

GC 35: MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS?

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The Uninvited.

I had a '*camera con vista*' (room with a view) in the *bastione* of the Writers' House next to the Curia during the period of GC. The view from my room was of *via penitenzieri* reaching to Borgo S.Spirito. Not a crowded street by Roman standards; both sides of the street were parking slots for cars, mainly from the near-by hospital and the school. From the early hours of the day, cars would arrive and all would find a slot. The management of space was so cleverly done that I wished I could take a lesson or two from them on the managerial skills. They had another skill that amazed me. Arriving early in the morning, they always had something to talk about, to greet, to discuss or even shout at. They managed space and sound so well! Was it particular an Italian skill or was it simply the result of a world-view where the other is welcome as a daily companion? Within this clever management of space and sound, there was always an element of unpredictability and surprise; one might not find a parking slot one day; one might not find a familiar face one morning.

GC had also clever managerial skills with regard to sound and space; by contrast, space and sound in GC35 were mostly predictable and certain. One spoke at the allotted time; one used prescribed language. The high-tech mode of functioning further added to this certainty and effectiveness. However there were occasional interventions that even led to an early termination of the sessions, or an intervention that

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went beyond the conventional item and mode, or the voting machines did not work properly. On hindsight, I recognize however that the key moments/experiences of the GC belonged to the category of the unpredictable and the uncalculated. Think of the surprise election of Fr.Nicolás at the age of seventy two and the spontaneous joy and peace in the aula; recall the warm, tearful and affectionate fare-well to Fr.Kolvenbach; remember the surprise and peace at the papal audience. These were not calculated and planned, rationalized and monitored events or experiences. Certainly, there was preparation, but the events occurred beyond the preparations. It was the God of surprises who visited us. The post-

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modern, high-tech, digital world is very precise, certain and predictable. One can monitor every move; one can surf every nook of the earth; one can reach everywhere. Nonetheless the Spirit blows where it wills.

The well-monitored, neatly-arranged and planned general sessions helped the smooth functioning of GC and its business. Technical assistance helped us in the process. That was real strength; perhaps that was also its weakness. We missed the free flow of ideas and interventions that could result in in-depth debate on issues and perspectives. We were too pragmatic to engage in serious discussion and debates as it emerged. The causalities were the frontier issues of indigenous people, of African concerns and of engaging perspectives on mission. In fact GC35 was a mix of both preparedness and spontaneity, perhaps tilting more towards the former. The challenge for us in the post GC period is to combine the rational, the planned, and the calculated with the uninvited and the unexpected. The uninvited could be the best guest at a party. Let us await the Lord of surprises of GC to walk with us in the post-GC period.

Did We Make a Difference?

I began with a narrative in the pre-GC issue of CIS *. Let me narrate

* "Doing things differently; S. Asia and GC35," Review of Ignatian Spirituality, XXXVII, N. 113, 2006. Curia S.J., Rome.

another piece of a story. Bored with the daily routine of teaching the lessons, Anita thought of a different lesson. She decided to honour each of the students. She called each of them to the stage and admired one quality or other in each of them. Then she gave them a blue ribbon inscribed on it: **Who I am makes a difference**. Thereafter she gave a class project to them to assess how recognition impacts any community. Each student was given three ribbons each, to see how people honour one another. The story goes on.

The single message that GC35 sends out to each Jesuit is that Jesuit identity makes a difference. In a sense for me the best contribution of GC35 is precisely this emphasis on the quality of a Jesuit: who a Jesuit is, makes a difference. There is a contemplative way of standing in the midst of the world; there is a differential way to discover the hidden God in the depth of realities. As a pendulum the Jesuit moves to and from the world and God. He is so familiar with God that he admires the variety and the multiplicity of the world and is not afraid of the world in all its profaneness and complexity. He is so familiar with the world that he senses the Spirit of God labouring in the world in the most unexpected places and ways. Reading the decree on Identity every Jesuit says to himself: **Who I am makes a difference**. The way I am makes a difference; the way I do things makes a difference. Is it not this perception for the quality of the person that led GC to elect Nicolás, at the age of 72?

