



## OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD: IN DIALOGUE WITH DIVERSE POINTS OF VIEW

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Taking clue from the past JESUDs (Boston 2012 and Manresa 2014):The first Global Education Network JESUD in Boston 2012 initiated a process of networking of Jesuit schools and the second Global Education Network JESUD in Manresa 2014 gave an opportunity, facilitating reflection about Ignatian pedagogy and spirituality needed for Educational mission.

### **Education is ‘Integrated’ Formation of the ‘Whole’ Person:**

Perhaps, we could begin with this simple question: What is Education? While there are over a thousand quotes on the definition of education, let me state what Swami Vivekananda, an Indian thinker and sage said: It is ‘man-moulding’. It is ‘shaping’ the ‘whole’ person, an “all-round development of the body, mind and soul of the individual.” The educational schema included under the broad heads of physical culture, aesthetics, classics, language, religion, science and technology.”<sup>ii</sup> It is with a purpose to learn, to understand, and to live in a particular context (including facing challenges) and to make meaning to a wider society and context by sharing one’s learning and expertise, one’s skills, and be (and help others to be) the ‘change-agents’.

Affirming the ‘radical goodness of the world’, the characteristics of Jesuit Education also assists in the total formation of each individual ‘created in the image and likeness of God,’ in ‘all the possible God-given talents of each individual person’ (the imaginative, the affective, and the creative dimensions of each student) within the human community. The characteristics include a *religious dimension* that should permeate the entire education. Education should serve as an apostolic instrument, promoting dialogue between faith and culture. “Since every program in the school can be a means to discover God, all teachers share a responsibility for the religious dimension of the school... Religious and spiritual formation is integral to Jesuit education; it is not added to, or separate from, the educational process... Jesuit Education is preparation for Life... And the success of Jesuit education is measured not in terms of academic performance of

students or professional competence of teachers, but rather in terms of this quality of life...”<sup>iii</sup>

### **Need for ‘Interreligious Approach’ to Education:**

The document continues, “Believing that God is active in all creation and in all human history, Jesuit education promotes dialogue between faith and culture - which includes dialogue between faith and science. This dialogue recognizes that persons as well as cultural structures... discover God revealing Himself in various distinct cultural ways. Jesuit education, therefore, encourages contact with and a genuine appreciation of other cultures, to be creatively critical of the contributions and deficiencies of each... Jesuit education is adapted to meet the needs of the country and the culture in which the school is located...”<sup>iv</sup>

And to this end, the Society acts as an instrument of God serving the world as ‘benefit’ (St. Ignatius and his companions used the word *aprovechamiento*) to the ‘salvation and perfection’ not only of its own members but of their neighbours (General Examine no. 3)<sup>v</sup> Whatever St. Ignatius shared and taught in the Sp. Exercises and other documents are to become the sources of inspiration like the contemplation to gain love,<sup>vi</sup> to see God’s true presence, power and essence in all (vulnerable) things<sup>vii</sup> (in order not to lose hope in life), and to share this “seeing and experiencing” of God’s powerful presence and essence (God-experience) with others, and in doing so, the principles that St. Ignatius left in the Spiritual Exercises like the *supposition*, namely, the un-biased or non-prejudiced manner<sup>viii</sup> in which one is to deal with another (mentioned in spiritual direction), repeated likewise in his advice to the Jesuits attending the first session of the Council of Trent (early 1556) on *appropriate behavior*<sup>ix</sup> of openness and compassion while holding conversation with others, to foster proper *attitudes and dispositions*<sup>x</sup> in a person (person includes all our stakeholders), appropriated by and modelled on the Jesuit missionaries...<sup>xi</sup> Hence the goal of the mission of the Society is defined in terms of *our service to our neighbour*, particularly to act as ‘witnesses of Friendship and reconciliation’.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Interreligious Dialogue and Reconciliation is a ‘Special’ Ministry:**

As one of the special ministries that surpass time and space and circumstances, Interreligious Understanding (Dialogue and Reconciliation) is urgent in Education (particularly School Education), both in terms of our witness and service. Being great instruments of peace requires that Jesuits and all the stakeholders (parents, teachers, and children) be instructed and trained in interreligious relationships and dialogue. Already 25 years ago, the Catholic Church insisted that Christian Lay, clergy and religious *students* should be acquainted with the basic knowledge about the beliefs and practices of other religions. Our acquaintance would help acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good found among non-Christians and remove ingrained prejudices built in our psyche over the years, and to revise preconceived ideas about people and their religious traditions.<sup>xiii</sup>

