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Father General

Visit to Sri Lanka As announced in a previous bulletin, Father General visited the Province of Sri Lanka, from the 5th to the 8th of February. Father Nicolás spent his time visiting the Jesuits and the areas in which they serve: Colombo-Galle, Kandy, the eastern and the northern regions, in order to have a clearer picture of the work of the Society and the struggles of a country seeking ethnic and political harmony. While visiting the region of Colombo-Galle, Father Nicolás stressed several themes particularly dear to him: depth of commitment, creativity and life in the Spirit, and inserting these into the specific reality of Jesuits in Sri Lanka today. He noted that technology can be a powerful aid to serious intellectual work and to the strengthening of commitment but that it can be a temptation to superficiality. He concluded by saying that unless religious life shows such experiential commitment it will have little to say to Asia so steeped in deep and ancient religious traditions. He called the Jesuits to a clear commitment to the intellectual apostolate as outlined by the 35th General Congregation. This commitment may take several forms: teaching in institutions of higher learning, research, publication, and interaction with professional scholars in order to help them to deepen their own reflection and analysis.

The meeting with the Jesuits of Kandy district was an opportunity to highlight the challenges the Society faces in Sri Lanka; Father Nicolás spoke on the GC35 theme of "frontiers" and suggested that the metaphor of the frontier could be enriched by the metaphor of the horizon. Frontier capture the pioneering dimension, the difficulties pertaining to certain tasks we must take up, while horizon connotes the widest possible scope and outreach that must characterize our service. During his visit of the northern and eastern regions, Father Nicolás underscored the importance of evolving creative forms of education and of placing Jesuits in positions that offer students good mentors. He called attention to the promotion of dialogue between the north and the south of the nation and among factions who are in conflict. It is necessary, he said, to build bridges and form alliances that will promote a just society.

Visits were arranged between Father General and special groups of Jesuits: the novices, men in formation, young priests, and those in tertianship. Likewise, Father Nicolás visited the Apostolic Nuncio and several bishops, in particular the bishop of Colombo. All of them warmly welcomed him, and expressed their gratitude for the spirit of collaboration displayed by the Society. The trip gave Father Nicolás the opportunity to meet also old friends including Father Aloysius Pieris, director of *Tulana*, the research center promoting inter-religious dialogue especially with Buddhism, the major religion of Sri Lanka.

Visit to Lahore, Pakistan. Father General visited Lahore from the 9th to the 11th of February. There are four Jesuits in Lahore, coming from various countries and working in the educational field. Pakistan, like Sri Lanka, is a country in a precarious state given its present political reality, the rise of fundamentalism, and its proximity to Afghanistan. In order to have a deeper understanding of the work of the Jesuits, Father Nicolás spent his first day in conversation with the community and with three visiting professors, two Jesuits, one layperson who are on a research trip. The next day he visited two schools for poor children, one for boys, and one for girls that the Society has sponsored for the past 25 years. Father Nicolás noted, "Both are in a very poor neighborhood, almost entirely Muslim. The students are Christian and Muslim and they seem to be creating a very good atmosphere of friendship and creative conviviality among all of them". He added, "The overall impression of this visit was excellent in terms of atmosphere, dedication of the lay professors, and vision and abilities of the two Jesuits who manage both schools."

Father General paid a visit to Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha, "an old friend from the time I joined the team of the *Pastoral Institute* in Manila." Later the archbishop joined the community for dinner. The final day, Father General had time to study, read, and visit parts of the city, especially its great Mosque, the fifth largest in the world and the second largest in Pakistan and Asia. The day concluded with a visit of sisters from four religious congregations who are "very dedicated women who work closely in collaboration with Jesuits."

Upon his return to Rome, Father Nicolás answered to the following two questions.

Q. Father General, this trip was different from previous ones since you visited two countries in very difficult situations, especially from the political point of view. What has been your impression and what about the Society of Jesus?

