water. Their courage and openness to enter into dialogue with Christians and especially with Religious and Priests are noteworthy. They accept Jesus Christ in their lives though they do not receive any sacrament and officially become Christians.

The Christian tradition of the lighting of candles in different celebrations is remarkable from the ancient time. In this chapter, I remarked the importance of light in Christianity and Hinduism. I also underlined that the symbol of light and burning candles transmit Christian faith at the Oratory. The senses of smell, sight and touch are much associated with the usage of candles and transmission of faith in a sacred space like the Oratory. The words of Jesus "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life" (Jn

⁵⁷⁵ N. Altman, 2002, p. 117-118.

8: 12) give a special thrust to the practice of the lighting of candles at the Oratory. These words of Jesus are not only meant for Christians but for all people and therefore people belonging to other religious traditions discover Jesus through the symbol of light. At the Oratory, Hindus associate themselves with Christians by partaking in the practice of the lighting of candles in the votive chapel. In doing so, some of them are also reminded of their traditional celebration of *Dīpavali* in Hinduism. In one way, Hindus get an experience of *Dīpavali* at the Oratory, but in another way, they carry home the Christian experience of light and life in and through Jesus. In their search for the Divine, they discover that the life is much more powerful than the death. The death of Jesus brought living light for all people. A candle that burns itself for giving light to others reminds people of the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ who gave his life for all people, bringing them light.

When people allow themselves to be led by God, they reach that point where they experience light. The light is given to a person by others and God. One allows others and God to enter into him. He creates space for them in his inner self. The light might lead a person where he would rather not go. Jesus said to Peter, “Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18). The mystery of Jesus’ light brings a person to life. The presence of the mystery of Christ is noticed in other religious traditions especially when there is an openness to discover Jesus and accept him as their way to a higher state of Reality. From this perspective, in my study, I remarked how Hindus discover Jesus through their participation in the two religious practices at the Oratory.

CHAPTER 9

9. PRAXEOLOGICAL INTERVENTION

9.1. Introduction

My interviews with the educators in faith have given me certain understanding of the ways in which the educators perceive the life of Hindus at the Oratory. The educators in faith play a vital role in the intervention. They are rooted in the spiritual life of Basile Moreau, the founder of their religious community. Basile Moreau was influenced by the French school of formation in the context of post-Revolution in France. His major concern was to educate the people in faith who were scattered after the Revolution. The central source of his teaching emerged from the imitation of Christ, especially the crucified Christ. He developed the themes of divine providence, union, and zeal for apostolic life. His spirituality and theology contained the soteriology of Cross. *Ave Crux, Spes Unica* or Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope, was his motto. He believed that the Cross of Christ gave strength to all those who embraced it. He transmitted Christian faith to students in the schools and parishioners in the villages who were frightened and lost. Basile Moreau invited his men in the community to be courageous and get strength from the Cross of Christ.

At the Oratory, it is interesting to see how Hindus get inspiration and strength from the Cross of Christ. The foot of the Crucifix in the Crypt Church is worn out as thousands of Hindus embrace it in a regular manner. In my interviews, some Hindus told me that the symbolism of touching the Crucifix brought hope and consolation to them. They unburdened their worries, tensions and conflicts at the feet of Christ.

Jesus' life was between a poor crib and a painful cross. The starting and ending of his life on the earth were shameful in the eyes of humans.⁵⁷⁶ Basile Moreau stated in his circular letter that Jesus's life was a fight : « ...la lutte à mort contre la chair, contre le péché; c'est la guerre à

⁵⁷⁶ J. Jomon Kalladanthiyil, *La théologie de la croix dans les écrits du Bienheureux Basile Moreau, fondateur de la Congrégation de Sainte-Croix : une étude sotériologique à la lumière de la Dramatique divine de Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Berlin, Éditions universitaires européennes, 2012, p. 45.

outrance contre le monde et toutes ses vanités.»⁵⁷⁷ Kevin Grove and Andrew Gawrych underlined that “learning entailed practice and walking the way of the cross meant recognizing three things for Moreau: that Christ represents the only possible reconciliation between interior dispositions and exterior actions, that union with Christ means union not only with his life but also with his death, and that those who learn the mystery of the cross of Christ are also learning his resurrection.”⁵⁷⁸ Getting inspiration from their founder, the educators in faith live an experience of hope in all situations of their life. As they take up struggles, trials and hardships of life, the resurrection experience is true for the educators in faith. In inter-religious milieu, the transmission of faith is a challenge for some of them. However, they do their mission with courage and humility. Welcoming people belonging to other religious traditions in their milieu of work and transmission of faith make them to be men who read the signs of the time with openness and courage.

In this chapter, I will elaborate the religious performance of Hindus at the Oratory. I shall note down the involvement of the educators in faith and their comments concerning the religious performance of Hindus. I will explain the dilemma of the educators to welcome Hindus at the Oratory with certain struggles and joys. The dialogue between the educators in faith and Hindus will help in further intervention. The educators in faith suggest certain tips for Hindus. The intervention will also highlight the perceptions of divine figures and spirituality of Hindus. It is significant to evaluate how competent are the educators in faith to accompany Hindus at the Oratory. Finally, I will suggest a few practical strategies and stages of intervention at the Oratory amid the religious practices of Hindus.

9.2. Religious performance of Hindus at the Oratory

I would say that the Oratory has become a hub of religions. Participation in various religious activities ensures their connectedness to God. For many Hindus, the Oratory is a visible sign on earth where God manifests as thousands of people pray together. The answer to the question in my interview reveals it. “*What do you normally do when you come to Saint Joseph’s Oratory?*”

⁵⁷⁷ B. Moreau, *Lettre circulaires de Basile Moreau*, Vol. II, Fides, Montréal, 1946, p. 232.

⁵⁷⁸ K. Grove & A. Gawrych, *Basil Moreau Essential Writings – An Introduction to the Life and Thought of the Founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, Notre Dame, Ave Maria Press, 2014, p. 45.

Vinesh said, “This Church is special. My Mum speaks about this Church.” For him, what was inherited from the family remained important. Faith is transmitted from one generation to the other. Parents and family members play a big role in the transmission of faith. Maheshwari went in line with the same thought as her family influenced her. “There is a place where Saint Joseph chases demons. I remember it from my childhood, my father used to take me there when I was a child. We used to recite the prayers loud. Jesus, I am going to be a good girl, I am going to listen to my parents. Sometimes I recite the prayers that are written there. After my father passed away, things are a bit different. I think of him and pray for him. I have the feeling that he was attached to Christian faith. If he is fine, my Dad will take care of me. Sometimes, I light a candle. Then I go to the main entrance and sit there. I look at nature. It is the whole experience of coming here at the Oratory.” The faith inherited from the family also becomes a personal conviction and trajectory of faith.

Shivani underlined that “Jesus is real. Other Churches are not like Saint Joseph’s Oratory. I experience peace here. In my personal life, I get peace. My family wants me to be Hindu hundred percent. However, I like to come here to Church.” As against Vinesh and Maheshwari, this person was more individualistic. He did not consider his family members to go with him to do religious practices at the Oratory. Manikkam said that he had a special experience at the Oratory. “I had a special experience here...One day, I came to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. I climbed on my knees. While I was climbing and praying, sudden rain fell on me. Then, I came inside the Church. I was completely dry. The water went off. I was feeling cold outside, but I felt warm inside the Church. I was still a Hindu, but my experiences helped me to reflect.” Remaining Hindu, this person got an experience of God from the Church. The action of climbing on the knees could be attributed to the faith of the individual. Likewise, the *special experience* of this person also could be attributed to his faith in God or Saint Joseph or Brother André.

Nathan was not afraid to make a manifestation of his faith in God and adherence to the Oratory. “People, all my friends, know that I come to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. They know that I have much faith...When I come here; I take Saint Joseph’s oil. I take Holy Water. I go to the Cross...I go and touch the tomb of Brother André. There is miracle happening there. I go for Mass though

I am not a Catholic! In 1991, my wife had to give delivery. Doctor told that she had to undergo cesarean and they were getting ready to do it. They were ready to cut her stomach. I took some oil of Saint Joseph and applied on her stomach. Then, the baby came out. There was no cesarean! There was a miracle! I have a special connection to Saint Joseph. I see him at home. I talk to him.” Nathan demonstrated why people take part in different religious activities at the Oratory. Hindus coming to the Oratory discover God through their involvement and participation in religious activities. God-experience is special also for Kapil who said “There are different experiences here. We respect God here at the Oratory.”

My study reveals that the practices of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles are two among many other religious practices. For Hindus, Saint Joseph’s Oratory is a special place of God-experience in their daily living, especially in terms of experiencing miracles. In my intervention, it is important to maintain a Christian atmosphere at the Oratory. On the other hand, giving freedom for Hindus to do the practices should not frighten the Oratory Staff. By knowing the Hindu spirituality, the Oratory Staff could better understand the religious practices of Hindus.

9.2.1. Becoming closer to the Divine

In my interviews, I asked Hindus: *Do you think that you become closer to the Divine through your participation in different religious activities at Saint Joseph’s Oratory?* The chart below shows that majority (11) of Hindus become closer to the Divine through their religious activities at the Oratory.⁵⁷⁹ Some of them elaborated how they become closer to the Divine.

⁵⁷⁹ Most of the Hindus associate all God images to the Divine. As per Hindu thoughts, there are many names for the Divine! I think that for many Hindus, the Divine is more of a spiritual experience taking them to a higher Reality than a single figure.

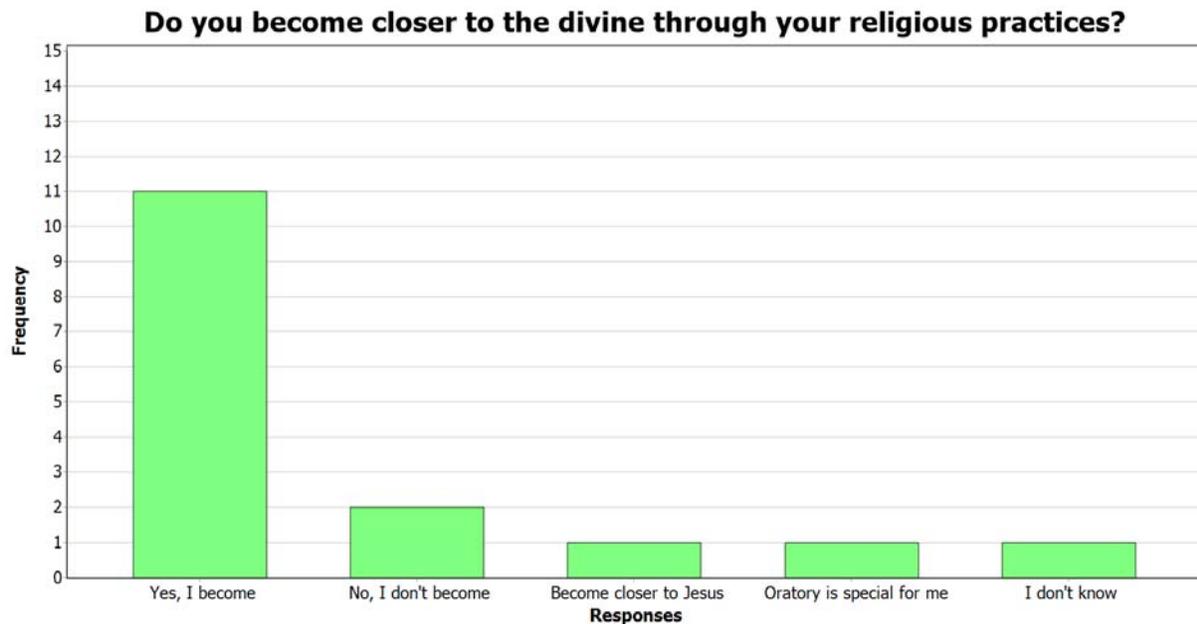


Figure 46: Becoming closer to the Divine through religious practices

Reshma said that she came to the Oratory since many years and she became closer to the Divine. “I am very close to God. I tell him everything in my life. I know that he loves me. Since 20 years I come to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. Whatever I ask here, I get. I just talk to God, to Saint Joseph. This is my house! I call my friends to come and talk to Saint Joseph. They do come with me.” She was not afraid to say that, based on her Divine experience; she invited her friends to come to the Oratory to experience the Divine. In her case, the figure of Saint Joseph was influential. Kannan went further as he said: “Yes. I become closer to God. God is Jesus for me. By coming to Saint Joseph’s Oratory, I become closer to Jesus...I am not baptized, but I go to the Church. I do not receive Jesus in Communion.” For him, the figure of Jesus was vital as his Divine experience was centered on Jesus. Manikkam spoke in the same tone. “Yes, I become closer to Jesus with all my practices. I have a special devotion to Jesus. I pray the rosary every day. I have a special devotion to Mother Mary.” Manikkam seemed to go in line with Catholic practices having a special devotion to Mother Mary.

Pushpa underlined the importance of doing a religious practice that involved his body. She became closer to the Divine by her religious practice of touching the Cross. “I feel like I become

closer to God. Sometimes, the Crypt Church is closed, and I am sad. I like to go there every time. I want to go and touch the Cross there. When I touch the Cross, I feel good. I have confidence when I touch the Cross.” Kumari spoke in the same way with a slight variation in the practice. “I find walking up on the steps is something like in Hinduism. It’s doing some sacrifice. It is like in Hinduism. However, we are not supposed to bribe our God.” For her, bribing God by doing some religious practices did not help her grow closer to the Divine. It was by self-introspection that people became closer to the divine. The element of self-introspection seemed to be true for Bhavani. “When I go there I have to give everything to God. I throw everything. I think that everything is true. I think only about him when I go there. I close my eyes and sit so that I do not see anything else. When you open your eyes, you see this and that. You can feel your God when you close your eyes.” Kalyani elaborated the result of such self-introspection and various religious practices at the Oratory. “I feel like I get more purification by coming here. By doing all that I do I am purified. By coming to the Church, lighting a candle, attending the Mass, you kind of get rid of the stress, you are cool, and I feel like someone else knows about me. You feel better. Even if nothing is going to happen or happened, someone else knows about you. It is getting closer to the divine.”

Kumari and Kapil did not become closer to the Divine through their participation in religious activities at the Oratory. Maheshwari mentioned as follows. “I do not think so. I question if there is a Divine. The concept of Divine is not the same for me. The peace within is the Divine. Alternatively, when someone does a great thing for me, he is like the Divine for me.” For her, divinity is not elsewhere but within oneself. I think that this attitude goes much in line with the Hindu thoughts that I discussed earlier in this study that concerns about *bhakti* at Saint Joseph’s Oratory. Kapil elaborated that he did not believe in becoming closer to the Divine. “I do my duty. That is all. As a human being, we have a duty. We are created. Someone has created us. By coming here, I respect my creator...I want to accept what God gives me. I am happy with what God gives me. I have no greed.” In his dialogue, I recognized the general attitude of Hindus towards their existence on earth. *Karma-mārga* seemed to have much influence on Kapil.

In my intervention, I need to listen to the experiences of Hindus at the Oratory. It is by knowing them that the educators in faith can accompany them in their spiritual journey. The educators in faith are supposed to be closer to God. Through their formation, personal life, prayer life, and community life in the Church, they are to be models for others. Though the ideal is always looked up to yet, the real may not be the same. Efforts are made to reach the ideal! During the intervention, a greater dialogue with Hindus and educators in faith will foster a conducive atmosphere at the Oratory for Hindus to grow closer to the Divine. It will also help them discover the God of Christians in a deeper way.

9.2.2. Involvement of the educators in faith

The educators in faith will have to play a vital role in the intervention to improve the pastoral practices at the Oratory. They are in constant communication with Hindus, who participate in various religious activities. It is true that some educators in faith do not care about communicating with Hindus as they may not be comfortable in doing so due to the language barrier and cultural differences. However, others do have the privilege to do so. The chart below shows how the educators in faith remarked the participation of Hindus in various religious activities at the Oratory.

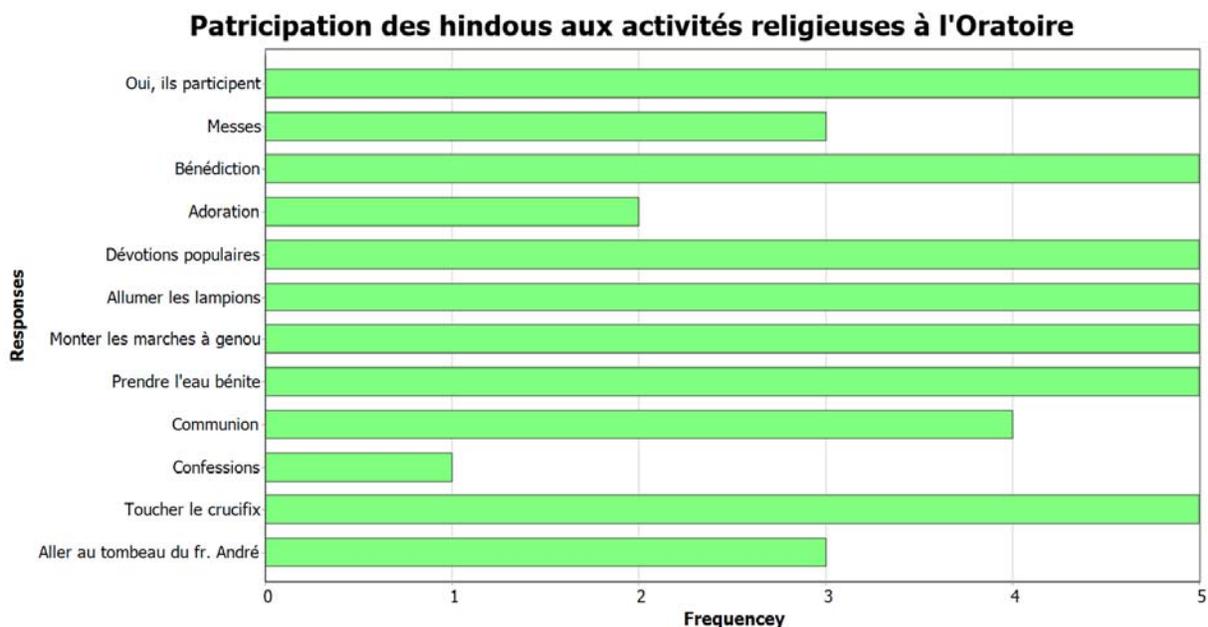


Figure 47: Remarks of the educators in faith about Hindus

The educators in faith know that Hindus participate in various religious activities at the Oratory. Most of them were unanimous in their remarks. It was evident for the educators in faith that Hindus took part in the Sacramental at the Oratory. The educators did not oppose to Hindu practices at the Oratory that were in line with piety and devotions. However, it was surprising to learn that the educators in faith did not oppose to the fact of Hindus receiving the Sacraments. For example, some educators underlined that Hindus took part in Masses and received Communion. Some Hindus went for Confessions!

My question to the educators in faith brings more insights: *Avez-vous observé que les hindous participent aux activités religieuses à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, à quelles activités participent-ils le plus?* Paul said: "There are a lot of Hindus who come for the Mass. There are also Hindus who come for confessions. They want to ask pardon from God. They do not know what confession for Catholics is. They just want to be in connection to God. They enter the confessional, and they search." Pascal went in line with the first one, but he also elaborated the Sacramental in which Hindus participated. « Ils aiment beaucoup venir à la chapelle votive, ils aiment beaucoup venir au tombeau du Frère André, il y en a beaucoup qui vont venir au grand crucifix aussi pour toucher les pieds du grand crucifix, il y en a qui viennent à nos célébrations eucharistiques, ce qui crée parfois un ambiguïté parce que pour eux autres je crois que quand on distribue la communion c'est un peu quand ils distribuent le *prasādam* dans les temples hindous tout le monde reçoit, alors eux autres ils ne comprennent pas qu'on exclurait quelqu'un de ce geste là. Et comme souvent on ne sait pas si c'est un chrétien de l'Inde ou un hindou, alors ils n'ont pas de signes distinctifs alors il faut être assez délicat pour essayer de vivre ça de façon sereine. » For Pascal, what was most important was to understand the needs of Hindus. By saying that, he was not ready to compromise the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Thomas underlined that Hindus were free to participate in any activities at the Oratory. « J'ai observé assez souvent les hindous dans des activités religieuses à l'Oratoire. Je pense que l'activité religieuse qu'on peut observer le plus souvent, c'est la prière ; ils prient à leur façon dans ce Sanctuaire. Ce n'est pas évident mais dans leur façon d'être, dans leur façon de circuler, on devine facilement que ça devient une occasion d'être en relation avec leur Dieu. Mais ceci

étant dit, il y a le fait qu'ils utilisent les rites et les symboles qu'ils trouvent ici que ce soient l'eau bénite, l'huile sainte, les bougies, les cérémonies liturgiques, ils viennent participer à ça à leur façon, pas comme les chrétiens bien sûr, mais ils entrent là-dedans et ils vivent ça à leur façon. » For him, the most important aspect was to let Hindus do their religious practices in their ways. He did not insist that Hindus should do religious practices in Christian ways in a Church. When it came to the participation in the Sacraments, this educator in faith had a wider concept of acceptance of Hindus with their identity. « J'aimerais bien parler avec certains qui viennent recevoir la communion; s'ils viennent recevoir la communion, je ne pense pas qu'on leur refuse, ici c'est un Sanctuaire, on est pas là pour juger et d'interdire la communion aux gens; c'est leur responsabilité, je pense que le Dieu de Jésus-Christ est à l'aise avec ça; Jésus s'est laissé approcher par toutes sortes de personnes qui n'étaient pas des juifs, de sa religion et Il aimait même ça élargir le cercle de ceux qu'Il rencontrait...les hindous à leur façon participent à nos rites et on peut savoir mieux ce que ça signifie pour eux en parlant avec eux. »

In my intervention, it is important to evaluate how far I can allow Hindus to take part in the Sacraments of the Church. It is essential to be open to Hindus, to receive them in an appropriate manner at the Oratory, as they desire to become closer to the Divine and grow in their spiritual journey. However, some Hindus may not know the real sense of what they do at the Oratory.⁵⁸⁰ It is the responsibility of the educators in faith to intervene in times of need, instead of keeping silence. The Oratory will have to develop measures to help Hindus to do their religious practices with a proper understanding of certain practices. The problematic is not based on doing the practices but the real sense of the practice. Ignorance about certain practices should not dilute the importance of a Sacrament in the Church. This is where the intervention will play a vital role in the context of the Oratory, especially when it comes to the participation of Hindus in different Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

⁵⁸⁰ Here, I mean to say “sense” that the Catholic Church gives for the religious activities conducted in the Church. As a Catholic Priest, I have to take into consideration the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church.

9.2.3. Reactions of the educators in faith about Hindu practices

The educators in faith are open to Hindus and their practices at the Oratory. The chart below gives an idea of the general reactions of the educators in faith. They gave freedom for those who wish to be part of any celebration at the Oratory. Some of them appreciated the efforts of Hindus and saw their gestures as positive. They opined that prayer touched the hearts of Hindus.

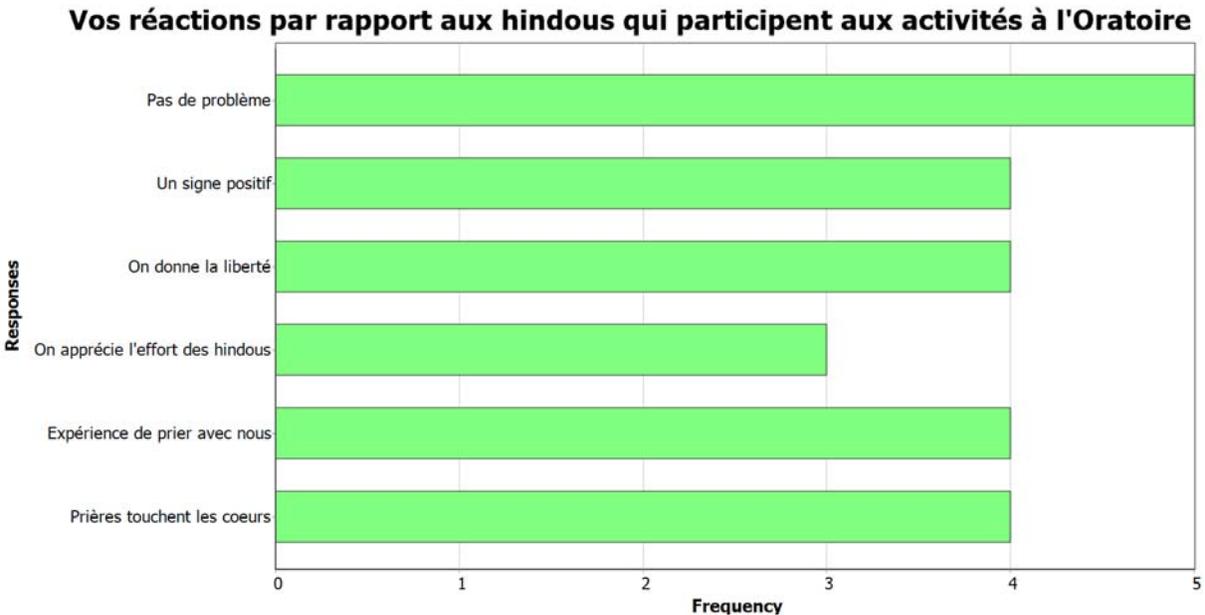


Figure 48: Reactions of the educators in faith about the religious practices of Hindus

Paul was skeptical about the practices of Hindus. “There are problems and struggles. They practice in their way. They do not integrate into our ways. We do not expect them. In Hinduism there is no order while praying, they can walk around anywhere. However, for Catholics, while the Mass is going on, normally we respect the celebration. There is no walking around and touching statues. In Hinduism, the faithful do not have many things to do. The *pūjāri* does all prayers. So the faithful walk around in the temple. When it comes to communion, Catholics are strict. Everyone cannot receive communion. We have our dogmas and teachings. For Hindus, it is not a problem. They are used to participate in any practice in their Temples. They think it is the same with Catholics. However, Hindus are not hurt when we tell them that the communion is reserved for Catholics.” Paul had a global picture of Hindus. He tried to compare the situation in

a Hindu Temple and Catholic Church. He was compassionate towards Hindus in their divine pilgrimage.

Violaine commented that Hindus lived a spiritual moment when they came to the Oratory. « S'ils vivent un bon moment spirituel, ça fait partie de l'énergie de l'endroit ou ça fait partie de l'esprit qui se dégage alors du sanctuaire qui est supposé d'être un lieu d'accueil et puis qui est là pour former un lieu où les gens viennent se déposer, viennent vivre quelque chose de beau et d'inspirant. Alors si les hindous posent des gestes qu'on associe au catholicisme et alors ce n'est pas grave... » It is interesting to notice the openness with which this educator in the faith welcomed Hindus. She opened up the participation of Hindus in the Sacramental of the Church as Hindus get a spiritual fulfillment through their practices. Marie also had no objection when Hindus took part in various practices. She stressed the importance of respect that they have to maintain while being in the Church. « Tant que c'est fait dans le respect, je ne vois pas de souci moi, tant que c'est fait dans le respect, bien entendu s'ils vont dépasser les bornes, je les vois mettre des fruits, des trucs comme ça, à ce moment-là je suis obligé d'intervenir, donc bien qu'en sachant que ce n'est pas dans un esprit de malice qu'ils le font, mais bien dans un esprit avec tout leur cœur qu'ils viennent apporter leur offrande, on peut pas blâmer quelqu'un de faire quelque chose...si on leur apprend ici on ne fait pas ça, ils comprennent, ils ne sont pas agressifs... » This educator in faith knew what was going on but did not want to intervene just because Hindus did not disturb the Christian practices. It was one way of accepting Hindus as they were and allowing them to do what they wanted to do.

Pascal underlined that Hindus took efforts to come to a Christian milieu to do their practices. It was by entering into the Christian devotions in Hindu ways that they experience God. « Moi j'apprécie beaucoup que ces gens-là prennent le temps de venir prier avec goût, parce que finalement même si on ne comprend pas tout d'une célébration religieuse, on peut se laisser porter par la dévotion d'un groupe que ce soit un groupe de notre propre tradition ou un groupe d'autres traditions, euh on peut s'associer et se laisser porter par ce qui se vit, moi je me dis l'hindou, le sikh ou le musulman qui est là avec nous à la messe, qui écoute les chants liturgiques, qui écoute ce qu'on dit et qui se laisse pénétrer et interpeller par ça, pour moi c'est

une occasion de partager avec eux et de leur offrir une façon de faire l'expérience de prier avec nous dans notre tradition religieuse. » Pascal perceived the realities with optimism. It was by giving an opportunity for Hindus to do the practices at the Oratory that the educators help them experience the Christian God. In one way or the other, Christian prayers and chants make meaning for Hindus.

Reactions of the educators in faith about Hindu practices at the Oratory give a positive approach to the transmission of Christian faith. It is not by forcing or correcting Hindus with rules and regulations in the Church that the educators can help them in their practices. The intervention is to be done in a friendly manner to accommodate Hindus to the new milieu that is not their own. Jesus' attitude of welcoming all people to experience God's compassion, mercy, peace and pardon could be applied to the educators in faith who are supposed to be instruments of spreading Jesus' love.

9.2.4. Manner of welcoming Hindus to the Oratory

I underlined that Hindus come to the Oratory without any force or invitation. The educators in faith from the Oratory do not go in search of Hindus to get them to do their religious practices at the Oratory. The educators in faith do not try to convert Hindus to Christianity. However, it is important to focus on my intervention strategies and the manner in which the educators in faith and pastoral agents at the Oratory would welcome Hindus. The chart below gives a picture of the general ways in which the educators consider Hindus. The educators in faith have a certain amount of respect for Hindu practices even if they do not in conformity with Christian practices. Though the educators said that they did not find any difficulty with Hindus, yet some of them expressed their uncertainties while distributing the communion. When Hindus approach to receive the Holy Communion during the Mass, some educators do not recognize them as Hindus. Most of the Hindus do not speak French, and some of the educators in faith do not speak English. It is a difficult situation for the educators in faith to get into dialogue with Hindus.

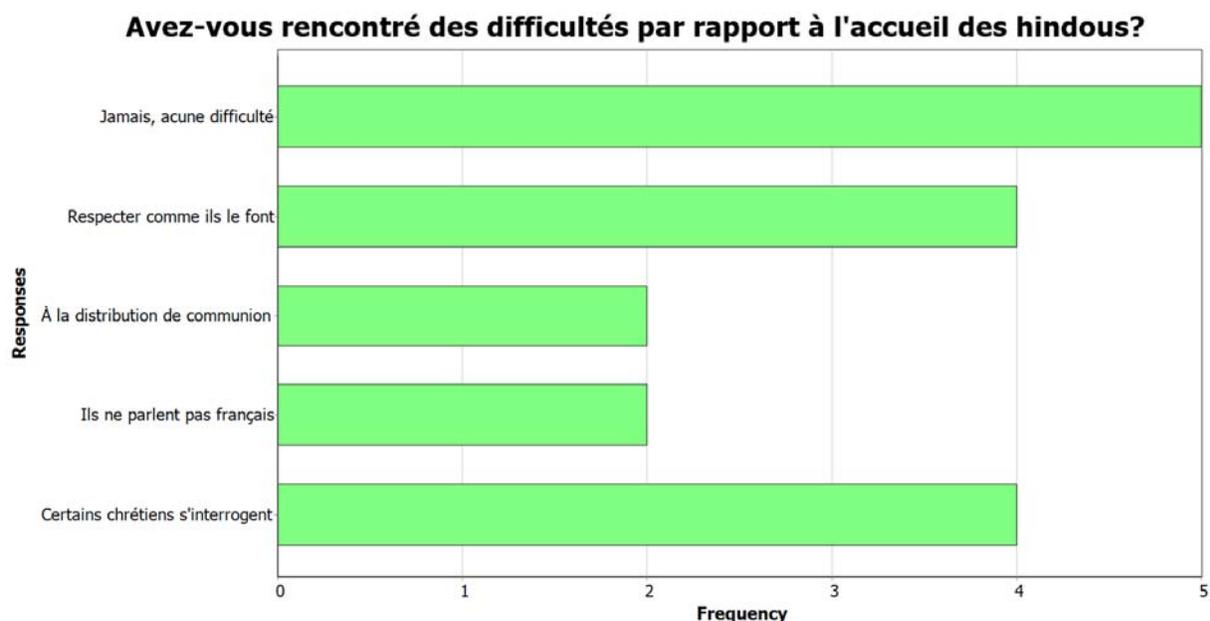


Figure 49: Difficulties of the educators in faith to welcome Hindus

In my interview, I asked the educators: *Avez-vous rencontré des difficultés par rapport à l'accueil des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?* Paul said, “Never. It is always a pleasant experience with Hindus. I never had any difficulty with any Hindu. They understand. When I explain concerning the non-reception of communion, they understand, and they respect.” Paul was a native where he already worked in a milieu of Hindus. He spoke the language of Hindus and understood their gestures. He was also able to differentiate between Christians and Hindus through their gestures and appearance.

