

## JESUIT MISSION IN INDIA TODAY

Jubilee is a time to look back with thanks and celebrate what we have achieved with the grace of God and to start afresh and face the challenges that the world has in store for us with renewed enthusiasm and commitment. During 150 years the Bombay-Poona mission has grown into four flourishing provinces. It has not only built up and stabilized the Church in this area; it is still playing a pioneering role in making real God's reign. It is only fair that we situate this Jubilee period in the wider history of India. India also has grown in the past 150 years. India has become a free country and has been maintaining a functioning democratic process in the midst of many difficulties and tensions. The Indian economy seems to be taking off, though the interests of the poor need to be protected. A socio-religious revolution, with leaders like Ram Mohun Roy, Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru, Narayana Guru and Ambedkar, is still going on with the oppressed and marginalized becoming aware of and demanding their rights. The Church itself, blessed with many vocations, is trying to become an authentic local Church, with a local theology and spirituality, though it is still plagued by multiple dependencies. The Society in Western India has contributed to this development in its own way. It is in this context that we are gathered here to think of the future and to spell out our missionary vision and goals.

Before we start our exercise, it is good to underline a basic constant. The Jesuits are men on mission. They are a group of "friends in the Lord", called to follow and work with Jesus in his mission of realizing God's reign which he had proclaimed and inaugurated. They are open to go anywhere and engage in any task that will further God's reign. They are also committed to excellence in all that they do. Availability and mobility are their characteristics. Taking this constant for granted, I shall focus on our missionary vision and goals. The letter of invitation to this seminar mentions the Second Vatican Council and our 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation as watersheds in our mission practices and vision. It is good then to start with exploring the change that these two events have brought about, both in our awareness and in our options. It is also necessary to complete this enquiry by noting how this change has been further developed and strengthened by Asian theology and by the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation.

### Mission at the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council has changed our vision of mission in three important ways. In its document *Ad Gentes*, 1 it has deepened our vision of mission, by setting it in the context of God's own mission. Mission has its origin in God 'sending' (missioning) the Word and the Spirit to realize God's plan to share God's life with the whole of creation leading all things to a communion in God so that God will be "all in all". (1 Cor 15:28) Particular missions, including that of the Word become flesh in Jesus, have to be set in the context of God's mission. Jesus himself sends his disciples on mission, not merely to plant the Church, as the people generally thought in pre-Vatican times, but to build up the reign of God and the Church as its symbol and servant. These two goals are not identical, while they are related. Asian theology, supported by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, has further developed this perspective. God is present and active also in other religions and cultures so that they too contribute to the building up the reign of God. John Paul II recognizes this in his encyclical *The Mission of the Redeemer*, 28. The Spirit of God is obviously controlling the whole process. We are called to discern and collaborate with the action of the Spirit in every time and place.

Once we recognize the presence and action of the Spirit of God also in other religions and cultures, mission becomes necessarily dialogical. Here again the Second Vatican Council laid the foundations, which have been developed by Asian theology. In its document on Other Religions, recognizing that God is the common origin and goal of all religions, the Council pointed to the ‘seeds of the Word’ in other religions and suggested dialogue with them. In its decree on Religious Liberty, it accepted the freedom of people, based on their human dignity as created in the image of God, to follow any religion of their choice. In the document on the Church in the Modern World, it suggested that the Church has to enter into dialogue with the peoples and cultures of the modern world with their “joy and hope, grief and anguish”. Enlarging this perspective the Asian Bishops suggested that mission or evangelization is the dialogue of the Word of God with the three-fold realities of Asia, namely its many poor, its rich cultures and developed religions. Theologians will later point out that liberation, inculturation and inter-religious dialogue become integral dimensions of mission in such a way that none of them can be done without the others, since they mutually involve each other. They would further specify how this three-fold dialogue becomes mission only when it is a call to conversion and transformation of people and of the world in the light of the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus. Such a call to conversion is rooted in the dialogue with the poor, which therefore becomes the thrust of this integral mission. Mission therefore is not only dialogical, but also prophetic.