R. These visits confirm the general impression of other visits. At the level of individual Jesuits I find our men excellent, dedicated, with many good talents and spiritual gifts. I find good will, a great desire to serve the Church and the people. In smaller regions, like these two, I also find a lack of resources. One consequence is that it becomes especially difficult to plan and to discern according to our priorities. This applies especially to formation as an investment in depth for our life and apostolate. I worry about this, because our life and future ministry greatly depend on this. The immediate and pressing needs are so visible and so many that we can be blinded - or, at least, distracted - by them and end up not seeing that in Asia (like on all other continents) we need to offer a consistent and credible witness if we want people to pay attention to us as a group of religious with a spiritual message and a hope that surpasses the light and superficial hopes of the open market.

Q. Our presence in Pakistan is modest, do you think it has an important role?

R. Yes, our presence is extremely modest and I hope the Society can feel the need and the responsibility to help strengthen this small presence. And, yet, I am convinced that it has an important role to play. Vis-à-vis the Muslim majority, a Christian presence can be a source of inspiration that, as such, will always include a challenge to be genuine, to live faith in depth and to deal with other human beings with compassion, generosity and fairness. With regard to the poor, we will always have a range of possible services, especially educational, and the sharing of life and hope as our men are doing at present. For the Pakistani Church there are many services Jesuits can offer to aid this local Church face its enormous challenges and develop its life and ministry with credibility and with an effective ministry. Lastly, we can encourage and cooperate with the many Religious and lay persons who want to transform Pakistani society for the better.

From the Curia

Several meetings are on the agenda for the month of February at the Curia:

- February 14- 21: **Orientation Course for JRS International Volunteers.** Twelve people participated in the program, six coming from various countries in Africa. The aim of the course was to sensitize the group to challenges faced by refugees problems, the struggle for human rights and begin reflecting in a deep way on Father Arrupe's vision and the Ignatian roots of JRS's mission. Other parts of the course included: reflections on the life of a volunteer in the field, living as a group, and contacts with the cultural environment.

- February 16-20: **International Counselors of the Apostleship of Prayer.** Four leaders coming from as many continents met with the International Delegate, to discuss the renewal of this ministry entrusted to the Society by the Holy Father. Father General attended some of the sessions. The agenda included a discussion of ways in which the Apostleship of Prayer and its section for young people, the Youth Eucharistic Movement (MEG), can be more present in the apostolates of the Society of Jesus, as well as in the formation of laity in the field of spirituality. Presently, the Apostleship of Prayer works in 61 countries, while the MEG is in 51; the levels of development are not the same everywhere.

- February 22-25: **Permanent Interprovincial Commission for the Roman Houses [CIP].** This is the annual meeting of the advisory group to Father General that studies the governance of the international Roman apostolic works. In addition to reviewing how past recommendations have been implemented, the commission will discuss ways and means of improving these apostolic works entrusted to the universal Society. There will be special meetings with the community and staff of the Oriental Institute, the Jesuits working at Vatican Radio, and a visit to the formation community at the Gesù.

- February 28-March 4: Meeting of the **Socii of the Central and Eastern Europe Assistancy [ECO].** The aim is to help Socii, many of whom are newly appointed, to meet one another, to learn about the General Curia, and to deepen their knowledge of different administrative and juridical procedures a Socius is concerned with during the course of his daily work.

Appointments

Father Michael Czerny, a member of the English Canada Province, coordinator of the *African Jesuit AIDS Network* (AJAN), has been named personal assistant to the newly appointed President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson of Ghana. The new AJAN coordinator is Father Paterné-Auxène Mombe, of the West African Province (AOC).

From the Provinces

LATIN AMERICA: A New Province

On January 30th at the *Colegio Maximo de San José*, in San Miguel, Argentina, the decree of unification of the Provinces of Argentina and Uruguay was read during the Eucharist presided over by Father Ignacio Echarte, Secretary of the Society of Jesus. According to Father General's Decree the birth of the Province Argentina - Uruguay is intended to create better conditions for the apostolic service of the Society in both countries. The new Province, whose provincial, Father Alfonso José Gómez, is the former provincial of Argentina, has 200 Jesuits assigned to 17 communities. In the message sent to the members of the new Province, Father General urge them to promote four fundamental attitudes: to enliven the passion and the fervor for helping others according to the example of St. Ignatius; to grow in unity so as to give testimony to the evangelical counsels; to accept difference as a richness and to live it with the consciousness that "the larger the tree's foliage, the deeper its roots must be"; and to learn from one another and to help one another.