Violaine was not much involved in welcoming Hindus. Marie said that many Hindus mistook her for a Hindu as she came from the Caribbean Islands and looked like a Hindu. « Ah oui, premièrement ils pensent que je suis hindoue moi, ils m'approchent naturellement parce qu'ils pensent que je suis hindoue...ils me parlent carrément dans leur langue parce qu'ils pensent que je suis hindoue, peut-être ça les encourage à être plus...je pense que les gens qui ne comprennent pas d'autres nations ont tout simplement de la mauvaise foi, l'impatience crée la mauvaise foi et automatiquement on rend l'autre responsable mais si on y va doucement et qu'on rassure l'autre qui déjà est stressé parce qu'on ne peut pas le comprendre, il est en milieu inconnu, peut-être qu'il

a déjà été rejeté ailleurs dans un magasin avant tout ça et qui vient nous rendre visite, le sourire il n'y a rien qui détend plus, le sourire détend tout le monde... » It is interesting to note the manner in which she intervened with Hindus. She made them comfortable to be in a place of peace. Through her gestures and explanations, she made Hindus feel at home at the Oratory. She argued that the language was not the only medium of communication with Hindus.

Pascal mentioned that there were certain difficulties with Hindus when they came to receive the Holy Communion. « ...c'est dans la distribution de la communion que ça crée une difficulté; l'autre difficulté, c'est pas ma difficulté, la difficulté de chrétiens alentours qui sont mal à l'aise devant la présence de gens pour eux qui sont non chrétiens et puis qui vont venir me voir me dire vous ne saviez pas que c'étaient des musulmans ou c'étaient des hindous et puis il y a des cas où ils étaient complètement faux, par exemple les gens d'ici ont l'impression que si une femme a un point rouge dans le front c'est une hindoue alors que tu sais aussi bien que moi que les chrétiens font ça aussi, et que c'est pas un signe distinctif...alors il faut aider nos chrétiens à être plus ouverts et plus tolérants envers ça. Alors c'est une des difficultés qu'on rencontre. » He underlined the need to intervene in such situations. In the context of the Oratory, it is important also to educate the Christians who regularly practice their faith. The local Christians from Quebec may not be used to the multi-religious and multi-ethnic context. The local Christians need to know that all Indians are not Hindus.

Thomas spoke in line with what is mentioned above. Personally, he agreed that all had to be welcomed to the Oratory. He understood why Hindus came to the Oratory but he was skeptical with the attitudes of Christians who found it difficult to accept Hindu practices at the Oratory. « ...moi je n'ai pas rencontré des difficultés, mais je vois que des chrétiens qui fréquentent le sanctuaire les regardent avec inquiétude et avec interrogation, ils se demandent qu'est-ce qu'ils font ici? Alors que moi je comprends facilement pourquoi ils viennent ici. Il y a des valeurs qu'on préconise qui sont très semblables aux leurs, et je comprends pourquoi ils viennent ici sans difficulté. » Certainly, there are some common values shared by people belonging to different religions. When Hindus discover the religious practices at the Oratory, they might see some of

the Christian practices are similar to their own. I already mentioned that the usage of water and candles are two major symbols in Christianity and Hinduism.

In my intervention, I need to emphasize that it is important to have an open attitude from the part of the educators in faith who encounter Hindus. It is in welcoming and accompanying them that the educators can create a better community of human beings and believers in God. Unlike the attitudes of some of the traditional Christians who do not want to care about Hindus, the educators wish to listen to Hindus. It is seen that some of the educators do not know much about Hinduism and Hindu religious practices. They have to be given a formation so as to work in an inter-religious milieu. Hindus, who need a specialized accompaniment in their faith journey, can be referred to those educators in faith who are more bilingual and who have specialization in Hindu traditions and practices. Concerning the reception of the Holy Communion by some Hindus, the educators in faith should not be afraid to discuss with them and make them understand the importance of the Holy Communion for Catholics.

9.2.5. Dialogue between the educators in faith and Hindus

Christian theology of religions gives a greater place for dialogue between people belonging to different faiths. The starting point of dialogue assumes that the other is not wrong in his practice. Pre-judgmental attitude and superiority mentality will not help one to get into a dialogue. It is important to search for greater truth while searching for meaning in life. Despite the adherence to a particular religion, God-experiences of people can help them to be together to form a beautiful community. God-experience goes beyond a cultural, linguistic, regional and national level. Human beings aspire to have a God-experience because they are capable of transcending beyond themselves. It is this capacity for “going beyond” that will help the educators in faith and Hindus to enter into a deeper dialogue.

The chart below spreads the responses of the educators in faith for the question, *Avez-vous dialogué avec des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, qui a pris l'initiative pour ce dialogue?*

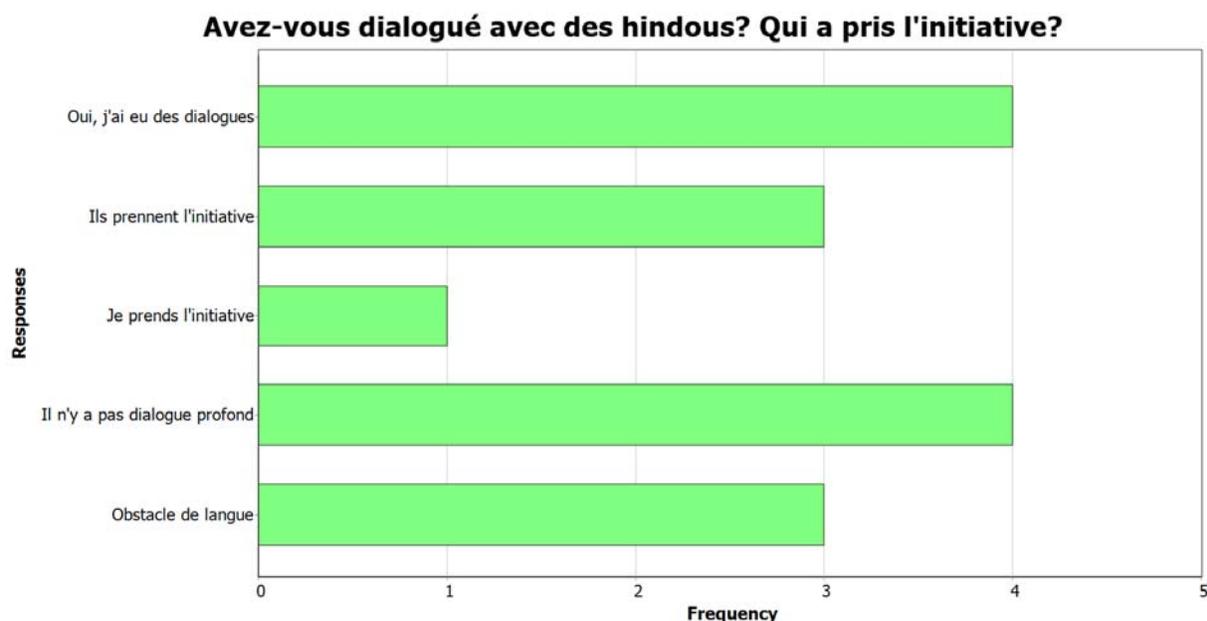


Figure 50: Dialogue between Hindus and educators in faith

The educators in faith have a constant dialogue with Hindus, but they remain at a peripheral level. There is no deeper dialogue due to various reasons. The initiative for the dialogue comes mostly from Hindus. They identify the educators in faith and ask them certain questions that help them continue their life at the Oratory.

Paul underlined that he entered into dialogue with Hindus when they asked for it. “I have a dialogue with Hindus. To welcome them, I talk to them. Concerning the faith, I do not do so much. However, there are some Hindus who wanted to become Christians, and they asked me how to become Christians. In those cases, I talk to them. I guide them to a parish. The initiative comes from them.” Marie agreed that Hindus took initiative for such a dialogue. « ...ils viennent demander des choses, mais je pense beaucoup par rapport parce qu'ils pensent que je suis hindoue, donc ils viennent. Si j'ai initié c'est parce peut-être que j'ai vu que la personne peut-être avait l'air un petit peu confuse, perdue quelque part ou devant les bougies ou un peu ne sait que faire, à ce moment là j'approche la personne et je demande si je peux l'aider... » She gave attention to Hindus, with certain reservations, who wanted to discover the Christian religious

practices. Though she was misunderstood for her origin yet she had a sense of dialogue with people of other faiths.

Pascal touched upon something interesting. He had a Hindu visiting him in the confessional. Knowing that Hindus cannot receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he still entertained a small dialogue with him. « Bon, un véritable dialogue interreligieux j'en ai eu juste une fois, les autres fois comme je l'ai dit au confessionnal, c'est juste un petit moment de contact et d'accueil de l'autre personne. Mais il est arrivé une fois qu'il y a des gens qui étaient venus avec ce qu'ils appelaient un Gourou hindou qui venait de l'Inde qui était très intéressé à mieux connaître notre tradition, alors la personne qui était au bureau de consultation m'a appelé pour savoir si je pouvais rencontrer cette personne-là, on a eu une assez bonne rencontre; ce type là voulait mieux comprendre quels sont nos rituels, quel est le sens de notre rituel ici et dans quel sens on fait ces gestes là, quel sens on donne, alors c'était beaucoup sous mode d'essayer d'expliquer le sens des gestes qu'on pose, alors comme je connaissais un peu sa tradition j'ai pu aussi faire quelques liens avec des choses qui se font dans leur tradition pour expliquer un peu ce qu'on fait dans notre tradition ici. » The role of the educators in faith was well done when he got into dialogue with Hindus. It is interesting to see that a Hindu Guru came with his disciple to dialogue with the educator in faith. It reveals that Hindus, who frequent the Oratory, keep searching for meaning to their practices. As the educator in faith knew more about Hindu practices, he was able to proceed with further dialogue.

Thomas had certain difficulties to get into dialogue with Hindus as he could not speak the language of Hindus. Nevertheless, he admitted that Hindus were easy to deal with and dialogue. « ...il peut y avoir beaucoup de difficultés à cause de la langue...mais de nature les hindous sont communicateurs même si il y a la barrière de la langue, encore une fois, ils ont le sourire facile et pour une personne qui elle aussi a le sourire facile, le seul fait de se sourire et de faire des gestes d'accueil et de compréhension, ça établit un certain contact. Bon, ceux avec qui on peut parler français et plus facilement encore anglais, là c'est plus facile d'écouter ce qu'ils ont à nous dire c'est facile de poser des questions sur ce qu'ils trouvent ici ou ce qu'ils font ici c'est très différent de l'un à l'autre. Mais je pense que c'est plus facile avec les hindous que des personnes qui

appartiennent à d'autres religions. » He was fascinated with the manner in which Hindus went around the Oratory. It was not only the verbal dialogue that mattered but also the gestures and non-verbal communications. The language barrier was easily forgotten when fraternizing and making a pilgrim people.

In my intervention, I should encourage that the educators in faith will have to listen to Hindus and thereafter make them understand the sense of Christian religious practices at the Oratory. It is appropriate to extend an invitation to Hindus so that they will reflect on their religious practices at the Oratory and know the deeper meaning of their practices. As it is done in praxeological perspectives, the why, what, when, where and how can be discussed with Hindus.

9.3. Usage of Holy Water at the Oratory

My interviews with Hindus revealed that most of them use Holy Water from the Oratory. The educators in faith do not intervene much about this practice. All of them know that it is an important practice for the Christians in connection with their baptism. Some of them also understand that Hindus use water in their *pūjā*. I asked the educators : *Que pensez-vous de gens qui utilisent de l'eau bénite de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?* The educators had rather a positive answer to this question as they tried to integrate Hindus to a new milieu of practice. Violaine underlined that the symbol of water was important for her. « ...le symbole de l'eau, c'est sûr que c'est le baptême et tout ça, oui c'est une belle pratique, puis moi quand je rentre dans une église ou quand j'en sors, j'aime me signer. Oui en sortant, en sortant je manque rarement d'aller me signer avec l'eau bénite, pour moi c'est un symbole important aussi, c'est une façon de communier, c'est une façon de me rappeler de mon baptême. » For Violaine, the usage of Holy Water to make the sign of the cross had a greater meaning. She spoke about the usage of Holy Water in a Church.

Marie commented more about the usage of Holy Water by Hindus. « ...Pour eux aussi ça représente la pureté, le nettoyage c'est comme se purifier, l'eau est symbole de purifier; si on est sale on se baigne dans l'eau pour se laver, donc ils le font peut-être à leur niveau pour d'autres raisons qu'on leur a apprises mais la base reste la même qui est la purification; donc pour moi

c'est sûr que si la personne s'amène et rentre dans le bassin de Saint Joseph pour se laver les pieds, d'ailleurs on ne peut plus accepter parce que ça ne fait pas partie de nos rituels à nous dans ce sens je ne l'ai pas vu, mais je sais qu'il y a eu des rapports...donc il faut peut-être à un moment donné tracer la ligne, on apprécie mais il faut garder comment ça fonctionne, ici on ne peut pas se laver les pieds, on ne peut enlever les chaussures malheureusement... » The intention of Hindus seemed to be good. Marie sensed the need of intervention in the usage of water at the Oratory. It is not only Holy Water that is distributed at the Blessing Office but also the water that is in the fountain and the water that falls from the rocks near the statue of Mother Mary that are to be considered for further intervention. Hindus have a tradition of washing the feet before entering into a temple for prayer and worship. They also remove their shoes or sandals because they enter into a sacred place. Therefore, Hindus might find it strange when they come to the Oratory as they are allowed to use their shoes and sandals.

Pascal saw the need of making connection between the usage of Holy Water and baptism. For him, the usage of Holy Water was one way of expressing faith: « ...c'est une façon d'exprimer notre foi, de confirmer notre foi par un geste qui est important pour nous, par un élément qui est important pour nous; pour un chrétien l'eau bénite est toujours une invitation à faire le lien avec l'eau du baptême; et l'eau dans ce contexte là c'est toujours le signe de la vie, de la vie nouvelle qui est donnée au Baptême, la vie dans le Christ ressuscité, alors c'est toujours un signe pascal du passage à cette vie nouvelle que Dieu veut nous donner à travers le signe de l'eau, alors pour moi c'est important; par contre quand les gens veulent se faire bénir avec de l'eau si on a le temps de faire un lien dans notre petite réflexion avec les gens on peut faire le lien, je ne suis pas sûr que les gens voient toujours ce lien-là. » He admitted that most of the Hindus may not see a connection between Christian baptism and the usage of Holy Water.

In my intervention, it is important to encourage keeping up the Christian tradition of the usage of Holy Water at the Oratory. I have to look for methods through which Hindus can be made aware of the significance of Holy Water for Christians.

9.3.1. Blessing of Holy Water

The Church recommends a prayer to bless the Water and this prayer is used at the Oratory. Nevertheless, in my observation and analysis, I mentioned that some Religious do not use the prayer recommended by the Church. They make a spontaneous prayer for the blessing. Some others, do not bless the water at all. They just add pipe water to the existing Holy Water in the container. In my intervention, I need to create a common way of doing things. It is better to follow the proper ritual to bless the water so that the effects of the prayers are transmitted through the usage of Holy Water.

It was also noticed that Holy Water container was not clean all the time. Through my intervention, a person could be appointed to clean the container every day. In a big institution like the Oratory, it is important to assign duties to various people even for a small thing like cleaning a container that has a wider implication.

I had noticed that the agents of security fill up Holy Water container without doing any prayer. They may not know the importance of the blessing of Holy Water. It is important to stop such a practice. My intervention will ensure that the Religious assigned to do the blessing has to do his duty so as to keep the practice intact.

9.3.2. Place for silence and transmission of faith

It was also observed and analyzed that there is noise in the Blessing Office as many people enter there to take water, register Mass intentions and get information. Through my intervention, I could suggest to bring more silence and prayerful atmosphere in the room. There is a statue of Saint Joseph in the middle of the room and a photo of Saint Brother André on the wall. People constantly come to receive blessings from a Priest or Religious. Therefore, this room may not be an ideal place for people who want to talk among themselves.

To regulate the issue, I might have to invite the Oratory authority to write down on the wall “silence” and create an atmosphere that leads to it. The whole practice of taking Holy Water should help people to reflect on what they do. A religious practice with a reflection or prayer will

always help interiorize the practice. When it comes to the transmission of faith, if time and situation permit, the educators can get in communication with Hindus. The intervention can include a written document near Holy Water container to explain the importance of the usage of Holy Water for Christians.

9.3.3. Manner of distributing Holy Water

I noted down that some people are not happy with the way the Holy Water is distributed. They are not satisfied with the small bottles that are available for sale at the Oratory; rather they look for bigger bottles. In my intervention, I have to make Hindus understand that it is not the quantity that matters but the quality and the proper sense of the usage of Holy Water. Proper education and awareness of the significance of Holy Water will change their conceptions about the distribution of Holy Water.

It was also observed that Holy Water was sold in bottles (already filled-in bottles) at the entrance of the Oratory. In my intervention, I have to suggest stopping this practice as people do not get to know the importance of the practice. Holy Water is not a commodity to be sold if the educators want the pilgrims to participate in the Sacramental. It is by involving oneself in the practice of filling the bottle of Holy Water that one gets time to reflect on the meaning of it.

9.3.4. Intervention of the educators in faith

I already underlined that the educators in faith have a big role to play in keeping the religious practice of the usage of Holy Water intact. They have to meet with Hindus at the Oratory and dialogue with them. It is through their fraternal dialogue and instructions that they can keep the authenticity of the practice. The educators themselves have to be convinced of the ways in which the practice should be carried on. In my intervention, it will be good to organize periodical meetings of the educators in faith. Regular appraisals of the religious practices at the Oratory will bring fruitful outcome.

The Pastoral Administration of the Oratory will have to organize meetings for those Religious who are in ministry at the Blessing Office. Learning from the experiences of various individuals, common consensus can be made to intervene in the context of Hindus, who take part in the practice. In their dialogue and intervention, the educators can make it clear to Hindus that Holy Water is not *tīrtha*. For those Hindus who wish to learn more about Christianity could be referred to people who teach Christianity. The educators also can make it clear to Hindus that by using Holy Water from the Oratory, they do not become Christians.⁵⁸¹ The availability of Holy Water for all people is a mere sign of the openness of Christians to welcome Hindus to discover the person of Jesus Christ through their religious practice.

9.4. Lighting of candles at the Oratory

I underlined that many Hindus light candles at the Oratory. Most of them do it for a purpose; either for thanksgiving or asking favours from God. Lighting candles bring happiness to Hindus as light represents life. Light keeps darkness away from the life of a person. Some Hindus associated lighting of candles with the festival of *Dīpavali* or the gesture of doing *ārtī*.

The educators in faith know that the symbol of light has a greater significance in Christianity. The chart below shows us that the educators in faith encouraged Hindus to do the practice as they estimated that it was a good practice. At the same time, the educators underlined that they need to be watchful about the motivations of the practice. The *why* of the practice was to be discussed in detail. If Hindus think that there are magical things that would happen through the practice, it has to be clarified through fraternal dialogue. In this way, the educators are sensitive to Hindus and their needs but at the same time they show their willingness to accompany Hindus.

⁵⁸¹ Hindus at the Oratory might just want to experience the “miracle” and “healing” through the usage of the Holy Water.

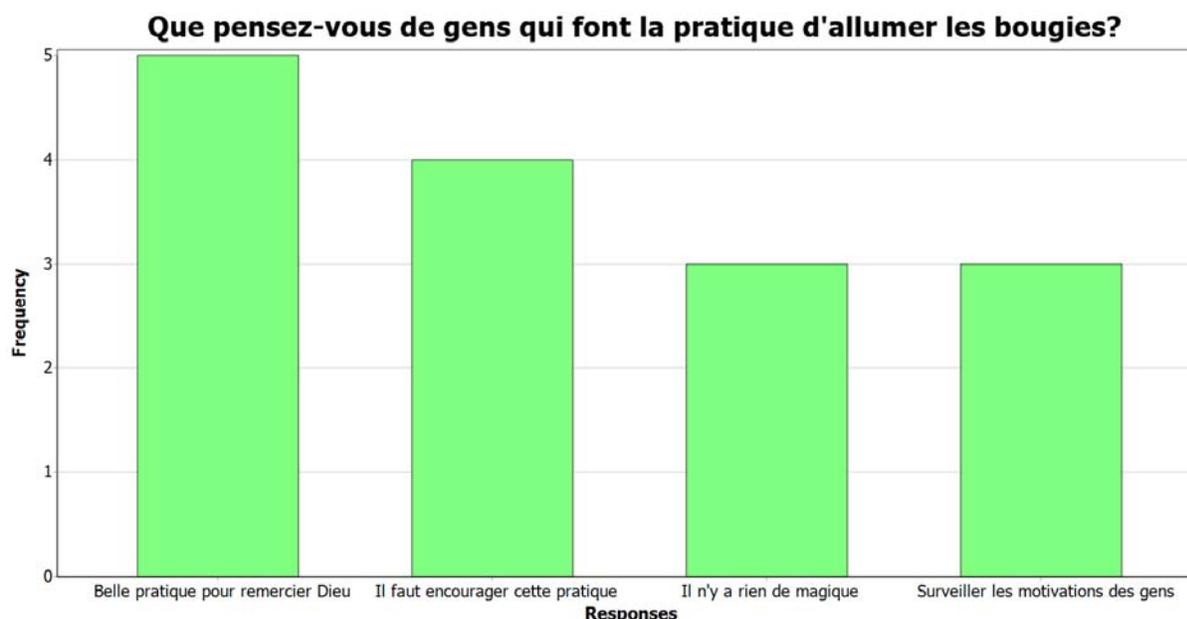


Figure 51: Opinion of the educators in faith about people who light candles at the Oratory

The following question was asked to the educators in faith: *Que pensez-vous de gens qui adoptent cette pratique d'allumer les bougies à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?* The educators found that it was normal for pilgrims to light candles even if they belonged to another faith. Paul mentioned, « It's natural to light a candle in the votive chapel. There are ten thousand candles here. Some people are touched. There are people who cry, who pray. Around us, there are people who light candles. Some people have special intentions. Some people have no work; they ask for it while lighting a candle. They make their intentions here. They thank God also by lighting candles. » Paul underlined that people have various purposes for lighting candles. While lighting candles, Hindus do some gestures as praying loud or slow, crying and wiping their tears, chanting *mantras*. They manifest their faith in God.

Violaine also underlined the faith of Hindus. « ...C'est un symbole très fort, moi ça me touche beaucoup, ça m'émeut de voir que des gens, comment prennent la peine de symboliser ou de représenter leur foi ou leur demande en allumant un lampion, pour moi c'est important; la prière de demande ici c'est sûr que c'est notre raison d'exister; la prière de demande, la prière d'intercession, la prière d'action de grâce aussi beaucoup, il y a beaucoup de gens qui écrivent ou

viennent ici allumer un lampion pour remercier pour une grâce qu'ils ont reçue, pour moi c'est notre raison d'être et d'exister au Sanctuaire. Donc, pour moi que des gens viennent ici et puis, ils prennent la peine de venir allumer un lampion, je trouve ça touchant et ça m'émeut, je trouve que c'est une belle pratique. » As an educator in faith, she was touched to see the practice of Hindus who came from another faith to do the practice at the Oratory. She also encouraged the Hindus to do the practice without any hesitation.

Marie saw the interconnectedness of people who light candles at the Oratory. She saw a positive energy that came out from the practice of people. Belonging to different faiths do not stop people from praying together and helping each other. A lighted candle also represented a person who gave himself for the other in service. « C'est un support, souvent ils demandent aussi et combien de temps ma bougie va rester là? Ils veulent s'assurer que la bougie va rester là, et oui ils ont besoin de prier, parce qu'ils ont besoin de sentir, oui on peut parler à Dieu n'importe où, c'est juste vraiment un symbole et je pense sincèrement quand Il a dit lorsque un ou plusieurs sont réunis en mon nom je suis parmi eux; c'est comme si pour moi là où il y a les bougies, les paroles c'est comme la radio, ce sont des vibrations donc le Verbe s'est fait chair, la Parole se matérialise dans cette bougie de joie ou de peine, je pense que ça crée tout un égrégore d'énergies, et quand la personne rentre déjà affaiblie et qu'elle rentre dans ça on dirait que ça vous donne de la force, elle allume sa bougie et la force des autres lui donne la force et comme renforce sa prière même si on ne sait pas pourquoi la bougie est allumée, je pense que ce n'est pas par hasard que certaines bougies éclatent parfois la vibration, la prière est tellement puissante que je pense que ça les énergies et bon moi j'y crois là. » She believed that when two or three people gathered in Jesus's name, he was there in their midst. At the Oratory, all Hindus may not be gathering in the name of Jesus. They gather in a sacred space where many pray in the name of Jesus.

Pascal had occasion to speak to Hindus and he found that they had all reasons to light candles at the Oratory. He underlined that Hindus and Sikhs have a greater faith in Saints. « ...Et il m'a dit écoutez pour nous les Saints sont des gens qui sont proches de Dieu et la bougie qu'on allume c'est comme si c'était notre présence qui continue aux pieds du Saint alors que nous on quitte, c'était comme notre prière qui se poursuit par cette flamme qui est là aux pieds du Saint; et je me

disais que c'est une belle façon de voir; je voudrais que ma présence aux pieds du Saint soit...se continue après mon départ, cette lumière-là va être ma présence qui va continuer aux pieds du Saint. » It is interesting to notice that the candles are lightened in connection with God. Saints are closer to God and by lighting candle at the foot of a Saint; it is a way of honoring the Saint as well as God. This also shows that human beings aspire to climb the steps to a higher reality while living on earth. Desire to be in proximity with the Divine is part of people belonging to different faiths.

Thomas was objective in his response as he said that it was important to encourage Hindus to do the practice but at the same time, the educators in faith have to intervene in times of need. « Je pense qu'il faut encourager cette pratique là, mais en même temps il faut les éduquer parce qu'allumer des bougies ça comporte un certain risque pour ne pas dire un certain danger, il n'y a rien de magique là-dedans, allumer une bougie ça ne veut pas dire que Dieu va faire ce que je lui demande, c'est plus complexe que cela; il faut que je sois animé par des dispositions et des motivations intérieures qui donnent tout son sens au feu que j'allume; donc il faut éduquer les pèlerins qui utilisent la bougie en ce sens-là pour alimenter leur foi. » Thomas insisted that proper education will help Hindus to grow in their faith.⁵⁸² There is nothing magical in lighting candles. The faith of the person who does the practice with devotion brings a change in him.

9.4.1. Installation of candles at the Oratory

I counted ten thousand candles in the votive chapel of the Oratory. There are big and small candles. Pilgrims have access to burning both types of candles. When they light a small candle, it remains for almost five hours and the big candle will stay for two days. The workers at the Oratory changed burnt candles and installed new ones. Some workers did the work with much devotion while others did not care about pilgrims who practiced the lighting of candles. Some workers made much noise as they did their work while others did it with attention.

⁵⁸² Growing in faith also could mean, growing in Hindu faith or Christian faith. In the context of the Oratory, it can be also inter-faith.

In my intervention, I have to instruct workers about the serenity of the place. As the installation of candles is done while pilgrims are around them, they have to be sensitive to their surroundings. It is important not to disturb the pilgrims who are in prayer. Some workers while installing candles seemed to be nice with pilgrims as they exchanged some words of greetings while others did not care for pilgrims. Hindus, who come from a different faith, might find it hard when workers do not behave with them in a proper manner. My intervention has to focus creating a conducive atmosphere both for Hindu pilgrims and workers who do their job.

9.4.2. Intentions of lighting candles at the Oratory

I underlined that Hindus and Christians light candles with various intentions. While some of the intentions are personal, others are family and community oriented. For Christians, lighting candles remind them that Jesus is the Light of the World. Hindus light candles as they give importance for light in Hindu *pūjā* by doing *ārtī* and celebrating *Dīpavali*. Nevertheless, my study shows that some Hindus lighted candles as they thought that magical things could happen in their life through the practice at the Oratory.

My intervention will focus on making Hindus understand that candle lighting has to be done with conviction and faith. The prayer of the heart while lighting candles can open their hearts to God and bring fruits in their life. The educators in faith have to instruct Hindus to examine their intentions while lighting candles at the Oratory.

9.4.3. Atmosphere in the votive chapel

The votive chapel is filled with people, especially on Sundays. I hear people speaking in different languages. Many people pray and some people kneel down. Some people cry and another smile. As the chapel is filled with people, it can be noisy, and one can lose the prayerful atmosphere of the place.

My intervention will focus on making the votive chapel more silent and prayerful. Visible sign boards will have to be installed at different spots so that people may know that it is a place of

prayer and silence. During peak hours, it might be good to appoint some volunteers to help pilgrims keep the silence and serenity of the site.

9.4.4. Intervention of the educators in faith

The educators in faith should meet with Hindus who light candles at the Oratory. In their dialogue, they can invite Hindus to recite the prayer that is at their disposal while lighting candles. The educators can talk to them about the importance of light in Christianity. They can speak to them about Jesus, the Light of the World. Hindus, who are open to learning more about Jesus, have an excellent opportunity to learn from the educators in faith. In their conversation, they can also tell Hindus that there is nothing magical about lighting candles. The educators can invite Hindus to examine their faith in God. The Transmission of Christian faith takes place when there is proper communication.

The educators can develop a good relationship with the workers at the Oratory, especially who install candles. The workers also need accompaniment as they may not know how to deal with pilgrims. It is essential to foster a climate of serenity in the votive chapel. The educators can play a significant role to instruct the workers who in turn will help to maintain a prayerful atmosphere in the votive chapel.

Ministry at the corridor is something new that has to be explored at the Oratory. Continued presence of an educator in the votive chapel will bring a new dynamism in the site. In general, people who come to the Oratory have a certain amount of respect for the Priests at the Oratory. By being present in the chapel, the educators become more accessible to people.

The transmission of faith begins with a simple encounter. It is by discovering the person of Jesus that Hindus can know more about Christianity. I mentioned that the aim of the educators in faith is not to convert Hindus to Christianity. The educators help Hindus to discover the mystery of Jesus Christ and Christian faith. It is the free will and choice of every person to accept Jesus. Hindus should be guided in a proper way while taking part in some of the Christian religious practices. The Oratory as a hub of religions has its own identity and it helps people to take right orientations. Hindus should not think that they do their Hindu practices at the Oratory. Catholic

identity of the Oratory remains the same even if Hindus take part in many practices. The Oratory cannot forgo its founding principles, but it can accommodate people from all faiths as Jesus himself welcomed all people to him.

The transmission of the faith continues from a simple encounter to a deeper understanding of Christian doctrines. The devotional practices may lead Hindus to discover Christian teachings and dogmas. The simple practice of lighting candles might inspire Hindus to listen to the Word of God and meditate upon Gospel passages. Man's search for meaning in life can lead him to a higher thirst for the infinite God. The educators in faith who are supposed to be people with a higher formation in Christian faith might accompany Hindus who want to know the person of Jesus Christ and his teachings.

9.5. Divine figures and multiple spirituality

It is clear from my study that Hindus have special attraction towards divine figures not only in Hinduism but also in Christianity. As they give respect to Rama, Krishna, and Saraswati, they also give respect to Saint Joseph, Saint Brother André and Jesus. When Hindus discover more about Jesus Christ and his teachings, they tend to be closer to him. They are attracted to the person of Jesus. They look forward to developing a spirituality based on Jesus' teachings. However, they do not abandon their multiple divine figures and spirituality in Hinduism. There is a tendency to walk side by side compromising one and the other.

The theological tradition of Christianity does not permit religious pluralism. Christianity has a unique status as God the Father sent his only Son to save the world. For many centuries, the Roman dogma *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church, no salvation), was the slogan of Catholic Church. However, this traditional view underwent changes with many studies and researches regarding other faiths. The Second Vatican Council recognized the good elements in other faith traditions. John Hick has a wider outlook as he pointed out that "Jesus lived in full openness to God, responsive to the divine will, transparent to the divine purpose, so that he lived out the divine agape within human history...*Agape* is incarnated in human life whenever someone acts in selfless love; and this occurred in the life of Jesus to a startling and epoch-

making degree.”⁵⁸³ He argued that this wider perspective of Christianity can do it a part of the religiously plural world. Jesus’ concern and love for all people will make people belonging to other faiths to come to him. In another reflection, he underlined that “We have been like a company of people marching down a long valley, singing our own songs, developing over the centuries our own stories and slogans, unaware that over the hill there is another valley, with another great company of people marching in the same direction, but with their own language and songs and stories and ideas; and over another hill yet another marching group – each ignorant of the existence of the others. But then one day they all come out onto the same plain, the plain created by modern global communications, and see each other and wonder what to make of one another.”⁵⁸⁴ It is quite true for people who have not opened up themselves to the other religious realities, faiths, and practices.

In the above view of thoughts, a sacred place like Saint Joseph’s Oratory gets the maximum attraction where Jesus’ name is proclaimed and pilgrims are accompanied in their faith journey. People belonging to different religious traditions are not discriminated at the Oratory. They get a chance to participate in various religious activities. Though they wonder for a while, at their first visit, not knowing what to do at the Oratory, yet they get familiarized with the activities and feel comfortable to come back.

9.5.1. Question of God and Gods for Hindus

Hindu concept of God is quite different from that of Christian. While Christians believe in one God in three Persons that they call the Divine Trinity, Hindus believe in many Gods. The *Trimūrti* in Hinduism is similar to Christian Trinity. The three persons in the *Trimūrti* are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Nevertheless, the *Trimūrti* cannot be compared to the Trinity as God understanding and manifestations are not the same among the two. Hindus also believe in *avatāras* that are manifestations of God. Unlike the Christian Saints, Hindus worship *avatāras*. For Hindus, *avatāras* are Gods.