Following the Church’s footsteps, the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Jesuits brought out a

fine document on *Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*.<sup>xiv</sup> The document gave the Society certain guidelines on Interreligious Dialogue encouraging “all Jesuits to move beyond prejudice and bias, be it historical, cultural, social or theological, in order to cooperate wholeheartedly with all men and women of good will in promoting peace, justice, harmony, human rights, and respect for all of God's creation.” Addressing Jesuits especially in Education, the document instructs that “all Jesuit educational institutions will conscientize their students and instil in them understanding and respect for the faith vision of the diverse local religious communities.”<sup>xv</sup>

And this starts from ‘here and now’, from *Local Contexts*: Whatever we could learn from the *signs of times*, while we are placed in this world, in a particular context and time, amidst a particular people and their culture... learning from and dialoguing in turn, seeing and discerning the good from the evil, and engaging prophetically. Hence, education is not merely communicating knowledge and the training of the mind, but the formation of the whole person, which includes religion, ethics, and spirituality. And, in the whole process, we have to take the *religious identity* of the students and faculty seriously.

### **Religious/Interreligious Education in Schools:**

There was a recent research carried on in our institute (Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions – IDCR, Loyola College, Chennai, India) on the *Role of Religion on Quality Education and their Impact on Students' Character Formation*. The summery result with statistics brought to light that students from *religion-based* educational institutions, with their focus on Vision and Mission Statements, religious charism and motivation, compulsory religious education, etc. were more inclined to and equipped with certain characteristics like becoming self-conscious, being conscientious and ‘God-fearing’ when compared to students studying in schools deprived of such programmes as mentioned above. The difference in behaviour was seen especially when one had to weigh between two positions or make moral judgments or choose between the right and wrong... The motivations and the inputs the students have received in these Religion/Ethics classes helped them at critical and stressful times in mature behaviour – sound decision making, taking criticism and negative feedback, motivated beyond one’s ego, and socially engaged. Concurrent to this finding, the researcher proposed that religion and religious/value education could be a right tool in improving the ethical and moral standards of students (in both private and public schools), and recommended that educators could work on a policy revision in their present educational system.

We shall explore *Religious/Interreligious Education* in three varied situations:

1. Countries professing ‘secularism’ in the strictest sense of separation (of Religion and State) wouldn’t like to have any link with religion. They may not even see any role of religion in education. They would perhaps go by common Law, Tradition, Culture, etc. and prefer a ‘secularized’ way of life. In such a situation, Public/Government schools would like to remain *neutral* to the idea of religion and religious education. Perhaps religion could be treated as an academic subject to learn about its history and culture. Religious/Interreligious education in

this sense might not receive much criticism and to some extent succeed if the syllabus is rich with religious literature, historical persons, and their teachings/guidelines, contributions to human history and civilization, etc. as one could see in History and Literature books. But the problem might arise when a teacher or a student is narrow in religious perspective and fundamentalist in approach and there could be criticism in his/her method of teaching, handling issues, discussions and debates, etc. Of course, a student has every right to object to such biased-instructions. But in a school context, the adolescent students may not protest. But at the most perhaps, they might lodge complaints against that teacher/school through their parents.

2. There are certain other countries that are publicly known as 'religious' (Catholic, Buddhist, Islamic...), where the Govt. and the majority people vouch a particular religion and who would push their religious teachings and values in the name of God, Mission, etc. Sometimes, the Governments themselves, given their religious/ideological stand (and also bias towards the other) can promote religious and legal sources, their values, etc. (with orthodoxy. In a situation like this, changes can be expected very slowly until there is certain openness is made with regard to minorities and their lawful religious freedom.<sup>xvi</sup> Religious/Interreligious education in such a situation could include a *comparative* hermeneutics (compared to other religious texts for example), while dealing with the teaching of a particular religion. E.g., an Islamic country, in its Religious education, could expand the *pillars of Islam* in relation to beliefs and practices in other religious traditions. In this way, there is not only openness toward religious minorities but also take the religious identity of the students seriously. In Sri Lanka, believed to be a Buddhist country with Buddhist majority, students can choose to learn their own as well as other religions, but Religious Education is compulsory in all schools, whether private or public.