BRAZIL: Vatican Radio Program Award

The Brazilian language program of Vatican Radio was honored by the Episcopal Conference of the Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) and the Catholic Radio Broadcasting Union (*Unda Brasil*) with a special award. The program, *The Jesuits in the evangelization of Brazil*, broadcast every fifteen days on Thursdays was given the *Silver Microphone* award. Father Cesar Augusto dos Santos, director of the program, received the award from Father Atilio Hartmann, Mutirão communication coordinator for the Bishops Conference.

HAITI: After the earthquake

More than a month has passed since the earthquake ravaged Haiti. Immediately after the first tremors, the Jesuits together with their collaborators, formed the "Haitian-Dominican Emergency Committee", which meets periodically to study the needs and to adapt their programs of health and food assistance according to changing reality. Jesuits also convened a committee of five people, headquartered in the Tabarre novitiate, for the development of reconstruction project, once the emergency phase is over. On February 21st, a first draft of this project was presented at a news conference in Port-au-Prince. Father François Kawas, coordinator of the Emergency Committee says, "this program will be delivered to political leaders and other influential people. There will be meetings with managers of United Nation agencies to let them hear the voice of the population, especially those who are voiceless, both about emergency aid and the reconstruction of the country." In another communiqué, Father Kawas describes the work of the committee, "We examined the difficulties, the achievements and what has to be improved. The big concern is the housing of people. The situation remains quite unsatisfactory in the temporary shelters. Medical assistance has been excellent for emergency care, but sanitary conditions remain precarious." Together with immediate aid, a project for the future has begun, to give birth to hope in the future.

UNITED STATES: Archbishop of Canterbury honored

On January 25th in New York, Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury was given the 2009 Champion Award for achievement in Christian Letters by the editors of the Jesuit magazine *America*. Doctor Williams was honored for his writings that span theology, the lives of the saints, religious identity, poetry, the September 11 terrorist attacks, and contemporary mass media. The award is regularly bestowed on notable Christian writers. It is named for the Jesuit, Edmund Campion, an English writer and martyr who is honored by both the Anglican and Catholic traditions. During the ceremony, held at the end of Christian unity week, Father Drew Christiansen, director of *America* magazine, recalled several recent efforts to promote Christian unity and said that giving the Champion Award to the leader of the Church of England is a further step on that path.

The 4th century of Matteo Ricci's death

Rome-Macerata-Taipei: Discovering Matteo Ricci. Many initiatives are on the World's agenda to mark the 4th century

of the death of Matteo Ricci. Among them is an international meeting on *Science, Reason and Faith: the Genius of Father Matteo Ricci*. It is being organized by the diocese of Macerata together with the Theological Institute of Marche, the University of Macerata, the Pontifical Gregorian University, Sacred Heart Catholic University and *Fujen Catholic University* in Taipei. The meeting will open at the Gregorian University on March 2nd with the theme: *Father Matteo Ricci Molded by Chinese*. It is a reflection on what the missionary himself writes in one of his letters, "I made myself at home with them."

Under this title, the organizers write, "we want to propose to the public a project that, in consonance with this aim, allows a deepening of the critical understanding of the Ricci method of the accommodation of the human and apostolic experience and its realization. Through an interdisciplinary approach, we will evaluate it so as to highlight its value, and possible limitations as well as its timeliness for the Church committed to interreligious and intercultural dialogue." The meeting will continue in Macerata from the 4th to the 6th of March with the participation of a number of renown Ricci scholars studying the historical and religious time in which he lived. All that pertains to Ricci will be examined: the relation between reason, culture and faith; astronomy; Ricci's works in the context of the missionary impulse after the Council of Trent; the philosophical categories underpinning his mission; the sacramental initiation used by him, and his spiritual life. A similar meeting will be held at the *Fujen Catholic University* in Taipei next April.

New in SJWEB

Two slideshows of Father General's trip to Sri Lanka and Pakistan and a podcast with Father Tony Corcoran, superior of Russian Region of the Society of Jesus are offered through the Curia's website. Go to: www.sjweb.info

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