

# Goethals News



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Issue on The Ignatian Year

July - September, 2021

## The Ignatian Year: May 20, 2021 – July 31, 2022



*Editorial*

*Dr. J. Felix Raj, SJ*

On May 20, Jesuits and their co-workers across the world commenced the Ignatian Year the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Ignatius' conversion – that fateful day when Ignatius, the soldier, struck by a cannonball, transformed into Ignatius the pilgrim.

inaugural address highlighting the milestones of the higher education history of the Society of Jesus. He touched upon the journey of St. Ignatius and elaborated the main thrust of the Jesuit educational institutions. He called the educational institutions to be instrumental in developing a healthy student community in this fragmented digital world.

An organising committee has been formed to plan a plethora of programmes throughout the Ignatian Year Celebrations, which will conclude on the Feast Day of St. Ignatius, July 31, 2022.

The Ignatian Year is a time for reflection and renewal—an opportunity to think about our vocation and to focus our desires—in order to become part of the movement to discern a better future for our young people, for our communities and our planet.

### Universal Apostolic Preferences of Jesuits

It presents an opportunity for us to stress upon the core mission of our institutions – to form men and women for and with others. It is an occasion to invite our students to think not only about the profession they are preparing for, but the way that profession can be a vehicle for making the world a more just and humane place.

After a 16-month discernment process, the Society of Jesus has announced its four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) for the next 10 years.

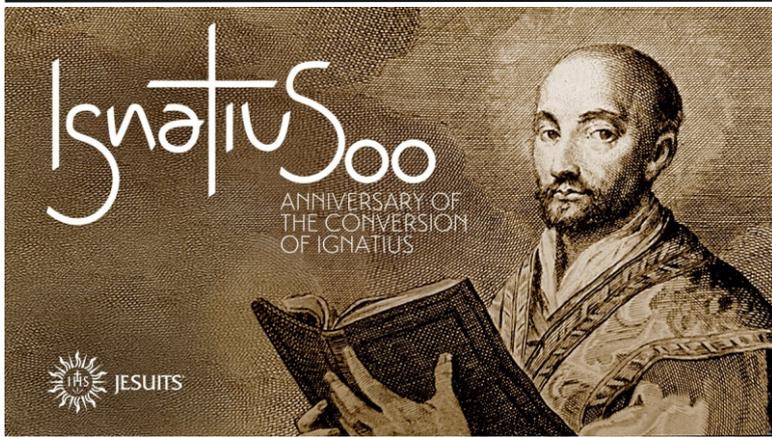
In his message to the Jesuits for the Ignatian Year, Pope Francis spoke about how God's plans for individuals are greater than the plans they have for themselves, using St. Ignatius as an example: 'That cannonball meant that Ignatius failed in the dreams he had for his life, but God had a bigger dream for him. God's dream for Ignatius was not about Ignatius. It was about helping souls. It was a dream of redemption, a dream of going out into the world, accompanied by Jesus, humble and poor'.

'The Universal Apostolic Preferences are a call to conversion. They are an invitation to rethink how we live, how we work and how we relate to the people we serve. They invite all Jesuits and their collaborators in mission to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and inspire them to take action'.

Jesuits and their collaborators have been asked to focus on how their current and future ministries can

SXUK began its celebration of the Ignatian Year in the virtual mode, with an inaugural function on May 20. Fr. George Ponodath, SJ, delivered the





special attention to them in the next ten years 2019-2029.

Each Jesuit, each community, each Jesuit institution, each province and conference of provincials will discern how to implement these preferences and take action based on that discernment.

The Four UAPs are:

### 1. SHOWING THE WAY TO GOD

The Jesuit mission is to show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment. We are the instruments God uses to bring people to Him.

### 2. WALKING WITH THE EXCLUDED

We are called to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice.

### 3. JOURNEYING WITH YOUTH

We are called to accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future.

### 4. CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME

We are called to work and collaborate, with Gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God's Creation. We are the ones to protect the environment and the universe.

We are called to reflect, share, discern and respond.



integrate the UAPs to address the real-world issues that they embrace.

In a letter to the whole Society, Jesuit Superior General Fr Arturo Sosa said the Preferences are the result of a process that was guided by the Holy Spirit at each stage.

'Our desire has been to find the best way to collaborate in the Lord's mission, the best way to serve the Church at this time, the best contribution we can make with what we are and have, seeking to do what is for the greater divine service and the more universal good'.

The UAPs are the fruits of a process of discernment lasting almost two years. All Jesuits and their partners in mission were invited to take part. It concluded with a confirmation from Pope Francis in a special meeting with Fr Superior General Arturo Sosa.

The UAPs give a horizon, a point of reference to the whole Society of Jesus. They capture our imaginations and awaken our desires. They unite us in our mission. The new Preferences are four areas vital for our world today. The Society of Jesus will pay

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**The next issue  
October - December, 2021 will  
be on 'St. Xavier's University,  
Kolkata Completes four Years'.**

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## Some Historical Milestones of Jesuit Higher Education



When people approach a topic like this the usual practice is to give some dates on which some institutions were founded, the purpose and conclude by looking at best, the present scenario. All that, and more, can be found from websites. I think

we have to go a little deeper. To do that I propose the following:

1. A look at the decisions that gave rise to such institutions,
2. The purpose behind those decisions, and
3. The challenges thrown at us today if we follow those decisions.

