

Frontier challenges: theology, science and culture

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Abstract

Fundamentalism is breaking the individuals and communities apart. Dominating forces like world culture is swallowing up the other cultures and alienating poor and the indigenous people from their very life. Materialism is dehumanizing everyone, reducing human dignity, respect and right relationships. Mines, industries and deforestation are displacing millions of poor and indigenous people rendering them homeless. Evil practices like abortion and divorce are breaking up family relationships. These forces seem to be so strong that it will win over us. But we have faith in Trinity who is continuously labouring to liberate the world from these evil forces and establish the kingdom of God where everyone has right relationship with God, with one-another and with creation. Our heritage 'Spiritual Exercises' has the power to transform the world.

Resume

Religious fundamentalism is tearing the social fabric of life, dividing the people and communities and killing en mass. In the name of development big industries, dams and mines are displacing millions of poor and indigenous people rendering them homeless. Youths are finding themselves empty, frustrated, and lost. There is erosion of traditional religious belief and growing interest in popular religiosity. In this broken world God is continuously labouring to establish His kingdom where everyone has right relationships with God, with one-another and with creation. We are collaborators with Christ to establish the kingdom of God. Science is a blessing for the modern world. It has made world a global village and our relationships have grown. It has helped us to come in contact with other cultures. It has enabled us to know the deepest mysteries of life. It has saved us from various sicknesses. But it has brought unhealthy technology and weapon acquiring competition. Today we have nuclear bombs which can destroy the earth hundred times. We have become more unsafe than ever. Human body, which is created in the image of God, is reduced to simple living material. Culture is the expression of people's life. Culture gives them identity. Through symbols they express their ethos. But the dominant world culture is alienating individuals and group from their very life. People are feeling uneasy, out of place and lost. They are struggling to find meaning in their lives. They are losing their identity. In materialistic culture there is no place for human dignity, respect and concern. There is no relationship but only bargain. GC 35 takes it as new apostolic challenge and opportunity to counteract materialism. Giving spiritual exercises to many is one of the ways we can lead people to a deeper and right relationship with God, with one another and with creation.

Introduction

GC 35 reaffirms service of faith as aim of our mission of which promotion of justice is an integral part. All the General Congregations since GC 32 in 1975 have stressed that the promotion of justice is not one ministry among others rather an essential dimension of the mission. Service of faith and promotion of justice is based on our relationship with God, with one-another and with creation. Inculturation and dialogue are presented as means to achieve this goal. Jesus is presented before us as saviour who continuously labours to fulfill the mission of God.

General congregation has not dealt elaborately with science. It wants to make us aware of the pro and cons of scientific knowledge and development. Science has devalued human being. Some have profited with technological development but others are excluded and marginalized. Mines and industries have displaced millions of poor and indigenous people rendering them homeless. Materialism has crept in due to technological developments.

GC 35 speaks of world culture which subjugates the other cultures. In this process rights of individual and group are denied. Dominant culture has alienated individuals and group from their very life. They are struggling to find meaning in their lives. General congregation mentions materialistic culture too which reduces human into material body. In materialistic culture there is no dignity, respect and concern for human being.

This article is not the critical analysis of theology, science and culture of GC 35 but expression of its spirit and little addition.

Theology

Growing religious fundamentalism is great concern of the world today which is tearing the social fabric of life, dividing the people and communities and killing en mass. In recent years we have witnessed number of riots and killings in the name of religion. We have examples of such incidents in Gujarat (in India) where thousands of Muslims were butchered by Hindu Fundamentalists; in Manglore (in India) some Christians were killed and many were beaten up once again by Hindu Fundamentalists; in Orisa (in India) thirty eight Christians were killed and burnt to death and thousands of houses were burnt yet again by Hindu Fundamentalists leaving millions homeless. Dominating culture in the world is subjugating other cultures.

Materialistic spirit is growing which is dehumanizing everyone. In the name of development big industries, dams and mines are displacing millions of poor and indigenous people rendering them homeless. Families are breaking away. Divorce has become common especially in western countries. Abortion is increasing alarmingly and, still worse, some countries have legalized it. Youths are finding themselves empty, frustrated, and lost. There is erosion of traditional religious belief and growing interest in popular religiosity.