The third perspective that the Council emphasized and which has not been much attended to is the vision of the Church as a communion at all levels. The universal Church is a communion of local Churches. The Church at every level should be marked by collegiality and collaboration. The incarnation of the Word of God in the various local cultures of the world and their consequent transformation was recognized as a goal of mission. Inculturation has become a popular word, even if any serious change is blocked at various levels. The Greco-Roman culture is proposed as a norm for all Christians. The synods at various levels seem to be an excuse to discourage true collegiality. The Asians affirmed at a Mission Congress in Manila in 1979 that every local Church is responsible for mission in its own territory and co-responsible for mission everywhere.

### Mission in Our Recent General Congregations

It is in this ecclesial context that we have to set our own 32<sup>nd</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregations. The 32<sup>nd</sup> Congregation spoke of our mission today as “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.” (GC 32, D.4, n.2) This was a revolutionary statement in two ways. The Society has always worked for the poor from its inception. But concern for the poor may have been limited to meeting their needs for subsistence and development. Promotion of justice, however, addresses the structural causes of poverty and struggles with the poor for their transformation. Secondly, working with the poor was traditionally seen as a prelude to or as a consequence of the service of faith. The perspective of GC 32 makes the promotion of justice an integral dimension of the service of faith so that one can speak of “faith that does justice”. In practice, however, there was a tendency among some Jesuits to reduce the service of faith to the promotion of justice. The 34<sup>th</sup> Congregation tried to correct this. It reaffirms: “The aim of our mission received from Christ, as presented in the Formula of the Institute, is the service of faith. The integrating principle of our mission is the

inseparable link between faith and the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom.” (GC 34, D.2, n.14) But it adds: “In the light of Decree 4 and our present experience, we can now say explicitly that our mission of the service of faith and the promotion of justice must be broadened to include, as integral dimensions, proclamation of the Gospel, dialogue, and the evangelization of culture.” (GC 34, D.2, n.20) There is always a risk that, while we are engaged in a variety of apostolates, we forget their interrelatedness and the integrating principle. Besides, our option *for* the poor supposes an option to *be* poor. Its centrality to our mission is underlined by GC 34. “Moved by the Spirit of Jesus, Ignatius and his first companions felt called to “preach in poverty.” The authenticity of our poverty is the test of our being or not being Jesuits, manifestly following Christ “poor and humble,” as we learned in the Spiritual Exercises.” (GC 34, D.9, n.3) Foreseeing the usual objections to such a call to poverty the Congregation adds:

We frequently make use of means and institutions in our apostolates which in themselves are not poor (since they must in fact always be suitable to their apostolic purpose). Here it is fitting to recall that effectiveness and apostolic poverty are two values which must be kept in ongoing tension; this should be the rule for each individual as much as for communities and works. Maintaining this difficult equilibrium requires constant discernment and a readiness to abandon such institutions and means when they no longer result in the “greater service” of God. (GC 34, D.9, n.17)

### The Focus of our Mission Today

Based on these developments in theology after the Second Vatican Council and in our own General Congregations I would like to summarize the focus of our mission today in five points: 1. Our mission is at the service of God’s own mission. Therefore we must read carefully the ‘signs of the times’ while we seek to discern our task in a particular time and place. 2. The goal of our mission is the transformation and reconciliation of the world into the reign of God and the building and functioning of the Church as its symbol and servant. 3. We have to do this in dialogue with all peoples, with their cultures, ideologies and religions, in whom the Spirit of God is present and active in “ways known to God.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22) 4. Such dialogue has to be prophetic, calling people to conversion. A normative point in such conversion will be the promotion of justice. 5. We are called to “preach in poverty”. The situations in which we are called to work, the activities that we take up, the concrete problems that we face and methods that we adopt can and should vary according to time and place. But our focus, commitment and criterion will be the same. Within this framework we can explore our challenges and priorities in our particular context, namely the India of today. To understand this Indian context I shall follow a framework made up of six elements in three pairs: economics-politics, person-society and culture and religion. While the first pair deals with the situation of life in the world, the second looks at the agents who live and act in it and the third evokes the symbols and meaning systems that orient and inspire life and action. The analysis will be rapid.