⁵⁸³ J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1980, p. 28.

⁵⁸⁴ J. Hick, 1980, p. 41.

The chart below shows that the educators in faith spoke to Hindus about God. When it came to the question of “which God”, the educators had varied opinions. Most of the educators spoke to Hindus about God without specifying any name. They talked about the creator God. They spoke about God’s care and protection. Some educators talked to Hindus about Christian God or the Trinitarian God. They spoke about Jesus Christ. It is also interesting to note down that some educators spoke about “God of all.” There are not many educators who talked to Hindus about Hindu Gods because they seemed to be not familiar with Hindu Gods. In my intervention, I need to prepare some educators in faith who are competent to accompany Hindus in their faith journey. It is by listening to the God-experience of Hindus that the educators can further accompany them in their faith journey. Every God-experience is authentic, and the good elements of God-experience should never be underestimated in faith transmission process.

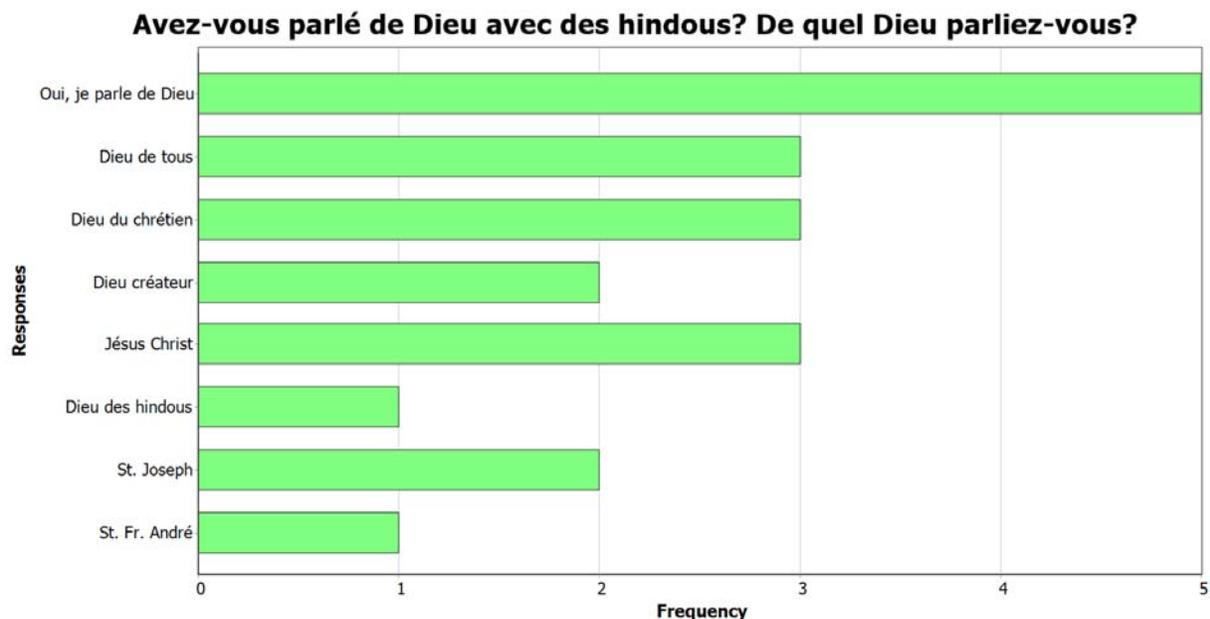


Figure 52: God of the educators in faith and God of Hindus

The educators in faith did not hesitate to respond to the interview question, *Avez-vous parlé de Dieu avec des hindous? Si oui, de quel Dieu parliez-vous?* Paul said, « Hindus know their God. If they ask me about Jesus, I speak about Jesus. Sometimes, I speak about Brother André to give an example so as to show them someone who has followed Jesus. » Paul waited for the initiative of Hindus to ask him about Christian God to give them some instructions. Marie spoke in the

same line as he said that « ...si on me pose des questions, je réponds...le Christ lui-même est toute miséricorde, donc je n'ai pas prêché par la peur mais par l'amour et je pense que les gens se sentent plus confortables à l'aimer, à le connaître à travers ça. »

The educators in faith, especially when they are Priests and Religious, do blessings at the Oratory. I mentioned that many Hindus go to receive blessings from a Priest. At the Oratory, the blessing is done in the name of Christian God. However, it is interesting to see how Pascal interacted at the time of blessing people who belonged to other faiths. Pascal explained, « Quand je parle de Dieu avec des non chrétiens, par exemple quand des gens viennent se faire bénir, on ne peut pas à mon avis bénir sans parler de Dieu d'une certaine façon, moi j'aime utiliser des termes un peu plus génériques, par exemple avec des hindous et des musulmans, je vais hésiter à faire un signe de croix, parler au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint-Esprit, alors je vais plutôt faire un geste en imposant les mains, donc en étendant les mains au-dessus de la personne et puis en faisant une bénédiction en disant par exemple, le Dieu d'amour, de compassion et de miséricorde soit avec vous et vous bénisse, je vais utiliser toujours des mots qui sont plus génériques pour sans aller nécessairement dans des mots qui sont typiques de telle ou telle religion, alors je n'utilise pas les mots d'une autre religion mais des mots un peu plus universels pour parler du Dieu dont on parle, à mon avis le Dieu des chrétiens est un Dieu d'amour, de compassion, on ne trahit pas ce qu'on dit comme chrétien mais en même temps on utilise un langage que dans lequel eux autres peuvent aussi se reconnaître. » It was a good way of interacting with Hindus and people who belonged to other faith traditions. God is the origin of all blessings. Nevertheless, the educators need to estimate how the transmission of Christian faith takes place in a small ritual of blessing.

God of the educators in faith is undoubtedly the Christian God. It is not only through studies and research that people can discover God but also through life experiences. God is primarily an experience. Christian God is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, fully human and divine. For Christians, Jesus' experience is God-experience. All the educators at the Oratory need to have Jesus' experience to be effective in their transmission of Christian faith. It is through constant personal efforts that they can reach a higher level of God-experience and transmit it.

The educators in faith look forward to building respect, educating hearts and minds and bringing hope to people around them irrespective of their religious background. Rituals and celebrations are visible signs of the legacy of the educators in faith. As the educators in faith perform some rituals and celebrations, they can help Hindus to know the deeper meaning of these celebrations through dialogue and personal accompaniment.

9.5.2. Syncretism and transmission of faith

As per the opinion of the educators in faith, the chart below shows us that there is no mixing up of religious doctrines at the Oratory. The educators in faith had confidence in the way things were arranged at the Oratory. Despite the visitors from different faiths, the Oratory keeps its Catholic identity. The educators in faith underlined that Hindus discovered the Christian life through their presence and practices at the Oratory. Hindus are open to other religious traditions and faiths. This does not mean that there is conversion of Hindus to Christianity. At the Oratory, no religious practice is imposed on Hindus. They make up their mind to participate in one or the other practice and they gain out of their practice. Therefore, there is no confusion with regard to the doctrinal teaching of any religion. When there is a need, the educators intervene to help them in their spiritual journey.



Figure 53: Syncretism at the Oratory – opinion of the educators in faith

It is interesting to glance through the detail of our question, *Pensez-vous qu'il y a un possible syncrétisme à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, comment pouvez-vous l'expliquer?* Paul said, "No. I do not think so. The Oratory remains a Catholic Church. There is no mixing of dogmas. We invite others; we are open to all. We welcome them. We do not take their dogmas and teachings to integrate into our ways of teaching." In saying this, this interviewee was delicate to speak about Hindus who participated in the Sacraments of the Church. Paul said that "There are Hindus who come to the Mass. Some even receive communion. Some come for the confessions. However, we do not encourage them to do so. Some Hindus might receive the communion without knowing it. Even some priests might not know that they are Hindus. Some Hindus kneel down. It is purely Christian. Hindus normally in their Temples do not kneel down. They lie down. So, Hindus integrate themselves to Catholics without making much noise." Sometimes, Hindus participated in the Sacraments without their knowledge of what the Sacraments meant for Christians. This was where the intervention needed by the educators in faith.

It is a challenging task for the educators in faith to identify Hindus at the Oratory. Those educators in faith who come from India might easily recognize Hindus by their gestures and manners. The educators in faith who hail from Québec, Europe may not easily identify Hindus. In my intervention, I should foresee conferences for the educators from different parts of the world to expose the practical issues such as identifying Hindus while distributing Communion. For instance, the educators from India can be resource persons to give some hints and lessons for others who come from different parts of the world.

Violaine mentioned, « Je ne pense pas qu'il y a de syncrétisme à l'Oratoire, je pense que la façon dont les lieux sont faits, la façon dont l'animation spirituelle est faite, comment la pastorale est menée que ce soit par la présence des prêtres ou des frères et aussi par les laïcs qui s'occupent de.... je ne pense pas qu'il y a de syncrétisme; je pense qu'on est ouvert aux autres religions...il y a le fait d'accueillir beaucoup de religions différentes, juste de les accueillir dans le but du dialogue en disant bon on est ouvert de cœur, physiquement par les lieux qu'on ouvre à tout venant, on ne fait pas de misère avec les gens qui rentrent dans les lieux; pour moi on est un lieu d'accueil mais c'est pas un lieu où il y a un syncrétisme qui s'installe. » Violaine also saw the

positive aspect of the presence of people belonging to different religions coming to the Oratory. She opined that by welcoming and creating a community, the educators in faith can make the Oratory a place of peace.

Marie mentioned that the Oratory is considered to be a place of peace on the mountain. « Moi je pense ce qui les attire beaucoup c'est la montagne et aussi ils en ont entendu parler comme un lieu de miracles et l'histoire, je ne sais pas s'ils connaissent l'histoire vraiment, il y en a qui me posent la question, mais la montagne pour eux est très symbolique... » Pascal affirmed that there was no mixing up of religious doctrines at the Oratory. « Bon, syncrétisme c'est souvent d'essayer de prendre des doctrines d'un peu partout et de faire un amalgame de doctrine. Pour moi à l'Oratoire c'est plus un amalgame de pratique religieuse que les gens, il faut faire attention par contre dans notre façon de parler, d'être au-delà de cet espèce de syncrétisme, de dire tout le monde fait la même chose on fait simplement pas dire pareil et puis finalement dire toutes les religions disent la même chose, non je pense que les religions ont des choses différentes et c'est important de garder ce qui est différent entre les religions. Devant le phénomène d'une grande diversité ethnique, culturelle, je crois que pour éviter ce syncrétisme-là il va être important que ceux qui sont au service pastoral à l'Oratoire aient une bonne compréhension des grandes traditions religieuses pour pouvoir être capable de comprendre chacune des traditions et être capable de distinguer chacune des traditions religieuses. Alors à mon avis plus on va avancer avec ça, plus on va avoir des équipes pastorales qui sont capables de faire ces distinctions là et de comprendre le dynamisme de chaque tradition religieuse. Quand on a fait ça, je crois qu'on va éviter le syncrétisme. » Pascal underlined the importance of having a good team of the educators in faith who understands different religious traditions and practices. Proper accompaniment and directions will avoid any type of syncretism at the Oratory.

Thomas mentioned that syncretism was possible for those people who did not reflect upon what they did. « Le syncrétisme est toujours possible pour ceux qui ne réfléchissent pas. C'est un amalgame, le syncrétisme. Et aujourd'hui on appelle ça la religion à la carte. On prend des éléments de toutes les religions, on mélange ça et puis euh, non on ne peut pas vivre euh les religions comme des menus qu'on apprête comme on veut, euh il faut à mon avis, faire ça ce n'est

pas bien. Ce n'est pas respecter ces religions-là dans ce qu'elles sont...Donc attention aux religions à la carte, au syncrétisme, euh c'est un manque de respect pour moi, en plus que c'est un mensonge hein. Donc, tous les éléments d'une religion s'expliquent les uns par les autres. » Thomas mentioned the importance of paying attention not to mix up doctrines of different faiths. It was up to every practitioner to discern in his spiritual journey. The practitioner had to take enough time to reflect on what he performed while being at the Oratory.

In my intervention, it is vital to accompany people who are confused in their practice. The educators in faith have to be prepared to accompany Hindus in times of need. It is a challenge to identify people who are in need. At the Oratory, Hindus who come to the Blessing Office and who get in dialogue with the educators in faith can be easily identified and accompanied.⁵⁸⁵

9.5.3. Transmission and reception of faith

The transmission of Christian faith is the essential mission of the Church. Jesus sent out his apostles and disciples to announce the Good News to the whole world. The Good News is based on the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians believe that “in Him and through Him” they have life in fullness. He has shown them the way to the Father in Heaven. The Christian missionaries have been announcing the Good News as they traveled across the world. The educators in faith are missionaries in their country or elsewhere in the world. Blessed Basile Moreau, the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, sent out his men to different parts of the world as educators in faith in order to renew and regenerate the society with a faithful people that follow Jesus Christ. My study emphasized that the educators in faith at the Oratory have been faithful in transmitting Christian faith from foundation. In the present scenario of this study, it is useful to elaborate how the reception of the faith is done by Hindus.

The chart below shows that most of the Hindus at the Oratory grew in faith through their visit to the Oratory. Some of them were close to Jesus. They prayed to Jesus as they knew that Jesus

⁵⁸⁵ I mentioned that some Hindus at the Oratory go to the Priests and Religious to receive blessings. They also talk to them about their life and spiritual journey.

could help them in their spiritual journey.⁵⁸⁶ This scenario is clear as I have underlined the multiple God images of Hindus. Jesus could be one among the other Gods for Hindus though some of them consider Jesus as a personal God.

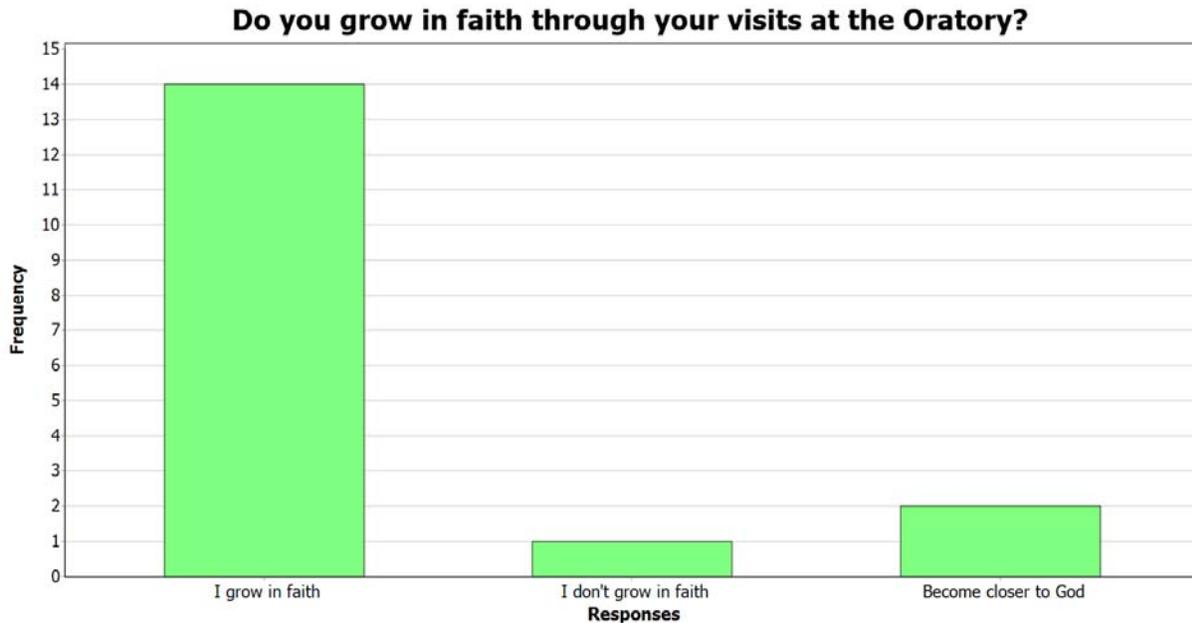


Figure 54: Growing in faith through the visits at Saint Joseph's Oratory

It is interesting to see the detailed responses of Hindus to the question: *do you think that you grow in faith through your visits at Saint Joseph's Oratory?* Vinesh said, “Definitely, this is a good place to come. This is a peaceful place. You cannot go and stand in a metro station or a grocery store and pray. You need some peace of mind. This Church has its history, and I really like it.” For Vinesh, growing in faith was also experiencing peace of mind. He insisted on the atmosphere at the Oratory to grow in his faith. Reshma counted on the dialogue she cherished with the Priests and Religious. “Yes, I grow in faith. Before 20 years, I just used to come here but I never used to talk to any priests. I just used to say hello to them, and they responded hello. However, now, I can speak to them, especially to Indian Priests. I can talk to them, they listen to me. Before the Indian Priests came, I never talked to Priests. My language is not good and thus I

⁵⁸⁶ Our study reveals that all Hindus at the Oratory do not have the same level of acceptance of Jesus. Some of them try to understand the Christian faith and grow closer to Jesus while others continue to grow in their Hindu faith.

am frightened to speak to them. I do not know much French. Now, I can talk to the Indian Priests. Fifteen years back, I wanted my son to enter in the choir, but the French Priest told me that it is for the French people. Then, I thought that the choir is for the rich people. I see also the *Notre-Dame* College students coming to the Church and joining in the choir. It is for the wealthy! I was poor at that time. However, now I see that there is a change. I see that there are Chinese students in the choir. Now, I have money. The Church is open to all. I see some changes at the Oratory...Now; I go to the Blessing Office. Earlier I never used to go to get a Blessing. Now that the Indian Priests are there, I go to get a Blessing. I have no fear to approach them, my language is ok. Earlier, I did not know French. So, I just used to go the chapel. I knew only Saint Joseph. Now, the Indian Priests told me the story of Saint Brother André in English and my language Tamil, and I developed a devotion to him. Now, I know Saint André. I am happy.” In the elaboration of the response by Reshma, I sensed that she came out of her fear to freely discuss her faith journey with an educator in faith.

In my intervention, I need to take into consideration the diversity among the educators in faith who can help Hindus to discover Christian faith and Jesus Christ. It is by meeting with Hindus and knowing them that the educators in faith can accompany them to an experience of the person of Jesus Christ. Linguistic and cultural factors play a big role in the transmission and reception of faith. Most of the Hindus do not speak French, but they can understand English and Tamil. I need to identify some educators in faith who speak English and Tamil. Their linguistic and cultural background will help them to connect with Hindus. Transmission and reception of faith become easier when both the educators in faith and Hindus feel comfortable with each other.

9.5.4. Intervention of the educators in faith

Some educators in faith work at the Oratory since many years and others are new in the field. In general, the educators are open to different realities of life and people visiting the site. The chart below shows that the educators had no fear and prejudgment concerning the life of Hindus at the Oratory. They were not anxious about the changing realities of the visitors and pilgrims at the Oratory. In contrary to the above attitude, the educators seemed to be suspicious of the unknown people. It was easier to work with known people or Catholics who were used to the Church

activities. Nevertheless, the educators in faith underlined that the Hindus also searched for God-experience.

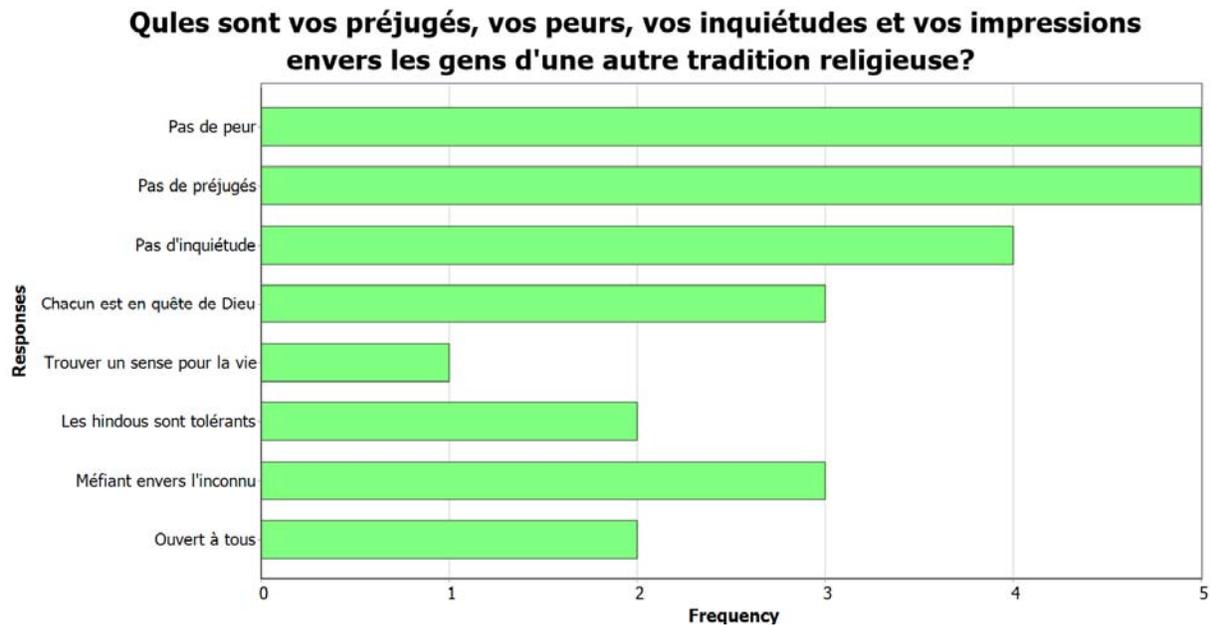


Figure 55: Impressions and fears about people from other faith traditions

The following question was asked to the educators in faith: *Quels sont vos impressions, vos préjugés, vos peurs et vos inquiétudes envers les gens d'une autre tradition religieuse?* Paul said, “Hindus are generally not fearful. They come to pray. They climb on their knees. It also depends on people who come with different intentions and attitudes here...As for me, there is not fear. At the Oratory, there is no fear as of now. People come here to pray and discover the life here. I am not fearful.” In his opinion, the educators and Hindus had no fear. They were in a place of God and prayer. Violaine was more concerned about the unknown people as she said, « C'est sûr que l'inconnu fait qu'on est vite un peu méfiant, c'est sûr on est, bon on est humain, et quelqu'un qui est en dehors du groupe qu'on connaît, c'est insécurisant. Je ne dirais pas qu'il y a des peurs ou des préjugés, mais il y a de l'insécurité par exemple. Parce qu'on ne sait pas trop comment l'autre personne vit sa religion et est-ce que lui est intolérant face à moi...Il faut d'abord jauger l'attitude des autres; c'est sûr que moi je respecte la foi des autres, c'est évident parce que la mienne est très importante pour moi, c'est vrai je m'attends à ce que les autres respectent ma foi, mais je donne ma pareille; mais c'est l'attitude qui peut faire peur des fois, qui peut insécuriser parce

qu'on se dit s'il est vraiment trop convaincu, et puis qu'il n'est pas tolérant avec la foi des autres; ça ce n'est pas agréable, on ne veut pas vivre ça. » Violaine spoke more about the attitude of a person who belonged to another religious tradition. In reality, every person is concerned about his faith expressions from the childhood. It is during the growth process of an individual that one encounters the other who belongs to another religious tradition and learns that there is a certain amount of truth in the other tradition. If the meeting point is smooth without much prejudice, it will create a better atmosphere for inter-faith life.

Marie was more connected with the social media and she underlined the need of openness to people of different faiths. « Ouverture, je suis très ouverte déjà, par exemple sur ma page face book, j'ai toute, pratiquement toutes les religions: bouddhiste, hindouiste, chrétienne, je parle des protestants, des catholiques, des athées, des vodouisants, beaucoup de gens et je sers tout le monde. Là mes peurs c'est toujours je pense qu'il y a un Dieu et tout le monde peut aller à ce Dieu par différents chemins mais pour moi le Christ reste le Fils de Dieu. Maintenant, mes craintes sont souvent les extrémistes, je ne parle pas seulement des musulmans, même les extrémistes catholiques ou protestants, ça pour moi, ils sont dangereux, pour moi ça ne peut pas être motivé par l'amour de Dieu, ce sont des gens qui ont leur propre agenda et des gens qui se servent de la foi, de la religion même, pour créer un sentiment de peur ou s'imposer. Donc l'extrémisme dans toutes les religions c'est quelque chose qui fait peur y compris certains catholiques. » The social media could be used to propagate good and bad things. The communication has become easier with the social media. The educators in faith can use the social media to transmit faith. The fear is all about the fanatic attitude of certain people who use religion as their weapon. In fact, no religion teaches violence and destruction of other human beings. Certain religious leaders interpret religion in such a way that small fanatic groups create chaos in the world.

Pascal was more interested to see the connection between different religious traditions and why people chose the Oratory as a common place of meeting. « J'avoue que je ne sens pas beaucoup de peur devant des gens qui ont d'autres traditions religieuses; je sens beaucoup d'intérêts et surtout en venant ici, l'intérêt de découvrir quel cheminement les amène à un endroit comme

l'Oratoire Saint Joseph; les gens savent que c'est un endroit qui se situe dans la tradition chrétienne alors pour moi la curiosité de mieux comprendre et de mieux saisir quelque chose d'important, de surprenant parfois, par exemple un Sikh qui était ici avec des visiteurs m'expliquait quel sens ça a pour eux autres d'allumer un lampion à l'Oratoire ou des musulmans qui m'expliquent pourquoi le vendredi saint ils sont ici parce qu'ils savent que les chrétiens viennent célébrer ce qu'eux autres appellent la mort de leur prophète et qu'eux autres ont voulu s'associer, alors c'est toujours fascinant d'entendre ces choses-là. » Pascal underlined the personal effort that someone had to take to come to the Oratory even when he belonged to another religious tradition. By participating in a religious activity, one got a certain amount of fulfilment in his spiritual journey.

Thomas noted down the religious and cultural elements that were important in the growth process of a person. « Alors, c'est une question très intéressante, très intéressante. Elle se situe dans un contexte culturel. Moi, je vis au Québec et au Canada, j'ai eu la chance très jeune dans ma vie d'aller vivre dans un pays d'accueil...Donc, très tôt j'ai été ouvert aux autres religions...compte tenu de ce contexte, l'autre qui appartient à une autre religion, on peut le voir de deux façons et autour de moi je constate qu'on le regarde de deux façons: soit qu'on le regarde comme un inconnu, c'est-à-dire que sa religion je ne la connais pas, on se méfie des choses qu'on ne connaît pas, ça amène une relation de distanciation un peu, ça peut même nous faire peur hein quelque chose qu'on ne connaît pas, on est porté à avoir une attitude de crainte à la limite, alors donc c'est souvent l'attitude la plus généralisée, on a beaucoup de préjugés par rapport à l'autre d'une autre religion, ça nous amène le plus souvent à ne pas respecter les gens d'autres religions, c'est dire qu'on ne respecte que ce que l'on connaît, alors comme on ne connaît pas l'autre et sa religion on a de la difficulté à avoir une attitude de respect mais plus on se donne la peine de connaître l'autre et sa religion plus notre attitude change. Donc il y a l'attitude je ne connais pas l'autre ni sa religion et je développe plus une attitude de vigilance, de crainte ou l'autre attitude, l'autre est mon frère en humanité même s'il appartient à une autre religion. Je constate qu'il y a de grandes religions auxquelles appartiennent des milliers et des millions d'êtres humains donc c'est pas une mince chose, c'est un phénomène de société et on ne peut pas rester indifférent à un phénomène de société, moi je vis ma religion tout seul dans mon coin comme si les autres

n'existaient pas, avec une société qui est ouverte de plus en plus sur le monde avec tous les médias sociaux, bien il faut être ouvert à l'autre; donc l'autre avec sa religion qui est différente de la mienne et bien ça peut m'aider à élargir mon univers intérieur et ça peut me faire découvrir des richesses nouvelles l'autre au lieu d'être un objet de crainte devient un objet de fascination n'est-ce pas, pour découvrir alors d'autres dimensions de la foi, au sens large. Donc, très tôt pour moi, l'autre appartenant à une autre religion a été un objet de fascination, et j'ai eu très tôt le désir de connaître sa religion et pendant dix ans de ma vie j'ai enseigné au niveau collégial l'histoire des religions et j'ai aidé beaucoup de jeunes à entrer dans la connaissance des grandes religions du monde et j'ai pu découvrir à quel point c'est fascinant...l'autre avec sa religion différente de la mienne a toujours été un objet de fascination. Ceci étant dit, au Québec, ce qui me dérangeait c'est qu'on a toujours pratiqué l'exclusion des religions, c'est-à-dire qu'il suffisait d'appartenir à une religion pour exclure les autres qui nous faisaient peur, qui étaient une menace pour notre religion. Je me rappelle quand j'étais jeune, les conseils que je recevais de mes éducateurs et de ma famille, il fallait pas m'approcher des juifs, des musulmans, à ce moment des hindous et des bouddhistes il n'en avait presque pas, donc c'était une menace, il ne faudrait pas s'approcher de ces gens-là. Aujourd'hui, maintenant plus de vingt-cinq ans, je pense que on pratique un autre mouvement, on pratique l'interpénétration des religions, où on accepte que les autres religions entrent dans notre sphère de connaissance et de vie; et je pense que ça se fait de plus en plus positivement, excepté dans un cas quand l'autre qui appartient à une autre religion est un peu trop extrémiste et qu'il veut me convertir à partir du moment où l'autre veut m'annexer alors là c'est plus difficile la relation, mais à partir du moment où l'autre veut tout simplement communier avec moi, euh à partir de sa religion et qu'il est intéressé comme moi à connaître ma religion, euh alors là c'est des relations très intéressantes qui se développent. »

I would say that people need to discover the other with a degree of fascination. It is by respecting the other cultures and faiths that people make a good society. Sometimes, one needs to unlearn what one has learned in his childhood in order to promote an inter-religious atmosphere. When one learns more about the other faiths, one becomes comfortable to accept people who do not practice the same faith. In today's context, the people in Québec experience more multi-

culturalism and inter-religious encounters. A positive outlook towards this newness can bring fruitful results in the society.

The educators in faith play a vital role as they work with people belonging to different religious and cultural background. In my intervention, it is essential to ensure that the educators in faith at the Oratory have a certain amount of knowledge and experience to accompany people from different backgrounds. Those educators who are not open to the new realities might find it difficult to work in a multi-cultural and pluri-religious atmosphere. However, as seen from my study, most of the educators are open to new realities that surround them, and they welcome all people belonging to different religious backgrounds. In their openness, they also have to hold on to the mission and vision of the Oratory that is in line with Catholic teachings and traditions.

9.5.5. Strategies of intervention

In my intervention, there should have a distinction made between Holy Water for Christians and *tīrtha* for Hindus. The symbolism of light in Christianity is not the same as the symbolism of *Dīpa* in Hinduism. The nuances should be made clear to Hindus who perform religious practices. The educators in faith can accompany Hindus by elaborating the details of different practices.

In the light of my assessment, the religious practices will have to be continued at the Oratory with a change of outlook. Holy Water will be available to all people as the Christian God is accessible to all. The educators in faith will have to meet with Hindus with a spirit of dialogue. Pastoral conversation in the Office of Blessing or the Votive Chapel will help Hindus in their practice. Non-judgmental attitude will assist in the entire process of conversation.

Periodical formation and update for the educators in faith and pastoral agents at the Oratory need to be organized so as to evaluate their interventions. Sharing of pastoral experiences will help the educators to accompany Hindus in the right direction.

At the Oratory, the educators in faith can create a community of people who are in search of the Divine. The presence of Hindus at the Oratory brings a certain amount of diversity and meaning

in the new cultural and religious context of Québec. It creates unity among people of different faith traditions. In the spiritual journey, all will realize that the Truth is one, and there are many faces to the same Truth. Without separating and isolating different faces, people need to see them in its wholeness. The presence of the Hindus at the Oratory brings a new dynamism of life. Hindus who frequently come to the Oratory discover the Christian way of worshipping God. Discovering the richness that is in another faith tradition will help one to go deeper with one's faith. It is also by knowing the other that one tries to go deeper into one's own practice.

Uninterrupted intervention can bring some good results.⁵⁸⁷ They can be enumerated as follows:

Dialogue for promoting life and living together – in international pilgrimage site, Christians and Hindus may pray together. By respecting every person who is in search of God, people walk along in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. They form an inter-religious and intercultural community where everyone has his place. The result of this project is to live in love and fraternity by respecting the religious and cultural tradition of the other.

Dialogue for action – it is to be at the service of human beings that people act. When they have an experience of peace and harmony in an international pilgrimage center, Christians and Hindus can act in their milieu of work and life. The faith tradition of the other is not an obstacle as they consider the other as their brother or sister to form an equitable society where there is love and justice.

Theological dialogue – the theological dialogue presupposes an understanding of the other. It is by entering into dialogue with the other that one comes to know better the theological richness of the other. Before entering into a theological dialogue, one needs to know one's own proper religious tradition. The theological dialogue will never impose the theology of one religious tradition over the other. The convergences and divergences of different religious traditions will help people live in peace by discovering the richness of the other.