Jesuits' special contribution is seen in education and very especially in higher education. Jesuit higher education institutions are the prestigious institutions in the world. Our institutions are able to produce best results in the universities. We have the best infrastructures. Competent students opt for our institutions. We have competent staff. We are graded among top colleges of the countries. Employment placement is not a problem in our campuses. Our students have excelled worldwide in the sphere of politics, science, management, business, games, beurocracy and so on. But they have become selfish intellectual giants unconcerned of others. Sometimes they turn out to be oppressors and exploiters of the poor. They become part of cut-throat

competition in earning money putting aside all their ethics. Our students with all their potentials, intellectual caliber and qualifications feel empty, discouraged, frustrated and lost. Our campuses witness division among staff and students based on caste, creed, colour and region.

Where are we making mistakes? Is it that we are irregular in value education classes? Are we not promoting equality? Is it that we have no student counselors in our campuses? Yes, we are doing all these. What do we miss then?

We miss God in our campuses. Without God we cannot think of peace within our heart. Without God we cannot be complete. Only in God there is real peace, joy, happiness and freedom. Through our will-power we can live moral life for sometime but only God can transform us. We and our students miss God experience. This experience will make us men for others. It will make us loving persons. It will fill us with life as Jesus says I have come to the world to give life and life in fullness.¹ It will prompt us to respect people, other living beings and nature and to take care of them. People are hungry for God more than for wealth, intelligence, professions and posts though they don't realize it. Let our campus be God's dwelling place. Let all who enter our campuses experience God. Let God inspire us to do what he wills. Let us give God to people.

We have to create an atmosphere where everyone helps the other to grow in all spheres of life. Everyone shares with others what he/she has. Everyone feels cared for, secure and loved. Let everyone love God, each other and nature. Sometimes our approach to students has a smack of partiality. People of our creed, caste and region feel favoured and others less cared for. Sometimes it builds up to communal conflict, tension and enmity. Our work, like that of Jesus, is to give them life, i.e. happiness, joy, peace and freedom. Let the people realize that we belong to

one home called universe and we are children of the same God who continuously labours to give us life.

We are called to be Christ. Our life must radiate God's presence, love, mercy, forgiveness, concern and sympathy. For this we have to become God experienced persons. Let God work through us. Let us, like our founder St. Ignatius did in Manresa, surrender ourselves to God and He will make us instruments to establish his kingdom. We should always remind ourselves of what G.C.34 tells us that aim of our mission is service of faith and promotion of justice of the kingdom.² Christ's value should permeate throughout the universe.

In this broken world, Holy Father reminds us, "Our world is the theatre of a battle between good and evil."³ God is continuously labouring in persons, in other living beings and in nature. He labours to establish His kingdom where everyone has right relationships with God, with one-another and with creation. In his kingdom justice prevails everywhere. He labours to give life in fullness. He wants to fill us with his love, peace, tranquility, happiness, joy and freedom.

Jesus undertook this mission of God and with his baptismal experience that he was the Son of God he opens up his ministry saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand..."(Mk.1:15)⁴ He also realized that he was the anointed one, the Christ and saw the fulfillment of Old Testament in him and hence he proclaimed,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.....

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. (Lk. 4:18-21)⁵

Like Jesus, God anoints persons, especially, through priestly ordination, to be his instruments in establishing His kingdom and in giving life to all. It is the realization of being

anointed gives power and inspiration to set all in right relationship with God, with one another and with creation. We, Jesuits have the special grace of ‘being placed with the Son’. We labour with Christ for the mission of God. *Spiritual Exercises* of our founder St. Ignatius is the instrument to transform the world.

In all our apostolate: pastoral, educational, social, communication and spiritual ministries we, Jesuits, should be aware that God is continuously labouring in each person irrespective of creed, caste, tribe, colour, gender and region to give them life. And hence, we, being the instruments of God, must go beyond the frontiers of creed, caste, tribe, colour, gender and region to serve all people. No one should feel neglected or less cared for. We should go even beyond persons to other living beings and nature since God dwells in them too. We have to respect and take care of them. We can use them for our need but never to exploit them for our greed.