*Jesuit identity
makes a difference*

Perhaps GC missed out a qualitative difference that could have emerged following discussion in the aula on indigenous people and on community life. A differential quality of our mission was emerging in the discussions on indigenous people, on ecology and on community; that did not however help us to redefine our mission towards building up a differential perspective on mission. We were aware of the different way of knowing, relating, organizing and communicating among the indigenous people; a perspective that admires and takes care of the earth in its relatedness with the humans and other creatures. However we were so well-prepared and calculated that such spontaneous development could not have emerged within that time. We preferred to stay with the dominant ideology and rationality that is the rule of the day. In that sense there was a disconnect between the decree topics and the ordinary governance topics; the former did not sufficiently fuse into the latter; often they were discussed

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in parallel groups and provided less chance for interaction or fusion. Did we miss out some prophetic voices because they were not audible within the prescribed time and modality? How do we assure a system that promotes also the non-systemic?

Internationality, Globality and Universality.

S. Asia, especially a resurgent South Asia remains a dilemma for the rest of the world. Its democracy, its economy and its judiciary survived many predictions of death and decay and yet they do not really fit into the schemes of the international pandits. There is an Indian style of growth and development which does not toe the line of a predominantly western model, whether in economics or in politics or in religion. It may be the line of the tortoise as against the hare. Indian democracy is growing slowly and differently, but it is growing, in an inclusive manner although many are impatient with the pace. But its inclusiveness runs through the axes of caste, language, religion and class and hence it is unique. Perhaps also in economics; its growth has been slower than anywhere; once again it has not opted for an all out market economy at the expense of a more egalitarian approach. It has not adopted a development model that determines everything in terms of economics; at least not yet. So also is the case with religions. It has opted for a national perspective that respects and promotes all religions. In a sense India remains a dilemma for the international community. As Ramachandra Guha, puts it: “*As a Modern nation India is simply sui generis. It stands on its own, different and distinct from the alternative political models on offer – be these Anglo-Saxon liberalism, French Republicanism, atheistic communism, or Islamic theocracy...India is the closest approximation to the Free World*” (*India After Gandbi*, pp. 770-1). However in its struggle to develop an inclusive approach, South Asia needs collaboration and support from the rest of the world. In the process, a redefinition of internationality might emerge that is more inclusive.

Does South Asian assistancy remain a dilemma of a sort for the rest of the Society after GC35? Is South Asia a dilemma to itself? To the first question, the answer seems to be in the affirmative. The main reason seems to be the experiment that South Asia has undertaken to evolve an inclusive approach. An inclusive perspective, whether in its theological perspective with regard to models of church, with regard to other religions and cultures or with regard to its own the recruitment policies, is a laborious process. It is an experiment in the sense that not everybody in South Asia easily accepts this 'inclusive' approach; there are strong and insistent demands for an exclusive approach that is dictated by the fundamentalist groups. However a vital experiment such as this is significant for the world at large and for the church in particular. Is inclusiveness a weakness or a strength? If viewed from an evangelical perspective, it is obvious that an inclusive approach is the perspective of the kingdom, where people from north and south, west and east come to the table of the Lord. I am labouring to highlight the point that an inclusive approach (with all its problems) could be a sign of 'excellence' if the criterion of excellence is closer to the evangelical counsels. One may define quality in terms of a given past or in reference to the contemporary response to evangelical counsels. If it is the latter, then S. Asian Jesuit inclusiveness, - in theology, inter-religious perspective or in its recruitment - is an evangelical virtue that could be counted among the *magis*. Should we abandon this 'inclusiveness' that does not seem to fit in with the so-called global criterion of excellence? The definition of 'excellence' in normal parlance seems to imply exclusion as an accepted criterion.

For a sub-continent that has one of the most ancient and thriving civilizations, one that is the cradle for many religions, different cultures and multiple languages, rich in philosophy and traditions, internationality would mean an inclusive, multiple and differing view point. For a sub-continent that was under the colonial rule for more than two hundred years and had won back its selfhood and freedom through a distinctly spiritual struggle, excellence would mean necessarily a spiritual perspective rather than a 'performance' yardstick.

A fast globalizing world seems to recognize and value the Asian/Indian experiment. In the Church however, Asian realities are under the scanner. During an interaction with a Jesuit theology faculty member in the west, I enquired whether they subscribe to Indian (or other Asian) sociological, literary, theological periodicals; the answer was in the negative; however they expect Indian/Asian Jesuits to study in those faculties and

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claim the faculty to be international in character. 'Internationality' has already been defined and they expect Asian realities to grow into that. The Asian growth of the church and the Society has to be woven into the definition of 'internationality'.