⁵⁸⁷ My study has elaborated that Hindus remain open to other religious traditions. Hindus cherish their life at the Oratory. If the educators in faith want to discuss with them about their religious practices and negotiate with them about certain manners and practices, they will be willing to do so.

Sacramental in Catholic Church – Holy Water and candles are part of Sacramental in the Church. It is in a spirit of prayer that pilgrims use Holy Water and light candles. When Hindus are given access to the Sacramental at the Oratory, they are welcomed with an open spirit. The place for informal transmission of Christian faith is open to Hindus through their religious practices at the Oratory. To go further, it is vital that the educators in faith accompany them in their search for the Divine.

Meeting of Religions and Cultures – the Mount-Royal where the Oratory is situated is a preferred place for people from different cultures and ethnic background. From the sociological perspective, Religion is composed of myths, rituals, dogmas, and institutions. Religion is not separated from a general global culture. Every culture has some myths, rituals, and institutions. In the 3rd century, when Christianity was recognized as the official Religion of the Roman Empire, all other pagan cults and cultures were put apart. In today's context, in Asia and Africa, there is much resistance to distinguish between the Religions and Cultures. In the West, there is a distinction between the Church and Society. The life at the Oratory, with the presence of Hindus, can explore a new “anthropology of intimacy”. People of different cultures, language backgrounds and faiths share their values with each other to create a beautiful community of love.

Encounter between Western and Eastern spirituality – my study highlights the values of Western and Eastern spirituality. Taking the good elements from West and East, Christians and Hindus will be able to march together in their faith journey at Saint Joseph's Oratory. Unity of the Universe and interdependence are significant phenomena of the Eastern spirituality.

To materialize the intervention, I give some practical tips.

Meeting with Hindu pilgrims – the meeting could take place in an informal way in the Office of Blessing when Hindus come to receive blessings from Priests. A short dialogue will encourage Hindus in their search for the Divine. Further, for those Hindus who come on a regular basis to the Oratory could be called for a formal meeting and sharing of their experiences. They could be formally accompanied in their search for the Divine.

Awareness tips – to help Hindus understand better the meaning of the usage of Holy Water, leaflets explaining the Christian usage of Holy Water will be published and kept near Holy Water.

Distinguishing Christian and Hindu usage of water – distinction should be done to avoid any confusion between the usage of Holy Water by Christians and the water from the Ganga by Hindus. One should be made aware of the difference between the baptismal ritual for Christians and the rituals at the bank of the Ganga for Hindus. One should also distinguish the sprinkling of Holy Water upon the Christians gathered in a celebration and Hindus applying Holy Water on their forehead. There is a fundamental distinction between Holy Water and *tīrtha*.

Publishing – as part of the intervention, certain articles will be published in the Oratory Magazine about the usage of Holy Water and the significance of lighting candles in Christianity and Hinduism. Hindus and Christians can benefit from these articles.

Internet Site of the Oratory – the Oratory has got an excellent website. The transmission of Christian faith also is done through social media. The internet site of the Oratory can highlight certain aspects that concern Hindus and Christians at the Oratory. It can be an excellent medium of communication.

Periodical meetings of the educators in faith – the pastoral agents at the Oratory could meet on a regular basis to discuss various issues that concern the life of the Oratory. The educators in faith can share their experiences of meeting with Hindus and accompanying them in their quest for the Divine.

Material and financial resources for the intervention – to materialize the project of intervention, the educators have to communicate with different departments at the Oratory. The directors of the Office of Blessing, the Communication and Publication, the Pilgrimage Department, the Liturgy Department and the Pastoral Department should be in focus. Discussing

with people who are directly responsible for various sectors will give an ample opportunity to work together. For the publishing of materials, the funding will come from different departments.

Collaborators in the intervention – the following people will be the main collaborators in the intervention.

- ✓ Director of Pastoral Affairs – he can help carry forward the project of intervention at different levels. He is the main coordinator for all the activities related to the pastoral life at the Oratory. He can also help with financing the project.
- ✓ Director of the Office of Communication – he can help with all editing and publishing work. He can also help with photographs that are needed for the publication.
- ✓ Director of Pilgrimage – he can contribute to creating awareness among the visitors and pilgrims.
- ✓ Sacristans – they can also help to create awareness about the right practices at the Oratory.
- ✓ Volunteers – they play significant roles to welcome and accompany Hindus at the Oratory. They might be the first point of contact for Hindus, who come to the Oratory.

Stages of intervention – the intervention could be done in a few stages as follows.

- ✓ 1st stage – presenting the problematic of the usage of Holy Water and lighting of candles by Hindus at the Oratory.
- ✓ 2nd stage – sending a message to the entire workforce at the Oratory about the project of intervention.
- ✓ 3rd stage – Preparation of the materials for the project.
- ✓ 4th stage – Executing the project for creating a better inter-religious atmosphere at the Oratory.

Evaluation of the project – it is necessary to do a periodical assessment of the project.

- ✓ Observing different stages of the materialization of the project.
- ✓ Organizing meetings of persons who are involved in the project to listen to their opinions.
- ✓ Making a report of the evaluation of the project.

- ✓ Observing the changes in the behavioral patterns of Hindus who participate in different religious activities at the Oratory.
- ✓ Evaluating the usage of publications by visitors at the Oratory.

9.6. Conclusion

In the light of the intervention of the practices, I would say once again that the practices of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles are two signs among many other practices of Hindus at the Oratory. The quest for the Divine leads Hindus to a Christian pilgrimage place that promotes peace. The challenge of the practices is to encounter the other who belongs to another religious tradition. There is no formal meeting forum created at the Oratory to welcome people who belong to another religious tradition. Though some of the educators in faith might dialogue with Hindus, who want to communicate with them, yet most of them are not able to go deeper in a dialogue. My study revealed that some educators in faith have no knowledge about Hinduism to guide Hindus in their spiritual journey. They have known only the Christian way of looking at religious practices and they have been working at the Oratory for a long period of time. It is true that in the context of the Oratory, it is always the Christian way of doing practices that is promoted. However, to understand the good elements in Hindu way of doing things, the educators need to know a certain amount of their practices to accompany them. As I mentioned, it is by knowing the other and his faith that the educators can gradually invite them to know the Christian God. There is a mutual understanding that is needed in the whole process of the transmission of Christian faith.

In the theology of religions, inter-religious dialogue is a mode of communication with each other. To enter into dialogue, one needs to assume that the other is not wrong. By listening to the spiritual experience of the other, the educators can enter into communication with people belonging to other faiths. Without fear, they could clarify concepts and practices that have connections with cultures and customs. For instance, some Hindus do their religious practices in connection with their cultural and linguistic festivals. As the Oratory attracts thousands of people from various walks, and the milieu of the religious practices is crowded with people, it gives an atmosphere of festivity.

From a Christian perspective, the contents of Christian faith that are rooted in the person of Jesus Christ have to be discussed in all its dimensions. In this regard, John Hick was right to say, “As Christians we have to do justice to our distinctive faith in the uniqueness of Christ as God the Son incarnate.”⁵⁸⁸ Nevertheless, he said that “we have to explore the possibility that the divine nature is infinite, exceeding the scope of all human concepts, and is capable of being experienced both as personal Lord and as nonpersonal ground and depth of being.”⁵⁸⁹ The challenge in the intervention lies at this point of holding on to one doctrinal faith. However, the praxeological approach in the intervention will accompany people in a comfortable rhythm.

During the period of intervention, hospitality from the part of the educators in faith will help Hindus to be at ease. My study reveals that Hindus have expectations that God’s people are people who will welcome everyone justly. In the book of Leviticus we read, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19: 33-34). The educators in faith have to widen their horizon so as not to alienate Hindus coming to the Oratory. The cultural and linguistic basis should not overtake the faith dimension and quest for the Divine. The religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory and the intervention related to them should help Hindus to become better Hindus and discover Christian faith and its richness in the person of Jesus Christ. As sons of Basile Moreau, the educators in faith will bring a new hope for Hindus by accompanying them in their spiritual journey. They will walk with Hindus in their struggles of daily life and give them hope that is centered in the cross of Christ. The educators in faith will share with Hindus the eschatological hope as they hold on to the cross of Christ.⁵⁹⁰ In this process of bringing a new hope to Hindus, the educators can get inspiration from their founder Basile Moreau. Kevin Groupe and Andrew Gawrych are right to say that Basile Moreau’s theology does not end at the Cross but at the resurrection and new life.⁵⁹¹ Basile Moreau encouraged the educators in faith to take up their work of education as the “work of

⁵⁸⁸ J. Hick, 1980, p. 38.

⁵⁸⁹ J. Hick, 1980, p. 38.

⁵⁹⁰ J. Jomon Kalladanthiyil, 2012, p. 121.

⁵⁹¹ K. Groupe & A. Gawrych, 2014, p. 48.

resurrection.”⁵⁹² In the context of the Oratory, the intervention by the educators in faith will help Hindus to know the deeper meaning of their religious practices and how they become meaningful and life giving resurrection experience for them.

⁵⁹² B. Moreau, *Christian Education*, Le Mans, Julien Printing Shop, 1856, p. 376. “This is what you can and must do for your students, if you truly have zeal for their salvation. Make haste, therefore; take up this work of the resurrection, never forgetting that the particular goal of your institution is, above all, to sanctify youth. By this, you will contribute to preparing the world for better times than our own, for these children who today attend your school are the parents of the future and the parents of future generations. Each one of them carries within him or her a family. Influence them, therefore, by all the means of instruction and sanctification that I have just explained. Then, and only then, will you be able to hope to achieve the end of your vocation by the renewal of the Christian faith and of piety.”

CHAPTER 10

10. PROSPECTIVE FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

10.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall elaborate the strengths and limits of the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory.⁵⁹³ My study will highlight the inter-faith hub of religions to nourish Christian faith in the given religious atmosphere at the Oratory. I will use some data from the interviews with the educators in faith to propose a collaborative conclusion to keep up some religious practices to transmit Christian faith. I will also discuss the prospective of dialogue with different religious traditions and cultures at the Oratory. Taking into consideration all the impressions, prejudices and fears about the other faith traditions, how can we go beyond a religious institutional framework? I will bring in some reflections on the gestures of Hindus while performing religious practices at the Oratory and how the educators can facilitate building the Kingdom of God based on inter-religious dialogue.

In the context of the presence of Hindus at the Oratory, transcending God images has a lot of meaning. Hindus coming to the Oratory have their own God images. They come to the Oratory just because they have faith in God and want to honour their God. I will discuss about growing in intimacy with God and gradual change of God images in the entire process of the religious practices at the Oratory. It will be interesting to see how Christian God images help Hindus in their religious practices.

Sharing sacred space, for religious practices that promote peace and harmony, is another discussion that I will undertake in this chapter. Taking opinions from the interviews with the educators in faith, I will elaborate how the encounter of multiple faiths helps the Oratory to be vibrant. The interest of the Oratory to keep up its heritage and tradition will be part of my discussion. Linguistic and cultural diversity at the Oratory will help one to understand the

⁵⁹³ Here, the study integrates the opinions of the educators in faith who were interviewed.

uniqueness of the place. My discussion will also include mountain as a favoured place for Christians and Hindus. Finally, I will estimate if the Oratory becomes a site of hope for Hindus in North America, especially in Canada and Montreal.

10.2. Strengths and limits of the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory

Québec has been a traditional Catholic region in Canada. The history shows how the French people wanted to keep up Catholic identity in Québec. The battle between the French and English people took place as the people in Québec wanted to preserve their religion, culture and language. When Catholicism flourished in Québec, the Clergy and Religious insisted people to have more children in their families to maintain their Catholic population. During the golden years of Catholicism in Québec, many local religious Congregations were founded and missionaries were sent out to different parts of the World. Québec missionaries played a vital role in the transmission of Christian faith in many countries.⁵⁹⁴ In 20th century, Québec knew a crisis time in the Church and ecclesiastical organizations. As a result, the people in Québec underwent the Quiet Revolution. The effects of the Revolution affected the Church in drastic ways. Many Catholics left the Church and abandoned the traditional Catholic religious practices. Many Priests and Religious left their Order as they did not find any more meaning in their vocation. Most of them who remained back in religious communities became much liberal in their thoughts. The Churches became emptier for Masses and other liturgical celebrations.⁵⁹⁵

In the aftermath of the Revolution, Christian families did not give much importance for prayer and religious activities. Transmission of faith in family circle became a difficult reality. Grandparents and parents were reluctant to speak about religion in their family gatherings as they did not want to displease their children who took a distance from religious activities. As there was a separation of State and Religion, the teaching of Catechism was prohibited in Catholic

⁵⁹⁴ J. Hamelin & N. Gagnon, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois*, Tome 1, Montréal, Boréal Express, 1984, p. 11-56. See also: J. Hamelin, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois*, Tome 2, Montréal, Boréal Express, 1984, p. 109-189.

⁵⁹⁵ J. Hamelin, *Histoire du catholicisme québécois*, Tome 2, Montréal, Boréal Express, 1984, p. 269-333. The effects of the Revolution are not always seen in a negative way. The changes that took place in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council are much appreciated to carry forward a decentralized Church as per the sings of the time.

educational institutions. As a result, the new generation of children, did not get any religious instruction neither at home nor at the school. The fragility of the traditional transmission of Christian faith in Québec continues to exist in our time.⁵⁹⁶

Christianity and Hinduism are two religious worlds. As seen in my study, Catholic liturgy has its specific norms, rules and conduct. In the same way, Hindu practice of *bhakti* has its specific ways and manners. However, I shall try to point out some possible areas of collaboration and mutual support as these two worlds are composed of people who look for a higher God-experience in life and who want to have an encounter with God. For this, one needs to take an attitude of non-judgement of the other who belongs to another religious tradition. One's own faith and practices should not defend one to have vested interests; rather help him meet with the other in a common hub of religions. In my pilgrim journey, I will see that there are strengths and limits for the transmission of Christian faith especially in a changed context at the Oratory.

Transmission of Christian faith is the founding mission of the Oratory. I underlined in this study that the educators in faith have been doing a generous service for transmitting faith as they catered to the needs of Catholics at the Oratory. The inter-religious atmosphere at the Oratory is a recent phenomenon. The prospective for the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory depends on the openness of the educators in faith to receive Hindus in their milieu. As the educators in faith give access for Hindus to do various religious practices at the Oratory, they frequently visit the site. Hindus adapt the Oratory as their place for worshipping God.

10.2.1. Inter-faith platform to nourish faith

In today's context in Québec, there are more immigrants coming from different parts of the world. They come with their baggage of faith and religious traditions. Immigrant Christians are enthused to practice their faith and fill up the Churches for various celebrations. They come with

⁵⁹⁶ L. Lemieux, *Une histoire religieuse du Québec*, Montréal, Novalis, 2010, p. 116-122. In this context, we perceive thousands of Catholic immigrants who came to Québec after 1960's. For example, in Montreal, most of the Churches are filled with immigrants for regular liturgical services. There are also many immigrant Priests and Religious who came to Québec and they contribute to the reorganization of the local Church.

their families and children. As I underlined, many Hindus came to the Oratory that became a platform for inter-faith encounter. The chart below shows that the Hindus at the Oratory appreciated the inter-faith platform as it nourished their faith. They wanted to practice their faith freely and they found the Oratory as an ideal place.

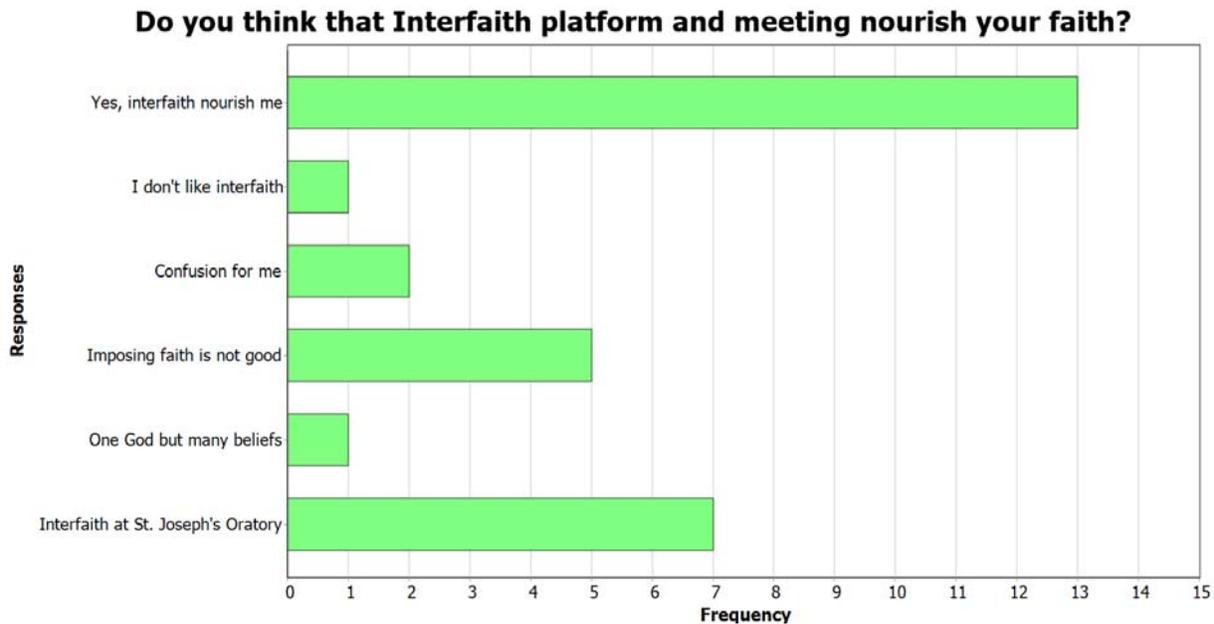


Figure 56: Inter-faith platform to nourish faith

I asked the Hindu interviewees the following question. *Do you think that inter-faith platform and meeting will nourish your faith?* Vinesh said, “Definitely, you know. When I was with my Muslim friends, they regularly told me that I was in the wrong path. Christianity is not good, that is why God came. Quran is the only way...I was wondering if I was wrong. I started soul searching...It’s good to have inter-faith platform. It’s good to let them know what is right. Lot of them have blind faith, they have been fed from their childhood. Unless you tell and explain to them, make them think, they will always keep hatred in their mind. God never wants you to hate but to love others. I can’t find it elsewhere other than in Christianity.” Vinesh had much bitter experiences with his Muslim friends who tried to convert him to Islam. They also talked to him the negative sides of other religions. In his soul searching process, he found out what was good and pleasing to him. He became closer to God in silence and prayer. He found that Christianity

promotes truth and Christian God is love and compassion. His faith was nourished by his visits at the Oratory and he enjoyed inter-faith platform in a Christian site.

Reshma also grew in faith through inter-faith platform. She said, “Yes. I think so. I have a lot of Hindu friends who come here to Church with me. They pray. They are happy and I am happy. Those who work with me, come here. Every Wednesday, they come. They don’t take Mass but they come and pray.” For her, it was important to come to the Oratory and pray. She and her friends did not go for Mass but spent time at the Oratory on a regular basis.

Kannan opined, “When I see people pray, it inspires me to pray. There are a lot of Sri Lankan people coming here. They come from Toronto. They come here and then they go to the temple. A lot of people from Toronto come to the Hindu temple, but they come to Saint Joseph’s Oratory too. My cousin from Toronto did not have a baby and after coming to the Oratory and praying, he got a baby. My boss is an Italian. I told my boss, employer, to go to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. He had no baby and he got a baby after coming to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. Miracles happen in this Church.” Kannan was more observant and communitarian. He was inspired to pray while observing people pray and he inspired others to have an experience of prayer at the Oratory. In some way, he was an agent of faith. Based on his experiences at the Oratory, he transmitted his faith to others. Kannan mentioned about the duality of people going to the Hindu Temple and the Oratory. He elaborated, “Sri Lankan Hindu people go to temple, but coming to Saint Joseph’s Oratory, they walk on their knees. They get miracles. Even pregnant ladies climb up to the Church on their knees. I used to go to *Murugan* temple. But now, I mostly come to the Church. I prefer coming to Saint Joseph. There is a holy element here. It’s from people who visit here that other people come to know about this place. I have a visiting card and give it to people; I explain them about my experience at the Church here. I invite people to come.” Despite being a Hindu, this person was passionate in welcoming people to the Oratory. He considered the Oratory as his second house, a place where he experienced God.

Manikkam narrated that there were people of different faiths at the Oratory. “There are different types of people coming here, people belonging to other faiths. But I am touched by their

presence here. It's good that all people come here. They all will be touched by Jesus one day. We never know when they will be touched by Jesus. Before, I used to go to temple. I was never touched by God. But coming to Saint Joseph's Oratory, I am touched by God...According to me, inter-faith platform is always good. God touches us in different ways. Being with God is important."

Nathan also cherished inter-faith platform. "I have no problem with inter-faith. I have no fear about anyone. I am like a little god because I am connected to God. I don't fear anyone by seeing anyone, big or small people. Human beings are called to become Godlike. I am a Hindu. I want to learn more about Christian faith. I want to visit more Christian places. I want to go to Jerusalem." Nathan had a strong desire to grow in Christian faith and practices. However, he thought in Hindu ways. He said that he was "like a little god" that does not go in line with the Christian theology. In Christian theology, one does not become "God" but "Godlike." One is created in the image and likeness of God. One wants to grow in conformity with Jesus Christ.

For Kavita, going to the Church had become part of his life. Inter-faith platform nourished his faith. "Whenever I don't come to the Church on Tuesdays I feel bad. It has become a practice for me. There are people from other faiths coming to Church. It's ok for me. I like it. Inter-faith helps me to grow in God."⁵⁹⁷

Kumari opined that it was interesting to listen to people belonging to other faiths. "I think that it's interesting to listen to other people about their faith without any prejudice. At the end of the day, we are all going to the one and same person. God is the same. There is someone above us. We know that there is a Higher Being. It's the same for all. We are just categorizing it. We just say it in different way, and naming it. Human beings try to say mine is better than yours. God is one and only, he is the same." Kumari was more concerned about the Higher Being.⁵⁹⁸ The Divine experience was more important in the spiritual journey. Human beings

⁵⁹⁷ Here, we see the nuance between "growing in faith" and "growing in God". Some Hindus at the Oratory, grow in faith, others grow in Christian faith, others grow in God, and some grow in Jesus.

⁵⁹⁸ Some Hindus at the Oratory have difficulty to name the God that they pray to. They spoke about a Higher Being, Supreme Being, Someone Above, Divine Being etc. The Catholic theology names God as the Divine Trinity; i.e., the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

compartmentalized and made distinctions between religions. For Kumari, not having prejudice about the other would bring success in faith journey.

Bhavani had appreciation for inter-faith platform. She grew in faith through her prayers with others. “I have an appreciation for all different faith traditions. I can pray with all of them.”

Shivani was explicit in saying that she prayed for people belonging to other faiths. As she was nourished by her faith in God at the Oratory, she became an agent of transmitting faith. “I pray for some people who belong to other religious background and they get healed. One day one Muslim at work asked me ‘which religion you belong to’? I told him I am a Hindu but I go to Saint Joseph’s Oratory...I pray for all people. I don’t say to anybody why I come to the Oratory. I ask favours from God to others. I don’t want to tell people that I pray for them if they have problems, but do pray for them without telling them. Then after two or three months they get healed and I am happy. There are so many miracles happening in our life through our prayer life here.” She was a strong devotee of Saint Joseph and came regularly to the Oratory. She was altruistic in her prayers.

Kalyani was brief in his response. She appreciated inter-faith platform and she grew in faith at the Oratory. She said, “...understanding why we do things will make me start thinking, why people do certain things will help us nourish in faith. Interacting comes with understanding and believing in.” For her, it was vital to understand *why one did what he did*. Doing certain religious practices at the Oratory made her think and find meaning in life.

It is to be noted that some interviewees did not profit much out of inter-faith platform at the Oratory. They were restrained in their perception to mingle with people of other faiths. Sangita said, “Sometimes, it is confusing. Different religions came up in different time. We need to believe in Jesus. We need to pray to God opening heart. Sometimes there are mistakes happening even in religions. Everything may not be correct. I read Bible. I have already read *Bhagavadgītā*. Bible is the answer for everything. There is nothing that is not mentioned in the Bible. The Bible contains everything. Peace is found in Jesus. Sometimes, people cannot control themselves. They

should go to Jesus. The Priest is only an instrument of Jesus. For 20 years I am close to Jesus. I am not baptized but I think that I am a Christian.” Though she was a Hindu, she preferred to be with Jesus. She liked to follow Christian ways of doing things. Having read *Bhagavadgītā*, she opined that the Bible has all the answers for her questions in practical life. Nevertheless, she was surprisingly not open to inter-faith platform.

Kapil did not gain much from the inter-faith platform. He affirmed, “Well. I don’t trust on that because as long as I pray for myself. I don’t believe in other things. Even when we go to Hindu temple, sometimes, I have to get ticket. Each one is born on a star. They pray on your star. I don’t believe in it. I don’t believe that I have to give money and get a prayer. I don’t like it. If it’s a charity box, it’s ok for me. I put money in the temple. God has given everything to me. I don’t want to bribe God through *pūjāri* by giving money for telling me my star. We have 3 Hindu Temples in Montreal: *Murugan* temple, *Amman* temple and *Ganesha* temple...I like to do pilgrimage. I take my family members...My family is a religious family. We are vegetarians. We were 9 children. When I left my country, I started to eat meat. It’s not easy to get vegetarian food.” Kapil was objectively critical in his thinking with regard to various religious practices. He did not want to bargain God with money. God has his place and human being should not take him for granted. The religious world should not exploit people in the name of God. Kapil liked coming to the Oratory but he also liked to go to the Hindu temples in Montreal. Going to the Oratory or the Hindu temple was part of his spiritual growth.

Pushpa did not appreciate the inter-faith platform. She said that the inter-faith platform was a nuisance. “No, that’s a nuisance for me. There are groups like *Jehovah* witness, they come around and come home. They disturb us. They want to convert us. They want us to become like them. They give books and all. I don’t like. We don’t like to open the door when they come. It’s a nuisance for me. I tell them that I go to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. I prefer to have freedom in my faith.” Pushpa did not appreciate when people imposed certain faith or practices upon her. It was in freedom that she experienced God. She had a special liking to come to the Oratory.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁹ Taking seriously this interviewee, I would say that religious freedom and dialogue would help one to discern well. The hub of religions should not force people to do certain practices; rather facilitate people in their journey. People who journey will decide where they want to go.

Maheshwari opined that the inter-faith platform helped as long as it was peaceful with mutual understanding. She said, “Sometimes someone can ask you a question and that can help you reflect and discover and you can grow in faith. But other times, it can disturb when someone gets into argument and trying to justify his faith.” She did not appreciate any aggressive way of spreading faith and practices.

In the prospective for the transmission of Christian faith, I would say that there is much hope. It is not only the educators in faith who are agents of the transmission of faith but even the Hindus at the Oratory can become good agents of the transmission of faith.⁶⁰⁰ It is surprising to learn that some Hindus promote the Oratory as a venue to discover and experience God. Hindus are not afraid to share their faith and healing experiences with people in their surroundings, family circle and at their work place. Though they are not baptized Christians, yet they pronounce the name of Jesus in their transmission of faith. In the prospective of this study, I see that this entire process is community building and life oriented.

10.2.2. Religious atmosphere at the Oratory

As I already mentioned, from its foundation, the religious atmosphere at the Oratory has been profoundly Catholic. The founder of the Oratory, Brother André, spoke to God about people and to people about God. He spoke to them about the Christian Trinitarian God. Following the footsteps of the founder, the educators in faith maintained Catholic religious atmosphere at the Oratory. As I underlined, Catholicism had struggles in Québec during the Quiet Revolution and the traditional religious atmosphere was shaken all through the Province. The aftermath of the Revolution was reflected in the religious participation of faithful at the Oratory. A reduced number of people came to the Oratory for worship and adoration. However, the Administration and Staff at the Oratory wanted to maintain Catholic religious character at the Oratory. The educators in faith made sure that liturgical celebrations were done with a lot of preparations and reverence.

⁶⁰⁰ Here, it is important to note down the nuance between “the transmission of Christian faith” and “the transmission of faith.” The educators in faith may want to transmit Christian faith but Hindus might transmit faith. Some Hindus who discover Jesus may contribute to the transmission of Christian faith.

The recent phenomenon of welcoming religious tourists and people belonging to different faith traditions bring diversity of the clientele. My study reveals that most of the Hindus at the Oratory are not disturbed with Catholic religious atmosphere. The chart below shows that some Hindus did not understand all Catholic religious practices and celebrations. However, they were comfortable in Catholic milieu and they respected the celebrations. They also took time to do their own practices without disturbing Catholic religious atmosphere at the Oratory.

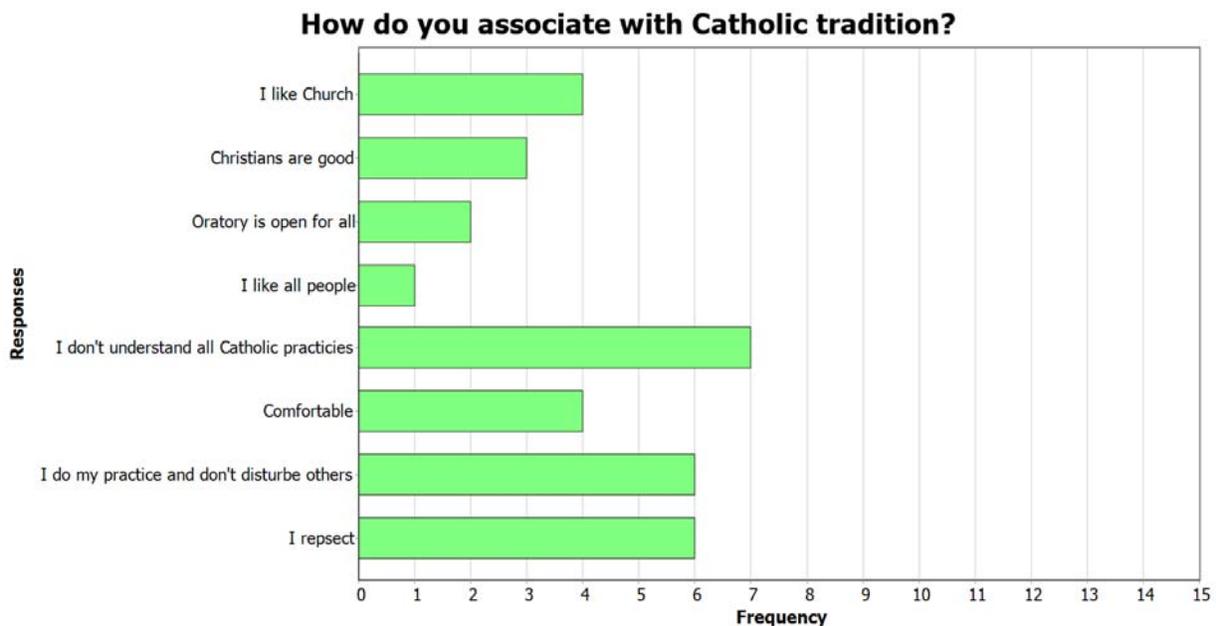


Figure 57: Hindus' association with Catholic tradition

In my interview, I asked the Hindus: *How do you associate yourself with the religious atmosphere at Saint Joseph's Oratory that is in line with Catholic tradition?* Vinesh said, "I used to go to Catholic Church now and then. In downtown, there is a Church. I like to go to Churches, where there are more sermons. When I was going to the university, I used to go to the Baptist Church. There are more messages. Is it the only way to pray, I don't know. Everybody has different ways of praying. That maturity has evolved in me. Everybody has different ways of doing things." Vinesh had a prior experience of going to the churches before coming to the Oratory. He liked to listen to sermons and messages based on the Bible. The instructions given in the church helped him to advance in his spiritual journey.

Reshma said, “I am at ease with all people who come here, Hindus, Catholics and all. I understand some of the religious practices here. Some of the things are in French, so I do not understand all. But I like all religious activities.” For Reshma, the language was a hindrance to fully participate in the religious celebrations at the Oratory. However, she appreciated the presence of people from diverse faiths. She was comfortable with Catholic milieu and celebrations. Sangita had a similar experience to share, “I do not take part in anything. I see that it’s all in French. There is no English...I have not listened to homilies and masses. I don’t understand French. If there are masses and activities in English, I will join in some activities. I like it.” Sangita discovered the Oratory at a slow rhythm. She felt comfortable to be in a Catholic milieu and she was willing to participate in the celebrations.

Kannan and Manikkam had short responses. Kannan said, “Yes, I am happy and comfortable. I have no problem.” Manikkam said, “Now I am ok. I associate myself with Jesus...I am born Hindu and I thought that I will always remain to be Hindu. I liked Hindu Religion and I used to help in the temple...I was attracted to Saint Joseph’s Oratory. I wanted to become part of this Church...” They were comfortable in Catholic milieu and they appreciated the way things were done at the Oratory.

Nathan came to the Oratory in the last twenty years. He was known by the workers at the Oratory and he seemed to have an easy access at the Oratory. He said, “Since 20 years I am here. I have no problem. Even at the parking place, they don’t ask me money. Everyone knows me here at the Oratory. I am a known person. Some years back, there were only 2 people working here to clean places. Now, there are so many to do jobs. I say hi to people. People are generally good and happy. I have positive experiences here.” Nathan underlined the general atmosphere at the Oratory. For him, it was not only the religious practices that mattered at the Oratory but also the people who worked there who were kind and welcoming.