Science

Science is a blessing for the modern world. Through communication technology whole world has become a global village. Microwaves have made our interconnection easy and our relationships have grown. In times of natural disaster rescue operation is faster. With great speed we can visit any part of the world. It is so easy to come in contact with other cultures. It is able to solve our energy problems. Mysteries of Universe are progressively unraveled. It has enabled us to know the deepest mysteries of life. It has saved us from various sicknesses since centuries. It has strengthened our security.

There is another side of science too. Science has become a symbol of power. Countries with better technology and hi-tech weapons are graded as super power and have the veto power in the affairs of the world. This brings unhealthy technology and weapon acquiring competition. Countries like India have not enough food to feed the citizens but they have billions of dollars

for the purchase of weapon. Poor countries have no good road for transportation but they are always busy thinking how to reach moon and stars. Today we have nuclear bombs which can destroy the earth hundred times. One bomb is enough to destroy countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka. We have become more unsafe than ever.

Biologically, human body is being manipulated for selfish interest. Human body, which is created in the image of God, is reduced to simple living material. There is no sting of conscience to abort a child. Cloning is destroying our relationship. In countries like India where dowry system in marriage is prevalent, female fetus is being destroyed because of availability of technology to distinguish male and female within a month of pregnancy.

Science has made us greedy. The earth gives us all that we need but we want to grab more and more. The earth has become money milking cow. Mines and deforestation is devastating the earth. Industries are polluting the air and water. The ozone layer is depleting faster than ever and thus our body is exposed to dangerous x-rays and ultra-violet rays. Mines and industries have displaced millions of poor people and especially the indigenous people. For an example a district called Jashpur of Chhatisgarh State in India, 112 memorandum of understanding have been signed by Chhatisgarh State government with different industrialists for mines and industries. Jindal Steel and Power Limited alone needs 105 square kilometers in Kunkuri region to set up a single industry. If all industrialists, likewise, barb their boundaries there will not be a single square kilometer left for the residents. In this district, according to 2001 census data of India, 64.1% are indigenous people. Over half million indigenous people have to be forcibly displaced. They do not want to leave their land because it has been handed over to them by their forefathers for livelihood and not for sale. They don't want to leave their forest because they live on forest products. They do not like to leave rivers because it has given them

life through drinking water and irrigation. People are protesting against the industry and for their existence but how long?

Yet another district called Bastar of Chhatisgarh State in India which is badly affected by so called development where over 80% population is of indigenous people. Six hundred and forty four villages have been vacated for industry. Till date we have no clue where the villagers have gone. Of course some are kept in the camps so that they cannot protest against the government's move. People who are opposing the move are termed to be naxalites and gunned down. It is a genocide of the indigenous people.

Copenhagen meeting on climate change indicates that weather change has become the biggest worry of the world. It is the consequence of mining, industry and deforestation. Though late we have realized our mistakes. But still developing countries want to continue as before because they want to be richer than they are.

GC 35 is well aware of two sided effect of science as it says:

Our scientific knowledge has reached the deepest mysteries of life, and yet the very dignity of life itself and the world we live in are threatened.⁶

God is giving life to us through our land, water and air but we are turning them into poison. Through mines, industries and deforestation we are destroying the atmosphere which promotes life. We are using things so rapidly as if our children do not need them. Jesus has commanded us to preach good news to the whole creation and not only human beings as he commands, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to whole creation."⁷ We should be stewards of nature. We have to preach good news to the land, plants and rivers as well. God is labouring in them too so that we have life through them.

Suggestion 1: Non-conventional energy should be promoted and more research in this field is needed. Among solar, wind and water energy, solar energy has better future. The reason

is that it is available everywhere, it is pollution free, continuous and inexhaustible. It can easily be tapped in small scale. It will solve energy problem, displacement problem, deforestation problem and pollution problem to great extent.

Suggestion 2: To protect the right of poor and the indigenous people: An international team of Jesuits or like-minded people could be formed where one person from each country, where poor and indigenous people's rights are violated, will be its member. Each member should be in touch with the government of his/her respective country. If problem arises in any country the team should approach the concerned government for solution.