### Where did it all begin?

On 20 May 1521, precisely five hundred years ago, a battle was raging in a small fort in Pamplona, Spain. It was the capital of the kingdom of Navarre. The battle was between a motely army of Spaniards and a formidable battalion of Frenchmen with guns, cannons and a conquering spirit. Initially the Spanish army did not want to engage in this battle – they wanted to surrender, except for a formidable knight in the prime of his youth – Inigo de Loyola. He would have none of it; he would engage the French, no matter what the outcome. So the others agreed and the battle began. Sometime into the battle, 'a shot hit him in one leg, completely shattering it for him; and because the ball passed between both legs, the other was badly wounded too' (Reminiscence no.1) Thus, Inigo, or Ignatius, fell to the ground, wounded.

The French took the fort and also took care of the wounded. They took great care of Inigo. After keeping him for about ten or twelve days he was brought to his home: castle de Loyola in Azpeitia, Spain in June 1521. He was kept in an upper room and there began another battle – a battle of life.

It was a battle between the human spirit, of ambition and vain-glory, and the spirit of God, of sacrifice and doing greater things for God. In the end, by about February – March 1522, the battle was decisively won by God. Inigo became a knight for God. After a few months of wandering, he decided to go to the Holy Land – to live and die in the very soil that supported

*Fr. George Ponodath SJ*

the feet of Jesus. But that was not to be. Though he did not want anyone to do anything for him and he wanted to be there 'to help souls', once his time of pilgrimage was over, he was told to leave. He obeyed and returned to Venice.

### What is this 'helping souls'?

Initially St. Ignatius meant to help people find the way of God. In the ebb and flow of life of each person, there is a language in which God speaks to each individual. Deciphering this language would be finding the road-map of life. St. Ignatius had experienced the various ways of God in his life during his convalescence at Loyola. Based on the light of this experience he wanted to guide people in the ways of God. Gradually the understanding of 'helping souls' expanded. He realized that 'Moving hearts and formation of conscience' is the first step to learn and accept God's language. This understanding expanded further to include formation of the mind as well. Hence the place of education. So it is not just about spiritual direction or mere mental development but it is also about the formation of the whole person. That is why in a letter of 1549, giving some guidelines to a team of Jesuits going to Ingolstadt, Germany, to open a college, St. Ignatius says, 'Your students should go back not only learned but better persons'.

Later on this practise of 'helping souls' came to be refined, adapted and redefined as 'service of faith and





20 MAY 2021 – 31 JULY 2022

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promotion of justice which it includes', 'preferential option for the poor' and so on. This is clearly specified under the four Universal Apostolic Preferences:

- To show the way to God through Spiritual Exercises and discernment;
- To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, and those whose dignity have been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice;
- To accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future;
- To care for our common home.

In short, helping souls would simply mean service to humanity.

## 1. The decision to study

In Venice, in 1524, St. Ignatius decided to study because he wanted to become a priest to help souls. This decision to study snowballed itself into his pursuit of Latin in Barcelona at the age of 33. After two years he enrolled himself in the nearby university

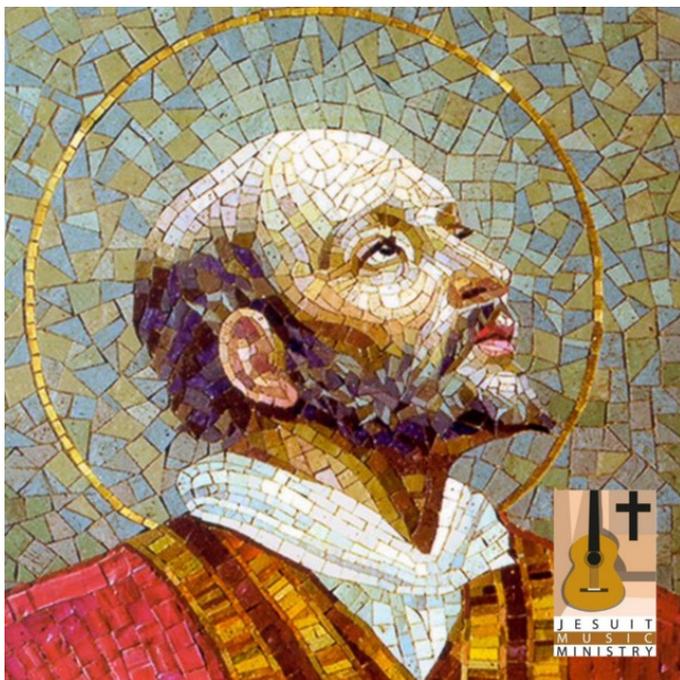
of Alcala. There, while studying, he helped people spiritually. He was questioned and stopped from doing so because he was not qualified. So he went to the University of Salamanca. There again he got into trouble with the Church hierarchy because he was 'helping souls' without qualifications. He was jailed. Finally, when he was exonerated, he left the place and enrolled at Paris University to study. At that time Paris was the citadel of learning and intellectual activities. That was the best university that Ignatius knew of. So he decided that he should get a Master's degree from the best university.

That was Ignatius stretching his hands towards the best, towards perfection. This trait of looking for the best, doing the best, would give rise to his famous motto: MAGIS, the more. So that decision to study was at the back of his qualifications and I think it should be at the back of all our educational institutions. In fact, in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius dedicates one full part (Part IV) to 'Intellectual and Practical Training'. He lays down guidelines and the purpose of all our educational endeavours: 'The purpose of studies in the society is to be of service to others' (Constitutions of SJ No. 351). By 1536, Inigo had gathered a group of companions in Paris, the most famous among whom was St. Francis Xavier. In 1536, Ignatius de Loyola obtained a Masters in Theology from the University of Paris on 24 June 1537, Ignatius and most of his companions were ordained as priests.