Aparna was not disturbed with Catholic religious practices at the Oratory. She opined, “I don’t care about what is going on. If there is a Mass going on, I just go around. It does not disturb me.” She did not take part in Catholic religious practices but she was comfortable to do her own

practices at the Oratory. Kapil had a similar response. “I don’t disturb anything. I pray and I go. I am at ease. I am not disturbed by any prayer that is going on here.” Allowing them to do what they want to do make Hindus feel comfortable at the Oratory. Pushpa went in line with the above two persons. “I have no problem. They do their prayers. I do my prayer. I kneel down and pray. Well, I am ok. I don’t know all the prayers but I am ok. In Hindu tradition, there is no kneeling down. I learnt it in the Church. It’s the way of praying in the Church. I adapt to the situation. I like to respect the God here.”⁶⁰¹ Unlike the others, she seemed to be more adapting to Catholic milieu to take in what was good for her. Certain Christian gestures like kneeling down while praying helped her to pray better.

Kavita appreciated the milieu at the Oratory, especially the presence of a Priest for Blessing. She said, “One thing I like is the blessing given here by a Father. It’s amazing. The Priest’s blessing is a special thing. God cannot come down and bless us. It’s the Fathers, in God’s name, blessing me. They are doing an amazing thing. They are great. Whatever I ask them, they respond.” It is interesting to see how Hindus get blessings from Priests. She recognized blessings of God coming down on her through the prayers of Priests. Kavita associated herself with Catholic milieu at the Oratory.

Maheshwari found that the atmosphere at the Oratory was helpful for her. She underlined, “I find the atmosphere is extremely helpful. Even the Mass, the songs are very quiet and there is no bell ringing and other things, it’s calm and quiet...I have some Muslim friends who come here. They all find it good. It’s calming.” The peaceful atmosphere at the Oratory helped people to come in touch with the Divine. Christians, Hindus, Muslims could pray together in the same place!

Kumari estimated that she and other people got connected to God at the Oratory. She said, “I am kind of comfortable. My Mum is bringing me here. I look around and see and there are a lot of people who come here and they don’t care about how others do. It’s all about getting connected to God. You and your God! People have lots of things that go on in their lives. They are trying to connect to God. So I don’t care about what others think now. I come here from my childhood. I

⁶⁰¹ Here, I find certain elements of a hub. Each one has a flight to take and a destination to reach but without disturbing the other! The Oratory as a hub of religions may smoothen the journey of Hindus.

am comfortable here.” The Oratory became a place of personal relationship building with God.⁶⁰² Most of the people did not know each other but they all went to the same site to connect to God.

Bhavani also appreciated Catholic milieu at the Oratory. She said, “I have to respect the things that go on there. It is a religious place, its God’s place! I respect that place.” Likewise, Shivani said, “I am ok. I am comfortable with what goes on here. I pray for my family and I pray for all my things. In Hindu temple, it’s not the same. There is a lot of noise. Before 2009, I used to go to some Hindu Temples. Now I don’t go any more to temple. I just want to come to the Church and pray.”⁶⁰³ Shivani made a distinction between the Hindu temple and the Oratory with regard to the milieu of prayer and tranquility. She chose to be at the Oratory as she got a better experience of God.

Kalyani felt much more comfortable at the Oratory as he participated in many Catholic religious activities. She said, “I am familiar with many of the practices. There is nothing different here. I don’t feel that I am Hindu. The only time that I feel I am different from others is the time of the reception of the Communion when everybody waits in line. I do not go to receive Communion.” Kalyani participated in the celebration of the Mass without receiving the Holy Communion. The only moment where she felt left out in the prayer was the moment of the reception of the Holy Communion. It was interesting to note down that she respected Catholic tradition of giving the Communion only for Catholics.

In the prospective of this study, I can conclude that there is much scope and hope for the future at the Oratory with the presence of people from the other faiths. The Oratory can really be a hub of religions for people from different faith traditions. Hindus are open to Catholic milieu and they

⁶⁰² The expression “you and your God” would mean that every Hindu chooses a personal “God” for his worship and adoration. Some Hindus have Vishnu as their personal God whereas others choose Shiva. At the Oratory, some Hindus tend to choose Jesus as their personal God. The devotional atmosphere at the Oratory helps Hindus to spend time with their personal God.

⁶⁰³ The twelfth interviewee appreciated the atmosphere at the Oratory to spend time with his God. The thirteenth interviewee criticized the atmosphere at the Hindu Temple. It is to be noted that the Oratory as a hub of religions is huge in size and it has enough space for people to move around. In some small chapels in the Oratory, there is complete silence whereas in other chapels it might be noisy. This type of choice may not be available in other Churches and Temples in Montreal.

obtain a lot of favours through their participation in the religious activities at the Oratory. Some of them join for Catholic religious activities and others do their own practices. Both the groups are comfortable in what they do. They want to form a community of peace and love. They want to grow closer to God.

10.2.3. Demographic changes of visitors at the Oratory

In the observation of my study, I underlined that the visitors at the Oratory come from four corners of the world. The number of the traditional Catholic visitors has gone down and the number of immigrants and people belonging to other faith traditions has gone up. In my interview with the educators in faith, I asked them about their observation and comments about the changes at the Oratory. The chart below shows that all the educators are aware of the change in the visitors at the Oratory. They underlined that the Oratory has become an international place of people coming from different countries, cultures and religions.

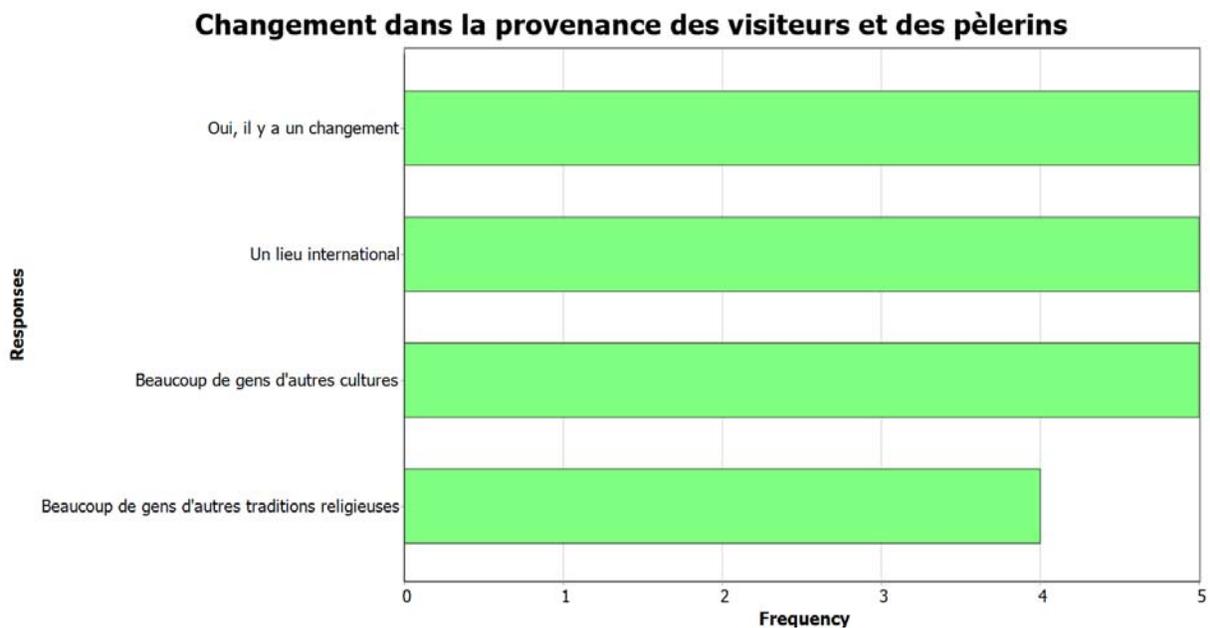


Figure 58: Demographic changes of visitors and pilgrims at the Oratory

The following question was asked to the educators in faith. *Avez-vous constaté qu'il y a un changement dans la provenance des visiteurs et des pèlerins à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, comment réagissez-vous à ce changement?* Paul stated that the Christians had started forgetting about this place but after the Canonization of Brother André, many come back. He said, "...Around the Canonization of Brother André we saw a lot of people here. There are many more people coming to pray here after the Canonization of Brother André. There is a return of Christians to the Oratory after the Canonization. The Christians had forgotten, the local people, Brother André for a while. Now they all come back. It's a special event to recall people. There are people coming from all over the world. I see people belonging to all cultures and continents coming here..." Paul was concerned about the local people as well as the people from many countries and cultures.

Violaine said, « ...je sais que il y a beaucoup de gens âgés qui viennent ici, mais il y a beaucoup de familles, il se passe du monde. On se promène sur le site hein, il y a beaucoup de familles et quand je sors après la journée de travail je vois souvent des gens, c'est évident qu'ils viennent de finir leur journée de travail et qu' ils viennent prier, ils viennent se déposer ici, et puis c'est des gens assez jeunes, puis il y a beaucoup d'adolescents, en tout cas il y a des gens de tous les âges; ça c'est une constatation que je fais; on pense toujours à l'Oratoire ce sont des vieux qui vont là, c'est pas vrai, le matin oui il y a beaucoup plus de gens âgés qui viennent participer à la Messe, bon des gens d'habitude là, mais c'est pas vrai que c'est juste des personnes âgées au contraire, au contraire. » Violaine rightly pointed out that there were people of all age coming to the Oratory. Many times, what people think about the Oratory was not the same when they came here. Many people thought that only old people went to the Church. When they came to the Oratory, they were surprised to see that it was world of people from different cultures, languages, religions, young and old.⁶⁰⁴ People came to the Oratory to take a new breath in their daily life. Many of them came on a regular basis, even after their whole day work.

⁶⁰⁴ People of all age go to the Oratory. The reason for going to the Oratory might vary from one age group to another. Many old people who are originally from Québec might go to the Oratory just to attend the Mass whereas the young immigrant families in Québec go to spend some time at the Oratory. They might have different faith traditions. They may not even participate in any official religious celebration but they do their personal devotions.

Marie affirmed that the number of immigrants was more at the Oratory. She said, « ... ce qui est sûr ceux qu'on appelle les immigrants sont beaucoup plus nombreux, les étrangers comme on les appelle... il y a effectivement moins de gens malheureusement du pays, même il y a beaucoup de canadiens que je vois qui défilent, mais il y a beaucoup plus de gens d'autres cultures, est-ce qu'ils ont transporté avec eux cette foi, comme les haïtiens ils sont très croyants, il y a mélange aussi de superstitions là-dedans, mais les autres religions aussi, les gens d'autres religions, les hispaniques, je vois beaucoup d'hindous qui sont en majorité, les haïtiens, les hispaniques en dernier lieu les canadiens dans ceux que j'ai pu atteindre, et les canadiens ce sont les personnes âgées, c'est à dire que dans la nouvelle génération à un moment donné, il risque peut-être même de ne pas avoir à moins qu'il y ait une renaissance... » Marie noted down the diversity of people as the richness at the Oratory. The local people did not give much importance for the Church and religious activities but the new immigrants practiced their faith with devotion.

Pascal also underlined that there was much diversity in the people who came the Oratory. He said, « ...le changement est très clair. D'abord, le changement en termes de gens qui viennent d'une multitude de cultures et de communautés ethniques c'est très marqué. Est-ce que c'est plus marqué aujourd'hui qu'il y a cinq ans probablement, mais c'est très graduel. Mais ça il y a clairement un changement de gens qui viennent d'une grande diversité religieuse et culturelle; aussi des gens même s'ils viennent de la même culture par exemple des gens qui viennent du Québec qui n'ont pas eu le même apprentissage de ce qu'est cette culture-là, moi j'ai vu des jeunes québécois de souche qui ne savaient pas ce que c'est le signe de la croix, qui ne savaient pas ce que c'est l'eau bénite, ça c'est un phénomène qu'on voit de plus en plus des gens qui se sentent assez loin de la réalité culturelle, la réalité religieuse du Christianisme. » It is interesting to note down that the local people from Québec continued to come to the Oratory but there was a change in their perception. Many young people from Québec have lost their religious practices. They do not even know what are the Sacraments and the Sacramental in the Church. Some of them do not know how to make a sign of the Cross. This is a delicate situation when they discover that the immigrants doing the religious practices and making the sign of the Cross.

Thomas also affirmed that there was a major change of cliental at the Oratory. He said, « Oui bien sûr, de gros changements; hein je pense qu'on n'accorde pas assez d'importance à ces changements survenus. Il y a seulement quelques années la majorité des visiteurs étaient des pèlerins qui venaient pour célébrer les sacrements, nourrir leur foi en Jésus-Christ, en Saint Joseph et en Saint Frère André, la majorité des visiteurs étaient chrétiens, alors que maintenant c'est le contraire, la majorité des visiteurs ne sont plus chrétiens et si on se donne la peine de faire une enquête sur la nature même des visiteurs qui fréquentent le Sanctuaire, on voit qu'il y a eu d'énormes changements. Donc euh on est appelé à accueillir tout le monde sans distinction, comme Jésus l'a fait, mais en constatant, et c'est très important de le constater puisque notre action et notre rôle devraient être modifiés par le changement de la nature de ces visiteurs, donc aussi il faudra qu'on parle de plus en plus de la pastorale du tourisme religieux puisque on constate que beaucoup de visiteurs viennent pour des raisons touristiques qu'on appelle, la beauté des lieux, le silence, les valeurs humaines qu'on semble mettre de l'avant ici et qui plaisent à tous ces gens-là. Et qui ont une valeur de ressourcement. » Thomas underlined the need to change one's perceptions at the Oratory. The educators in faith have an important role to play so as to bring a change in the intervention. Perceiving that the traditional style of Catholic practice was reducing at the Oratory, he mentioned the need to promote religious tourism.

In the prospective of this study, I have to pay attention to the changing demographic at the Oratory. As the educators in faith unanimously agreed to the fact that they were aware of the changing cliental, it will be easier to act in the future. It is not only Catholics who come here for their regular religious practices but people of different faith traditions. As the visitors and pilgrims respect the venue, the Administration and Staff at the Oratory have to cater to their needs.⁶⁰⁵ Priests and Religious who speak multiple languages and who come from different cultural backgrounds will bring more consolation for Hindus at the Oratory. Hindus might easily get in communication with the educators in faith who know their background and spirituality.

⁶⁰⁵ The Oratory has to make a choice here. It is a choice between remaining strict by allowing only Catholics to the venue or opening up the venue for all people. If the Oratory is open only to the Catholics, the income from visitors will reduce and the maintenance of the place will suffer. It is to be noted that the Oratory is also a declared patrimony of Canada that invites many tourists to come here. It is known to be one of the most visited places in Canada. Therefore, there is a clear distinction between tourists and pilgrims at the Oratory. After the Second Vatican Council, many theologians spoke about the theology of inclusivism in the place of the theology of exclusivism.

Promoting religious tourism gives a certain amount of scope for the future. Religion versus spirituality is a big debate especially in our context today. The people of Québec could get certain amount of inspiration from all those people who come from different parts of the world and get familiarized with the Oratory that is the pride of Québec. Every human being is capable of inspiring another person through his gestures, words and interventions. At the Oratory, though people come from different faith traditions, they inspire each other and walk together.⁶⁰⁶

10.2.4. Devotional activities

Religious practices and frequency of visits of people bring life in any Sanctuary. At the Oratory, regular pilgrims and visitors bring life and meaning to the place. For example, unlike other Shrines in Québec, the Oratory is not closed for winter due to the large number of regular pilgrims. The existence of a massive and attractive building may not be the essence of the vision of the founder of the Oratory. In his vision, Brother André wanted to bring people closer to God. He spoke to people about God and vice-versa. He felt himself to be an instrument of God's love and compassion for all people who visited him. The educators in faith continue to walk in the vision of Brother André and they unanimously agreed that the religious practices will have to be maintained to transmit faith.⁶⁰⁷ The chart below shows that all the five interviewees spoke about the need of Sacraments and devotional activities at the Oratory.

⁶⁰⁶ At the Oratory, we see many Hindus touching the feet of the Crucifix in the Crypt Church. I am told by my older educators in faith who are at the Oratory in the last 30 years that this tradition did not exist before. The Catholics from Québec never used to go and touch the feet of the Crucifix and stand there for a few minutes. Now, when the Québec Catholics watch them do the practice for many times, they are also inspired to do it. A lost tradition of the veneration of the Cross is found through the other who is from another faith tradition!

⁶⁰⁷ In the given context at the Oratory, there are more religious tourists and people belonging to the other faith traditions as visitors. They may not be ready and prepared to receive the traditional transmission of the Catholic faith. However, one has to keep in mind that the mission of the Oratory is to welcome all people with respect as did its founder, Brother André. He considered that his mission was to bring people close to God and therefore transmit the faith that he had. It is through various religious practices that he accompanied people in their faith journey.

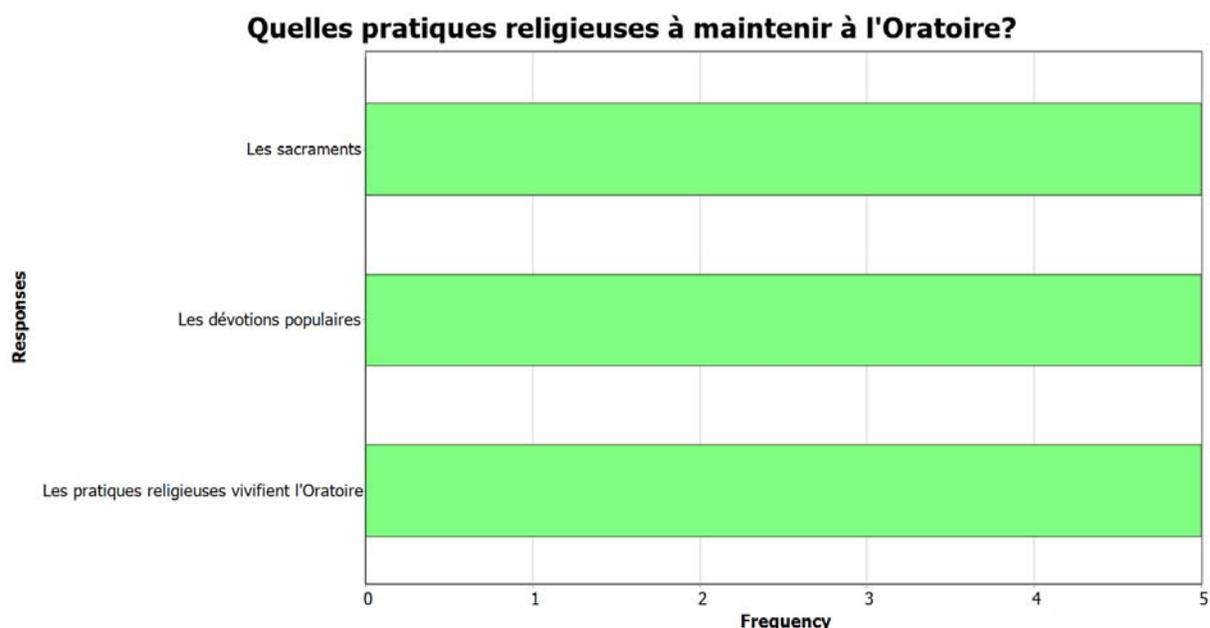


Figure 59: Religious practices to be maintained at the Oratory – educators in faith

I asked the following question to the educators in faith. *Parmi les nombreuses pratiques pastorales et dévotionnelles à l'Oratoire, lesquelles préférez-vous maintenir pour la transmission de la foi chrétienne?* Paul said, “Simple contacts are helpful for transmission of faith. It depends on situations...If it’s for Catholics who have abandoned their faith, confessions, masses and other sacraments can help. But for a Hindu, it might be climbing on the knees, taking water, lighting a candle and other things...The grace manifests in different ways. Sometimes, it’s through contact, meeting with a Priest. The other day, a Hindu from Mumbai came, a doctor, he wanted to meet with a Priest. He wanted to talk to a Priest. He was stressed and after meeting with a Priest he was okay. He came and prayed here. He did not go for the Mass but just a meeting with a Priest. If there are no religious and priests at the Oratory, the atmosphere will change. The religious element will go away from here. The people find something special in Religious and Priests just like they found in Brother André. If there are no Priests, no more rituals will be there. There will not be any more Sacraments. It will become more touristic. If there is no prayer here, things will change. It’s not by looking at the structure of the Oratory that people are inspired. It’s the prayer that accompanies people that matters a lot. The building has nothing to do with it. Even if there is lighting of candles, holy water and walking on knees, if

these things are not accompanied by prayer and Religious people, I don't think that there will be a lot of people coming here. It's the religious practices that inspire people at the Oratory. The Religious and Priests who are there believe in the religious practices and they lead people in prayer. It's inspiring for others to join them. There should always be a group of Religious here. The practice of the Eucharist and other Sacraments give a vibration for the Oratory. If they are not there, it will be a void place. There will be only statues and pillars. The place will be completely changed. Already, in the society it's the case. There is no practice. The Churches are closed down or religious rituals are reduced because there are not enough Priests, Religious. Younger generation of people is unable to decide what they want to do today. So if we don't give them a chance to practice their faith with accompaniment, then things will change. If there are no Religious and Priests at the Oratory, the candles and Holy Water and other religious symbols will disappear from the Oratory." Paul foresaw the difficult time that would come at the Oratory with a reduced number of Priests and Religious. There are fewer vocations to Priesthood and Religious life in Québec.⁶⁰⁸

The educators in faith who are members of the Congregation of Holy Cross belong to an international Order. In the prospective, it is important to ensure the continuity of the presence of Priests and Religious at the Oratory.⁶⁰⁹ The Oratory Administration has to take serious measures to collaborate with the international Congregation of Holy Cross to ensure the continuity of the ministry in the Sanctuary. The remuneration of those Religious coming from the other parts of the world will have to be revised to make it interesting for the other entities to collaborate with the Oratory. The vision of Brother André is primarily carried out by the religious accompaniment of the people who come to the Oratory.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁸ The opinion of this interviewee can be contested as some pilgrims and visitors never meet with a Priest or Religious. The footprints of Brother André are more important than the presence of Priests and Religious. His presence continues to be at the Oratory as his tomb and hearts are first class relics in the site. Pilgrims and visitors get inspired by the story of Brother André and they experience miracles through the intercessions of Saint Joseph and Brother André. The educators in faith can take a humble place at the Oratory to accompany people who are in need.

⁶⁰⁹ My interviews showed that some Hindus appreciated the presence of Priests who come from different countries. Hindus could enter into dialogue with them as they spoke their vernacular language.

⁶¹⁰ It is true that people will continue to experience miracles at the Oratory even if there are limited number of Priests and Religious in the site. However, my study revealed that Hindus are happy to share their religious

Violaine focused on the difference between the Sacraments and the Saramental. She said, « on sacramentalise beaucoup ici, je trouve...moi je trouve que oui c'est sûr que les sacrements, c'est important, c'est fondamental, bon c'est signe de l'Église vivante tout ça, c'est fondamental; mais je trouve que les sacramentaux sont très importants parce que justement ça va joindre des gens dans des pratiques plus intimes comme allumer un lampion ou aller chercher l'eau bénite, l'adoration c'en est un, c'est sûr que moi j'y crois beaucoup, l'adoration pour moi c'est une pratique importante et je veux participer à ça, donc pour moi c'est important pour moi; mais je pense qu'il y a beaucoup, beaucoup de messes ici...moi je trouve on pourrait diversifier ce qu'on fait ici parce que c'est sûr qu'une messe est une valeur sûre, c'est sûr, mais est-ce qu'on ne pourrait pas offrir d'autres choses parce que les gens vivent toute sorte d'affaires, toute sorte de choses quand ils viennent ici; dans leur vie personnelle, des fois il y a beaucoup de drames, il y a de grandes joies, tu sais, c'est intense ce que les gens vivent, puis quand ils viennent ici ils veulent les déposer quelque part, si on pouvait penser à des activités, des moments de communion autour de ça, ça pourrait être bien aussi, moi je trouve qu'il y a beaucoup de choses à développer ici...j'ai été plutôt en paroisse et puis dans les communautés; mais dans les paroisses, écoute j'ai travaillé trois ans pour l'Archevêché de Montréal et j'étais dans une région pastorale, et c'est sûr que là moi je connais plus le milieu paroissial, là les gens, tous les gens qui ne sont pas en paroisse, je pense qu'ils sont tous ici, alors les gens sont habitués en paroisse, tu sais, on est habitué à de petits nombres, des gens plus âgés, bon c'est un milieu déclinant, tandis qu'ici c'est un milieu très effervescent avec énormément de personnes, mais pour moi venant du milieu paroissial avec l'expérience pastorale que j'ai vécue, pour moi c'est pas grave s'il n'y a pas beaucoup de monde, parce que ceux qui sont là et surtout maintenant il n'y a plus l'obligation d'aller à la messe, s'ils sont là c'est par choix, et puis pour moi c'est des gens extraordinaires, ils veulent vivre un moment et on est là pour le vivre avec eux, et pour moi de toujours viser les grands nombres ce n'est pas nécessaire. Moi je dis demeurons humbles et ce qu'on a à offrir, ben offrons le de bon cœur ; puis si les gens sont intéressés, ben tant mieux, même s'ils sont deux, mais ils sont deux, les deux qui sont là ils veulent, ils sont intéressés. Il y a de quoi vivre un bon moment avec eux... » Violaine wanted to keep a certain number of religious practices at the

experiences and miracles with Priests and Religious at the Oratory. Basically, many people coming to the Oratory as pilgrims need someone who listens to them. Brother André was a good listener.

Oratory. She also wanted to give more importance for the Sacramental at the Oratory as the people from different faith would have access to them.⁶¹¹

Violaine also underlined that changes took place in the Church in Québec. It was not easy to continue the Christian life in Parish set up as there were no more young people to do the animation of the life in Parishes. Acknowledging the great number of people coming to the Oratory, she was confused about how to go ahead in the transmission of Christian faith. However, she said that the humility with which the educators do things would bring much fruit in their work and ministry at the Oratory.

Marie said, « ...l'adoration eucharistique, pas seulement l'adoration mais l'adoration avec les petits billets, ça a l'air fou, mais moi, c'est parce que j'ai vécu quelque chose d'extraordinaire avec ça et je pense que c'est important que les gens aient beaucoup l'idée des petits billets, ils écrivent... ça matérialise un peu la présence de Dieu. Il m'écoute et me répond, et on ne peut pas leur en vouloir, arriver à croire comme ça de rien demander, c'est un travail qu'on doit faire tous les jours ; donc surtout quand on a un problème on a envie d'avoir des réponses... » One of the religious practices that Marie wanted to keep was the weekly Adoration at the Oratory. She had a personal God-experience from the time spent in Adoration and she recommended it for all. It was also a way of growing closer to God.⁶¹²

Pascal underlined that the pilgrims had to decide what practices were to be kept at the Oratory. He said, « ...c'est les pèlerins qui vont décider quelles sont les pratiques qui sont importantes pour eux, alors il s'agit d'essayer de regarder la pratique des gens et peut-être de supporter les

⁶¹¹ To keep up the Sacramental at the Oratory, it may not be important to have many Priests. However, people coming to the Oratory to participate in the Sacramental are happy to meet with Priests. It is seen that the “immigrant” pilgrims and Hindus value much more the presence and assistance of Priests. In line with the thoughts of this interviewee, the Oratory could reduce the number of Masses and hours of Confessions. When one looks at the statistics of the participation of pilgrims in the Sacraments at the Oratory, one would hesitate to reduce the number of celebrations. Every week, there are around 4 to 8 thousand people who participate in the celebrations of Masses at the Oratory. Likewise, many people come to the Oratory just to do their Confessions. It is seen that there is greater number of “immigrant” Catholic pilgrims who participate in the celebrations. Cutting down the services will definitely bring frustrations for many pilgrims. The Oratory is known for having enough number of Priests and Religious to attend to the needs of people. It is to be noted that the Hindus will not be affected by the reduced number of celebrations of Sacraments at the Oratory. They basically do their devotions and prayers at the Oratory.

⁶¹² My study reveals that Hindus at the Oratory receive some responses to their prayers. They receive favours and miracles and that’s why they become regular visitors at the Oratory.

gens dans les pratiques, alors pour moi l'expérience religieuse se vit avec tous les sens et là à l'Oratoire j'aperçois l'importance du sens du toucher et bon l'eau, l'eau bénite justement on touche, c'est quelque chose qu'on touche, et c'est important de toucher, toucher aux pieds du crucifix, toucher au tombeau du frère André, euh ce contact physique avec quelque chose qui me rapproche du sacré, c'est peut-être le sens du toucher qui nous fait sentir le plus la proximité du sacré, euh dans notre tradition, toucher le sacré c'est peut-être ce qui est le plus important; dans d'autres traditions le regard est très important, pour moi ici tout ce qui nous permet d'entrer en contact, de toucher, c'est quelque chose qui est à préserver ce qui veut dire de toujours garder des possibilités pour les pèlerins de pouvoir se rapprocher physiquement de ces objets-là...j'attache une grande importance à cette relation tactile avec le sacré. » It was interesting to see how Pascal wanted to maintain certain religious practices at the Oratory that could be accessible to people belonging to various faith traditions. He seemed to be more open to people of other faiths and less concerned about the traditional Catholic religious practices at the Oratory. However, he was practical in his approach as he sensed the need of the time.

People have to experience God by getting their entire being involved in the religious practice. I mentioned earlier that the physical gestures helped pilgrims in their worship. Hindus like to touch the statues of divine figures. They like to touch Holy Water. From my interviews, I concluded that Hindus experienced God through their gestures, especially through “touch.”⁶¹³

Thomas also touched upon the importance of maintaining the Sacraments and the Sacramental at the Oratory. He underlined, « ...les pratiques fondamentales sont la pratique de la prière et des sacrements. C'est les deux pratiques les plus fondamentales, s'ajoutent les autres pratiques en référence à des modèles comme Saint Joseph et Saint Frère André, l'utilisation des rites et des symboles comme l'huile sainte, l'eau bénite et les lampes, euh sans oublier bien sûr euh la Parole de Dieu et les livres qui nous aident justement à établir des liens avec des témoins et avec la

⁶¹³ It is true that pilgrims can help the Oratory to maintain or stop any religious practice. As per the need of the pilgrims, the Oratory will have to change. However, it is important to maintain the Catholic tradition at the Oratory. For instance, if Hindus want to install a statue of Krishna at the Oratory, it will not go in line with the Catholic tradition. Hindu practices of using Holy Water and the lighting of candles do not bring any harm to the Catholic tradition. Therefore, my study can affirm that changes at the Oratory should be done with caution and proper discernment. I do not agree with the attitude of neglecting the traditional Catholic religious practices at the Oratory.

parole de Dieu, euh sans oublier l'image avec les médias sociaux, il faut développer ça, et on le fait actuellement et pour moi c'est très important les médias sociaux pour développer ce qu'on essaie de faire dans ce Sanctuaire, sans oublier ce qu'on a toujours fait plus traditionnel comme les sacrements, la prière, la place des lieux de culte qui sont nombreux et l'utilisation de certains rites comme l'eau bénite, l'huile sainte et les lampions. » As per Thomas, all the practices that are there at present seem to be good and helping pilgrims in their spiritual journey.

In the chapter dedicated to the observation, I spelt out various religious practices at the Oratory. I noted down that Hindus do many religious practices at the Oratory and some of them are in connection with the Christian practices while others are not. Now it is interesting to note down that none of the educators in faith mentioned about putting an end to any religious practice that is not in line with Catholic tradition at the Oratory. In the prospective of this study, it is important to evaluate the feasibility of all the religious practices at the Oratory. It is true that Hindus and Christians do the religious practices as per their wish. They decide to do what they want to do. However, it is important to accompany them and support them in certain practices and discourage them from other practices so as to maintain the tradition and identity of the Oratory. The educators in faith will help Hindus and Christians to do their religious practices in the proper way and continue to transmit Christian faith.⁶¹⁴

10.2.5. Educators in faith to transmit Christian faith

I already stated that the educators in faith strive hard to keep up their spirit in transmitting Christian faith at the Oratory. Their mission is to transmit Christian faith, regenerate the society and help safeguard the teachings of the Church. As they go in line with the official teachings of the Church, they also get inspired by the charisma of their founder Basile Moreau. They are to read the signs of the time and act accordingly to help people around them. The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross states, “We heard a summons to give over our lives in a more explicit way. It was a call to serve all people, believers and unbelievers alike. We would serve

⁶¹⁴ Christians and Hindus should know *why they do what they do*. “The proper way” means to say that the educators might take time to sit with those in need to explain to them the meaning of the religious practices. For instance, Hindus taking Holy Water from the Oratory should not think that it is the same as the water from *pūjā*. Inter-religious dialogue will certainly help Christians and Hindus understand better the religious practices of the other.

them out of our own faith that the Lord had loved us and died for us and risen for us and that He offers us a share in his life, a life more powerful and enduring than any sin or death.”⁶¹⁵ The call of the educators in faith is to serve all people and help them discover the life of Jesus.⁶¹⁶ There is no discrimination in the service that is to be offered to believers and non-believers. While transmitting Christian faith, the educators have to recognize that they are not extraordinary people. They have to identify themselves with all people who are around them. The Constitutions put it clearly, “As disciples of Jesus we stand side by side with all people. Like them we are burdened by the same struggles and beset by the same weaknesses; like them we are made new by the same Lord’s love; like them we hope for a world where justice and love prevail. Thus, wherever through its superiors the congregation sends us we go as educators in faith to those whose lot we share, supporting men and women of grace and goodwill everywhere in their efforts to form communities of the coming kingdom.”⁶¹⁷

The chart below shows how these lines in the Constitutions come true in the mission of the educators in faith at the Oratory. They are open to welcome all people and announce the love of God to them. They want to announce the message of Jesus to all and help people grow in their faith. The educators underlined that the transmission of Christian faith continued through the means of the participation in the life at the Oratory.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, No 1, “God’s Call”, Rome, CSC, 1988, # 3.