Culture

Culture is the expression of people's life. Culture gives them identity. Through culture they relate with God, with each-other and with creation. Through symbols they express their ethos. Through folklores and folkdances they express their joys and sorrows, get relaxed and get united. Through language they are able to express themselves to the world. A culture gives them life. It creates an atmosphere where each individual and tribe as a group grow. In India alone we have 1700 tribes. Each tribe has its own culture. But today as GC 35 realizes there is 'world culture' created due to globalization which results in homogenization as it says:

Globalization has given birth to a world culture affecting all cultures; often this has resulted in a process of homogenization and in the policies of assimilation that deny the right of individuals and groups to live and develop their own cultures.⁸

The world culture and other dominant cultures within countries are alienating individuals and tribes from their very life. They are feeling uneasy, out of place and lost. They are struggling to find meaning in their lives. They are not able to express themselves fully and hence have stopped growing. They are not able to excel in all spheres of life because they are trying to adopt an alien way of living which is not in their blood. There is a feeling of inferiority to express themselves in their own folklores and folkdances because world culture stands out as the superior

culture. They keep away from their own practices. They are losing their identity. The negative effect of the dominant culture is well expressed by GC 35:

...this dominant culture has been marked by subjectivism, moral relativism, hedonism, and practical materialism leading to an erroneous or superficial vision of God and of man. In many society people find themselves increasingly alone and struggling to find meaning for their lives.⁹

Materialistic culture as mentioned above is very dangerous for human society. It is a dehumanizing process. Everything is measured by profit. Indigenous people are being displaced because they are considered to be non-productive people. They are considered hindrance to the profitmaking rich because they own big areas of land and preserve forests. Poor are sidelined because they do not contribute to this profit making race. Labourers are considered profit making agents. Now big machines are replacing labourers because machine is more profitable thus worsening the employment problem in developing and under-developed countries. In this materialistic culture there is no place for human dignity, respect and concern. There is no relationship but only bargain. The poor, weak, sick and old are out of place. They are to be eliminated.

GC 35 takes it as new apostolic challenge and opportunity to counteract materialism. Human being is created in the image of God.¹⁰ He/she is not just material body. He/she is a spiritual being. It is essential to have a right relationship with God, with fellow human being and with creation. Ultimate satisfaction, peace, joy, happiness and freedom are achieved by our right relationship with God, with human and with creation and not by abasing wealth. Jesus reminds us that we cannot serve God and mammon.¹¹ Today it seems the world prefers mammon than God and hence the results are: discouragement, dissatisfaction, immorality, killing, suicide, etc. It is a great challenge for the Jesuits and like-minded people to transform this materialistic

atmosphere to spiritual one. Giving *spiritual exercises* to many is one of the ways we can lead people to a deeper relationship with God.

Suggestion 3: Training centres to train the people in their original cultures (especially folklores and folkdances) could be set up in our educational institutions so that people do not forget their original culture and are able to express themselves. These centres could serve as research centres of culture of the land.

Conclusion

The evil force like fundamentalism is breaking the individuals and communities apart. Dominating forces like world culture is swallowing up the other cultures and materialism is dehumanizing everyone. Destructive forces like mines, industries, deforestation are displacing millions of poor and indigenous people. Evil practices like abortion and divorce are breaking up family relationships. These forces seem to be so strong that it will win over us. But we have faith in Trinity who is continuously labouring to liberate the world from these evil forces and establish the kingdom of God where everyone has right relationship with God, with one-another and with creation. We have to collaborate with Jesus Christ and fulfill the mission of God. We have to stress on the social and spiritual aspects of human being in our apostolate. Materialism has to be denied. Our heritage ‘Spiritual Exercises’ has the power to transform the world.

Words

Freedom = absence of tensions, worries, oppressions, exploitations, guilt feelings, sickness and all that bring sufferings.

Non-conventional energy = Solar, wind and hydro, energy.

Endnotes

¹ John 10:10.

² GC 34, D.2, n.14.

³ Allocution, '6' in GC 35, D.3, n.18.

⁴ Mark 1:15.

⁵ Luke 4:18-21.

⁶ GC 35, D.3, n.11.

⁷ Mark 16:15.

⁸ GC 35, D.3, n.10

⁹ GC 35, D.3, n.20..

¹⁰ Genesis 1:27.

¹¹ Mathew 6:24.