## 2. The purpose

After his graduation and ordination as a priest, Ignatius and his followers went to Rome and placed themselves at the disposal of the Pope since they had no Superior. What does all this mean? Ignatius prepared himself as a good and fit instrument for the work of God. This is the final purpose of all Jesuit studies and this should be the aim of all our educational endeavours: to prepare men and women as fit instruments in the hands of God for the service of his people.

It is to **serve** that the first educational institution of the Society of Jesus, St. Paul's College, Goa was opened by none other than St. Francis Xavier in India in 1542. That same spirit of service was the guiding principle in starting St. Xavier's College, Kolkata (1860) and St. Xavier's University, Kolkata (2017). That same spirit of service is at the back of all Jesuit institutions in India: 118 primary schools, 149 high schools, 58 autonomous and affiliated colleges, 22 technical



institutes, 16 business schools and 2 universities catering to 3,34,538 students with the help of 11,517 teachers and an equal number of support staff. If that is the scenario in India, what about the rest of the world?

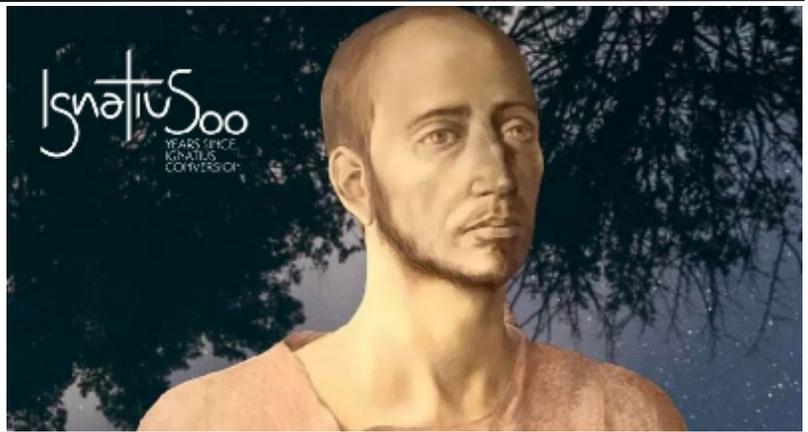
In 1543 St. Ignatius started the Roman College with the specific aim of teaching Jesuits how to serve. It has now become the famous Gregorian University, opening its doors to numerous other men and women desiring to learn to serve. In 1548 the second school for the public was opened at Messina, Sicily. St. Ignatius himself sent a formidable staff of five Jesuits, including Jerome Nadal and Peter Canisius. The tradition of opening educational institutions became a hallmark of the Society of Jesus ever after.

By 1556 (the year St. Ignatius passed away) there were 40 colleges around the world. Some were for training Jesuits, others for the public. By 1600 that number went up to 245 and in 1773 there were 875 educational institutions all over the world. That was the year when the Society of Jesus was suppressed. But one must note a very important fact: the Society of Jesus was suppressed but the spirit of Jesuits refused to be suppressed. In 1789 one of the most prestigious universities of the Jesuits in the United States – the Georgetown University – was opened. The Society was restored in 1814. Today there are 3,897 educational institutions of the Society of Jesus in 96 countries of the world. They engage the services of 34,303 teachers to serve 2,928,806 students.

From the now non-existent St. Paul's College in Goa to the latest university of the Society of Jesus – St. Xavier's University, Kolkata – the single thread that binds all these institutions is SERVICE. That is the singular purpose of all these institutions.



His Love of adventure was simply voracious



### 3. The challenges that are thrown at us today

We have heard it many times but I still want to reiterate that we are now living in a different world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Deep down in the minds and hearts of everyone is the hope that one day this world would return to the world we knew. But, I think that is a false hope. I think the new normal of the coming years will be totally different. The first challenge is whether we are ready to face that new normal.

**To the administrators:** Your administration should be student-centred and not discipline-centred. Our institutions are known for discipline but now under the online regime, discipline will not be a problem. Students will not come to our institutions. So the question of discipline does not arise. Then your efforts should be to build a teaching-learning community in this 'faceless' cyber world which relies not so much on the real but on the virtual. The point to be emphasised here is service rather than economics.

**To the teachers:** Your aim should be teaching the student; not just covering the syllabus. The student is much larger than the syllabus. Can you try to follow the advice of St. Ignatius: 'your students should go back not only learned but better persons'? To do that first and foremost, you have to become not only a learned person but a role-model. You have to walk the talk. Remember the saying of that great media guru, Marshall MacLuhan: 'Medium is the Message'? It is not just what you teach that is the message; you are the message. Your students will learn more from the way you deal with them than from your learned lectures. As the entropy of knowledge is accelerating at a breakneck speed, remember to update yourself. Otherwise you will become irrelevant. 'Do not give yesterday's answers to tomorrow's questions'.

*Continue on Pg.- 14*

## First UAP: Showing the Way to God

Fr. Jeyaraj Veluswamy, SJ



Jesuits across the globe have recently set out on a new roadmap called the UAP, i.e., the Universal Apostolic Preferences. In their 480 years-old history, starting from 1540, Jesuits have so far held a total of 36 General Congregations (GCs), at each of which they

would unfailingly ask themselves two fundamental questions: (1) Is what we are doing now in accordance with God's will and His expectations of us Jesuits? and (2) What more and what newer responses is the Lord asking of us in today's context? They feel that the Holy Spirit has each time shown them a right path and a right direction.

During the 32<sup>nd</sup> GC (1974-75) they came up with the following epochal vision statement to re-define their mission: *'The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement. For reconciliation with God demands the reconciliation of people with one another'*.