Unfortunately the GC did not have an occasion to define what is meant by 'global' or 'international'. That brings us to the question of globality, internationality and universality. When something is pertaining to many nations, crossing the boundaries, then we say it is international. One can

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have a currency that is valid and acceptable across the national boundaries. Whereas the word global is used in the sense that it affects the entire globe as for example the warming of the atmosphere. The universal however belongs to a qualitatively different order. What is universal does not necessarily and only mean that it is

valid across the nations; rather it means that it is valid in particular situations and across the particularities. Perhaps it is in that sense that GC asks us to develop the sense of 'universality' in the Society. We discussed in GC35 the need to go to the frontiers, but we shied away from discussing it seriously when the frontiers were touched upon in terms of indigenous people, or African plight. Pragmatism, diplomacy and accepted paradigms won the day as against certain daring in-depth discussions and challenging confrontations. Perhaps GC is not supposed to or expected to do that in such a short period.

At this juncture in the history of a fast globalizing world, we are invited to define 'internationality and globality' anew. Asian, African, American, European, Indigenous ways of seeing and acting in the world could evolve an international perspective. Unfortunately it is the economic might that defines the style, not cultural and spiritual strength. Perhaps our mind-set is too structured, too conceptual, too one-sidedly rational to enable us to question our paradigms. We are not yet ready for a more imaginative and creative approach to living. Our thinking in inter-cultural context is at best 'representational' but not integrative. We have not devised inter-cultural

tools to be enriched by cultural wisdoms. A cultural auditing will enable us to recognize the traits that are operative in us.

South Asian Dilemma after GC35.

Does South Asia feel rather lost in the aftermath of GC35? Does the globality of the Society of Jesus find us constrained in our national limits? Do we fit into internationality, as it is understood? Can we articulate the universality of our approach in a credible way? Do we need to interrogate ourselves on any account? These are some of the questions that surfaced in me after GC. They in fact point out to two kinds of responses from the South Asian delegates: how to respond to the demands of 'internationality' (where internationality is apparently identified with universality?) What happens to Asian/Indian perspectives? Both questions are valid.

During and after GC, many of us were eager to look for 'pragmatic' ways of reaching out to internationality. Often that boiled down to sending our men for studies in western faculties or missioning them for various apostolate in other assistancies. They are very genuine efforts to make us international. What is rather disconcerting is an assumption (I surmise) that our attempts at developing an Indian way – in ecclesiology and theology etc are not worth following in this age of 'globalization'. The bold initiatives and experiments of recent decades in formation, especially in fostering an Indian / Asian model in ecclesiology and theology are being particularly distanced. Perhaps it emerges from the confusion of identifying 'internationality' with 'universality'. It is part of the universality of the Society that we engage in developing local church, local theology and incultured kingdom communities. That universal approach should not be mistaken with the demands of 'international' collaboration. The universal dimensions of our mission – faith/justice, enculturation and dialogue with religions, reconciliation with creation – cannot be compromised for the sake of an internationality whose meaning and exigencies are yet to evolve. Besides, the recent attempts at re-hellenization of Christianity (the fourth wound according to CJ-129 – '*What is happening in the Church?*'), is rather inexplicable. Unintentionally, in the name of internationalization, we fall into a 'Hellenistic mould of mind' disowning the Spirit of God at work in Asian, African, American, European, indigenous cultures, philosophies and religious traditions. I am afraid that South Asia is taking such a path in the

name of globalizastion which easily fit into the 'hellenization' project of some quarters. 'Experts believe that, in today's world at least, the hellenization of Christianity has led to a loss of its Biblical roots.' (CJ-129, p.25).

However there is need to critically view our innovative ways in mission and in formation in South Asia. We have to internationalize Asian/Indian efforts both in terms of inviting Jesuits (scientists, theologians, thinkers) from across the borders to interact with us in our mission and formation. Similarly we need to improve 'theological discipline' among us. Still more, there is urgent need to cultivate interest in theology as a discipline along with other studies. More concretely the national institutes, colleges and theologates have to be innovatively engaged to allow the total Asian/Indian reality to engage our theological discussions and scientific researches; similarly in the spirit of globalization, we have to invent a Jesuit IPL (Indian Premier League in cricket) to interact with faculties and centers abroad. In this enterprise we bear in mind that our experiment in South Asia is in itself an example of international collaboration with many languages, cultures and races.

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Brand name Tata may not be a good example for all. However we need to learn from Indian enterprises like the Tatas. When Jamshedji Tata started an Indian Steel Company on borrowed money, the then British colonial masters laughed at him. Today he is lording over the Steel

Industry in the world, (not withstanding the huge land-alienation and exploitation of indigenous people and nature caused by the industry). The trust in Asian-Indian realities and the belief that the Spirit is laboring among us should enable us to develop a 'Jesuit way of standing in Asia/India' and gazing at the world boldly. In the name of international standards and quality, we should not be reinventing Greco-Roman Hellenistic theological perspectives nor relinquishing our *marga* (path). That will be a disservice to true universality and internationality in the church.