⁶¹⁶ It is to be noted that the teachings of the Church are based on the life, death, passion and resurrection of Jesus.

⁶¹⁷ *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, No 2, “Mission”, Rome, CSC, 1988, # 12.

⁶¹⁸ I find that there is an openness and closeness from the part of the educators in faith. My study shows that the educators want to be open to all people but at the same time they want to keep the Catholic traditions and teachings at the Oratory. It is a challenge to draw line between the two tendencies, i.e. to be closed and to be open. When one negotiates certain practices of the Church, is one being faithful to the teachings of the Church? For instance, my study showed that some people who were not Catholics received the Communion at the Oratory. I think that the Oratory has to make a choice and announce at every Mass that the reception of the Communion is strictly for Catholics. Some people might get hurt by such an announcement but it is essential to hold on to certain teachings and accompany those who want to prepare themselves for the reception of the First Holy Communion.

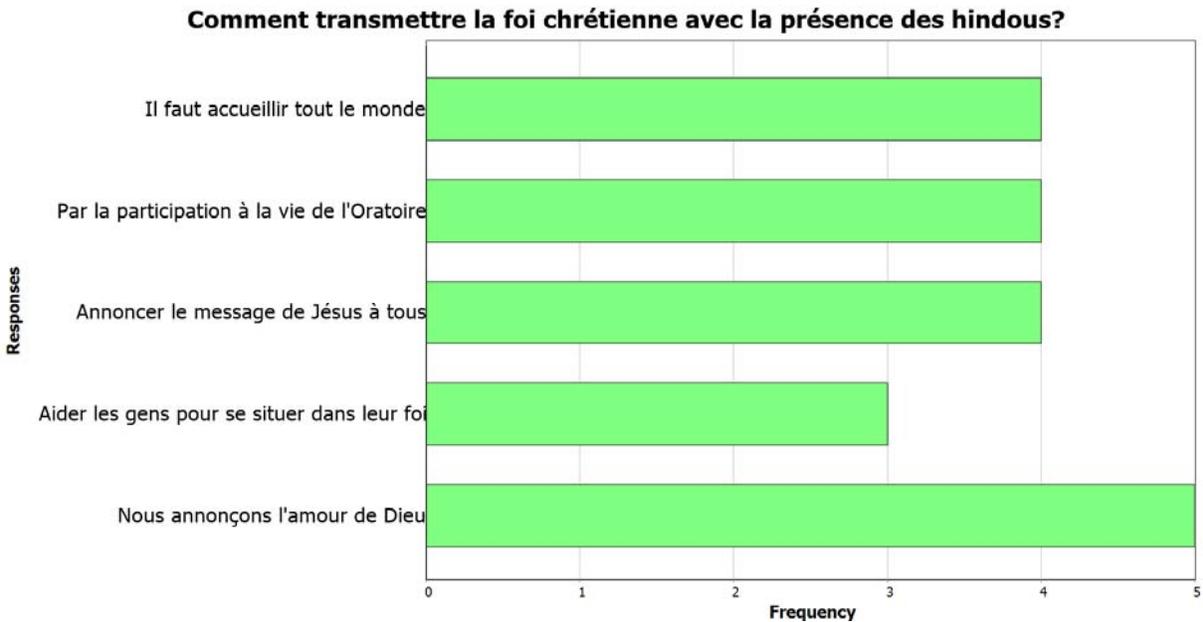


Figure 60: Transmission of Christian faith in the presence of Hindus

In my interview, I asked the educators in faith the following question. *Comment envisagez-vous de transmettre la foi chrétienne dans le contexte de la présence des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?* Paul said, “It’s simple. We need to give attention to the people. These are simple people. We should not go to them to convert them. We just need to dialogue with them. We need to be friendly with these people. When they know that people are friendly, with a good welcome, they will come in big numbers...friendship is very important...Friend, Brother, Saint – that is what we say of Brother André...It would be interesting to have more Religious or Priests who speak Tamil at the Oratory and that will make Hindus feel at home to talk to them.” Paul insisted that the educators are not there to convert Hindus. The transmission of faith takes place while listening and conversing.

Violaine also stressed on the importance of being open to all people for transmitting Christian faith. The openness should be from the side of the educators in faith and pilgrims. She said, « Ben, transmettre la foi ça veut dire qu’il y ait une ouverture, si on transmet il faut qu’il y ait, nous on est les émetteurs mais il faut que le récepteur soit ouvert. Alors pour moi là, transmettre la foi, je ne sais pas on peut la proposer, on peut la vivre de façon sereine et bien située devant

des gens d'autres religions, s'ils sont intéressés, ils vont poser des questions mais il faut qu'ils viennent d'eux-mêmes...on ne fait pas de la mission agressive là, donc au contraire...les gens disent souvent des gens qui rentrent ici visiteurs et qui ressortent pèlerines qui vivent une conversion, qui vivent un moment de grâce extraordinaire ça va jusqu'à la conversion, c'est propre à chacun. Nous, on peut proposer, on peut juste par le fait de vivre de façon sereine et ouverte, je pense que ça peut être intéressant... » Violaine made it clear that forced conversion was not the mission of the educators in faith. The Oratory did not promote any forced conversion.⁶¹⁹

Marie opined that the transmission of Christian faith took place when people lived their life in an authentic manner. With its joys and struggles, the educators had to communicate the life they lived. Marie said, « Encore je partage ma façon de vivre, ma façon de les accueillir, donner envie de projeter ce que je projette, donner envie d'être heureuse comme j'ai l'air d'être heureuse, donc on transmet la joie. On me demande pourquoi tu as l'air toujours souriant, pourquoi tu as l'air si bien, tu n'as pas de problème? J'ai toujours le Christ vit en moi et fait partie de moi- ah écoute!- moi j'ai dit c'est vrai, à ce moment-là ils écoutent, ensuite au fur et à mesure ils approchent (du Christ)... » It is the faith that one lived that one transmitted. Christian faith is not a theory but it's all about the life of the person of Jesus Christ. It is by imitating Jesus that the educators can live Christian faith and transmit it.

Pascal was more concerned about the diversity of the religious practices of the people coming to the Oratory. Keeping the fundamental elements of Christian faith, one needs to use a language that is more universal.⁶²⁰ Pascal said, « ...le message fondamental, on doit toujours le garder, ce qui est important c'est de trouver comment transmettre ce message-là, quels que soient les gens qui viennent en tenant compte de la grande diversité, et comment trouver un langage vrai à la tradition chrétienne et assez universel pour rejoindre les gens qui viennent d'autres traditions ou qui se sont complètement aliénés des traditions religieuses; alors il faut trouver un langage qui

⁶¹⁹ If at all there is a conversion taking place, it should be a personal choice. The Catholic Church has an established Catechumenate program for adults who wish to become Christians. If Hindus at the Oratory want to become Christians, they will surely be guided to a nearby Parish where the initiation will be done.

⁶²⁰ It is to encourage an attitude of inclusivism. During the Second Vatican Council, some theologians took this attitude of inclusivism.

soit authentique et en même temps qui puisse parler, trouver les images qui vont pouvoir parler du Dieu des chrétiens et de notre tradition religieuse euh en étant capables de parler à des gens d'une multitude de cultures, une multitude de traditions religieuses, pour moi ça va, c'est un grand défi de bien faire ce travail là et je crois si on fait bien ce travail là on en arrive à présenter le Christ et le message d'Évangile à des gens de toutes les traditions et chacun l'accueillera selon ce qu'il est, il y aura probablement des gens d'autres traditions religieuses qui vont s'attacher beaucoup à la figure de Jésus-Christ, à la figure de Saint Frère André, et cet attachement-là va devenir important pour eux, est-ce que ça les amènera à faire un choix de changer de tradition religieuse, je crois que ça sera très rare que ces choses-là arriveront mais déjà d'autres traditions, surtout des traditions plus ouvertes comme le bouddhisme et l'hindouisme, ces gens-là vont plus facilement rester à l'aise dans leur tradition mais dans leur vécu intégrer les valeurs qu'apportent le message de Jésus-Christ, le message de Saint Frère André et voir en ça quelque chose qui les amène à mieux vivre. » Like others, Pascal also did not see many Hindus converting themselves to Christianity. It is interesting to notice that he underlined the Christian values that the Hindus accept and follow while they come to the Oratory. The message of Jesus Christ, Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André will be part of Hindus when they frequently participate in the activities at the Oratory. This is one way of transmitting Christian faith.⁶²¹

Thomas also was concerned about the future of the Oratory with the presence of many more Hindus. He spoke about the consumerist society where people want to acquire more things. In religious sphere, he sees an element of consumerism. Thomas said, « ...les hindous sont de plus en plus présents, ils viennent de plus en plus nombreux et en ce sens il faut être préoccupé par l'accueil, la qualité de l'accueil qu'on leur fait, si on veut développer avec eux une communion et une relation. Encore une fois je pense que le grand défi de la société moderne actuellement dans tous ses aspects dont l'aspect religieux, c'est de diminuer un peu l'aspect consommation, consommer des choses et la religion parfois devient un élément de consommation. On consomme

⁶²¹ My study underlined that Hinduism is not a religion that has a founder. It is a way of life. However, the Hindu traditions are strong. The whole question of being a Hindu by tradition and being a Christian by religion can be raised here. It could be like being a Quebecor and Catholic at the same time! Though Hinduism has no founder, yet there are many Gurus. They are teachers and founders. There are also religious texts that give guidelines for living. Hindus are born Hindus unlike Christians are baptized Christians. The identity of a Hindu cannot be changed just with the Sacrament of Baptism. I underlined in my study that the new convert Hindus to Christianity in India have tendency to keep Hindu way of life and Christian values.

la religion comme on consomme la nourriture, on consomme des biens matériels, d'automobiles; il faut euh diminuer cet instinct de consommation qui nous anime et il faut développer l'instinct de communion avec les autres. Donc parce que ça s'oppose un peu la consommation et la communion...il faut apprendre à les vivre, on ne peut pas vivre sans consommer des biens, mais quand on consomme il faut savoir ce que l'on fait, et quand on développe une communion avec un être humain il faut savoir aussi ce que on fait, c'est très difficile. Donc il faut bien distinguer consommation et communion. Et il faut les vivre parce que les deux sont indispensables. Donc, développer la communion avec les hindous c'est un bel objectif. Dans un Sanctuaire comme celui-ci ça va nous enrichir et ça va faire du bien aussi à ceux qu'on accueille et ça va agrandir l'espace de rayonnement... » Thomas developed a new concept that is in connection with consumerism. He distinguished consumerism from communion. When it comes to the relation with people belonging to other religious traditions, it is the communion with other people and God that has to be promoted at the Oratory. The consumerism that includes selling and buying is not the objective of the transmission of faith at the Oratory. Relationship among human beings and God has to be promoted at the Oratory.

10.3. Dialogue with different religious traditions and cultures

Dialogue has to be part of the mission today. It requires sensitivity to the social, cultural, linguistic and religious aspects. Relationship has to be built in a multi-ethnic context knowing that God is all about relationship and communion. Transmission of Christian faith has to be continued not by conquest and imposition of ideas but by sharing of God's Word and Love. Dialogue alone cannot help in advancing the transmission work but it requires a prophetic dimension. Transmission and mission that do not have a prophetic dimension might lose its vitality and liveliness. Therefore, the transmission of faith involves boldness in proclamation of the Good News. The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross underline this aspect. "Our mission sends us across borders of every sort. Often we must make ourselves at home among more than one people or culture, reminding us again that the farther we go in giving the more we stand to receive. Our broader experience allows both the appreciation and the critique of every

culture and the disclosure that no culture of this world can be our abiding home.”⁶²² Dialogue and prophecy will bring newness in mission and transmission. In the context of the Oratory, in order to get into dialogue, the educators in faith need to patiently listen to Hindus’ stories of past and present so as to accompany them towards a future that is filled with hope. Love should be the basis of all encounters.

If love is the basis for encounter between God and people, then people need to have a bigger religious concept. Religion should help people live in authentic freedom, respecting one another. Every religion propagates love and peace. As I elaborated in this study, Catholic liturgy and Hindu *bhakti* have got their own dogmas, traditions and practices. Therefore, it is important to respect the other knowing that there are differences and similarities.⁶²³

10.3.1. Impressions, prejudices and fears

Hindus at the Oratory had good impressions about people belonging to other faith traditions. The chart below shows that most of the Hindus were open to the other faith traditions. They recognized Christians as peace loving people. Most of the Hindus underlined that every Religion was unique.⁶²⁴

⁶²² *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, No 2, “Mission”, Rome, CSC, 1988, # 17.

⁶²³ Though the Oratory remains open to welcome people belonging to various religious traditions, it has its own limits of sharing the sacred space for worship. For instance, the Oratory will have difficulty to allow Hindus to conduct a *pūjā* in one of its major chapels. However, the Oratory can promote to have an inter-religious dialogue held in one of the halls. This is one of the challenges that the Oratory has to face in the future with the increasing number of Hindus coming to the site. My study showed that Hindus at the Oratory seem to understand certain rules and regulations of the Church and they do not expect the Oratory to become a Hindu Temple.

⁶²⁴ As it goes in the world today, many people seem to have fear of Muslims! Some Hindus also seemed to fear Muslims. I would say that the influence of politics and media had a lot to do with it. All Muslims are not bad people or terrorists. Like in every religious group or sect, one can find people who take extreme positions and they become a fear factor for others. Hindus who fear Muslims could surely be more tolerant and objective in their outlook.

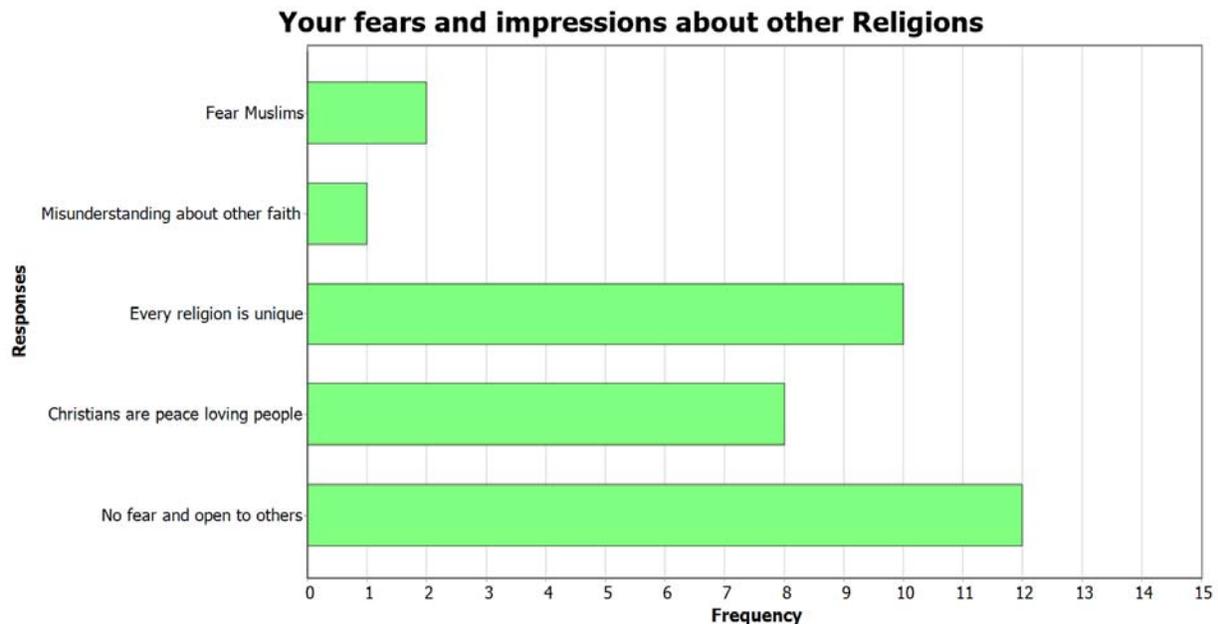


Figure 61: Fears and impressions about people of other faiths

I asked the following question to Hindus. *What are the impressions, prejudices, fears and anxieties you have about people of other faith tradition?* Vinesh said, “People have a lot of misunderstanding towards other faiths. It’s important to have an open mind, what other people think. If you go with prejudiced mind, we may deal with people in a wrong way...Each religion has its unique features. You know, in Hinduism there is an effort to co-opt. It’s a polytheistic religion. It’s easy for them to co-opt Jesus, Buddha or Allah. They are the *avatāras* of the same God...” I already mentioned about this broader understanding of Hindus at the Oratory. They were open to receive what was good without doing any harm for the other. Nevertheless, they did not give any supreme authority to any God.

Reshma said, “...I have no fear. They are all human beings. People come here to pray. Everyone has faith in God and Saint Joseph. My father was a Hindu and mother is a Catholic. When my mother married, my father got converted and became a Catholic...I follow both Christianity and Hinduism. When I was young, I was with Hindu families and I did everything for them. I worked for them; I joined in their prayers...I had to pray to Hindu God. I believed in them. After I came to Canada, I prayed to Saint Joseph. I had a special devotion. Now I pray to St. André...” The

duality of religious practice was quite clear from the response of this person. Reshma was not disturbed by the existence of multiple Religions and God. She adapted to the situation and she did not fear the other. There was a positive element of not having fear of the other. However, as a practical theologian in Catholic Church, I cannot support the attitude of holding on to different faiths at the same time. During the period of discernment, a person might take time to decide. It is important that the person takes a decision with regard to his faith orientation so as to grow in relationship with his God.

Sangita said, "...I feel that this Church is for all people of all faiths. I have no fear. Here we are able to hold together everything. We grow together." Likewise Nathan had similar opinion. "...I have no issues. I love every one. I have no fear and prejudice." Aparna underlined that she went to the church and temple. "...I feel that every religion has good points and bad points...There are many names for God and it's the same God. I don't have any fear and prejudices towards the other religious people..." Kavita said that she had many friends belonging to other faith traditions. Nevertheless, she did not discuss his faith with others. "...I have a lot of friends belonging to other faiths. They are good. I do not discuss with them about my faith. I respect them. I don't talk about God to other people." Pushpa expressed her freedom to come to the Oratory. "I am not frightened to come here. Whoever is here, I have no fear. I am free to come here. I have no fear of other religious background people. Some people say hello and others do not. I talk to people who are open and who say hello. Others are left free. I respect them." Kumari mentioned about the difference between the Hindu temple and church. "...When we go to the temple there is a lot of noise and when we come to the Church it's more silence and calmness. You actually get time to think and reflect. For some people it's good. I know that a lot of people coming here who are my friends, and they like the silence and calmness..."

Hindus at the Oratory are open to the context and realities of Quebec. They are immigrants and respect the new culture and social set up. When it comes to the religious practices, they adapt themselves to the new milieu. Without imposing their old practices, they take in what is right

from Christianity. As most of them come from multi-cultural and multi-religious background, they find the new milieu in the new country much relevant for them.⁶²⁵

In the prospective of this study, I can foresee that there is a bright co-existence of diverse people at the Oratory with their strengths. It will lead to the creation of a peace-oriented community that gives place for all people.⁶²⁶

10.3.2. Going beyond religious institutional framework

Organized religions had a tremendous influence in the lives of people both in individual and collective sphere. They pretended to protect human beings, bringing them salvation. Religions played a great role in education and social change. In every undertaking and accomplishment, religions made a connection to the Sacred or Divine. The institutional framework of religions tried to establish a historical linkage that enveloped a theological summing up justification. Interpretations and clarifications of various practices helped to frame a doctrinal set up for religions. I mentioned about it to certain extent in Catholic liturgy and Hindu *bhakti*. However, the practical orientation of both Catholic liturgy and *bhakti* are not imprisoned in any institutional framework. My pastoral praxeological study based on the religious practices at the Oratory shows that there is much scope for the future. Christians and Hindus share the sacred space for advancing in their spiritual journey. Some religious practices seem to be common for both Christians and Hindus while others are distinct.⁶²⁷

The prospective of my study will help me go beyond the institutional framework of a Religion so as to focus more on human relationships. At the Oratory, I can build bridges to connect people

⁶²⁵ In a Christian-Hindu dialogue, Hindus can elaborate what are the good elements that they adapt from Catholics and what are the bad elements that they reject. The openness of Christians to take comments from Hindus will open a new chapter in the entire Catholic theology. We underlined in our study that the Second Vatican Council was open to accept the good elements in Hinduism. A reciprocal evaluation and acceptance will bring much fruit in a pilgrim journey. The theologians of the religions will have to work hard to reach a common consensus.

⁶²⁶ The Oratory has to go in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Even if there are many Hindus coming to the site to do their practices, the Oratory as a Catholic Church cannot compromise the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church to give more space for Hindus. Creating a peace-oriented community without negotiating the principles of the Catholic Church is the maximum that the Oratory could do.

⁶²⁷ It is to be noted that in every religious practice there are hidden elements that need to be discussed and clarified. For instance, my study reveals that Hindus using Holy Water from the Oratory have certain hidden elements. Some of them do not use it as per the teachings of the Catholic Church.

who are coming from different cultural, linguistic and religious background. The Oratory as a hub of religions in Québec will help people from different parts of the world to find their way to God while doing their spiritual journey.

10.3.3. Gestures in religious practices

It is true that every religion has got certain code, creed and practice. Prayers, gestures, devotions and sharing of meals are just symbols and signs to indicate something that is beyond our temporal realities. Meditations, rituals and discernment go in the same direction. One could even say that some of the gestures and practices have similar nature both in Hinduism and Christianity. Some religious practices help human beings for a transformative liberation in their life.

The prospective of this study will cherish the common elements and gestures that are observed in the religious practices of Hindus and Christians. It will help for building good relationships with Hindus at the Oratory. By doing it, I don't think that the Oratory will compromise its Catholic theology and practices.⁶²⁸

10.4. Pilgrims' evolving perceptions of God

Someone could easily ask: How big is your God? In other words, what limits have you placed upon God in your life? Do you limit your daily religious practices to God? Trying to answer these questions, one might be able to meet with someone who belongs to another religious tradition. As I mentioned in this study, Christians and Hindus have differing God images. It is evident that Christians and Hindus have various ways of worshipping God. What is critically important is to grow closer to God whom one worships. The images of God help people to become true to self and go beyond their small world. For instance, Brother André at the Oratory asked the people, who praised him for all the miracles that he performed, to go beyond their thoughts. He did not take any credit for miracles, but he attributed them to Saint Joseph and God. He called himself a “watchdog” of Saint Joseph. The prospective of this study can ask if the

⁶²⁸ For instance, one of the common elements that I mentioned in this study is the veneration of the Crucifix. Hindus and Christians do this practice in the Crypt Church. This Christian practice seems to bring meaning for Hindus. Therefore, during the Good Friday celebrations, the Oratory may not want to stop Hindus who come to venerate the Cross along with Christians. Theologically speaking, I see it as an inclusive attitude from the part of the Oratory.

Oratory goes in line with Brother André. Does the Oratory promote the humble spirit of Brother André by welcoming people or does it function like an enterprise to make money by selling God images?

10.4.1. God of intimacy

It is essential to have God concepts and understand them from various sources like scriptures and traditions. Christianity and Hinduism have followed certain teachings all along the history. Though Catholic liturgy has various tendencies with its specific traditions and inculturation elements, it wants to maintain unity with common code of law. The common code of law seems to be more flexible in Hinduism when it comes to the practice of *bhakti*. However, liturgical celebrations in Catholicism and Hindu *bhakti* are done in order to praise and thank God while discovering the face of God. Christians and Hindus want to grow in intimacy with God. I mentioned above that some Hindus at the Oratory grow in intimacy with Jesus while others grow in intimacy with Hindu Gods. All Hindus at the Oratory respect the God of Christians.

The prospective of this study will help Hindus who want to discover the person of Jesus. The educators in faith will help them in their discovery of the person of Jesus while unfolding the story of birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. However, some Hindus might want to become better Hindus by their activities at the Oratory. This meeting point of Christians and Hindus should be cherished to bring out better fruits in the given context of religious pluralism.

10.4.2. Changing perceptions of God

As part of growth from childhood to adulthood, people change their God images. When one is small, he is accompanied by his parents to participate in liturgical celebrations in Churches and *pūjās* in Temples. They transmit certain images of God to him. As adults, these images might undergo certain changes as one goes through deeper spiritual experience. Paul Coutinho is right to say, “If we want to get deeper into the river of divine life, if we want to know an infinitely big God, then we too will have to transcend the images of God that we might have.”⁶²⁹ In my study, I

⁶²⁹ P. Coutinho, *How Big is Your God? The Freedom to Experience the Divine*, Chicago, Loyola Press, 2007, p. 49.

affirmed that people go to worship God with certain images in mind but they aspire to go beyond these images. Hindus who come to the Oratory for the first time have certain Hindu God images. When they regularly come to the Oratory their God images change through their participation in many Christian religious activities.

The prospective of this study will cherish the changing God images of Hindus. The transmission of Christian faith is done at the Oratory to help people who are interested to know better about the Christian God. Hindus who want to discover the Christian God will have ample opportunity at the Oratory.⁶³⁰

10.4.3. Living relationship with God

When people have transcending God images, their relationship with God becomes vibrant, living and authentic.⁶³¹ There is a greater exchange and communion. I underlined that Catholic liturgy proposed various celebrations at every stage of human existence. There are various Sacraments and Sacramental offered to nurture a living relationship with God. This is true in the case of *bhakti* practice of Hindus where there is an exchange of love relationship between the *bhakta* and God.

The prospective of my study will highlight a compassionate and living relationship with Jesus. The mission of the Oratory is to welcome all people with compassion and kindness. Like Jesus, who welcomed all people who went to him, the educators in faith will have to open their minds to welcome all people. On the other side, Jesus also dared to go to people, go to the other side of the river. Like Jesus, the educators in faith also will have to go to all persons, especially those belonging to other religious traditions. The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross states it clearly, “Our mission sends us across borders of every sort. Often we must make

⁶³⁰ I believe that the changing God image takes place over a period of time. The mystery of God is revealed to a person as he goes in depth in his search and understanding. Knowing more about the Christian God, some Hindus might decide to believe in Jesus and some others might continue to believe in their Gods but in a different way. One cannot really measure the depth of belief of the other person unless the person testifies it.

⁶³¹ Transcending God images will free a person from any forced convictions. It is not only proclaiming the faith but also living the faith in which one should be confirmed. When people have proper God images, the fear of the other will go away and there will have true communion.

ourselves at home among more than one people or culture, reminding us again that the farther we go in giving, the more we stand to receive. Our broader experience allows both the appreciation and the critique of every culture and the disclosure that no culture of this world can be our abiding home.”⁶³²

10.4.4. God of celebration, life and love

It takes time to know that God is not a frightening figure, always waiting to punish people. A bigger God understanding will bring people to a God of celebration, life and love. God’s intervention in the lives of human beings is to give them life in fullness. Love is the basis for encounter between God and people. The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross says, “We contemplate the living God, offering ourselves to be drawn into His love and learning to take that same love to heart. We enter thus into the mystery of the God who chose to dwell in the midst of his people.”⁶³³

The prospective of my study will help Hindus understand the real sense of the religious celebrations at the Oratory. Through the assistance of the educators in faith, the Hindus will get to know that the Christian God is a God of celebration, life and love. The whole meaning of the Eucharistic celebration is based on the life and love of Jesus.

10.5. Sharing of sacred space for peace and harmony

The present religious context in Québec and Canada will lead to a reflection of sharing of sacred space for peace and harmony. My study reveals how Hindus like to use a traditional Catholic place to do their religious practices. On the other side, I also underlined the openness of Catholics to live with Hindus in the Church. Multi-culturalism and religious pluralism of the present age make people reflect on the life realities in Canada. In the context of the Oratory,

⁶³² *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, No 2, “Mission” Rome, CSC, 1988, # 17.

I mentioned in this study that J. Hick has a similar reflection where people take different paths to reach the ultimate destination. It is interesting to note from the Constitutions that “the farther we go in giving, the more we stand to receive.” There is a theology of recompense behind the whole concept of giving. Jesus Christ gave himself and he did not expect anything back. It was a total giving. I would personally promote a compassionate Jesus who comes in search of every human being.

⁶³³ *Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, No 3, “Prayer”, Rome, CSC, 1988, # 30.

people come in search of an existing sacred place that is considered to be “reserved” for the people from Québec with a unique culture and religious background. Keeping this in mind, the prospective of my study envisages a harmonious and peaceful multi-cultural and multi-religious environment at the Oratory.

10.5.1. Encounter of multiple faiths at the Oratory

Encountering people belonging to multiple faiths and traditions is a reality at the Oratory. The educators in faith have an excellent opportunity to work with this diverse reality. While continuing the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory, it is also interesting to see how the people belonging to other faith traditions help Christians to go deeper in their faith. The chart below shows that the educators agree to the fact that an inter-religious milieu at the Oratory helps Christians in their faith journey. When Christians are confronted with Hindus who do their religious practices on a regular basis, they get inspired to go back to their religious roots and cherish their Christian faith.

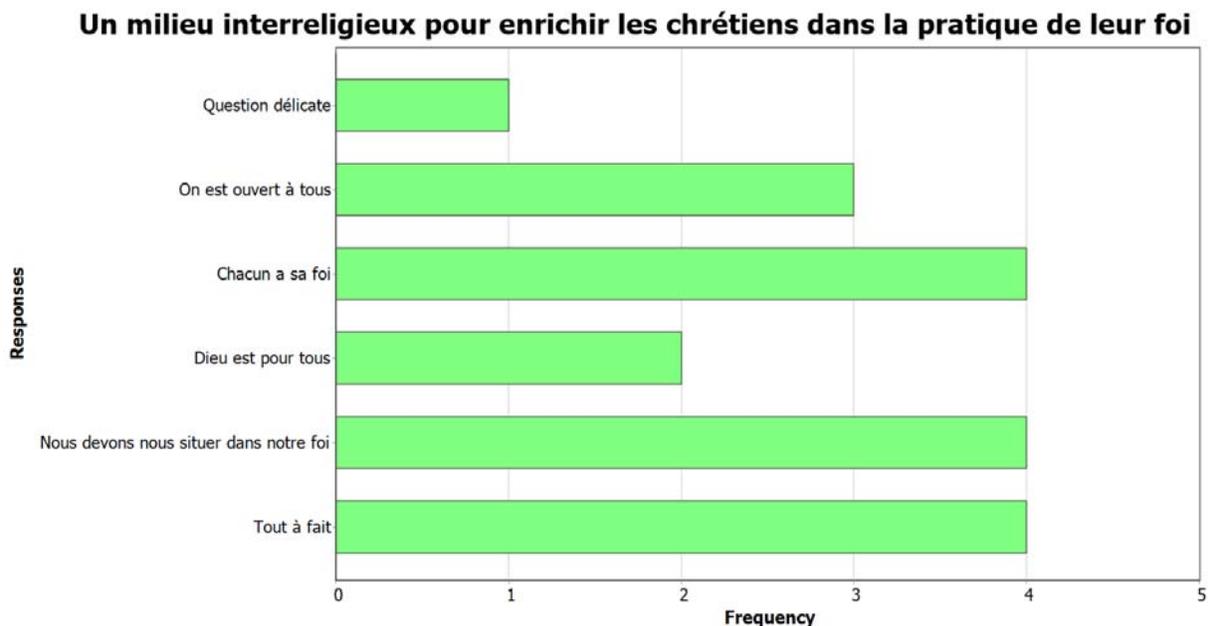


Figure 62: Inter-religious site to enrich Christians in their practice of faith

I asked the following question to the educators in faith. *Pensez-vous qu'un milieu interreligieux peut enrichir les chrétiens dans leur pratique de la foi?* Paul said, "Yes. Of course. Christians are not closed to others. They are open. If you ask in India, people would tell us that Christianity has contributed a lot to the society...For example, in the Oratory, people come without knowing anything about Christianity, and they do many religious activities. They climb on their knees; they touch statues and other things. They get in touch with God. For Hindus, the sacred element is necessary. Sacredness of the things at the Church is vital. For them, any God is ok. If they receive favours from any God, they are ready to adore that God." Paul was more concerned about the contribution of Christianity to the society. However, he underlined the way Hindus felt at ease in a Christian sacred space. Looking at the way how Hindus respect the sacred place, the Christians could learn from them. It may not be an exaggeration to say that in Québec society, many Christians have lost their respect for the sacred space.