In our own times, the 36<sup>th</sup> GC (2016) has inspired the Jesuits to adopt a set of four global concerns as their Universal Apostolic Preferences so that they could make the best contribution with what they are and have, always seeking to do what is best for the greater divine service and the more universal good for the next ten years (2019 to 2029).

### **An Ignatian pathway: To love and serve God in all things**

For Ignatius the path towards God and God-encounter began when a cannonball, at the battle of Pamplona on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1521, shattered his right leg and badly injured the left leg as well. With that fall all the dreams he had been nurturing to win more and more worldly honours and positions came down crashing. Lying in bed in his Loyola castle, the wounded soldier began to experience in his soul some deeply life-transforming moments. In a nutshell, he underwent multiple experiences of deep spiritual conversion one after another, such as a conversion from an old Ignatius fighting to

acquire all earthly honour and fame for his Spanish King to a new Ignatius surrendering everything to become just a pilgrim servant for Christ; a conversion from an old Ignatius stubbornly determining what he should be doing with his life to a new Ignatius discerning what God wanted him to do with his life. All this led Ignatius to finally crystallise all his spiritual experiences into the twin objectives: to love and serve – *'amar e servir'* – God in all things and all things in God.

Ignatius of Loyola thus introduced a new pathway into the 16<sup>th</sup> century church, of being *'contemplative in action'* while leading a hectic life in the world, as opposed to the then prevalent way of leading a life of contemplation only within the four walls of a secluded monastery. For Ignatius and his followers, the entire world had now become the monastery to live in and labour as *'contemplatives in action'*.

### **One Truth but Many paths, One Reality but Many Names!**

In our multi-religious Indian context, one cannot speak of any single pathway to God. The quintessence of Hinduism is affirmed in the ancient text of the Rig Veda as follows: *'There is one reality, the wise call it by many names; there is one truth, reached by many paths'*. This is the kernel of Hindu beliefs and the Hindu way of living. That God or the Divine is encountered and experienced in myriad ways and myriad forms; and is worshiped and called by myriad names as well. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna enlightens Arjuna on the same truth thus:

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम् |  
मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः || 11 ||



*ye yathā mām prapadyante tāns tathaiva bhajāmyaham  
mama vartmānuvartante manuṣhyāḥ pārtha sarvaśhaḥ*

**BG 4:11** *In whatever way people surrender unto me, I reciprocate with them accordingly. Everyone follows my path, knowingly or unknowingly, O son of Pritha.*

### Touch of the One in the play of Many

Bengal is indeed a land of many seekers and bauls, saints and mystics. For me, it is the Viswakavi Rabindranath Tagore, poet and mystic, who has captured and elucidated the god-man experience or the divine-human encounter, in terms of ordinary human experiences such as finding 'his footsteps' hearing 'his melodious voices' relishing 'his company on the road' working along with 'him labouring in the field' and eagerly awaiting 'his coming as an unexpected guest'. If Lord Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, tells Arjuna how he could be approached by any path a devotee may take, Tagore in Gitanjali describes how he could experience God coming to him in myriad ways and myriad forms. He presents God as the 'one among us' reality, and an ever accessible and encounterable personal God. The following poem in Gitanjali expresses how Tagore experiences the ever accompanying presence of God at every step and at every moment of his life journey:

*'Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.*



*I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.*

*Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the one companion of my endless life whoever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.*

*When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of many."*

### To Worship God in Man

Swami Vivekananda is one of the most loved religious thinkers and leaders that India had ever known in our modern times. His life and teachings greatly inspire all, especially the youth and his followers, in particular to the truth that to serve humanity/man is to truly worship God. The following lines of Swamiji beautifully summarise this truth:

*‘বহুরূপে সম্মুখে তোমার ছাড়ি কোথা খুঁজিছ ঈশ্বর?  
জীবে প্রেম করে যেই জন, সেই জন সেবিছে ঈশ্বর’।*

The monks and nuns of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swamiji in 1897 carry forward the legacy and teachings of Swami Vivekananda through their numerous philanthropic missions spread worldwide today. It is said that the mission of RKM is to carry out the practice of 'worship of God in man'.

### 'I Thirst': Loving and Serving Christ in the poorest of the poor

'I thirst' is what the religious Sister or Brother or Volunteer of the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa hears resounding in the depths of their hearts

*Continue on Pg.- 15*

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## Care For Our Common Home

*Dr. M. Thamacin Arulappan, SJ*



Mrs. C. F. Alexander in 1848 sang, 'All things bright and beautiful; All creatures great and small; All things nice and wonderful; The Lord God made them all'. Yes, a beautiful world was created by God and man—perhaps his most beautiful creation—was placed

in it. When we look at this world as described all through in the past, there is no doubt in our minds about its beauty or its prevalent harmony. But since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, what has happened to our world? What has gone wrong? Where is its beauty? Who is responsible for this so-called scare?

These are all the doubts and queries arising in the mind of man, not out of his concern for the world at large, I think, but for his own selfish motives. What will happen to his future progenies? Will they be able to survive for long? These worries have forced man to look around, to take stock of the situation. The deterioration is scaring. Man is therefore becoming aware of his surroundings, his environment.

Thus, the concern for the protection of the environment is of greater importance in today's context as the effect of environmental deterioration is being felt all over the world through climate change, global warming, natural calamities, loss of biodiversity and so on. We can no longer be mute

spectators; we have to get involved in protecting the environment.

