

I stand here before you not only to celebrate this historic event in the life of the Church in India and more specially in Poona but more importantly to share an experience. I refer to this evening's celebration of the presence of the German, Swiss and Austrian Jesuit missionaries and their legacy in the fields of education and social work. I have been a beneficiary of this experience as student, seminarian, priest and bishop. And therefore together with you all I thank God for the gift of the German, Swiss and Austrian Jesuits. Together we remember them with affection, aware of a sense of challenge to live up to their expectations and to carry on their legacy.

When reflecting on the past we must suspend our judgement on their ministry as we see it today and transport ourselves to the context in which they worked. They were children of their times and worked with conviction. As one bishop put it at the Synod for Asia, *"The missionaries may have made mistakes from today's viewpoint. But I am ever grateful to them for bringing me the most precious gift of Jesus."*

What inspired them to leave the comfort and security of their country and come and spend their lives in selfless service in the Western Region of India? They came in 1854 at the invitation of Bishop Anastasius Hartmann - himself a Capuchin. The Capuchins and Carmelites had ministered before them. It was a period of the Padroado and Propaganda tussle and the Catholics directly under Rome were morally, socially and culturally in a bad way. The Jesuits were called by Bishop Anastasius Hartmann OFM Cap to raise up these Catholics.

These pioneers faced a long and dangerous voyage and many did not reach India. In India itself they had to look after a vast area from Quetta to Hubli. They travelled by bullock-cart and horseback. There were scarcely any medical facilities on the whole, especially in the rural areas. Quite a few young missionaries died before they could be taken miles and miles to a hospital.

Their accommodation was simple, sometimes primitive. The people, the culture, the language were foreign to them. But they worked hard and persevered.

What was their driving motivation? It was Jesus and to continue his mission. For this they were ready to sacrifice even their lives. The need to lift up the Christian community impelled them to start schools. Within 20 years they had started St. Patrick's School in Karachi; St. Mary's in Hubli; St. Stanislaus and St. Mary's, St. Xavier's in Mumbai and started St. Xavier's College in Mumbai.

### **3 observations as an aside:-**

Many might not know that the St. Xavier's college was to be started in Poona. But the priest Dr. Sheehan who was to head the college died in 1850 and it was then decided to build the college in Mumbai.

St. Vincent's in Pune was started by the S.V.P. and then handed over to the Jesuits.

St. Patrick's in Karachi had many political and religious luminaries as students – Cardinal Valerian Gracias, Cardinal Joseph Cordeiro, Archbishop Raymond, Bishop William Gomes etc. Gen. Musharaf and Advani were products of St. Patrick's.

Besides schools the missionaries started social works and later inspired other religious to start medical institutions.

### **What are the challenges we face looking over the last 150 years?**

1. Like Ignatius his sons must be gripped and fascinated by the Person of Jesus. Their lives must be centered on Jesus. As Fr. Neuner observed, *“This personal, almost absorbing, attachment to Jesus’ person remains the core of his (Ignatius’) spirituality”* and then asks *“Is this still our spirituality?”*

To proclaim the Kingdom without proclaiming the King is meaningless. To be a Jesuit without deep attachment to Jesus is to be a Jesuit in name only.

One of my earliest recollections as a young priest was in Harigaon. A young Jesuit was about to leave on his motorcycle. There was a bedroll and luggage on the carrier. He informed me he would be out for a week visiting mission stations. He would spend each night under a tree. Every evening he would sit with the villagers and listen to them. This would go on week after week.

The jeep has saved time but have we preserved the custom of spending the evening and even the night in a village, being with the people, listening to them?

2. **what is our present commitment and dedication compared to our predecessors?**

Fr. Tony de Melo wrote that *a pilot cannot fly with yesterday’s weather report.*

Times have changed vastly and we cannot compare their living conditions to ours. But is the same spirit there with regard to our life-style, readiness to go when and where we are sent? Do we seek the more important schools and posts? Do Jesuits stand by one another?