### A Socially Responsible Economy

India is still a poor country, though rich in human and other resources. Political freedom has not brought economic independence. It remains economically and commercially dependent. The gap between the rich and the poor has been increasing. With organizations like the World

Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization economy and commerce have become global. But globalization has not meant equality. It has only facilitated global domination and exploitation by the few rich. The global economy and the market are driven by the system of liberal capitalism. In the economic and commercial game played between unequal teams – the rich and the poor of the world – the stronger rich obviously dominate. Worse, they rewrite the rules of the game to suit them. Unlike the time of Marx, commerce and banking are more important today than ownership of the means of production. The poorer countries have no choice but to play the game, if they do not wish to be totally marginalized and left out in the cold. In every country, the rich elite collaborate with the richer countries for their own benefit. The phenomenon of globalization has helped multi-national Companies to dominate the globe. Profit is the only motive that drives the economic and commercial enterprise. Corporate structures help to diffuse responsibility and guilt.

The globalization of the media of communications make the poor aware of their plight, especially in a comparative perspective. The poor and the exploited have started protesting. But as there seems to be no alternative to liberal capitalism in sight, something will have to be done to make capitalism socially responsible and just. It must learn, not only to amass wealth, but also to distribute it equitably. I am not speaking of charity, but of just remuneration to the producers of wealth, wherever they are. The ‘free market’ is free only for the rich, not for the poor. So it will have to be socially controlled nationally and internationally.

### A Participative Political System

India became democratic, when it obtained freedom from colonialism. But, feudal arrangements still continue under a veneer of democratic structures. There is an easy alliance between rich landlords and industrialists on the one hand and professional politicians on the other. Sometimes they are the same. Competition for limited resources leads to widespread corruption at all levels. In a majoritarian democracy, the majority, whether ethnic or religious, can dominate the minorities and the minorities become defensive-aggressive. This leads to social tension and violence. There is also fragmentation and ghetto formation. The quest for power is seen in the multitude of political parties and self-styled leaders.

On the other hand freedom movements and the globalization of information have encouraged many subaltern groups to assert their identity and to seek for liberation and autonomy. There is also a desire to be agents of their own destiny, not merely passive objects. The challenges here are the empowerment of the weaker socio-political groups and the move towards a more participative and consensual form of democracy, starting from the grass roots.

### An Egalitarian Society

Political fragmentations often have their roots in social divisions. As I have mentioned already, behind the façade of a democratic order, feudal social structures are still prevalent in India. Loyalty to a leader or to a group take exaggerated forms. The caste system that divides society in a hierarchical order according to the kind of work people do, classified according to a ritual purity-pollution scale, is still very prevalent in India. It relegates some, not only to the bottom of the scale, but beyond the pale, as outcastes and untouchables. They constitute nearly

18% of the Indian population. They suffer multiple oppressions: economic, political and social. Though the Constitution has made untouchability illegal and has initiated a programme of preferential, affirmative action, its benefits reach only a few elite in the group. The Christian Dalits are doubly oppressed, since the caste system is practiced also within the Church.

As an old Indian legal text has it: the women are subject their parents when they are young, to their husbands when they are adult and to their sons when they are old. Abortion of female fetuses and female infanticide is common in India and China. The women are discriminated against in the field of education and in the job market. They constitute armies of cheap labour in industrial production. On the other hand, family values are still strong in India, though these too are under attack from nuclear families in contemporary urban areas.

The challenge is how we can promote authentic equality and community. Democratic voting rights offer a chance to exercise formal equality once every few years. But it does not transform society. We have to be on the side of the marginalized and oppressed. But at the same time our goal is to transform society and to build community. Our aim is not to prolong the struggle but to promote reconciliation with equality and justice.