Violaine said, « ...oui certainement, mais à condition que nous, on soit bien situé, c'est très important ; alors l'éducation à la foi pour moi c'est essentiel...il y a beaucoup de communautés affinitaires maintenant alors qu'avant ça c'était sociologique, alors la différence de contexte est complètement différente, le post-modernisme, la postmodernité fait qu'on est complètement atomisé, donc c'est d'autant plus important de mettre l'accent sur l'éducation à la foi. Puis c'est ça, à condition qu'on soit bien situé, on peut faire des échanges intéressants. » For Violaine, the sharing of sacred space was not a problem but the Christians needed to be strong in their faith before doing it. Knowing the history of Catholicism in Québec, the young generation needs to have a strong education in their faith. Like Paul, Violaine did not dare to say that the Christians will learn from Hindus who do religious practices at the Oratory. I understand the position of Paul and Violaine as they thought in line with the Church. On the contrary, Violaine said that the educators in faith need to make arrangements for Christians to get well rooted in their faith.⁶³⁴

Marie underlined that the location of the sacred place had a lot to do with the entire process of gathering people from different faiths. She said, « ...Je pense avant toute chose l'Oratoire est

⁶³⁴ Even after 50 years of Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church needs to continually open its doors so that there is a place for the other. In a religious hub like the Oratory, there should have mutual learning. Christians should not be frightened to learn from Hindus as the latter learn from Christians.

symbolique, parce qu'il est sur une montagne, et je pense que le niveau vibratoire est très élevé et attire naturellement non seulement les curieux, il y a les touristes...les hindous, les bouddhistes, oui il y a beaucoup de sikhs, il y a des juifs, il y a les mormons, beaucoup de curieux mais, moi par exemple, ce qui me frappe le plus, justement ce sont les hindous; les hindous parce que je pense que les chrétiens auraient beaucoup à apprendre d'eux même si on ne prie pas le même dieu, par les respect qu'ils ont par rapport au lieu que les chrétiens n'ont pas; je m'explique ils sont non seulement très respectueux, ils gardent le silence, ils se mettent, ils enlèvent leur chaussure parfois même, des gens que ça choque; l'eau pour eux est très importante, pour eux donc je pense c'est un symbole de purification pour eux; comme on parlait de *bhakti* là qui est avant tout l'oubli de l'égo complètement; moi je pense que vraiment ils viennent dans un esprit de simplicité et d'humilité dans un lieu même s'ils ne connaissent pas les entités qui sont là mais ils ont ce même respect pour ces êtres supérieurs qu'ils voient et ils leur accordent ce même respect; donc les chaussures qu'ils enlèvent, ils se mettent à genou pour ne pas dire complètement par terre et ensuite ils posent beaucoup de questions aussi, ils ne veulent pas juste imposer leur façon de faire, quand je travaillais à l'accueil là-bas, beaucoup m'ont demandé comment faire, comment on allume, quels sont les rituels pour allumer...qui est ce personnage, ils savent que c'est un personnage important, mais est-ce qu'il y a un rituel spécial pour lui, est-ce qu'on va dire quelque chose de spécial, est-ce qu'il y a une façon de le faire; donc ça montre aussi beaucoup de respects non seulement du lieu mais de la religion et du personnage...Je pense que oui, nous aussi, on a à apprendre de leur façon, de leur humilité et je pense qu'on devrait nous aussi au lieu d'entrer comme des arrogants, on arrive, oui on fait le signe de la croix, je ne sens pas la même humilité je dirais qu'on rentre dans un lieu sacré, oui on rentre dans la maison de Dieu, et je pense que j'aurais peut-être le même réflexe, moi je pourrais très bien aller visiter un temple bouddhiste ou hindouiste, j'aurais ce même respect, même si c'est pas ma religion, c'est respecter l'endroit...il faut que cela prône l'amour, ça prône le respect de l'autre, ça prône le partage, ça prône justement paix à cet égo; on n'est pas censé entrer avec notre égo chez Dieu. » Marie noted down the respect with which Hindus take part in religious activities at the Oratory. She recommended that Christians learn from the mannerism of Hindus while taking part in various celebrations in the Church. As one respects God, the sacred place also is to be respected.

Pascal affirmed that the inter-religious presence could enrich all people. He said, « La présence interreligieuse peut enrichir tout le monde. De découvrir que quelqu'un qui n'est pas de foi chrétienne est à côté de moi, qui pose les mêmes gestes que moi, ça peut enrichir tout le monde. Par contre, dans notre société, il me semble que ça crée chez beaucoup une certaine crainte, devant quelqu'un qui à cause de son apparence, qu'on considère qu'il est probablement pas chrétien, et il y a une certaine méfiance, une certaine qui peut aller à une énorme méfiance, dans certain cas on a l'impression que ces gens-là viennent nous épier, on ne sait pas trop leur raison de faire ça; et j'ai entendu des commentaires de gens qui manifestent cette méfiance-là devant les gens. Je dirais pour nos chrétiens qui sont ici, certains sont très ouverts et voient ça d'un bon œil et je crois que ça les encourage dans leur démarche religieuse de voir des gens d'autres traditions religieuses qui viennent partager leur richesse religieuse ici; pour d'autres personnes plus craintives, méfiantes par rapport aux autres ça ne peut pas avoir cet effet-là à cause de la méfiance... » Pascal underlined the positive and negative elements of the presence of people belonging to other faiths at the Oratory. While some Christians might be enriched by the way Hindus do their practices, others think that Hindus come to spy over Christians. Knowing the other faith tradition and keeping an open mind will help people to share a sacred space.

Thomas was more positive about sharing the sacred space with Hindus. He said, « ...c'est une occasion merveilleuse pour la foi chrétienne de grandir et de croître euh par le contact avec les autres cultures et dénominations religieuses, euh je pense que Jésus d'une certaine façon a vécu ça, et ma foi chrétienne au contact des autres religions se consolide hein et en même temps elle grandit tout en s'ouvrant euh aux autres religions. Parce qu'à ce niveau-là, il faut, je pense, adhérer à des convictions profondes. Moi euh mes convictions, c'est qu'il y a du bon dans toutes les religions et surtout entre les grandes religions du monde, les grandes religions du monde ont beaucoup de choses en commun, que de choses qui les différencient, si on se donne la peine de les étudier en profondeur. Donc elles se rejoignent dans l'essentiel et à commencer dans leur conception de Dieu. C'est souvent le même Dieu à qui on donne des noms différents, mais c'est l'Absolu, le Transcendant bon, c'est des chemins, des voies différents pour atteindre le même objectif et à ce niveau-là euh je ne peux pas croire qu'au niveau du Salut qu'on annonce il y a seulement que les chrétiens qui vont être sauvés, Saint Paul nous le dit Dieu veut que tous les

hommes soient sauvés par des voies et des chemins différents, bon les théologiens parle de la voie chrétienne comme la voie plus officielle, plus euh efficace bon euh on peut se poser des questions là-dessus quant à la supériorité d'une religion par rapport à une autre, on distingue notre religion comme une religion révélée qui se définit de haut en bas, c'est Dieu qui a pris l'initiative de se faire connaître à nous, alors que d'autres religions comme la religion hindoue et la religion bouddhiste, euh on ne les appelle pas des religions, elles unissent l'effort de l'homme pour s'ouvrir au Transcendant. Les historiens des religions se plaisent à parler comme ça, c'est intéressant hein, je ne sais pas si c'est vrai à cent pour cent. Que parler des religions révélées par rapport aux religions non révélées, parler des religions qui sont l'effort de l'homme pour s'ouvrir au Transcendant euh comme si ailleurs il n'y avait pas l'effort de l'homme pour s'ouvrir au Transcendant donc, mais c'est très intéressant tout ça...Je pense que le milieu interreligieux peut enrichir les chrétiens dans leur pratique de la foi de bien de façons. » Thomas was much open to the present realities at the Oratory. He also underlined that the salvation was not reserved only for Christians. There were different ways to reach God. The central point that he brought out was the theological point that, in Christianity God comes in search of humanity and in Hinduism people go in search of God. I agree with Thomas that there are different ways to reach God. However, it is to be noted that some people have already found the way whereas the others still search. Those who found the way might even go away from it for various reasons and they might have to come back. Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (Jn 14:6). This is where I see that both Christians and Hindus have work to do to be with God. The Oratory seems to me a good place to discover God.

In the prospective of this study, I see a future with much hope to build an inter-religious community of peace and love at the Oratory. While the Oratory welcomes Hindus, the Christians who come back to the Church also will gain from the presence of Hindus. The educators in faith and the Staff at the Oratory will have to help Christians and Hindus to have mutual respect for each other.

10.5.2. Heritage and tradition of the Oratory

The Oratory is well rooted in its heritage and tradition. The people who work at the Oratory keep the integrity of the place and the founder’s vision. Periodical appraisals and strategic planning with long term and short term objectives help the Oratory to move forward. The inter-religious milieu is a new phenomenon at the Oratory, but it is not a threat to the heritage and tradition. The chart below shows that most of the educators do not think that the inter-religious milieu will not be a threat for the heritage and tradition of the Oratory.

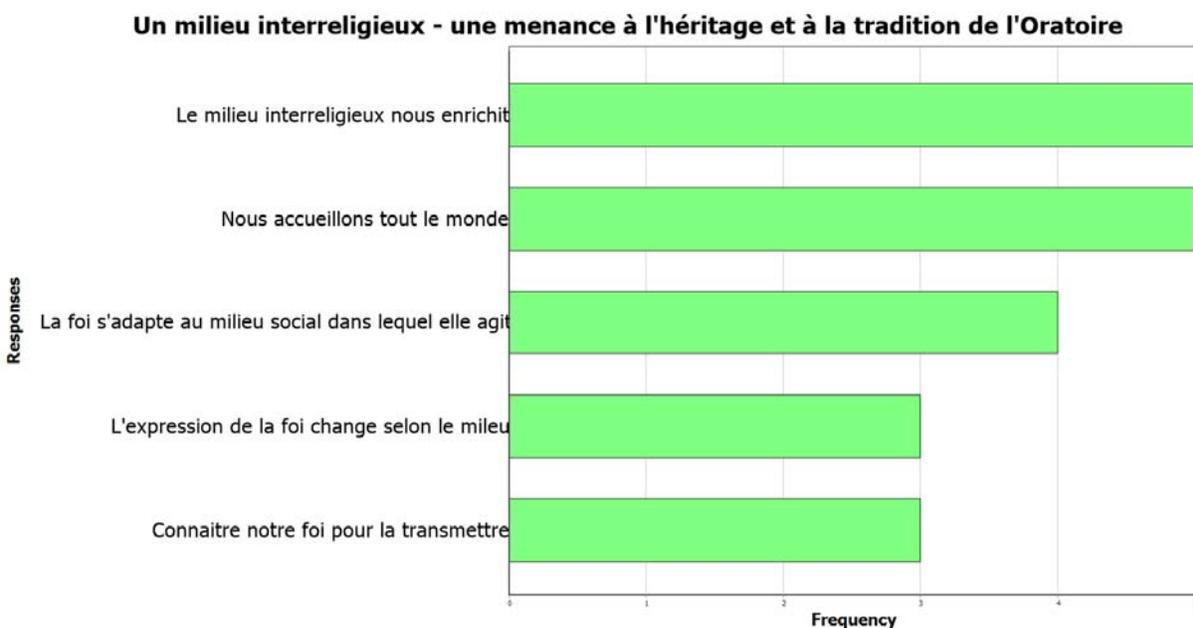


Figure 63: Inter-religious site as a threat to the heritage and tradition of the Oratory

I asked the educators in faith the following question. *Pensez-vous qu'un milieu interreligieux est une menace à l'héritage et à la tradition de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?* Paul said, “No. I do not think that it is a danger for us. We know our faith and our God. Our God is a living God. We welcome others to join us. We will remain to be what we are. We open our doors to others. If we are not strong in our faith, then there is a danger. We do not know what others do. If we know our faith and creed, then there is nothing to be frightened to be. We remain in our conviction. We can negotiate, not for changing us or changing them. We do not change. We welcome them to participate...My convictions do not change because of others presence. I am strong in my faith

as an educator in the faith. I am a priest with certain convictions and faith...” Paul also shared something concerning the reception of the Holy Communion by Hindus at the Oratory. He opined that the educators need to keep their doors open for Hindus, but it is not necessary to open all the doors. He insisted, “...We are ready to dialogue and open our door. However, we do not open all the doors. It is like someone coming to our house who is invited. We are ready to share the meal. Nevertheless, we do not open all the doors, especially the door of the room where we have all the jewels and money. It is for us, for the house. At the same time, we eat together, we talk and dialogue...” Paul was open to accept Hindus but all the doors were not open for them. In his terms, “jewel and money” could be equal to the Communion. I agree with him in theological perception of reserving the Sacraments to Catholics.

Violaine also said that the educators need to keep their doors open by keeping tight their heritage and tradition. She said, « ...c'est nous qui animons à l'Oratoire Saint Joseph, on est bien situé dans notre foi. On peut accueillir, là on peut accueillir les bras ouverts...et puis l'appel universel à la sainteté ce n'est pas seulement pour les baptisés...l'appel universel à la sainteté, lisez comme il faut *Lumen Gentium*, c'est universel et ce n'est pas conditionnel au fait qu'on est baptisé, chrétien, disciple du Christ tout ça ; bon c'est universel, c'est sûr que on est des disciples du Christ, mais ce n'est pas nécessaire d'être baptisé... » I would say that every person has access to holiness. It is not only Christians who are called to lead a holy life but all people. The religious practices help people find their way to God. There is no need to be frightened of the other in our spiritual quest.⁶³⁵

Marie underlined that Christians have their way of living that will inspire others who come to the Oratory. The heritage and tradition of the Oratory will remain for ever. She said, « Non parce que tout ce qui est bien implanté, si les racines sont bien profondes, je pense au contraire si notre façon de vivre peut inspirer les autres à nous rejoindre mais il faut que ce soit notre façon de vivre, notre façon de rayonner donne à ces gens qui viennent par curiosité l'envie de mieux nous

⁶³⁵ The Catechism of the Catholic Church underlines that the Sacraments are visible signs of the invisible reality. I think that the Sacraments help people to grow holier. For example, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an experience of the forgiveness of God and renewal in the Spirit. When the person who receives the Sacrament has done a good preparation, he takes decisions to bring changes in his life. He gives a place for God in his life to transform him.

connaître je pense que c'est bien, maintenant il faut surveiller c'est évident les gens qui viennent régler leur propre agenda là, il y en a, ce n'est pas de leur faute, ils ne comprennent pas, comme pour les vodouisants parfois c'est parce que c'est mélangé depuis l'esclavage leur affaire, donc ils viennent parfois pour prier Saint Joseph mais c'est pas Saint Joseph c'est un autre, et c'est pas par malice, c'est parce qu'ils ont été, on ne leur a pas appris. »

Pascal was much positive in his response as he underlined the richness of the Oratory with the presence of people from different religious faiths. He said, « Non, moi je pense que le contexte interreligieux est une opportunité pour euh redécouvrir toute l'ampleur de ce qu'on peut offrir euh la présence des Saints euh est très importante, différentes traditions religieuses vont utiliser différents noms, mais tout le monde va reconnaître que l'être qui s'est rapproché de Dieu, l'homme de Dieu, la femme de Dieu qui est proche de Dieu peut m'inspirer et m'aider, mais ça je découvre ça à l'Oratoire des gens de toutes traditions religieuses vont avoir cet espèce de respect que ça soit pour le grand crucifix, pour la statue de Saint Joseph; la présence de ces gens qui nous rapprochent de Dieu, et particulièrement un personnage comme Saint Frère André peut avoir l'appel à des gens de toutes traditions religieuses, parce que c'était simplement un homme qui était très humain; et l'histoire du Frère André peut rejoindre les gens de toutes les traditions religieuses et cette histoire-là dépasse la tradition propre du Frère André qui était évidemment la tradition religieuse catholique et il peut influencer et inspirer des gens. Pour moi de voir que des gens de diverses religions, de diverses cultures vont retrouver quelque chose du sacré dans cet endroit-là c'est un enrichissement pour nous ; et pour nous de mieux comprendre comment les gens d'autres traditions religieuses découvrent l'Oratoire, comment ils peuvent en parler, comment ce qu'ils peuvent dire de l'Oratoire...ça nous fait prendre conscience qu'il y a d'autres langages qui peuvent parler de ce qu'on découvre à l'Oratoire. » Pascal mentioned about different figures of Saints at the Oratory that attract Hindus. As for me, it is enriching to hear what others speak about the Oratory. The sharing of their experience will contribute to the heritage of the Oratory, as the heritage has to be lived in today's context.

Thomas also agreed to the fact that the heritage has to be seen in today's societal context in Montreal. He said, « ...c'est une chance pour relancer cet héritage dans un milieu social qui s'est

beaucoup transformé. Donc la foi doit s'adapter au milieu social dans lequel elle agit, vit et grandit. Le milieu social de Montréal a beaucoup changé, et la foi aussi dans son expression, donc son souci de rayonnement doit aussi changer. » Thomas spoke about the changes in the expressions of faith. The fundamental teachings of the Church would not change with a change in the cultural or social milieu. I think that the inculturation of faith is all about the manner that people express their faith.

In the prospective of my study, I have much scope for the Oratory. The heritage of the Oratory will continue with different dimensions. The educators in faith will continually accompany the pilgrims of various faith traditions. Keeping the tradition and heritage of the Oratory, they will adapt to the time and society.

10.5.3. Encounter of multiple cultures

The prospective of my study reveals the cultural richness that is entertained by the Oratory. As seen in my study, the Oratory is rooted in the French culture in Québec. For many years, the Administrative Staff and the educators in faith were people only from Quebec culture. They were mostly catering to the pilgrims coming from the same culture. Presently, this cultural perspective undergoes a tremendous change. As pilgrims come from different cultural backgrounds, one notices that there are people from other cultural backgrounds in the Administrative Body of the Oratory.

The presence of people from different cultural background is a blessing for the Oratory. As the Church going people in Québec are older generation, the perennity of the Oratory has to depend much on the younger generation that is composed of people from all cultures. It should not be surprising to see that people belonging to other cultures and faith traditions becoming part of the Associates of Brother André who contribute financially to the maintenance of the Oratory and are invited for a special meal every year. In this way, the cultural transmission of Christian faith has much scope.

10.5.4. Linguistic richness at the Oratory

Like the cultural richness, the prospective of my study highlights the linguistic richness of the Oratory. Québec has a tradition of promoting French language and culture. Over the years, the Oratory has been highly promoting the French language and culture. The openness of the Oratory to welcome people who speak different languages brings a new dynamism. Conducting various religious services in different languages encourage people to come to the Oratory and participate in the activities.

The Staff at the Oratory has to become more bilingual and they should be able to attend to the needs of pilgrims. Most of the Hindus do not speak French and they feel much comfortable when they meet with someone who speaks Tamil or English. Unofficial records say that the Oratory neighbourhood is surrounded by people from more than 85 linguistic backgrounds! The openness of the Oratory to this new reality will attract more people to its site.⁶³⁶

10.5.5. Mountain as a favored place to grow in God

In the prospective of this study, I would say that the Oratory situated on the mountain has a favorable location to attract more people. Brother André, as a door keeper at Notre-Dame College, always looked towards the mountain that was just across the road. His intention was to build the Oratory on the Mountain. He had understood the importance of the mountain in the life of Jesus and in the Gospels. Mountains are frequent in biblical stories as they have a symbolic value. Mountains are part of the physical reality of the Bible. In a symbolic manner, as God dwells in heavens, mountains take people closer to God. In the Old Testament, Sinai and Zion are two prominent mountains. The Mount Sinai is associated with Moses, who received the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the Mount Sinai remains a symbol of God's Covenant with Israel (Exodus 19-20, 24). Mount Zion is the location of the Jerusalem Temple. It is the city of David (2 Samuel 5: 1-10, 1 Kings 8:1). The Mount of Olives is the place where Jesus prayed before his arrest and crucifixion (Luke 22: 39-49, Act 1: 9-12). The Mount Carmel is the place where Elijah called God to light a sacrifice on fire to prove the prophets of Baal that his God was the true God

⁶³⁶ It is to be noted that once a month, the Tamil people come to celebrate a Mass in Tamil at the Oratory. I see a better participation of people in their language. They sing and respond well in Tamil.

(1 Kings 18). In Matthew's Gospel there are 6 famous mountain scenes: Jesus' temptation (4: 8), the Sermon on the Mount (5: 1), a number of healings (15: 29), the Transfiguration (17: 1), Jesus' final discourse (24:1), and the commissioning of the Apostles (28: 16).

I underlined in this study that Hindus like to do pilgrimages to mountains and holy places as they think that these are favoured places to meet with God. There are many known Temples on the mountains in India where Hindus make their annual pilgrimage. I come to the conclusion that Hindus are attracted to the Oratory and its location. Knowing that it's a Church, for many Hindus it is also like going for a pilgrimage to "their Temple." Many Hindus name the Oratory in Tamil "*malai kovi*" that literally means "temple on the mountain". Climbing on the mountain and doing varied religious gestures make their entire being involved in the pilgrimage. They see God's presence in their life while doing the religious practices at the Oratory. They get spiritual and physical nourishment from the Oratory.

10.5.6. Hope for Hindu immigrants

During his visit in the USA, in September 2015, the Pope Francis urged the U.S. Congress and America's leaders to accept those born in other countries as their own children. He asked the Americans to embrace people "who travel north in search for a better life." This call is also for the contextual situation in Canada. It is true that the immigration is never an easy process for anyone as they leave their country, home and people. In the case of Hindu immigrants, it's also leaving their religious belongings and practices in their own countries.

The educators in faith also move from country to country while doing their collaborative efforts in the transmission of Christian faith. Crossing borders leads to a new environment, people, places, customs, traditions, language and cultures where God has already been at work. God is already present in the new environment. Like in the case of the Oratory, people from different background come to the sacred place to experience God. They believe that God is present in that particular location. The sacredness of the site has something to do with the gathering of people. It is also in meeting with others who come to this place that one discovers the face of God. It is in

respecting the other, who is different from oneself, as a child of God that one becomes a child of God.

In the prospective of this study, I can say that the Oratory is a privileged place for Hindu immigrants in North America, especially in Canada. Hindus find a second home at the Oratory where they get consolation, solace and comfort in their struggles. In their spiritual journey, they get accompaniment from the educators in faith. Through their prayers and sacrifices during their pilgrimage to the Oratory, they get peace of mind and happiness.

10.6. Conclusion

The prospective of this study brings much hope for the future, both for Hindus and the Oratory. This study shows that there are more strengths than limitations for the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory. There is a shift from the traditional way of doing things where only Catholics have access to the Church. One of the major limitations of the study is that the Hindus do not become Christians by receiving baptism at the Oratory. This was not the objective of the study and therefore, what is important is to see how Hindus get to know the person of Jesus Christ. The inter-faith platform at the Oratory nourishes not only Hindus but also Christians. Despite their language and cultural barriers, the educators in faith are encouraged by the presence of Hindus at the Oratory. Hindus remain respectful towards the Christian religious celebrations at the Oratory. Going beyond all the prejudices and fears, Hindus and educators in faith can form a community of the Kingdom.

Through the entire process of the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory, the Hindus who have a limited Christian God image are helped to get a wider understanding of Christian God. They are able to transcend from their certain understanding of God. Many Hindus do not want to go to the Hindu Temple anymore as they are more satisfied with the religious practices at the Oratory. They experience freedom and closeness to the God of Christians at the Oratory.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁷ Some Hindus seem to become less Hindu and more Christian in spirit by their visits and religious practices at the Oratory. On the contrary, some other Hindus become better Hindus!

The Oratory Administration is not threatened with the religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. The educators in faith have expressed that the tradition and heritage of the Oratory will not be shaken by the presence of Hindus and their religious practices. It is in diversity that one finds unity and richness. In line with the thoughts of Pope Francis, welcoming immigrants and minority to practice their faith should become one of the missions of the Oratory.

I am sure that this research study will be well received at the Oratory as it contributes to the internal life and present image of the place. The respect that the study gives for every person will be appreciated by all. This study does not put down any person in his religious practice but will bring awareness among all people who engage directly or indirectly in the religious practices at the Oratory.

Concrete steps in the prospective

- Distinction will be made between Holy Water and *tīrtha* to help out Hindus and Christians. Distinction will be made between the Christian usage of candles and Hindu *Dīpa*.
- Hindus will continue to use Holy Water from the Oratory, knowing its importance for Christians. Hindus will continue to light candles at the Oratory, knowing the importance of the symbolism of light for Christians who confess that Jesus is the Light of the world.
- Meeting between Hindus and Christians will continue at the Oratory in an informal way.
- Outcome of this research study will bring awareness to some workers at the Oratory who do not know the practical pastoral concerns at the Oratory.
- Outcome of this research study will bring a new dynamism at the Oratory especially for welcoming people who belong to other religious traditions and minority groups.

The milieu of practice after 10 years

- ✚ The practice of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles will continue at the Oratory with more precisions of the two symbols for the Christians.
- ✚ More Hindus will do the practices of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles. They will discover more about Christianity and Jesus Christ through the sacramental.

- ✚ Cost of Holy Water bottle and candles will go up in ten years.
- ✚ Brochures explaining the meaning of the sacramental in the Church will appear in the Blessing Office. They will be available in many languages, including English and Tamil. Many Hindus will consult the brochures and it will initiate them to discover Jesus Christ.
- ✚ Milieu of the practices will be a privileged place for meeting and entering in informal dialogue between Christians and Hindus.
- ✚ Hindus will financially contribute to the life of the Oratory. Some of them will become Associates of Brother André.
- ✚ The Oratory will employ some Hindus, especially in the sector of material resources.
- ✚ Some Hindus will become agents of spreading the message of Jesus' love and compassion to other Hindus in their families and surroundings.
- ✚ Hindu-Christian inter-religious meetings will be held at the Oratory.
- ✚ Some Hindus will join for *Taizé* prayer at the Oratory.
- ✚ Hindus will adapt better to the culture and language of Québec by their frequent visits at the Oratory.

Practical theologian and praxeological approach

- ✓ I would say that the praxeological approach goes in line with the definition of pastoral praxeology given by Jean-Guy Nadeau. “La praxéologie pastorale s’identifie comme une approche herméneutique des pratiques chrétiennes, visant à intégrer analyse empirique et discours critique...La praxéologie pastorale apparaît ainsi non seulement comme une pratique de recherche intellectuelle, mais d’abord comme une pratique de responsabilisation des sujets de l’action.”⁶³⁸ Therefore, the pastoral praxeology corresponds to a method in theology that is connected to hermeneutics. The praxeological approach counts on the link between practice and theory.
- ✓ The milieu of the practice at the Oratory is religious, spiritual and socio-cultural. The practice of the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles has a long history in the Church. For Hindus, both symbols of Holy Water and Light are seen as sacred as they have the same symbols in Hinduism. The cultural aspect of the milieu is interesting too as

⁶³⁸ J.-G. Nadeau, « La praxéologie pastorale : faire théologie selon un paradigme praxéologique », *Théologique* 1/1, 1993, p. 80.

people from all cultures do the religious practices. The possibility of meeting with the other brings meaning to the quest for the Divine.

- ✓ The pastoral praxeological enquiry has been interesting for this study. Different steps in praxeology helped the researcher to be systematic. It also contributed to see the larger milieu of the persons involved in the practice.
- ✓ The analysis of the religious practices at the Oratory has helped the researcher to see that there are many practices done by Hindus though only two of them are studied in detail. All the religious practices help Hindus in their faith journey.
- ✓ Based on this study, I can affirm that the pastoral praxeological enquiry has to be done in a regular manner to see the changing trends and religious practices in the pastoral context at the Oratory. It is important to read the signs of the time and act as per the need.

My way of seeing the other actors in the future

The praxeological steps of this study have helped me see that every person involved in the practice has something to do to accomplish the project. Collaboration of different actors is essential to bring a change in the practical pastoral milieu. Relationship between various actors has to be given a big place. First of all, there is a relationship between God and the person who does the practice. For instance, when water is blessed, the blessing of God is invoked upon the person who would use Holy Water. There is also a relationship between the educators in faith and Hindus. Directly or indirectly, the educators in faith, especially the Priests, pray for Hindus. There is also a relationship between persons who do the practice for someone who does not come to the Oratory. A chain of communion between God and people is created in the entire religious practices at the Oratory.

My way of seeing the intervention in the future

In the prospective of this study, it is good to mention how the educators in faith will intervene in the future. My intervention will be oriented in line with the founder of the Oratory. Through every religious practice, the message of the founder of the Oratory has to be put in evidence. Brother André, the founder of the Oratory, spoke to people about God. He had a big heart to welcome all persons without any boundary. He was a man of peace, and he helped people find inner peace so as to live in relation to God. The great mystery of God is revealed in the person of

Jesus Christ. The Christian God announced at the Oratory is accessible for all persons. It is in welcoming all pilgrims with compassion, divine mercy and love that the vision of the founder of the Oratory will be carried on. Here below is a small presentation of how the educators could announce the Christian message to Hindus.

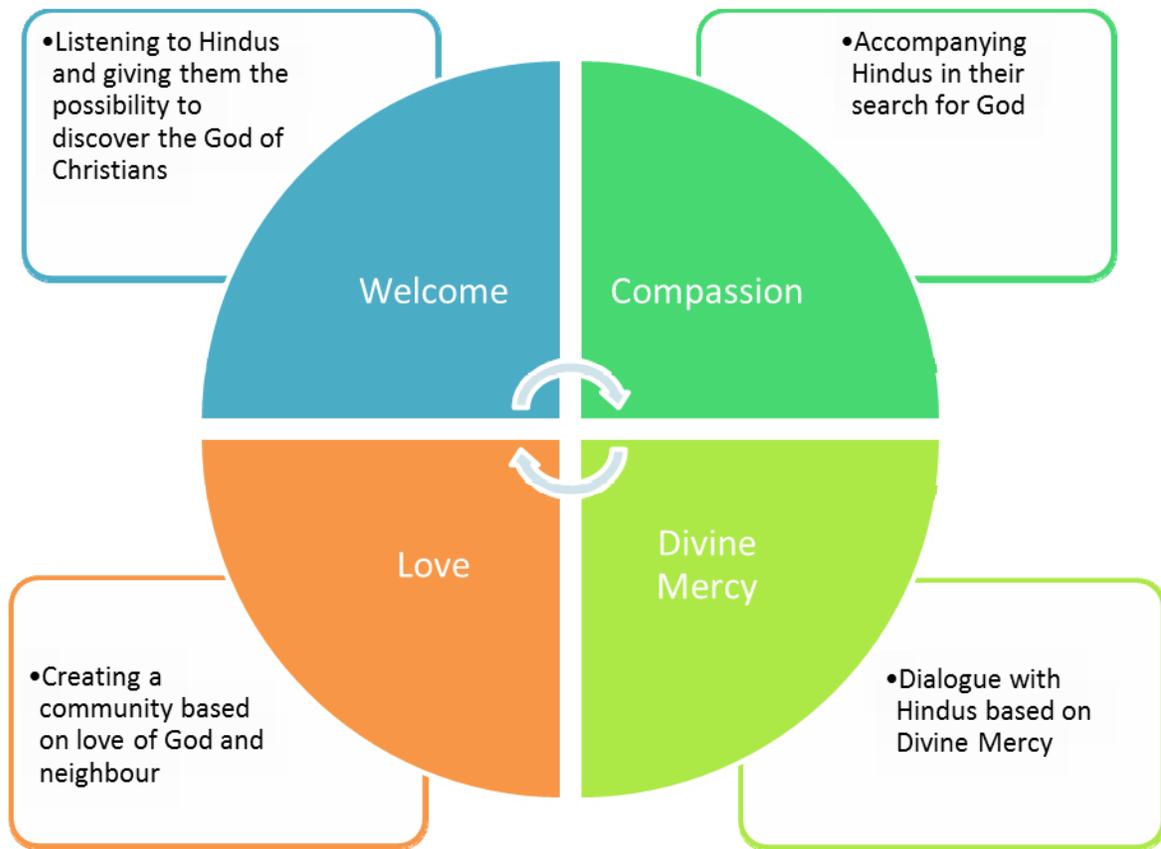


Figure 64: Key elements to accommodate Hindus at the Oratory in the future

CHAPTER 11

11. GENERAL CONCLUSION

The pastoral praxeological study that I have done elicits a clear understanding of the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory and of the methods by which the educators in faith continue to transmit Christian faith. Sharing of the sacred place and learning from the faith experience of the other are contemporary realities at the Oratory. My initial observation, stated in the introduction to this study, that Saint Joseph's Oratory becomes a cradle for all people from different religious traditions, can be reaffirmed in conclusion. The study identified the religious practices performed by Hindus at the Oratory and described how the educators in faith perceived them. The educators in faith strive to accommodate Hindus in a Catholic milieu and try to accompany them in their spiritual journey, while keeping in mind their priority to transmit Christian faith.

I would say that the Oratory has become an international hub of religions where people from different origins arrive with their plans to either halt or continue on their journeys. Some of them come as pilgrims and others come as secular visitors. Some drop in for a quick visit time and others dwell longer at the Oratory. Some people decide to find a new home near the hub, while others prefer to frequent it only when needed. From the frequency of the visits of Hindus at the Oratory, we have seen that some of them are regulars, while others come once a year for their religious practices. Some Hindus come expecting specific miracles and others transit through on their way to the *Murugan* temple.