We need to re-discover our roots, our interconnectedness and our interdependence in the cosmos. We have to re-awaken our conscience in relation to our duties and responsibilities to all that exists in the environment. We are obliged to link our faith and spirituality with the whole of God's creation.

### **Jesuits with the Mission of Caring for Our Common Home**

On 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019, Fr. General, Arturo Sosa, announced the four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) for the Society of Jesus. One was to collaborate in the care of the Common Home (Environment). The Common Home today is crying out as never before, labouring to be set free (Roman 8). Today's environmental crisis is impacting the poor and the vulnerable in a particular way. This needs the urgent action of the members of the Society of Jesus and the whole of humanity. To become honest custodians of this wonderful planet, by way of ecological conversion, each one of us should undertake five processes of ecological conversion, namely, : (1) our common home is sacred, (2) to know that we are of the earth, (3) to know that we are in constant relationship with other living species, (4) to become aware of the imbalances that we create knowingly or unknowingly to the environment and (5) to collaborate in the sustainable development of ecology.

#### **1. Our Common Home is Sacred**

Since classical times, the word 'Earth' has been used to describe the sum total of all existing things bound together in a fertile, quasi-personal divinity. The conception of nature is compatible with pantheism, the religious attitude which says that God and the universe are one.

The earth is central to God's



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purpose. As Jesus said, the kingdom of God should happen to Earth. Thus the Earth will be transformed into 'the New Earth and the New Heaven'. The Earth is sacred. The trees are sacred. Water is sacred. We are sacred. The Earth is a sacrament, of God's fidelity and dependability. The Earth is a symbol of God's great action of sharing his love.

As creatures, including humankind, enter into personal communion with God, they are created 'in the image of God'; and as creatures they are led by the intangible, interpersonal dynamics of human community.

Pope Francis in his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, appeals to us that there is an urgent challenge to protect our common home and we should work towards a sustainable and integral development of God's creation. He further says in the encyclical that the Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us.

The ecological conversion required now is environmental spirituality that arises from experiencing the Divine in and through the environment. It is founded on the realisation of the intrinsic worth of the environment. It perceives the infinite presence of the Divine, immanent in the environment. It emerges from the realisation of the environment as the heart or focus of our intellectual, moral, aesthetic, psychological and spiritual lives. It brings about a shift in paradigm, which generates awareness and prompts us to act. The environment as the creative blessing of God entrusted to humans, takes on the central stage in this spirituality.

## 2. We are of the Earth and Earthly

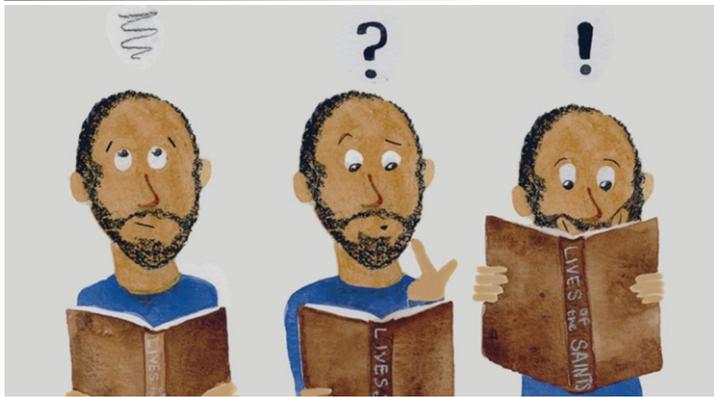
We are intimately and profoundly connected with nature and in a special way to the land because it is the source for our sustenance and, most importantly, offers us our identity. The land, therefore, is sacred to millions of people, especially for us, Indians. If the earth is sacred, every creature dwelling on the earth too is sacred. The earth is the basis of life. This earth is the mother of all humans, an object of reverence. Land, directly or indirectly, helps us in the man-making process. Therefore, our respect and reverence for the land is a reality in us.

For a tribal, land, in a special way, is a very important reality. He/she sees the sacredness of the land. He/she treats the land as God's creation and treats it with utmost fear and respect. He/she believes that the land

has the power to bless and destroy. According to him/her, the whole ecosystem is the *mother earth*, a symbol of love and sustenance and also a symbol of destitution when one has no mother. It gives the tribal his/her identity. Hence, '*if land is lost, the family, clan, village and tribe's identity too will be lost*'. They also show great respect to the land through various celebrations for the land.

From our sacred scriptures we find that in Yahweh's eyes, Abraham stands out as the authentic human being. For Abraham, to be human meant to live in the divine presence and to live in a land close to his heart. The Promised Land, as promised by Yahweh, serves as a metaphor of His divine presence which makes Abraham's life, a celebration of the divine praises and enables him to enjoy the Promised Land in the company of his fellow brethren. Theologically speaking, Abraham, who was landless once, was destined to possess the Promised Land and live in it, meaning Yahweh blessed him by giving the Promised





Land as a symbol of his love, acceptance and the divine presence.

### 3. Our Inter-relatedness with the Environment

Ecology has to do with relations, interactions and dialogue of all living creatures among themselves and with all that exists. From an ecological viewpoint everything that exists, co-exists, and everything that co-exists, pre-exists. Everything that co-exists and pre-exists subsists by means of an infinite web of all-inclusive relations. Nothing exists outside relationships. All creatures manifest and possess their own relative autonomy; nothing is unnecessary or unimportant. All beings constitute a link in the vast cosmic chain. As Christians, we may say that it comes from God and returns to God.