### Free Agents

In India the person is still defined in terms of the groups to which s/he belongs. These groups themselves can be multiple. So s/he is a conditioned being. S/he is not a free agent. Conformity and loyalty are more valued than creativity and initiative. People feel more comfortable in working within clear structures. Sometimes they may even hide behind them. Tradition is more important than imagination and newness. The individuals then are alienated from the deeper identities of their own selves. Their choices and actions are guided by a host of prejudices and social compulsions. Contemporary media seek to constitute commercial selves as a network of desires and needs. These submerge the ego itself.

The challenge then is to free the people to become personally and socially responsible. While a certain materialistic focus on this world has to be transcended, the world has to be included, not renounced. We have to enable people to live in harmony with nature and with their bodies, to integrate their intelligence and their emotions, to harmonize their selves with the divine. True freedom is a gift of the Spirit of God. This Spirit has to be discerned at every moment and to be allowed to energize and empower oneself. Mere sacramental ritualism, emotional and need-based devotions and dry intellectual reflection will not achieve such personal integration. They will only strengthen various alienations. Any real personal transformation will have to be based on life, experience and struggle.

### Transforming Cultures

India is a land of great cultural diversity. Underlying it there is also a certain unity, which is perceived better when it is compared with other countries. Commercial contacts between Europe and India go back even before the start of the common era. The tradition that St. Thomas, the Apostle, came to India is an indication of this millennial contact. Unlike the

Americas, India has withstood the impact of the cultures of the European colonizers. Its political subjection seems to have increased its pride in its cultural and religious difference and identity.

This tension can be seen today in the contact between Indian cultural tradition and the globalizing impact of science and technology. India is not becoming European. It is integrating the instrumental values of science and technology while maintaining its cultural identity. This is not done without tension. We can also speak about a tension between tradition and modernity. But culture is not constituted by the things that we use, by world views and systems of values that come from a way of life in community. The media of communications have an ambiguous role. They can also spread and promote local cultures as well as or better than a global commercial culture. Modernity does bring in a materialistic and secularizing influence. Today the subaltern cultures are rediscovering and reasserting their identity. The indigenous people are reawakening in a special way. They are challenging the hegemony of the dominant traditions. So we are moving fast into a situation of multi-culturalism, where every culture has to be recognized, acknowledged and accepted.

Indian cultures reflect the unequal, feudal values of the society in which they had their origin. They have to be transformed so that they can express and support a just and egalitarian democratic order. This is our challenge today. But we do not yet seem to realize that this can be done only from within. The Church has remained and remains largely a foreign cultural transplant. It is not being allowed to become Indian, in spite of all the rhetoric about 'inculturation'. Christians in India live in two cultural worlds at the same time. So they lack the credibility to be effective prophets in their attempts to transform culture. On the contrary their institutions may be promoting an ersatz, superficial, contemporary commercial culture. They seem to be happy doing so. Traditional cultures prize life in harmony with nature, its processes and seasons. They will have to be protected from the commercial onslaught which seeks to exploit and destroy the cosmos.

### Renewing Religion

India has been the cradle of Hinduism and Buddhism, besides other meta-cosmic and cosmic religions. Indians are still very religious. The phenomenon of secularization has not had much impact yet. I think that one of the reasons for this is that secularization in Europe has been a reaction to a dominant, institutional, and politicized religion. Indian religions do not have strong organizations.

India has been religiously pluralistic. Inter-religious tensions have surfaced only when religion has been used as a political tool. This is what is happening today. The tension between Hindus and Muslims in India is primarily political and commercial, though religious symbols are used to gather and motivate a crowd. Unlike Euro-American Christianity which has integrated the Greek world view with its dichotomy between God and the world, the world and the humans and the spirit and the body in the humans, the Indian religious traditions tend to be holistic in their outlook. Its religious vision is *advaitic* or non-dual. God and the world are not-two. This non-duality has been interpreted both in a monistic and in a relational sense. Some, for instance, would see the world as the body of God. But the body is not an object in the Greek sense, but an expressive manifestation of the Self. The spirit of poverty or renunciation is the Asian spiritual

ideal. As Aloysius Pieris points out, an option to *be poor* is characteristic of all religions. Without this option to *be poor*, an option *for the poor* and their liberation will not be very effective.