I have experienced missionary meetings in the Ahmednagar District and also in the Bombay Province where there was hard talk and even personal attacks. But after the meeting all were brothers. It amazed me because we Indians find it difficult to be brothers when we or our projects or administration are strongly criticized.

The challenge facing the Jesuits today is to remain a team. To quote Cardinal Gracias, *“We must disagree without becoming disagreeable.”*

3. **Pioneering Spirit:** The first missionaries had to be pioneers. They needed to be creative. They experimented and failed at times, but they persevered. They tried to read the signs of the times and act accordingly.

Parish work was not the main charism, but they took up parishes to be in touch with the people. They started institutions in response to the needs of the people – boardings, Dynanamata with an agricultural bias, technical schools, Snehasadan, the Social Centre.

**Today we need that creativity.** Loans to farmers, watershed programmes, Mahila Mandals etc. are some examples. The world is changing so fast that we can be left behind. We cannot rest on our laurels. What are the new initiatives that are being planned?

4. **Challenges in Education:** Speaking to the bishops of USA in June 2004 Pope John Paul II reaffirmed, *“Her many religious, educational and charitable institutions exist for one reason only: to proclaim the Gospel. It is utmost importance, therefore, that the Church’s institutions be genuinely Catholic: Catholic in their self understanding and Catholic in their identity.”*

A few quotes, slightly edited, from the Roman document of October 2002 on “The Mission of Catholic Schools” provide us guidelines.

*“The Catholic School must enable the students to raise great questions concerning the meaning of life, the significance of reality, and a responsible commitment to transform it in the light of the Gospel Values and modern culture... The poor and the marginalized must have a central place in our educational programmes.....”*

The CBCI meeting in 1977 says *“Our educational institutions particularly those catering to the more privileged classes, should become agents of social change.”*

Writing on Ignatius Fr. Tom Kunnunkal has this: *“Ignatius saw education can become an effective agent of transformation.”*

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (N. 18) Pope Paul VI spoke of *“Changing society through the power of the Gospel. Our institutions can be and should be agents of change in a society riddled with discrimination, corruption, denial of human rights, greed for money, power, position, ethnic riots.”*

President Abdul Kalam has words of high praise for the Jesuits. *“The Jesuits are doing something holy, something sacrosanct by working in the field of education. Education gives one the ultimate human value. They have made excellent contributions not only in India but the world over.”*

**Globalization of Love:** People speak of the globalisation of justice, peace and solidarity. Only the Holy Father Pope John Paul II has spoken of the globalisation of love. The world has little understanding of that. But the challenge for the Church throughout the ages is to globalise love. The early Christians were known for their love, which was confined more to the Christians. *“See these Christians how they love one another.”*

Jean Vanier commenting on the Holy Father’s Message for Lent 2002 writes, *“They discover that to be human and to be Christian means to love people. Things and projects are important but should always be oriented towards people. Martin Buber, the Jewish Philosopher, says that when*

*societies put too much emphasis on acquiring things, they tend to lose the importance of relationships. And yet the treasure of us human beings is precisely relationships, the heart. The road to conflict resolution and justice can only come through dialogue, relationship and love.”*

Children today have more knowledge and information than we had at their age. But most of them lack balance and emotional maturity. We older people had problems too in school and college but they were minor compared to what students go through today. They lack emotional support because they often lack parental love. They get much more pocket money and bigger presents than before, but money and gifts are no substitutes for love.

The most troublesome students normally are craving attention.

In our educational institutions we are called to be educators and not just administrators. *“The heart of education is education of the heart. We must help our students to become really good human beings, have the right values, and live for something worthwhile. Academic life is important, but, by itself, it is really inadequate. In fact, if we are not careful, we can turn out successful egoists, or deeply corrupt professionals who ‘did well’ in our schools.” (Fr. Joe Mannath SDB).*

Efficient administration and excellent results lead us to forget that we are **dealing with persons** whom we can hurt in our quest for that excellence, efficiency and 100% results. 100% results has become an idol in many institutions. Even Jesus had only 91.7% success with his apostles.