In the 1970s, an organised resistance to the destruction of forests spread throughout India and came to be known as the Chipko Movement. The name of the movement comes from the word 'embrace' as the villagers hugged the trees and prevented the contractors from felling them. The original Chipko Movement was started around 260 years earlier in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Rajasthan by the Bishnoi community. A large group of Bishnois from 84 villages, led by a lady called Amrita Devi laid down their lives in an effort to protect the trees from felling on the orders of the Maharaja of Jodhpur. Due to this messianic movement, in 1980 the Indian Government banned felling trees. Rallies and other protests were organised by the activists and Opposition Parties in Singur and Nandigram in 2008 against the then Bengal Government inviting the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) groups to start industries on the fertile land adjoining the farmers' land whose livelihoods depended on the land and its agricultural produce. Eventually, the ruling Government then became more sensitive to people's needs and ecological requirements. Since then, the ideas of nature,

ecosystem and land have attained a fuller meaning. These movements evidence the fact that we are in constant communion with the environment.

### 4. The Cry and Groaning of the Environment

The entire planet is at risk today. We are facing an ecological crisis of gigantic proportions looming across the horizons endangering the very survival of the human species together with all other forms within the present century. Today, for many people around the world, the environmental crisis is already a matter of survival, for themselves and for their children. To list a few crises, at first, the temperature of the planet has risen by 4.5° Celsius causing erratic climatic changes, melting of the polar ice caps, rising of the ocean levels by over two feet, inundation of coastal cities and towns, a rise in the frequency and vehemence of droughts, storms, rains, floods and tidal waves. Secondly, the gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related "greenhouse effect" has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. Industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides, coolants and propellants are some of the crises. All of these are known to harm the atmosphere and environment. The resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands.

The recent Amphan destructions have cost us so much. To list a few, about twelve thousand trees were uprooted in Kolkata alone. Due to humans' greediness and self-centred motives, the land gets exploited daily. We, human beings, consider land merely as a means of our recreation and objects of experimentation, and fail to think that it is an end in itself too. This type of attitude cuts off our relationship



with the land. This is the principal cause of the ecological imbalance as we see today. All the catastrophes of ecological imbalance such as oil and chemical spills, acid rain, global warming, greenhouse effect, destruction of rain forests, droughts and erosion of soil are the results of human's greediness over the earth. These seem to threaten the life of human beings along with the ecological balance of the earth in which he/she lives along with the other creatures.

## 5. Collaborating in the Sustainable Development of Ecology

'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not for every man's greed', said Mahatma Gandhi. The Earth is precious to God and to us. The preciousness of the earth is a central witness of the Bible and of all tribal traditions. It is precious in itself. It is unique, the only one of its kind. And it is beautiful beyond words. And the ecological crisis we face is real. It has led us to 'biocide' (the destruction of life), 'ecocide' (the destruction of eco-systems) and 'geocide' (the destruction of the earth). One of the most widely discussed issues today is that of environmental crisis. Although global awareness of the problem is steadily increasing, the Third World countries have been reluctant to address the issue, until quite recently. It is heartening to note that the Church also has finally awakened to this reality, thanks to the efforts of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical initiatives.

People living today not only have to consider their own well-being, but also the well-beings of their future generations. Also we must remember that we are dependent on the natural environment not only for our physical needs but also of our psychic needs as well. Plants and animals in the environment are of



enormous aesthetic, medicinal and economic value.

### Calcutta Province's Ecology Commission's Initiatives

The Ecology Commission of the Calcutta Jesuit Province began seriously to contemplate on the environmental crisis with an eye on ecological conservation. A general environmental awareness alone is not enough to address the emerging issues, but a concrete plan of action is necessary as well. All our educational institutions have Nature Club Units to educate our students to collaborate in the care of our common home. In addition, the Commission feels that through a series of ecological conversion processes, our students, teachers, parents and well-wishers can create an Eco-State, an Eco-Nation and an Eco-Planet for an 'Eco-just society'. The Commission will take the five ecological conversion processes mentioned in this article and will develop a short term and a long term action plan to cultivate an eco-just society.

The Ecology Commission, keeping in mind the fourth UAP Caring for our Common Home in association with St Xavier's Collegiate School and ALSOC (Old Boys' Association), Kolkata, has been trying to enhance a healthy and green campus by organising webinars on the environment and planting about 100 Ashoka (debdaru) saplings in the campus. It also has given Pongamia (karanj) saplings to St. Xavier's University, and mango and Ashoka saplings to Dhyana Ashram, St. Xavier's School, Burdwan, Raghobpur, Kalaridhya, Arunoday and Kalna, and will be supplying fruit-yielding and timber plants to all our mission stations.

## Set Our Hearts On Fire

Ignatian Reflections to Pentecost



*Continue on Pg.- 15*

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# Walking with the Excluded

*Fr. John Kerketta, SJ*



The Jesuit mission is a step forward to walk with the excluded in West Bengal. Since its inception, our fundamental choice of mission is the preferential option for the poor. Increasing their quality of life, we have initiated several capacity building and

empowerment programs, enabling them in social, economic and political participation. There is no better way to walk with the excluded than the work of empowerment through education. In every ministry of ours, the choice of the poor is inevitable.

The Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus (2019) illuminates our minds and hearts towards our fellow humans for their greater universal good. How can we accompany the poor, the migrants, the refugees and the abused in their journey of life? What will we do when we encounter suffering in our society? The preference calls to respond more earnestly by walking with the excluded, marginalised and impoverished. Udayani, as a social work wing of the Calcutta Jesuits, promotes social justice and human rights. In this article, the work of Udayani and its intrinsic role in walking with the excluded is focussed upon by highlighting its commitment towards promotion of an inclusive humane society.