Yoga, which is a system of psycho-physical integration, underlies both Hindu and Buddhist *sadhana* (spiritual practice). Through yoga one can experience the deeper recesses of one's own self and even reach out to the divine in which we are rooted. It becomes mystical, then. It takes various forms in India. Today there are secular forms of yoga like 'pranic healing' and *reiki*. All these methods reach out to the realm of energy that is in between the body and the material world that one can touch and measure through science and its instruments and the spirit, whether human or divine. What humanizes this energy is the role of human intention and will. Christianity has not explored this area of experience very much and seems to be afraid in its presence.

Religions are both legitimating and prophetic. In their effort to be relevant to life in the world, they try to 'inculturate' and in the process they tend to justify existing economic and socio-political structures. On the other hand, as they try to reach out to the Transcendent, from its perspective they are prophetically critical of unjust economic and socio-political structures. Even when religions claim revelation it is received and responded to by the humans. So they are bound to be affected by the limits, imperfections, sinfulness and other historical and cultural conditions to which the humans are subject. Religions therefore are in constant need of reform. An actual challenge in the area of religions is how people belonging to different religions can live together, promoting common human and spiritual values while finding justification and inspiration for them in one's own religion. Religions can also be mutually prophetic.

### Challenges for Mission

What are the challenges for mission in such a situation? In discerning these challenges we have to keep in mind the reign of God as our horizon and the transformation of the world into the reign of God as the basic process. My analysis of the Indian situation has evoked in passing a number of challenges. I would like to mention here only those that seem to me to have a priority that demands our attention.

India still has a lot of poor, oppressed and marginalized people. Opting to be with them and to struggle with them for their liberation is an obvious priority. This involves first of all their empowerment. This can be done through education, conscientization and development. At some stage we will have to move beyond this to support them in their protests and agitations, because entrenched structures do not change on their own. But conflict is not an end in itself. It should lead to negotiation. Such a process would involve a non-violent method of conflict. This would demand that we keep in touch also with the rich, the powerful and the dominating, especially with those among them who are of good will, and work for their conversion. If our goal is to achieve equality and community every one will have to be involved in the process. Leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King are examples of such a strategy, though some would accuse them of not being radical enough. But mere radicalism will not help either. It will only lead to a spiral of violence or to an uneasy balance of forces. The caste system is a good example. Education and development of the oppressed will not automatically provoke a social

transformation leading to a casteless society. Programmes like inter-caste marriages will have to be promoted, as it was done by some Indian reformers. At the economic level we have to promote a socially responsible capitalism and encourage a spirit of sharing at every level.

India is a land of social, cultural and religious pluralisms. The castes and ethnic groups represent social pluralism. These, together with the languages, also involve cultural pluralism. Today the subaltern cultures are rising up and affirming their identity. Fundamentalism and communalism are promoting inter-religious conflict and violence. Our challenge here is how do we help people to live in a pluralistic world, respecting and accepting difference and promoting community. Real pluralism is acceptable only when there is equality, at least in a formal sense. In the public sphere it may also demand equality of opportunity. In a situation of conflictual pluralism, we are called to promote reconciliation. Reconciliation demands mutual forgiveness in an atmosphere of truth and the promotion of restorative, not retributive, justice, - in the words of Bishop Desmond Tutu. Mission then becomes reconciliation. We could also speak of other values like solidarity and harmony. These demand the recognition, respect and acceptance of others who are different and a readiness to collaborate with every one in the pursuit of the common good. In an atmosphere of violent conflict some of these values may sound impractical. But we are not going to build up communities of the reign of God without seeking to realize these values. Dialogue will also be a key dimension in this process. In India, we have been speaking of dialogue in a very restricted sense as inter-religious dialogue. Even here our focus has been narrowly religious, centred on mission and spirituality, and confined to experts. We need now to think of dialogue as starting with reconciliation and leading to collaboration and community building, beginning with the grassroots. Religion will be only one dimension of this dialogue. Perhaps building Common Human Communities could be a locus for such a dialogue.

