

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ADVENT OF THE JESUITS TO BOMBAY & POONA**

The situation of the Catholic community in Bombay and Poona in the mid-nineteenth century was depressing. The community was divided on the one hand between the adherents of the Goa Padroado, which still insisted on its jurisdiction over the whole of India (Asia) as it was entrusted to the Portuguese kings and, on the other hand, the Apostolic Vicariates, which had been developed by the Propaganda Fidei. Catholics who looked for better education for their children had to send them to Protestant schools. Neither the Carmelites nor the Capuchins had the required personnel to care for the widespread and large areas, and in particular to develop education and true social services for the Christian community.

To respond to these needs, Bishop Anastasius Hartmann sought the help of the Jesuits. Thus, the actual purpose for the invitation of the Jesuits was not simply pastoral in the narrow sense. Pastoral ministry was indeed taken up after their arrival because they needed some personal communication with the people, and for this reason requested charge of a parish. Soon, though, the total responsibility for Poona and, a little later, for Bombay was entrusted to them.

On the occasion of our Jubilee, we could reflect on the special needs which were the reason for inviting the Jesuits to Bombay. This is reflected in the enthusiastic letter of Bishop Hartmann thanking the Jesuit General for sending them: “Now I can die in peace; nothing could keep me back in this world: the College for which I have been struggling for years will soon come.” Bishop Hartmann felt the urgent need in the developing city of Bombay to care for the status of the Christian community in the surrounding society. The Christian community needed a cultural and social status. This he expected from the Jesuits. Is this truly part of the Jesuit ‘charism’ – rooted in Jesuit spirituality? We could very briefly reflect on three dimensions of Jesuit spirituality as they were expressed in various stages of Ignatius’ life:

The first stage after his conversion was the encounter with the person of Jesus. After all the initial inner struggles, he found the fulfilment of his deepest desire to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and there to follow Jesus’ footsteps with the ardent desire i.e. to remain in the world where Jesus had lived. The Franciscan Provincial had to threaten him with excommunication to send him back! Before leaving, he wanted to see the foot-prints of Jesus on Mt. Olivet once more. His whole life was centred on Jesus, to be close to him. We may find it difficult to understand this intense link with the historical Jesus. It actually remained with Ignatius even after his return, and, after all his studies in Spain and Paris, he still had the desire to return to Jerusalem together with his early companions. This personal, almost absorbing, attachment to Jesus’ person remains the core of his spirituality. Is this still our spirituality?

His spirituality needed, however, a new dimension: Ignatius and his companions could not get a conveyance to the Holy land – just in that year. So, they went to Rome, and in La Storta Ignatius had the transforming experience of his life: In an ecstasy he is associated with Jesus in a new way: “I will be propitious to you in Rome (*Ego ero vobis*

*Romae propitius)*”. *Ego* means Jesus who had been Ignatius’ centre of life; *vobis* refers not to Ignatius alone but also to his companions who had been fully associated with him – meaning actually the Society of Jesus; *Romae* stands as a certain alternative – or as a definite new orientation – to Jerusalem. His union with Jesus is not in the romantic remembrance of Jesus’ earthly life but in Jesus’ actual presence in his Church. It is the change from a still individualistic orientation of his mission to the worldwide openness of Jesus’ message of God’s reign in the all-embracing community of nations, embodied in the Church. I find this symbolized in Ignatius’ desire to celebrate his first Mass in Bethlehem. He actually celebrated it in Rome, in *Maria Maggiore*, where according to legend Jesus’ crib was preserved.

The opening of his mind to the universal mission of the Church still needed a specification: This mission must be all-embracing as Jesus’ own mission was for the world, not only for its fulfilment at the end of time, to lead people to heaven, but as the transforming power of all spheres of life. The narrow understanding of mission as limited to the sphere of faith and sacraments was broadened in Vatican II to include the responsibility for all spheres of life: politics, social issues, culture and economics.... in the *Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*. For Ignatius, it is contained in the search for “God in all things”, which is not an invitation to worldliness but a call to universal responsibility. We have now realized this change by widening the sphere of mission to include many educational, social and other initiatives. Mission today is seen in the framework of Ignatian spirituality.

If we reflect on Bishop Hartmann’s invitation to the Jesuits to take over the mission of Bombay and Poona, for better education, for social services etc., we feel that he anticipated the spirit of the Council. The actual needs of this vast region was not merely for faith and sacraments, but “changing society through the power of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* n. 18) This perspective is of paramount importance for our approaching Jubilee celebrations.

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