## Understanding the Context

The excluded groups are the individuals and communities like Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, unorganised labourers and youths who are vulnerable, marginalised and impoverished. They are victims of abuse of power, abuse of conscience and sexual exploitation in the socio-economic and political system, and continue to be excluded from society or part of society as a result of one or more social factors namely, unemployment, old age, ill-health, alcoholism and drugs, discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, creed, education and criminal activities.

A large part of the population is grappling to find a place in society. The dichotomy between social inclusion and exclusion is still unable to reconcile with the human progress. Udayani engages in empowerment and education of the poor with Right Based Approaches (RBAs). Our emphasis is on

networking and collaboration with like-minded civil society groups and NGOs as it is a felt need of the hour to make our demands be heard at the local and national level.

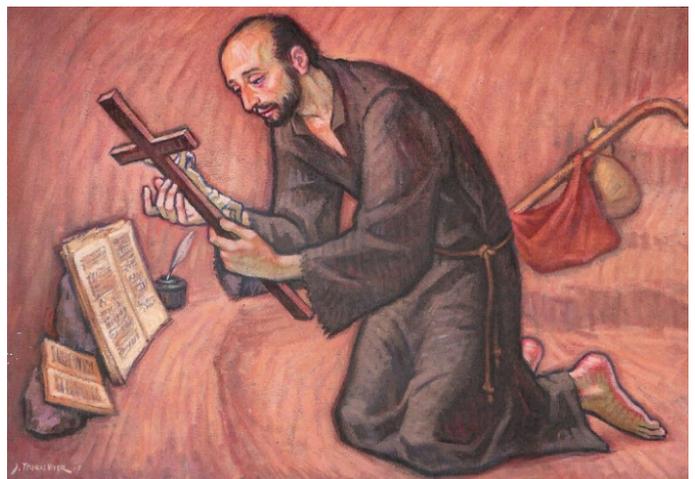
## Udayani's Response

In response to the problem, we awaken the victims from deep slumber and enable them to exercise their democratic and moral rights that is sustainable for their integral development. Our walking with them is beyond time and space. By enabling the local institutions, civil society, men and women to not only address the issue of social exclusion but also empowering local institutions for sustainable growth and establishing a resilient society, which has the knowledge and expertise to deal with the challenges they face.

## Empowering vulnerable communities

We believe in providing people not just with aid to relieve their hardships but also with a means to protect, develop and sustain their future. Our long-term development programmes build independent and brighter futures. Social, economic and political empowerment of the marginalised is an absolute requirement of the hour. Without it, no progress at any level is possible.

Dalits, Adivasis and minorities have been pushed to the margins. We desire to mainstream them by walking with them, 'to come closer by going out to the human peripheries and to the margins of society, adopting a style of life and work appropriate to the situation so that our accompaniment is credible'. They are poor because of deprivation. They need political



representation to avail development schemes. Udayani walks alongside the poor to address the core issues that paralyse and weaken human dignity; mobilising their consciousness to understand the problem of impoverishment and help them to lead a better life. In a country like India, without empowering the poor, the nation will not progress.

### **Positive long-term Change**

We enable marginalised communities to live with dignity by restoring livelihood opportunities. This could include improving agricultural productivity, enabling access to micro-finance or improving skills through training and support. The path we want to adopt with the poor is that which promotes positive long-term changes in human life the change in economic, political and social structures to generate holistic and inclusive human society. By doing so, social justice, reconciliation, peace and human dignity will be restored. The social cohesion in our educational institutions that accommodate every child for learning without discrimination is to be sustained. Accompanying every child to school to mitigate illiteracy from our society is a great service to the nation. In mentoring rural children by organising coaching classes, camps and computer literacy programs, we help them to come abreast with other, more fortunate, students.

To improve families' per capita income, Udayani promotes Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for micro finance and saving among women. More than 5000 women have been linked with the banking system to improve their economic conditions. They have been made



eligible for bank loans for starting livelihood activities. Their income, purchasing power and savings have increased considerably.

Political representation is inevitable for the development of the poor. At the panchayat level people's participation is very important for their development. Studies show that marginalised communities' participation in politics is poor. As a result, the local governance system has been unable to fulfil their local needs. Government schemes remain elusive to them. There are many loopholes in the system that can only be eradicated through sensitisation and strengthening of their democratic rights. This is absolutely essential for the positive long-term change in society.

Training some able women in leadership to represent their people in Panchayats was a bold step forward. We need to strengthen political democracy by imparting good civic formation, especially among those at the base of the social pyramid. By promoting social organisations committed to seeking the Common Good, we want to help counteract pseudo-development, fundamentalism and communalist politics that ruins the social fabrics of our country.

### **Lobbying, Advocacy and Networking**

To safeguard the vulnerable sections of the society there is a need to work in collaboration with like-minded groups who share the common vision. Not every government policy is favourable to the poor. Good and pro-poor development schemes often do not bring the desired results due to poor implementation and large-scale corruption. Political mafias extort income from the development schemes in the form of cut money; the poor remain poorer. To counteract the powerful agencies who curtail the rights of the poor, there is a need of a strong platform



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## Conclusion



The hurt feeling for not being able to walk with the excluded is a self-realisation. This cannot be an excuse or escape from duty and responsibility. Responding proactively to remove the scars imprinted on victims of social exclusion is a stepping stone for us. We have created a vacuum in society—we have to fill it up. According to the Bible, God created humankind in His image and likeness, created them male and female (Gen: 26). In the beginning there was a perfect order in the Universe. Equality and human dignity were divine necessities. Where did it go wrong?

to raise the collective voice against the Government's faulty policies.