The third challenge that I would like to suggest is cultural transformation. GC 34 evokes the Jesuit tradition of a positive appreciation and promotion of culture whether in their schools in Europe or in other countries. (cf. GC 34, D.4, n.10) In India we need to be sensitive to cultural pluralism and to the struggle of subaltern cultures to assert their identity and equality. We will not be able to play a prophetic role in dialoguing with cultures till we become really inculturated, in spite of the many obstacles, coming either from the central authority in the Church or from the forces of westernization. We will certainly have to assume the ongoing tension between tradition and modernity and find our creative equilibrium. But the real goal of our dialogue with cultures is their transformation in the light of the reign of God. Cultures are human constructs and are subject to their limitations and sinfulness. So they need conversion. But they also need to be creative, in imagining the new world of harmony which we wish to create. While we have many educational institutions and media centres, I do not know how far we have been outstanding in cultural transformation and creativity.

India is still a very religious country. But this religiosity finds expression mostly in devotional ritualism. On the other hand commercial globalization is spreading a materialistic mono-culture of consumerism. What we need in this context is authentic spirituality that enables people to live in creative freedom reaching out to the world, to others and to the divine. India also has a rich tradition of *sadhanas* that help people find personal and social integration and fulfillment. Thanks to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the Jesuits have always been known for their efforts to promote the spiritual growth of the people. The challenges in this area

are two-fold. The Exercises have always had an elite flavour. We need to develop popular versions of it. Secondly, in spite of the pioneering efforts of Anthony D'Mello, I do not think that we have adequately integrated the rich Indian spiritual tradition. There is an ashram movement in India. I do not think that the Jesuits are called to build more ashrams. But we will have to pioneer a spirituality for life in the world that can integrate involvement in conflict for personal and social liberation with a search for a mysticism that finds God in all things and all things in God.

No consideration of our missionary challenges can ignore the need for us to become credible missionaries. Our mission calls us to be the symbols and servants of the reign of God. I wonder whether we are authentic symbols. Many of us are happy serving and working hard in the area of our apostolate. But I think that at the moment we are too tied to our institutions. Do these institutions hamper our option to serve in poverty and our mobility? The Indian Church is made up mostly of poor people but with rich institutions. It is the Clergy and the Religious who have these rich institutions. I think that they are a structural counter witness to "our preaching in poverty", however sincere and poor the people who are working in it. Fr. Arrupe insisted on an evaluation of our ministries. He used to say that he would believe in the authenticity of such evaluation only when the Jesuits decided to close down some of their institutions which may no longer promote the greater glory of God and the welfare of the poor under the changed circumstances of the world.

### Conclusion

Jesuits are supposed to be contemplatives in action. This contemplation does not involve trying to intuit the divine Being or to enjoy out of the world or out of the body experiences. It aims at contemplating how God is present and active in every situation. Our mission then is to hear God calling us to work with God in that situation and collaborate with God's action. On the contrary we make big plans and count on our personnel, institutional, money or media power and expect God to support us. Secondly, when we look for models for our mission we think spontaneously of Jesus. The contemplations on the Kingdom and on the Two Standards in the Spiritual Exercises are familiar to us. They set us in a context of conflict and conquest. I would like to suggest that our model for mission could be Godself. After all Jesus himself followed the will of his Father. The image of God's action is evoked in the Spiritual Exercises in the contemplations on the Incarnation and for obtaining love. God is engaged in the work of giving life to all the humans. God is working in the world out of love for the humans to enable them to live and love. Love for the others and for the whole universe should be the motive for our mission too. We go out into the world to share – to give and to receive - God's love and life with every one. Just as God is working in the world, God is also working in us for the other humans and the world. Our mission is to do God's work, with God. A communion of love and life with God, with each other and with the world is the goal of our mission. This is what Jesus prayed for: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us." (John 17:21)

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