

Spices

“Jesuit Alumni/Alumnae Networking for Communal Harmony”

South Zone JAAI Meet in Guntur, 27th December, 2017.

George Pattery,sj

Glad to be part of this South Zone gathering of Jesuit Alumni/ae meet. You are a privileged group to gather in this wonderful campus.

Jesuit education has imparted values and perspectives that you continue to cherish as Alumni/ae. There are memories and faces of Jesuits you treasure; there are experiences and encounters that you would like to relive in this reunion. There are friends you want to meet and cherish the bonding. Memories are waiting to be embodied. JAAI gathering offers you such an occasion. Welcome to Jesuit family to embody your memories.

I am glad that you are gathering as South Zone JAAI. This augurs well for the future. Zonal level gathering takes you beyond the one Jesuit institution that you are associated with. It takes you to Jesuit tradition that is shared in the Jesuit Institutions in this zone. It is already one form of networking. Continue this outreach and build on this so that JAAI strengthens the sense of a corporate body at the national and international levels.

1. Ecological Networking.

You have chosen a very good theme: “Networking for Communal Harmony”. We exist, move and have our life in a ‘network’; starting from the big bang about 14 billion years ago, every atom, every being, everyone in the universe are inter-dependent and inter-connected. The web of life is part of the universal web; there is star-dust in each of us. We are all inter-connected with all and everything. That is why we say: even the flutter of a butterfly can affect the harmony of the universe. Ecology is not simply about environment; ecology is about everything. We are cousins of plants, animals, birds and the sky and the ocean. Philip Clayton writes: *“Once there was no universe and then, after the Big Bang, there was an exploding world of stars and galaxies. Once the earth was unpopulated and later it was teeming with primitive life forms. Once there were apes living in trees and then there were Mozart, Einstein and Gandhi.”* (religion-online.org). Your/our family is much bigger than you/we were thinking!

By now a classical, the Encyclical *Laudato si*, of Pope Francis says: (77).The universe did not emerge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire for self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: “For you (the Almighty) love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have

made anything if you had hated it" (*Wis* 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Every inhabitant on this planet is precious; every citizen in our country has dignity. The document says: ". God has written a precious book, "whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe" (85). 'The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness'. (83)

At the national convention in Ranchi last October, JAAI adopted 'ecology' as a point of collaboration with all Jesuit schools and colleges, and with ADO (Assistancy Development Office). Ecology is not only about protecting environment, it is a way of relating, and it is to belong to universal web where all and everyone is related. Ecology is a compassionate way of being and relating. (92). Every act of cruelty towards any creature is "contrary to human dignity". (69). We can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality: "Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism". (70) Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.

Eco-sense teaches us what is networking and harmony. We are fundamentally in a network and in harmony. If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. "Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship, harms the environment" (142). Our openness to others, each of whom is a "thou" capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human persons. A correct relationship with the created world demands that we do not weaken this social dimension of openness to others, much less the transcendent dimension of our openness to the "Thou" of God. Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God (119). Ecology provides a new sense of network for harmony; takes us to the origin and to the end.

2. Net-working to rebuild Social Fabric that is being ruptured.

We appreciate the original harmony of the universe, and humanity, and the harmonious existence of many peoples, cultures, religions and languages in India. Our struggle for independence 60 years ago, embodied a new understanding of a nation that is built on plurality of religions and ethnicities and languages. We have a unique memory of a nation built on ahimsa and non-violent struggle. We envisaged a social order that is just and equitable and dignity for every citizen of our country. Unfortunately this is being threatened today. India's social fabric is being ruptured. Let me quote from the recent Statement of the Jesuit

Conference of S.Asia. “In our world today, divisive social identities, premised on ethnicity/nationalism, ideology/ religion and patriarchy/machismo emerge as among the three most resilient and potent challenges to a just and humane society. South Asia is struggling against multiple injustices that stem from economic inequalities, caste discrimination and cultural hegemony, which have for ages oppressed our long suffering peoples. Our quest must be to fulfil the vision of the founding fathers/mothers of our nations for a just society through just means: a justice founded on liberty, equality, fraternity; a society that guarantees fundamental rights and civil liberties; is inclusive and participatory; respects and protects individual and collective identities; prioritises basic *needs* over superfluous *wants*; privileges restoration over retribution, forgiveness over revenge.”

We witness today a situation that breeds divisive hate politics, co-opting people into a consolidated majority that oppresses minorities and the marginalised. There is an underlying narrative filled with falsified myth and imagery that sustains this process and is concretised in fabricated religio-political ideology; the single largest threat to India's secular democratic tradition is the rise of radical religious fundamentalism, striking at the very idea of India born in the freedom struggle and constitutionally proclaimed secular by our founding fathers/mothers. ... In this context, India needs a second freedom struggle to create a new narrative that renews the legacy of the freedom movement and contextualises it for today and thus counters the neoliberal religiously coloured ideology that colonises our peoples through instrumentalizing religion. Religion per se is pluralistic and universal in its core and approach”.

Any Jesuit inspired response is founded on our mission to promote justice and reconciliation in our broken world of which dialogue with the poor and with people of other cultures and religions is an essential part. Our mission as Jesuit Alumni/ae in South Asia is to build counter-cultural human communities of solidarity that will be instruments of peace and reconciliation to respond to the danger of this region turning into a region of hate and violence. As Jesuit alumni/ae you are well aware of the Jesuit tradition of ‘social concern’, critical learning and ever seeking ‘magis’ – the ever greater one. Hence along with genuine ecology, we promote social harmony; rather genuine ecology demands social harmony. Let us pledge to protect the social harmony that is our tradition and heritage.

3. Net-working with non-formal Education.

Along with ecology and social harmony, I elicit your support for net-working for ‘non-formal education’; besides the formal schools, Jesuits are engaged in non-formal education of many poor students across the country. These non-formal centres require much support. Can our educational institutions and Alumni/ae associations adopt one non-formal centre each, in order

to support them with financial resources to enhance the quality of teaching and learning? The poor in the villages have also right to educate their children, have the right to food and shelter.

Thus ecological collaboration, building up social harmony and resourcing non-formal education could form three pillars for JAAI to reconnect with Jesuit heritage and tradition that you have inherited. They say: "Happiness is a crazy mathematics; because it multiplies when you divide it". Jesuit heritage is crazy because it does not inherit for itself but for 'others'.

This being Christmas season, allow me (now we need permission to celebrate X'Mas!!) to conclude with a quote from Pope Francis: "... Christmas reminds us that a faith that does not trouble us is a troubled faith. A faith that does not make us grow is a faith that needs to grow. A faith that does not raise questions is a faith that has to be questioned. A faith that does not rouse us is a faith that needs to be roused. A faith that does not shake us is a faith that needs to be shaken. Indeed, a faith which is only intellectual or lukewarm is only a notion of faith. It can become real once it touches our heart, our soul, our spirit and our whole being. Once it allows God to be born and reborn in the manger of our heart. Once we let the star of Bethlehem guide us to the place where the Son of God lies, not among Kings and riches, but among the poor and humble." Pope Francis, X'Mas Messge to Roman Curia.2017.

Wish you well and invite you to net-work on the three pillars to make JAAI 'a crazy heritage' of 'harmony'!

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