Part of the western church feels itself under attack from an overly and one-sidedly secular civil society; part of the western church is struggling to cope with the emerging signs of the times in the perspective of the

kingdom communities. Civil societies like in India, though paying heavy price, is carving out a notion of civil society that is inclusive and is struggling to provide a level-playing field for all religions, cultures and even economies. With all its struggles and imperfections, this is a vital experiment for the world and the church. The omniscient and over-protective church model is no more accepted in such a civil and global community. In shaping a new global inclusive civil society, we participate in the process of building kingdom communities; this cannot be done without international collaboration. There is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look (Decree on Identity: GC35).

Beyond the Geographical Boundaries.

The decree on mission speaks of a reconciled earth-people of God. It reiterates the vision of the 'principle and foundation' (EE 23) where the creation is viewed in relation to the intention of the creator. There is one-ness and unity of purpose. Such a vision challenges us to see the entire creation as one and the humanity as people of God, beyond the geographical boundaries. The exigencies of globalization help us to have such a perspective, and invites us to put on the mind and heart of the creator. Such a universal perspective is ingrained in the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises and in the outlook of the Constitutions.

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When it decided to act upon the universal salvific plan, the Trinity chose to 'incarnate' in a given time and place, within geographical and temporal boundaries. Any given time and space is part of the creation, containing all the goodness and beauty of the creator. Creation is to be seen as an ever-widening circle where every point can be a central point and every circle is within the embrace of the creator. . Hence the incarnational pattern is embedded in the 'salvific plan'. Asian, African, American, European, Indigenous cultures are all vehicles of the creator-saviour God.

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No culture, no philosophy, no rational system is a privileged vehicle. Geographical particularities and cultural specificities are ingredients in the formation of identity. They are not to be bypassed in the name of 'internationality'; nor should they be absolutized. True universality will include them to evolve genuine kingdom perspectives. In the decree on 'identity' we speak of Jesuit identity as relational. In and through our cultural, national, geographical, linguistic identities we grow into our identity as companions aligning ourselves to his 'way' and adopting it as our 'way'. The call to go beyond the geographical boundaries implies not a colonial project of reaching the ends of the world, but a salvific plan to recognize the people of God wherever they are and to evolve true universality that integrates all particularities; true inter-nationality that respects all nations; true globality that contains all the corners of the earth and beyond.

GC35 Beckons us.

The amazing experience at GC of electing Fr. Nicolás through a process of 'murmuration' confirmed the strength of the discernment process and gave a new joy and hope for the Society. Such an experience and the resultant joy are the gift of the Spirit for the Society at this point of time. GC is beckoning us to **trust** in the wisdom of 'Our Way of Proceeding' in the Society.

The GC is inviting us to reinvent ourselves in the charism of Ignatius and to be rooted in our identity. As companions being placed with Christ bearing the cross mark the identity of every Jesuit; this foundational grace means that we accept his 'way' as our way, freeing us interiorly for his mission. The entire Society, especially we in South Asia receive this **challenge** anew and form ourselves into men of 'interiority and boldness' for a world of addictions and fragmented images.

The mission of reconciliation particularly with creation, provides us with a new **vision** that implies a new pedagogy. It is as if the ancient wisdom of the indigenous people is being restored. The cyber-net people are also the earth people searching the heavens. A new paradigm of living, seeing and relating are emerging amidst us, connecting the indigenous with the trans-national and the beyond. The Society is invited to invest its resources in unfolding this new vision building new bridges of relationships.

The God of creation is the Lord of history making things new amidst us and through us of a new people of many cultures, religions, races and languages.

Conclusion.

In a sense GC35 does not give answers; rather it poses questions to elicit responses. That is the strength of GC35. It throws perspectives on Jesuit identity and charism; it broadens the understanding of mission; it amplifies the possibilities of obedience; it points out the demands of governance; it invites a collaborative heart.

GC35 taught us all these and more through 'experiential way of learning'; perhaps that is the key. Beyond a strictly Hellenistic rational philosophical theology, we learned to be together as companions and learned to look at reality in a contemplative way. This is eminently human, universal, Ignatian and Asian.

References:

1. *GC35 Decrees*, Rome.
2. Guha, Ramachandra. *India After Gandhi*. London. Picador, 2007.
3. 'What is happening in the Church?' Xavier Alegre et al, CJ Booklets, 129. Barcelona. Spain, 2008.