

**JESUIT CURIA: CONSULTATION ON
ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
2011**

Recognizing that that Jesuits today carry out their mission in a world of ecclesial and religious pluralistic, the Jesuits' 34 General Congregation (1995) broadened the Jesuits' understanding of their mission to stress ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Mindful of this, Father Adolfo Nicolás shortly after his election as Superior General reorganized the Jesuit Curia's one man secretariat for ecumenical and interreligious affairs, appointing eight Jesuits from around the world who would meet with him every September for three years to advise him on shaping Jesuit mission in these areas. These consultants had their second annual meeting with Father General at the Curia in Rome this past September.

The discussions were wide-ranging, covering topics as diverse as new challenges to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, how those from different religions might find ways to pray together or in each other's company, how to encourage dialogue with indigenous and traditional religions, addressing historic tensions with Judaism, theological tensions about Christian proclamation in the context of religious pluralism, and two recurring themes, how to prepare Jesuits for ecumenical and interreligious issues, and spiritual ecumenism.

Several of the consultants called attention to the growing importance of spiritual ecumenism, including spiritual direction and accompanying those through the Spiritual Exercises from other Christian traditions and even other religions. At the recent 21st Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists, meeting at Bucharest, Romania, July 18-24, representatives from Britain, the Czech Republic, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and the U.S. as well as reports from Hong Kong and Taipei where Protestants are making the Spiritual Exercises at Jesuit retreat houses. While prayer together is usually not possible, one delegate from Asia spoke of silence together before the mystery as an effective approach that can lead to a real spirituality, especially for those among us who are compulsive thinkers and talkers.

The consultants observed that many Jesuit formation programs were heavily Western. Asian and African scholasticates have people who can teach Kant or Schillebeeckx, but nobody to teach other religious traditions. To teach Christology in India without a reflection on religious pluralism and Indian traditions should be unthinkable. Africa lacks Jesuit scholars who can offer courses in Islam. They made a number of suggestions, that the Society needs to find ways to encourage young Jesuits to prepare themselves for teaching and entering into dialogue with Asian and African religions, that it needs a new *Ratio Studiorum* to train Jesuits for ministry in today's religiously pluralistic world. The Society needs men like De Nobili and Ricci for a new generation. In philosophates and/or theologates there should be a basic, required course in

ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, as well as courses on Protestant and Orthodox churches as well as a basic course on world religions, including traditional or indigenous religions.

One of the most interesting moments in the course of the meeting was a presentation by Monsignor Juan Usma Gómez from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the



growth of Pentecostalism today. He said that Pentecostalism in its various forms—classical, charismatics in mainline churches, and Neo-Pentecostals—number over 600 million; it is the first grass roots movement since the Reformation. He repeated a line often heard about the Church in Latin America: the Catholic Church opted for the poor, but the poor chose Pentecostalism.

Positively, Pentecostal Christianity represents a

rediscovery of the power of the Holy Spirit, stresses experience, personal conversion to Christ, prayer, and a recovery of the charismata. They expect their members to be actively involved in their congregations. Less positively Pentecostals tend to regard their spirituality as the only one. Those who are interested in talking to Catholics in Latin America are in the minority and Pentecostals often target Catholics for conversion, which leads to reservations about dialoguing with them on the part of many Latin American bishops. Some Neo-Pentecostals preach the health and wealth “Prosperity Gospel.”

But there is much that Catholics can learn from Pentecostals. They are very much a missionary movement, something often lost in the mainline churches, and they challenge Catholics to rediscover their own spiritual treasures. Many Catholics are not able to give voice to their own experience of God’s grace in their lives. They don’t know how to answer when an evangelical or Pentecostal asks, “have you been saved?” and can’t point to a personal conversion. Without this experience of faith, Pentecostals see them as not truly evangelized and doubt their Christianity. In his closing remarks Father General said that ecumenism and interreligious dialogue were among those frontier areas where Jesuits do their work today.

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