The Oratory, an international hub of religion, could be compared to a busy international airport where many flights land from different destinations and take off for others. All passengers get off at the hub, but some spend more time exploring it. A few passengers have a short transit and rush on to catch connecting flights, while others have longer waits to catch their onward flights. Many of them explore the hub and share their experiences with their family members and friends on their arrival home; certain family members and friends get inspired to fly via the same hub. There are passengers who are tired and wish to rest or sleep. Several passengers simply observe others occupied in their many activities. A number of passengers shop a lot for themselves or for

others in their family. A few look for a silent place to spend time in solitude, while others engage in conversations with co-passengers. Having undergone their diverse experiences, at some point in time, all passengers will have to depart the international hub for their individual destinations. If they have had good experiences, they will choose to fly through the same hub again at a later date, and may even try to engage in the same activities as earlier. If they return after a long interval, they may discover certain changes in the hub in terms of the staff, the internal layout, modernized facilities and new activities.



Figure 65: Saint Joseph's Oratory: International Hub of Religions

The above figure represents the Oratory as an international hub of religions that is accessible by all people. Travellers who come to perform their religious practices do not need tickets to enter into the hub, but those who visit as tourists have to purchase a ticket⁶³⁹. Inside the hub, people have ample time to explore as they wish. Some people walk around alone while others reconnoitre in groups. Informal meetings and dialogues with people belonging to different religious groups and educators in faith enrich the travellers in the hub. Finally, before departure, all people get an experience of the hub despite their religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I surmise that the experience of the hub of religions can be related to the theology of religions.

The theology of religions holds a prominent place in the theological reflection carried out since the Second Vatican Council. The interaction between different faith-traditions is a vital element in contemporary society. Today's society is marked by religious pluralism. The International Theological Commission discussed in detail some of the elements concerning religious pluralism in a document named *Christianity and World Religions*.⁶⁴⁰ There are fundamental issues of concern for Christian theologians. How can a Christian keep his faith in Jesus Christ by acknowledging God's revelation in other religions? How should a Christian understand the place of his religion in the world? Is Christianity the only way to attain Salvation? If so, does it make sense to announce the Good News to all people belonging to other religious traditions as told by Jesus in the Gospel of Mathieu 28, 19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"? The Second Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, explained the Church's position on its relation with non-Christians. The Council stated that "those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God."

⁶³⁹ The concept of insiders and outsiders can be developed here. Those who participate in religious practices are considered to be insiders who would spend money in regular ways of buying religious articles, lighting candles and taking holy water bottles etc. The tourists are considered to be outsiders who are forced to pay at the entrance because they do not automatically take part in any religious practice. In either case, all are encouraged to spend money at the Hub!

⁶⁴⁰ International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the World Religions*, Rome, Vatican, 1997. See also: *La documentation catholique*, CTE, no. 2157, Paris, Bayard, p. 312-332.

God's salvation is also for non-Christians.⁶⁴¹ *Gaudium et Spes* stated that "we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery."⁶⁴²

11.1. Religious piety at the Oratory

My study reveals that Hindus conduct many pious activities at the Oratory. Some of them are done in line with Christian piety and others in accordance with Hindu piety. Some of the pious activities help Hindus grow in their faith. The Catholic Church has observed the existence of piety among the faithful. "The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the Stations of the Cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals etc."⁶⁴³ From my interviews and interpretations, I can affirm that these Christian pious activities convey meaning not only to Christians but also to Hindus. The inclusive attitude of the educators in faith at the Oratory gives Hindus a chance to practice their piety. The Catholic Church attributes greater value to sacred liturgy than any pious religious activity. The expressions of piety should not replace liturgical life of the Church; rather they should help people get closer to sacred liturgy. Liturgy, by its very nature, is superior in value to any other pious activity. The Catholic Church also recommends making discernment, if needed, to sustain and support popular piety, to purify and correct the religious sense which underlines devotions, so as to educate the faithful in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ.⁶⁴⁴

In the pastoral context of the Oratory, my study reveals the significance of the Sacramental. Hindus at the Oratory get ample opportunities to practice their faith through the Sacramental. Most of them respect that the Sacraments are exclusively meant for Catholics, whereas the Sacramental remains open to all. The Catechism of Catholic Church speaks about the importance of the Sacramental in the Church. "These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the Sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through

⁶⁴¹ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, Rome, Vatican, 1964, # 16.

⁶⁴² Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, Rome, Vatican, 1965, # 22.

⁶⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome, Vatican, # 1674

⁶⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome, Vatican, # 1675 & 1676

the intercession of the Church. By them, men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the Sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.”⁶⁴⁵ In the light of my interviews with Hindus, I can affirm that the usage of Holy Water and the lighting of candles accompanied by various intentions remain strong symbols through which Hindus feel one with Christians in prayer and worship. Hindus consider these two religious practices effective for their spiritual journey. The two practices help them grow closer to saintly figures of Christianity and divine figures of Hinduism.

I have pointed out that some Hindus attend Confessions and Masses at the Oratory, though they do not receive Holy Communion. Many of them know that receiving Communion is reserved for Catholics. Those who do not know might receive Communion assuming it to be *prasādam*, just as in any Hindu *pūjā*. It is always a delicate matter to lookout for Hindus amidst a large gathering for Mass at the Oratory to refuse them Communion. Normally, when the Priest gives out the Communion, the one who receives it responds “Amen.” The Priest can refuse to give the Communion if there is no response. In the context of the Oratory, even if the Priest refuses to give the Communion to Hindus, it is wise to meet with the person after the celebration to enlighten them with the details of receiving Holy Communion. By welcoming the person, the educator in faith will have the opportunity to discuss with him the differences between a Sacramental and a Sacrament. Likewise, when Hindus go for the Sacrament of Confession, the Priest can listen to the person and enter into a dialogue or invite him to further detailed dialogue at a later time. The Priest cannot give Absolution to a Hindu. However, it is important to note that the divine mercy of God is for every person, including Hindus.

11.2. Kingdom building in Holy Spirit

Mutual recognition through dialogue should be the key element in Kingdom building. At the Oratory, people from different religious traditions keep the values of their religion while acknowledging those of the other. On a common platform, people seek to understand the meanings of different religious practices and traditions, and the truth of religions practiced

⁶⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome, Vatican, # 1667.

around them, including the religions' roles and functions in helping them achieve salvation. As Christians and educators in faith, the Priests and Religious at the Oratory should not make personal judgements on different religious practices but try to understand them in the light of truth emanating from Jesus Christ himself. One should consider the people belonging to other religions with honesty and respect.

In a theological dialogue, one must be loyal and faithful to one's own faith, be prepared to share it with members of another faith tradition and listen to them with reverence and honour. According to Ilia Delio, "The more we enter into union with other religious traditions, the greater the complexification of our own religious consciousness. The way into complexified religious consciousness is through the experience of otherness and difference, and this experience is integral to the meaning of Christ."⁶⁴⁶ One chooses to hold on to the uniqueness of one's faith, which is a gift, a sacred responsibility received from God through Jesus Christ. In the process, one must transcend the limitations inherent in one's journey towards the ineffable mystery of God. It is the sense of transcendence that ultimately will make one free and lead one to further explore one's experience through dialogue with various religions. Within the dialogue, one seeks, together with others, to better understand the similarities and differences in the respective religions. This process will lead one to recognize the identity of each religion and its links with others.⁶⁴⁷ The fruits of dialogue will help to form a community of love. The values of the Kingdom of God will reign in such a community.

In order to respect other religious tradition, it is vital to study the story, history and actuality of one's own religion, and to open up to the same dimensions of the other religions. Many might argue that Christianity is a historical religion, and that Hinduism does not consider traditions and historical elements. Such general statements may get nuanced when specific traditions and practices of every religion are carefully studied. In the introductory chapter of my study, I have

⁶⁴⁶ I. Delio, *Christ in Evolution*, New York, Orbis Books, 2012.

⁶⁴⁷ Dialogue is a two-way communication. It implies speaking and listening, and giving and receiving for mutual growth and enrichment. It includes witness to one's own faith as well as openness to that of the other. It is not a betrayal of the mission of the Church, nor is it a new method of conversion to Christianity. This view has been stated in the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue developed the same view in two documents: The attitude of the Catholic Church towards the followers of other religious traditions – *Reflections on dialogue and mission* (1984) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991).

elaborated how Hinduism has its own long history and traditions just like Christianity. Catholic liturgy has a long tradition and, as I have elaborated, Hindu *bhakti* practice, too, has connections to various schools and traditions. Therefore, one should give due respect to every religious tradition. It is important to build dialogical Kingdom of God that promotes justice and peace.

As elaborated in the introductory chapter, the theological reflections of Michael Amaladoss, Raimundo Panikkar and Michel Fédou have much relevance in the Kingdom building process at the Oratory. M. Amaladoss was of the opinion that all people are invited to live the values of the Kingdom of God. He affirmed that the Kingdom of God was like a new humanity that enjoyed liberty, communion and justice, and that all people with goodwill could participate in the life of the Kingdom.⁶⁴⁸ He argued that it's in the construction of the Kingdom that the Church becomes local and pertinent to the social context. For him, the dialogue between the Gospel and the culture helps in building the Kingdom.⁶⁴⁹ He believed that transmission of faith was aligned with the option for poor, the option for culture and the option for dialogue with other religions. M. Amaladoss claimed that people belonging to different religions and cultures would walk together and converse with each other to create a new community of the Kingdom. He opined that this new orientation of the new community, which would help everyone grow in faith despite their religious backgrounds, was guided by the Spirit and the Word. The mission is essentially to create a just society and a dynamic community composed of people coming from all sectors of life. The Spirit would bring together people from different cultures and religions to form a harmonious community.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ M. Amaladoss, « Le Royaume de Dieu, but de la mission. » in *Spiritus*, No. 140, Paris, Karthala, 1995, p. 293.

⁶⁴⁹ M. Amaladoss, *A la rencontre des cultures – Comment conjuguer unité et pluralité dans les Églises ?* Paris, Atelier, 1997, p. 77.

⁶⁵⁰ M. Amaladoss, 1997, p. 81-83. The *option for the poor* has got a strategic dimension. It's not to make the rich poor or the poor rich, but to liberate all people, so as to make a new community based on fraternity and sharing. Every person has a place in this process, though some will be leaders. The gospels have assigned a special place to the poor and the marginalized, and it is interesting to note that the poor and the marginalized have a special interest in the gospels. The *option for culture* means to say that the gospels bring new light into culture, even though it appears to be counter-culture. The gospels help people leave ghetto culture. We need to recognize the existence of multi-culturalism in our times, and look for greater interaction between different cultures in a given milieu. The gospels will help us cross borders between different cultures. The *option for dialogues* with other religions calls for a prophetic voice. It's not the religions that dialogue but people who belong to different religious traditions that create an ambiance of dialogue.

R. Panikkar propagated the presence of Christ in Hinduism. For him, dialogue had to be based on the experience of the believer. His approach of blending the Western and Eastern theology could be relevant in a context like the Oratory where pilgrims come from different parts of the world. Indian Christological outlook of M. Fédou also could bring new meaning to the kingdom building process at the Oratory. The task of the educators in faith is to promote themes that are common to different religious traditions, including the fundamental questions of human life: the meaning of life and death and the experiences of love, suffering and happiness. In the whole process of dialogue with various religious traditions and cultures, freedom of religious and spiritual expressions should be given prominence.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is inevitable in any setting of inter-religious dialogue. At the Oratory, the Spirit inspires the educators in faith to convey to all people the message of the Good News. The Holy Spirit prompts the proclamation of faith and leads people in the right direction. “The Holy Spirit is present and active among the hearers of the Good News even before the Church’s missionary action comes to operation.”⁶⁵¹ It is important to get into inter-religious dialogues that “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found” among people of different religious traditions.⁶⁵² The presence of these virtues is attributed to the Holy Spirit who, as the Vatican Council II teaches, was “already at work in the world before Christ was glorified.”⁶⁵³ One finds these values not only in individuals but also “in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples.”⁶⁵⁴ One cannot dissociate the Holy Spirit from the “Word made flesh.” It is the Spirit that makes human beings get in touch with the “Word made flesh”, the Son of God who brings salvation to all people.

The declaration *Dominus Iesus* concluded its section on the Holy Spirit by saying, “the action of the Spirit is not outside or parallel to the action of Christ. There is only one salvific economy of the One and Triune God, realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value

⁶⁵¹ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, No. 64 & 68, Rome, Vatican, 1991.

⁶⁵² Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, Rome, Vatican, 1965, # 2.

⁶⁵³ Paul VI, *Ad Gentes, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, Rome, Vatican, 1965, # 4.

⁶⁵⁴ Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Rome, Vatican, 1964, # 17.

to all humanity and to the entire universe.”⁶⁵⁵ Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, Hindus at the Oratory experience God while performing their religious practices. The Spirit guides everyone. It is the Spirit that would show the way to all humans, who want to be filled with life, by entering into greater association, collaboration and communion with them. “It is the Spirit that gives life” (John 6: 63). It is the same Spirit of God because God is Spirit. “God is Spirit, and those who worship must worship in Spirit and truth” (John 4: 24). Having this wider understanding of God will help people have a genuine experience of encounter and communion with God and other humans.

11.3. Authentic God-experience

Authentic God-experience leads people into the unfamiliar – a terrain where God, not people, is in control. Saint Augustine said, “if you can understand it, it is not God.”⁶⁵⁶ Often, people try to limit God to their little personal worlds, whereas God wants them to be part of His bigger world. In Jesus’ parlance, it is the “Kingdom of God” where everyone has a place. Authentic God-experience comes when people go beyond their narrow perceptions and shallow experiences. They need courage to think outside the bounds of their usual thoughts, act beyond the limits of their normal actions and live larger than their routine lives.

In the present times, organized religion is facing challenges with regard to its structured functioning and well-written dogmas. Some people challenge hierarchy, structures and dogmas, whereas others silently keep themselves away from them. For instance, some people do not want to become members of any religious institution or parish but they like to go there for their personal devotions. Some people are revolutionaries and others are contemplatives. Finding a middle path, one has to create an atmosphere in which God-experience is made possible. Belief systems, and also religious practices, could be right or wrong; they could be questioned or followed submissively. Essentially, people need to have a deeper encounter at the levels of inner life, prayer, religious practices, spiritual disciplines and contemplative practices. When

⁶⁵⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus, Declaration on the unicity and the salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, Rome, Vatican, 2000, # 12.

⁶⁵⁶ A. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages – An Encyclopedia*, Cambridge, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999, p. 389.

Christians and Hindus have a larger view of God, they encounter each other confidently, being aware of the interconnectedness between them. In my study, I have elaborated the predominant beliefs of Hindus who come to the Oratory to perform different religious practices. Qualitative interviews helped me discern that most of the Hindus were open to Christian values and religious practices while they remained to be Hindus.

In the beginning, Christianity was merely a spiritual movement led by Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew. He was filled with the life of God and was obedient to his Father in heaven. It gave him greater freedom to be what he was, and he always remained in affiliation with his Father. However, he was not well understood by the chief priests and religious heads of his time. He had to undergo a period of tension and hardships as he opposed the institutional religious structures and functioning of his time. Finally, he had to give up his life as a price for his spiritual movement which continued by his disciples. Gradually over time, as communities formed and took shape, they had to be institutionalized with certain norms and criteria. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

In the same way, Hindu *bhakti* was a spiritual movement. The concept of *bhakti* had to undergo some strain when the Brahmins of Vedic times did not accept it. Gradually, some people tried to institutionalize *bhakti*. They even claimed that it was a religion in itself. When spirituality and religion reconcile, there is a point of convergence where people develop a combination of spiritual and religious practices that give meaning to their daily existence.

When it comes to spirituality and religion, there could be different types of tensions: tension between the institutional and the spiritual, tension between the dogmatic and the spiritual, tension between the sacramental and spiritual, tension between the ethical and the spiritual. Religions have set rules and dogmas to be followed, and spirituality has the liberty to practice what brings meaning to life. Religions have a public presence, whereas spirituality has a private form. It is to be noted that religions include spiritual practices. Some spiritual practices can reduce tensions among religions. The authority of *homo spiritualis* comes from the values that one holds in life along with one's personal experiences and testimony. Those who are "spiritual"

always seek to go beyond what they are, but often do not reach where they want to be. As a result, they look for institutional, dogmatic, sacramental and ethical principles or frameworks to get an overwhelming experience in their quest to go beyond themselves.

From the time of birth to the end of life on earth, humans seek to improve the quality of their lives. Formal and informal education, familial, social and religious gatherings help them to grow to become what they want to be. The thirst for the Divine seems to be innate in every human being, and there are numerous ways to quench this thirst. While some people travel for miles and miles to encounter the Divine, others make a journey into their inner-life for a similar encounter. I have emphasised that Catholic liturgy and Hindu *bhakti* propose various paths to encounter God. Numerous physical gestures, prayers, chants, *mantras*, *japas* and music have common elements in Catholic liturgy and Hindu *bhakti* that help people experience God. In both Christianity and Hinduism, the use of liturgical sacramental and symbols like Holy Water and light leads people to a meeting point of higher reality. Through various religious practices, people realize that God is an experience and not a theology. Humans search for the truth all along their life. If the search is conducted in complete freedom, one would realize that the truth is that which touches one's heart and changes one's life. Catholic liturgy and Hindu *bhakti* need to be oriented in such a way that there is space for freedom and truth. Above all, humans are interconnected. Experiencing that human interconnectedness through our divine association is the transition from charity to compassion. It is an experience of going beyond one's self to a higher spiritual experience. Whether people belong to one or the other religious tradition, they are not deterred from joining hands together to form a community of love. In the above perspective, sharing of the Oratory as a sacred place has much relevance for our time. At the Oratory, people find a blend of religion and spirituality.

11.4. Christian-Hindu encounter at the Oratory

Christians affirm that all humans are created in the "image and likeness of God" (Genesis 1: 27). When Jesus says, "the Father and I are one" (John 10: 30), one understands that though being different from the Father, he is united with Him. They are united in the communion of love, i.e. Holy Spirit. Greater God-experience arises from greater love received and given. "Whoever fails

to love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4: 8). The mystery of the communion of humans with God cannot be understood without love because love is a reciprocal bond. “We have recognized for ourselves, and put our faith in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 John 4: 16). All humans desire to live life fully, and seek out the richer meanings of their lives.

God, being the Ultimate Reality, is also the final goal of all people. Humans, in as much as they are spiritual beings and are created in the “image and likeness of God”, are neither totally different from God nor identical to him. Hence the search for God is both possible and meaningful. God reveals himself to humans in different ways. If God reveals himself to Christians through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, it is through various *avatāras* that He reveals Himself to Hindus. However, the critical object is to experience that God, who is close to people in revelation yet distant in his infinity. In my study, I noted that humans experience the Divine in manifold ways; especially through their participation in various religious and spiritual practices. I have pointed out that though Christians and Hindus belong to two distinct religious worlds, there possibly are areas of encounter in the common search for God; especially in physical gestures and practices that evoke body and spirit. Moved by the Spirit who is the source of love, Christians and Hindus do different religious practices. Moved by compassion, a fundamental and deep-seated human instinct, Christians and Hindus recognize their interconnectedness.

Catholic liturgy, including Sacraments and Sacramental, are “visible signs of the invisible reality.” They symbolize more than what they are because the mystery behind them is richer and greater. If the Church considers herself to be the mystery of salvation associated with Christ, she cannot claim to be the author of salvation as Christ himself is. Catholic liturgical celebrations help humans rediscover this element of God’s mystery to cherish a higher spirituality that goes beyond a religious framework. Similarly, Hindu *bhakti* is universal and goes beyond *jāti* and *varna*. Though connected to various schools of philosophy having different interpretations of it, *bhakti* is essentially a way to cherish a higher spirituality that goes beyond a religious structure. The religious practices of Christians and Hindus have higher and larger existential and philosophical meanings that are based on the mystery of God’s love. Though Christian and

Hindu religious practices have quite distinct manners, they mutually illuminate each other and, thus, become beacons of hope and symbols of mutual support for humans in search of God.

11.5. Haven of peace

Every religion is unique. The individuality of each religion reveals different aspects of the Supreme Mystery. Religions need to enrich each other. In their diversity, they should allow people to more deeply experience the richness of the One. There is profound sharing of experience to build communion in true interreligious dialogue. Religious expressions and practices of the other, who does not belong to one's faith tradition, deserve greater respect. The sharing of experiences is easier between people of different religions. The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference qualifies interreligious dialogue as a journey in the company of the Holy Spirit to discover from where He comes and to where His grace goes.⁶⁵⁷ Recognizing the identity of the other, it is easier, and acceptable, to say that the Spirit is at work in the hearts of Hindus than to say that Jesus Christ saves Hindus. However, speaking about the Spirit without talking about Jesus Christ carries the risk of being vague in Christian theological reflections because the Spirit of God is inseparably the Spirit of Christ.

In this research, I have studied the religious practices of Hindus at the Oratory and the transmission of Christian faith in a new environment with people belonging to different faiths. I have elaborated the opinions of Hindus, who perform their religious practices, and educators in faith, who transmit Christian faith. I have pointed out the attitude of Christians toward people belonging to other faiths and the attitude of Hindus towards Christian faith.

The Second Vatican Council documents helped me see how the Catholic Church has boldly opened her doors to all people, acknowledging that there are elements of truth in different faith traditions. The hermeneutical outlook of my study shows that many Hindus find meaning in the person of Jesus Christ. They are attracted to the saintly figures of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André. The Oratory has become a hub of religions for people belonging to different faith traditions, especially for Hindus. Amidst the diversity of faith traditions of people at the Oratory,

⁶⁵⁷ *Documentation Catholique*, No. 2217, Paris, Bayard, 2 janvier 2000, p. 42.

the educators in faith help people grow in unity. Diversity is the richness and unity is the oneness of the people. Diversity and unity infuse new life and relevance to the transmission of Christian faith at the Oratory within the new phenomenon of a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious milieu.

In concluding my research study, I affirm the following points:

- Praxeology is a suitable methodology to conduct research at the Oratory where there is a pastoral field of human encounter and religious practices.
- Qualitative research interviews bring out real human experiences. The interviews conducted at the Oratory with Hindus and educators in faith brought out not only their views and opinions about different religious practices but also their personal spiritual experiences and growth in life.
- Religious pluralism is, both, an ancient and modern phenomenon. It has existed since the beginning of Christianity.
- Theologians of the Second Vatican Council brought new light to Catholic theological reflections regarding non-Christians. They declared that Christianity did not reject anything good in other religions.
- Sharing of sacred places existed in different parts of the world. However, it's comparatively a new phenomenon at Saint Joseph's Oratory. The Oratory brings spiritual care and solace to thousands of people through sharing of its sacred space.
- Saint Joseph's Oratory is a hub of religions for people belonging to different faith traditions. Hindus get enrichment and solace in their spiritual life through their religious practices at the Oratory.
- The inter-religious platform at the Oratory provides an opportunity for people of different faith traditions to discover the mystery of Jesus Christ.
- In any inter-religious dialogue, one needs to respect the specificity of every religion without judgment.
- Context-based Christology can help discover the mystery of Christ at the Oratory. Indian theological reflections would help the present interreligious context at the Oratory to continue its mission.

- Hindus grow in their faith through their religious practices at the Oratory. They also accept Christian values and teachings while becoming closer to Jesus Christ. Thus, the Oratory nourishes the piety and devotion of Hindus. However, Hindus at the Oratory prefer to remain as Hindus without converting themselves to Christianity.
- Physical gestures, verbal and non-verbal communications and *bhakti* expressions of Hindus help them in their prayers and worship at the Oratory. Some Christians who distanced themselves from their pious and religious practices get inspired by the Hindus' fervour. Therefore, there is reciprocal Christian-Hindu enlightenment at the Oratory; they help each other grow in their faith.
- Christian-Hindu unity and diversity at the Oratory is a model of peace propagation in the world.
- The exemplary life of the educators in faith can inspire Hindus in their spiritual journey. Personal witness of faith life is important in the setting of religious pluralism.
- The cultural and linguistic diversity of the educators in faith at the Oratory brings newness and enthusiasm in the transmission of Christian faith.
- The figures of Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André inspire many pilgrims including non-Christians. Hindus experience miracles and receive favours through the intercessions of saintly figures at the Oratory.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit is inevitable at the Oratory where people of different faith traditions walk hand in hand and share the sacred space.
- Hindus at the Oratory will not change the Catholic identity of the institution. Regular administration of the Sacraments and Sacramental helps nurture the Catholic character of the Oratory.
- A new generation of educators in faith will be composed of people coming from different continents with varied cultures and languages. They will be better disposed to welcome Hindus and people belonging to other faiths. They might cross barriers of unique culture, language and ethnicity.
- The Oratory administration will have to set up an Office to welcome and accompany people belonging to different religious traditions who are in their quest for the Divine.

- French tradition, culture and language will enrich the new comers – both, educators in faith and Hindus – to the Oratory.
- The educators in faith will continue to transmit Christian faith unreservedly to non-Christians. They will affirm the fact that Jesus Christ is unique and universal; he is the Saviour; the Word made flesh. However, they will remain to be compassionate and merciful to non-Christians just by keeping an inclusive attitude that Jesus himself projected during his public ministry.

I believe that Jesus Christ is unique because he is not only a religious expression but also a historical figure. His incarnation, earthly life, passion, death on the Cross, resurrection and ascension compose a unique event in all of human history. In my view, he is unique because as the Son of God he is the only mediator between God and humanity, and the characteristic of his uniqueness makes him universal. I consider Jesus Christ as, both, unique and universal, and that all religious aspirations are oriented toward him through the action of the Holy Spirit. According to me, each religious tradition has one divine Reality present in it. The divine Mystery reveals itself to all those who contemplate the depth of life in God. I opine that humans will have to venture beyond their reasoning and allow the divine Mystery to capture their entire being. I suggest that the Mystery of God is neither limited to a few saintly figures and *avatāras* nor to specific religious practices of Hindus or Christians. The Mystery of God becomes evident to those who open up their minds, in faith, to a transcendent Reality. Finally, I propose that true openness to other faiths, while maintaining a commitment to one's own faith tradition, is an asset in the process of rising into transcendence. Religious pluralism at the Oratory and in Quebec society invites Christians to live their faith more ardently so that their very existence may transmit Christian faith.

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ANNEX

ANNEX 1

Questions for interview with Hindus

Section A: Specific to faith life

1. Do you have faith in God?
2. What are your religious practices to sustain your faith? Name five of them.
3. Can you imagine yourself as an instrument of transmitting your faith? If so, how do you do it?
4. What are the impressions, prejudices, fears and anxieties you have about people of other faith tradition? Name five of them.
5. In your opinion, is it possible to grow in faith through religious rituals and practices?
6. Do you think that inter-faith platform and meeting will nourish your faith?

Section B: Specific to Saint Joseph's Oratory

7. Do you come regularly to Saint Joseph's Oratory? If yes, approximately how many times in a year?
8. What do you normally do when you come to Saint Joseph's Oratory? Name five activities that you do.
9. Do you think that you become closer to the Divine through your participation in different religious activities at Saint Joseph's Oratory? If yes, how?
10. What do you receive through your visit at Saint Joseph's Oratory?
11. How do you associate yourself with the religious atmosphere at Saint Joseph's Oratory that is in line with Catholic tradition?
12. Do you try to understand Christian faith and its practice at Saint Joseph's Oratory?
13. While you come to Saint Joseph's Oratory, do you meet with priests, religious or lay people who are at various services and dialogue with them about your faith or their faith?
14. Do you think that you grow in faith through your visits at Saint Joseph's Oratory?
15. Are you well received at Saint Joseph's Oratory?

16. What are your positive and negative experiences at Saint Joseph's Oratory? Name three each.
17. What are your expectations while you come to Saint Joseph's Oratory?
18. After having visited Saint Joseph's Oratory, have you thought of becoming a Christian at any time?

Section C: Specific to Religious Practices

19. What is your understanding of *bhakti* in Hinduism?
20. Do you practice *bhakti* in general?
21. Do you practice *bhakti* at Saint Joseph's Oratory?
22. Do you light candles at Saint Joseph's Oratory? If yes, why?
23. Have you ever celebrated the festival of *Dīpavali*?
24. Do you take Holy Water from Saint Joseph's Oratory? If yes, why?
25. Have you ever used *tīrtha* or the water used for *pūjā* in a Hindu temple?
26. What is your understanding of *avatāras*?
27. Do you foster Krishna *bhakti*, Shiva *bhakti* or Jesus *bhakti*?
28. Who are Saint Joseph and Saint Brother André for you? Do you have *bhakti* towards them?
29. Do you think that *bhakti* helps you grow in faith and associate yourself to the religious atmosphere of Saint Joseph's Oratory?
30. Do you think that *bhakti* leads you to *Moksha*?

ANNEX 2

Questions d'interview avec les éducateurs à la foi chrétienne

Section A : La foi chrétienne

1. Avez-vous la foi en Dieu?
2. Quelles sont vos activités religieuses pour nourrir votre foi? Énumérez cinq activités.
3. Êtes-vous un agent de la transmission de la foi chrétienne? Si oui, comment la transmettez-vous? Énumérez cinq manières que vous utilisez pour la transmission.
4. Quels sont vos impressions, vos préjugés, vos peurs et vos inquiétudes envers les gens d'une autre tradition religieuse? Énumérez cinq.
5. Selon vous, est-il possible de grandir dans la foi chrétienne par la participation aux rites religieux?
6. Pensez-vous qu'un milieu interreligieux peut enrichir les chrétiens dans leur pratique de la foi?

Section B : L'Oratoire Saint-Joseph

1. Depuis combien de temps travaillez-vous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?
2. Quelles sont vos activités à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?
3. Pensez-vous que l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph est un lieu privilégié pour la transmission de la foi chrétienne? Si oui, pourquoi? Énumérez cinq raisons.
4. Pensez-vous que vous êtes un éducateur à la foi chrétienne dans la lignée de la pensée de Basile Moreau, le fondateur de la congrégation de Sainte-Croix?
5. Pensez-vous que le frère André, le fondateur de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph, mettait l'accent sur la transmission de la foi chrétienne tout en faisant un service d'accueil et d'accompagnement?
6. Avez-vous constaté qu'il y a un changement dans la provenance des visiteurs et des pèlerins à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, comment réagissez-vous à ce changement?
7. Avez-vous initié des pratiques religieuses à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, lesquelles et pourquoi?
8. Avez-vous l'habitude d'allumer des bougies à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, pourquoi?

9. Que pensez-vous de gens qui adoptent cette pratique d'allumer les bougies à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?
10. Avez-vous utilisé de l'eau bénite de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, pourquoi?
11. Que pensez-vous de gens qui utilisent de l'eau bénite de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?
12. Parmi les nombreuses pratiques pastorales et dévotionnelles à l'Oratoire, lesquelles préférez-vous maintenir pour la transmission de la foi chrétienne?
13. Pensez-vous qu'un milieu interreligieux est une menace à l'héritage et à la tradition de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?

Section C : Rencontre Hindoue-Chrétienne

1. Avez-vous rencontré des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, comment les repérez-vous?
2. Avez-vous observé que les hindous participent aux activités religieuses à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, à quelles activités participent-ils le plus?
3. Quelles sont vos réactions par rapport aux hindous qui participent aux activités à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Énumérez cinq.
4. Avez-vous rencontré des difficultés par rapport à l'accueil des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?
5. Avez-vous dialogué avec des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, qui a pris l'initiative pour ce dialogue?
6. Avez-vous parlé de Dieu avec des hindous? Si oui, de quel Dieu parliez-vous?
7. Que pensez-vous de la *bhakti* dans l'hindouisme et son influence sur les hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?
8. Que pensez-vous de l'*avatāra* dans l'hindouisme? Pensez-vous que les hindous sont attirés par les figures de saint Joseph et de saint frère André?
9. Pensez-vous qu'il y a un possible syncrétisme à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph? Si oui, comment pouvez-vous l'expliquer?
10. Comment envisagez-vous de transmettre la foi chrétienne dans le contexte de la présence des hindous à l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph?

ANNEX 3

AUTHORISATION FROM THE INSTITUTION

The praxeological study of this research is done in the context of Saint Joseph's Oratory. Every institution has its rules and regulations. For this reason, it was essential to obtain an authorisation from the highest authority of the institution to conduct a study that concerns its life and structure. It is the responsibility of the researcher to respect the regulations of the institution while using its data for research purpose. The researcher used the name data bank of Saint Joseph's Oratory to get fifty names of potential candidates to participate in the interview after which the initial contact and gradual selection of candidates were done.

ANNEX 4

ETHICAL CERTIFICATE

This research concerns human beings, and thus the researcher obtained an Ethical Certificate from the pluri-disciplinary committee of ethic from the University of Montreal. As per the rules of the ethical committee, there is a validity period for the certificate. The certificate was renewed periodically till the end of the research thesis submission.

ANNEX 5

FORMULA OF CONSENT

The first part of the formula of consent gives precise information about the research to the participants and the second part is the consent itself with the signatures of the selected candidate. The confidentiality, advantages and inconveniences of the interviewees and their right to withdrawal from the participation in the interview are clearly mentioned in the formula of consent.