#### **The (Principal) head can become an:**

- *Executive director of pastoral work*
- *absorbed in administration, supervision, planning and organization... no longer have adequate time to dedicate himself to the people for whom he is working.*
- *Impedes being close to the ones they are serving*
- *The issue here is of giving more time, taking more interest, being more available to people, to those who have better human qualities: more intelligent, more interesting, entertaining, more pleasant and attractive.*
- *Subtly relegated to second place are those who are less gifted: those who are dull, bland, less intelligent, less attractive and charming.*
- *Most common form of personal presence in ministry.*
- *Option for the poor should not be restricted to the sociological level but consider as well the “poor” in external human qualities, those psychologically discriminated against in receiving care. (Segundo Galilea)*

In today’s world of hectic schedules not only our students but also their parents and the teachers have personal, family, workplace problems and have no one to talk to. Priests, brothers can render valuable service by listening – just listening. They do not need solutions from us, but just that we think them so important that we give them our time.

Listening is a virtue that is very difficult for religious and priests. At once we come up with advice. Let people speak their hearts out. And when we listen we have to go to not only what they are saying but what they want to say but are not saying.

To give you an example: I used to be intrigued by the complaint of the poor, "*The Church has done nothing for us.*" This is not true. We have educated 1000s of poor people and raised them up. The poor themselves know this. What they have not put into words is, "*You have done very much for us, but you never accepted us.*"

There we must strike our breast and acknowledge our fault. We have served with commitment and dedication, but often we have not loved, which means accepting persons as they were.

We priests and religious find it difficult to listen not only to others but even to one another.

Even in schools today the Principal as Head is valid, as Boss is outdated. Teamwork, personal relationships are of primary importance.

How many teachers or parents dare to tell Principals negative observations? I hear complaints and when I ask the person, "But have you spoken to the Principal?" They say "No". parents will add, "My child will suffer." That does not speak well of us. People feel we are not open to objective criticism. When I bring to the notice of a priest/sister some negative observation that I have heard the first question in the mind is not whether it is true or not, but who told the bishop.

Today the in-thing is **empowerment**. In General Chapters of the Society empowerment especially of lay people, of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and women is stressed. Much has been done in this field and the Jesuits can be proud of their involvement in fighting against injustice and in working for upliftment.

My point is how much empowerment has taken place? In the social sphere people are being trained to fight for their rights and not depend on the priests/brothers. Is this taking place in the educational sphere? How much power do we give our teachers and lay Principals?

Speaking about Inter-Religious collaboration at the CRI Plenary Assembly, Priests' Section in August 2004, Fr. Lisbert D'Souza S.J. spoke of 3 blocks. One is the "*Difficulty we have in playing second fiddle. This is most noticeable in our reluctance to have laity work with us on equal terms, and even more in allowing them the final word in decision making.*"

The most difficult instrument to play in any orchestra is second fiddle, especially when lay people are above.

I have mentioned reading the signs of the times and creativeness. Technical schools were started for those who could not finish their school education. St. Vincent's Night College was begun in order to help working youngsters to get a degree. They have proved to be very beneficial.

Today, the formal system of education is inadequate to serve the needs of the marginalized. We have many dropouts. They are helped by non-formal systems of education. It is then not difficult for these students to pass the SSC examination.

In the cities we need to invest more in providing education at all levels in the vernacular medium. Option for the poor means moving out to remote rural areas and new urban areas.

These are tall orders and seem beyond the reach of individual organizations. **Networking** is the need of the hour. The last Plenary Assembly of the CRI Men's Section had the theme "Inter Religious Collaboration." We have to go beyond inter-religious collaboration to wider networking, making use of the expertise and professionalism of others and offering to other institutions our strength and resources.

The Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education is trying to read the signs of the times. It has introduced **new subjects**. *"The revised syllabi will incorporate topics as diverse as life skills training, stress management, human rights awareness, ecological conservation, child labour, space technology, water management, agricultural techniques and how to cope with privatization and globalization."* (Times of India, 30 Aug. 2004)

The corporate world realizes that new career options have arisen. Youngsters *"now aspire to be business managers, advertisers, fashion designers, models, flight attendants, consultants, travel agents, IT engineers and, of course, call center executives."* (Times of India). This need has spawned private institutions and universities focused on providing special skills and jobs for students after schooling. Today's world seeks not only people who are educated but who also have skills. Unscrupulous players have entered this playing field.

Where do we stand? What are our plans?

We decry corruption in our country, but can turn a blind eye to corruption in our institutions. The tuition racket is making many of our teachers lakhpattis. Parents who cannot afford to pay the tuition fees are spending hundreds of rupees on tuitions. They feel compelled to do so, otherwise "Teacher will fail my child." I have mentioned this more than once at meetings of our Diocesan Board of Education. Can we find a solution to help our parents by stopping this rampant disease?

We also need to reflect on the new trend in many of our schools – I am speaking of our schools in general – to build and build. That is not the problem. The point is how do we raise the funds? A Donation by its very definition is voluntary. Are the donations really voluntary? I know of cases where the student was humbled before the entire class because the donation was paltry.

There is a lot of talk among parents when contributions are forced. Principals will not hear of it because of the old refrain, "My child should not suffer."

Many Catholic parents here in Pune have sent their children to schools of other faiths. This is not because of poverty. Why have they taken this step? I am happy if the reason is that there are too many poor children in our schools and they want schools with elite students. I am disturbed when I hear they find the Principal arrogant, children being beaten, standards going down.

Evaluation of our institutions will show us where we stand.

**Inter-religious dialogue**

The Holy Father speaks of inter-religious dialogue as an essential element of evangelization. To me our schools and social work offer us excellent opportunities for inter-religious dialogue. We do not have to invite people. They are already there in our students, teachers and parents. Let us make use of that.

One idea very close to my heart is for Principals to visit the homes of our Std. X students. Even if they number 150 we can do it over the whole year. The amount of goodwill we can generate is tremendous. Even a radical anti-Church person will not shut the door on the face of the Principal of his child, but will feel honoured at such a visit. He will consider it a blessing that a man of God has entered his house.

Let me end by enumerating some characteristics our educational and social work show manifest.

**Integral formation:**

If we are challenged by our various apostolates to transform society, we cannot accomplish that task all by ourselves. The students we educate and serve, the people we lift up have to become agents of transformation too. They are expected to be whole persons. We call it integral formation. What should be the characteristics? I am quoting Bishop Orlando Quevedo.

- a) "A person of deep convictions or deep religiosity, integrated with culture and life, living the primacy of the religious and the moral in daily life.
- b) "A person who respects deeply the human dignity of every human person, defends and promotes human rights especially of the powerless and voiceless."
- c) "A person of service, inspired to contribute as far as he/she can for the common good, even ready to make sacrifices for the good of the community."
- d) "A person who uses power and position to help others especially the weak and the poor. Works for national integration."

It is our experience that the poor whom we help often do not bother about their brothers and sisters who are poor. They have a decent standard of life but do not want to be reminded of their past. But I know others who want to give to the Church and to their less fortunate brethren their time and even money in gratitude for what they have received.

- e) "A person who builds up a strong family. If family life is solid, the nation will be solid, for the family is the basic unity of society."

"In short our prime objective must be to form men and women who will not live for themselves but live for others, who will try to humanize society."

That is the primacy of love – to live for God and for others. This challenge is beautifully expressed at one of the dismissals in the Mass in Marathi. "*Za parmashwarawar prem ani ek mekachi seva karnyasatti tumhas patveenyath yeth aha.*" "Go you are sent to love God and to serve your brothers and sisters." One could add "**serve them in love**".

While remembering the German speaking missionaries with deep gratitude, we continue their legacy in these vastly different times putting our faith in the Lord who promised us *“I am with you always till the end of time”*, and remembering his admonition, *“Without me you can do nothing.”* We are encouraged by the words of St. Paul, *“I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.”*

**Bishop Valerian D’Souza**