

WORKSHOP ON MISSION -- DECEMBER 27TH –29H, 2004
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SESQUICENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE GERMAN-PROVINCE JESUITS.

OBSERVER’S COMMENTS – WENDELL D’CRUZ S.J.

1. Historians and Narrative theologians will tell us that one of the purposes of an exercise like this, where a community comes together to retell its history, is to create a sense of COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP of its story. The 150 years history of the German Jesuits is OUR history, we are part of that story, we BELONG to it, we OWN this story. To the extent that each of us can look back and recall this part of our history with a heightened sense of belonging and pride, the first objective of this workshop has been achieved.
2. We have certainly come to an increased owning of our story. But WHAT do we own -- The buildings erected by the German Jesuits, properties, apostolic institutions... ? All these are part of the inheritance that we own up, all this and more. We affirm as our own the CHARISM and the SPIRIT of the German Jesuits. In our sharing, the reflections of the heart, our narration of anecdotal history we talked of “their breadth of vision”, “attention to details and planning”, “professionalism”. We were touched by their “sensitivity to the needs of the poor” by their “heart for the poor”. We felt challenged by their “pioneering spirit”, their “zeal and enthusiasm”, their “availability”, “simplicity of life”, “perseverance through hardships”, “self discipline”. We were touched by their “hospitality” and reassured by their “sense of humor”. We recognized in these many qualities, amongst other, the concrete expressions of the charism and spirit of the Society of Jesus that we own and affirm as our own. Affirming our affective ROOTEDNESS in our story was an important part of the process of the workshop. It is from this rootedness that we turn to respond to the challenges of the present times and future.
3. Historians and narrative theologians will tell us that owning our past is always with a view to better understanding the present and shaping the future. On the second and third days we turned towards analyzing the present position of our three major apostolic areas and looking at the challenges ahead for the future. In many ways we were faced with the challenge to go beyond ourselves. The self-same charism of the German Jesuits that we owned was challenging us to respond to present times in ways even apparently opposed to what our German brothers did 150 years ago:
 - If our Jesuit charism led our German Jesuits to set up large institutions over the 150 years, the present challenged us to re-evaluate our institutions – Are they keeping us away from the poor ? Have they become obstacles to the very poor we set out to serve ?
 - The irrefutable need for English in the modern world challenged our ideological prejudice for vernacular medium education.
 - The “shrinking space for traditional Jesuit apostolates” is forcing us to re-define the parameters of Jesuit excellence.
 - The still unattended to illiterate masses challenged us to look beyond “running OUR institutions” to being a catalytic effect in institutions run by others.
 - The “clericalization of the Church” challenges us to go beyond parochial structures to build Base Human/Christian Communities.
 - The challenge of the “participatory model” will re-define the many social developmental works we run.

- The fact that the agents of social change today are the State, the market and civil society will force us to re-think our role as NGO's and the closed world of our institutions.

These and many other realities of today challenge us to go beyond ourselves in our response. The affective rootedness in our Jesuit charism, shared with our German brothers, will ensure our response is made in creative fidelity.

4. Much of the reflection on our mission centered around, directly or indirectly, the paradigm of the KINGDOM OF GOD. While the paradigm of the Kingdom has served Liberation Theology well over the last many years, it may fall short in our present Indian context. We admit, the "Kingdom" is larger than the Church. Even if we downplay the institutional dimension and go purely by lived values, there will always be those who are OF the kingdom and those who are NOT, and to draw all to the Kingdom remains the objective. The Kingdom remains the focal centre. The call to go outside, beyond ourselves may be better served by the PARADIGM OF DISPERSION. (Dispersion is not dissipation of resources. It is the invitation to re-allocate ones resources around a focal point beyond oneself.)
5. Among the biblical paradigms, most radical and least used, is the paradigm of 'Dispersion'. If we filter out the priestly author's moralistic preoccupation, the events of biblical salvation history can be read in a different light:
 - The blessing to Adam and eve was to "be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the EARTH", yet they chose to remain in the garden, so God forces them to go out over the earth.
 - Israel was to be a "blessing to the NATIONS" but it chose to sit back and wait till the nations came to Jerusalem, so God forced it out, beyond its national borders and into foreign lands.
 - Time and time again Israel refused to go out of itself so God decided to show us how by sending his Son, who "emptied himself". He was of the house of David, but David's village had no room for him, he was born outside Bethlehem. He was the "high priest" but offered his sacrifice outside the temple, outside the city of Jerusalem. In Calvary we have the "great dispersion".
6. I couldn't help but notice the deep scars of ethnic and linguistic groups amongst some of us. To hold the perceived prejudices of the past as solely responsible for the problems of the present points to a rather naive analysis of history. Equally futile is the speculation of what might have been, had ... The paradigm of dispersion can be threatening in that it will not allow us to cling onto superficial roots of caste, linguistic or ethnic groups or even creed. It demands a much deeper sense of belonging before we can go out of ourselves. If we are to live and work by this paradigm, we will have to re-discover our sense of belongingness and Jesuit companionship.
7. We realized that we are only a small part of GOD'S MISSION, at work in ways beyond our comprehension. We are called to be leaven and salt. The salt can never replace the food – it will lead to death – it must always be present in minute quantities. We need to sit down in apostolic groups and apply this paradigm to our apostolic works, to brainstorm and discern in what concrete way God is inviting us to look outside ourselves, beyond OUR missions to HIS Mission. May he give us the courage and the strength to follow the dictates of His Spirit.