Lobbying, advocacy and networking are very good tools to influence a policy change. They strengthen and guide the policy-makers in favour of the poor. The Food Security Act, 2013 is the result of extensive lobbying and advocacy work of NGO partners at the national and local levels. Local NGOs are often socially excluded and do not get necessary government support to execute important development projects benefitting the disadvantaged individuals of the society. In West Bengal, through the Right to Food and Work Network (RTFWN) platform, more than twenty NGO partners are working together for people's rights.

Human selfishness posed a threat on the cosmic order pushing it to acute danger. The unprecedented COVID19 pandemic further deepened the wounds of millions of people beyond imagination. None of the problems have a simple solution. It is an inner call to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated. The popular and heart-melting song of Michael Jackson, 'heal the world to make it a better place for you and for me, and the entire human race' is an inspirational force to 'kindle a fire of hope that kindles other fires, (GC 35, D2). A choice that we have to make among several possibilities is to desire the best way to work for the poor and by walking with them we resolve to do what is for the greater good.

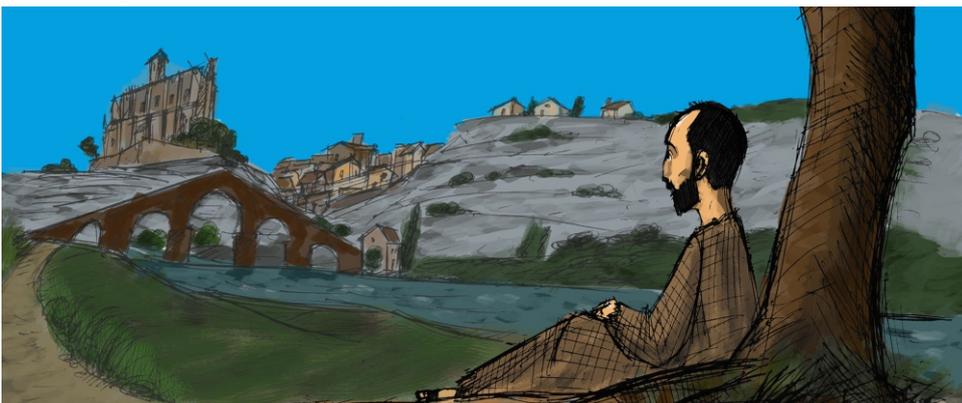


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*Continue from Pg.- 5*

### Some Historical Milestones of Jesuit Higher Education

**To the students:** Today is an age of superficiality which is the breeding ground for mediocrity. Most people get away with mediocrity most of the time. Please do not become a prey to that culture. Stretch towards perfection. You may not achieve it; but



stretch towards it all the same. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Today is also an age when instant solution and satisfaction are sought in many spheres. Remember the saying, 'Rome was not built in a day'. For anything to be done properly, thoroughly and in depth, you need time. Give life the necessary time; do not rush through it.

I would like to conclude by drawing your attention to one word that should propel your entire life: COMMITMENT. Commit your entire self to whatever good that you do and you will taste satisfaction and, may be, success too.



*Continue from Pg.- 7*

## **First UAP: Showing the Way to God**

every morning when they gather for morning worship in their respective chapel, before dispersing to begin their service among the poorest of the poor. That is why in each of their chapel one finds the words, 'I Thirst' right next to the Cross. This is considered as one of the seven famous words that the crucified Jesus uttered from the cross and hence it is deeply significant. Mother Teresa drew constant inspiration and spiritual power from these words of Jesus, as she stepped out on the streets of Calcutta to meet and serve a man who was thirsty, a woman who was hungry, a child that was abandoned, a youth who was lying on the footpath crippled and unattended. For Mother Teresa and her sisters, brothers and volunteers, it was Jesus, their Lord, whom they met in



each of these least brothers and sisters, regardless of their creed, caste and colour. For Mother Teresa and her followers, reaching out to love and serve the poorest of the poor was their definite way of meeting God face-to-face in the suffering humanity.



*Continue from Pg.- 11*

## **Walking with the Excluded**

Realising the importance of the UAP (Caring for our Common Home), St Xavier's Collegiate School has given a green look to the campus in the Primary and Secondary sections by planting varieties of saplings. Rev. Dr. Fr. Thamacin Arulappan, S.J. (Convener of the Ecology Commission of the Province) – together with the Vice-Principals and some of the school staff had been making painstaking efforts by going to various places to collect medicinal plants.

The fruit of their hard labour was seen on 18 September 2020. Rev. Dr. Fr. Dominic Savio, SJ (Principal, St. Xavier's College) inaugurated the Herbal Garden in the Primary Section in the presence

of St. Xavier's Community, some of the ALSOC members and the school staff. The Herbal Garden – named 'Assisi Herbal Garden' – contains about sixty different kinds of medicinal plants. This beautiful and much needed initiative is an encouragement for others to do their part in taking care of our Common Home which is disfigured by the carelessness and consumerist attitude of people.

The Commission will set up Herbal Gardens in all our campuses by the end of December, 2020. In addition, with the help of ALSOC, the Commission will organise a series of webinars and sapling plantation programmes both in Kolkata and other parts of Bengal to support the venture of making our common home a fitting place to live in.



## Readers, Response

Rev. Father,

I thank you for sending me the Goethals News April-June, 2021 issue. Very erudite editorial authored by you on Farm Laws and India's new reforms. My hearty congratulations to you and you team in St.

Xavier's University. Very are very proud to see the news clipping where Honourable Chief Minister of West Bengal requesting your good office for support in Asansol.

Chenthil, JAAI President

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