Private schools have religious and moral education. If a school is run by a 'religious' management, it gives preference to students of its own religious affiliation, giving opportunities to them to know more about their own religion, and it is at most times made compulsory. Simultaneously for all others, it is general moral instruction, an ethics class! In many private schools, financially supported and/or subsidised by the Govt., Religious education classes are kept outside their regular school hours. But Ethics and Spirituality classes can always be held commonly for all.

3. In multi-religious situations like in Asia and elsewhere, Interreligious education, dialogue, and collaboration need to be insisted, either as a component in the regular Religious education class or a 'focused' course for every student. Interreligious education and a culture of understanding, tolerance, and respect, is all the more necessary when migrations are becoming the universal phenomenon. People carry with them their cultural and religious backlog and they would like to exercise them in newer situations with freedom and peace.

Say, in countries like India, the school students are from different religious traditions – Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi, and Jews! (India is the cradle of great religions and diverse religious paths!) The classroom composition in terms of religion is more or less 70-20-

15-5% of Hindus-Muslims-Christians-Others (the ratio would change if it is a Madarasa Muslim school, a Christian or a Jain school, depending on the school management – ‘privately’ managed with or without Govt. aid; or depending on the area where a school is situated. For example, there are Christian nuns who serve mostly Muslim children in a predominantly Muslim area). In a privately managed Indian school assembly, there is a time for ‘prayer’ – everyone stands up to pray. There is a common recitation (addressing to God in common term) or sometimes read from scriptural texts, sometimes include religious songs from different traditions.

To the whole school it is a time of prayer and praying to God. To the individual students, it is a time for prayer and praying to ‘my’ God. Most Hindus will pray to male gods like Lord Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Ganapathi, Murugan, or to female gods like a particular Amman. In a village setting, it is praying often to the Family god (kula Deivam – either male or female). It is indeed a challenge for a Christian or a Muslim to understand this, including the school Management and others! It is already a great thing that private schools (including Jesuit schools) have provided time for prayer, and in some schools, a meditation/prayer place called by several names like ‘Hall of Meditation’, ‘Universal Prayer House’ and so on.

#### **Addressing Diversity and the Need for ‘Interreligious’ Education in Schools:**

The word ‘Interreligious’ has a connotation. It is not merely learning about a religion and all religions. It has a perspective on ‘diversity’. Religious diversity is not just a reality, it is an attitude, a challenge, and a task to understand and live together. The word ‘Interreligious’ implies an attitude of accommodation, giving space, of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, exchange, learning, and celebration. There are happy trends in diversity: mutual dependence, sharing, ready-help, protection, cooperation, and celebrating life together. On the other, there are also threats: prejudiced mind-set, disrespect and hate, provocation to conflict and fight, destruction, and violence.

Why do Asians insist on ‘Interreligious Education’? Perhaps it is the History and Context. A country like India has seen several rulers, Buddhists and Jains and Hindus, Christians and Muslims from the time we could read in History books. India has tasted their profuse contribution in terms of governance, polity, art and architecture, music and dance, food and dresses, etc. There have been rulers who understood India’s diversity and fostered healthy dialogue between and among govt. officials including kings and nobles, religious leaders and communities, fathomed healthy relationships, advanced peaceful co-existence and amicable living. On the contrary, India is facing a rift among religious communities, especially among Hindus and Muslims.<sup>xvii</sup> This may be true for other countries as well.

There are several counts on which understanding diversity (particularly religious pluralism) and Interreligious education become prominent and significant in the present era.

I would like to highlight only two:

1. Ignorance, Prejudice, and Hatred:

People are prejudiced about anything and everything they dislike or have reservation about. It is everywhere, in school, workplaces, etc. For e.g., people have all kinds of conceptions, probably all not true, about those who are 'fat'! They see and treat them differently just because they are overweight. They say fat people are 'lazy', 'stupid', 'ugly', 'unhappy', 'unpopular', 'mean', 'greedy', 'eat too much', 'gross'... But the experts say that the causes of obesity are complex. It is a combination of genetic factors, environmental factors, psychological factors, and it is important to recognize that so that when we look at someone and see whatever their body weight is, we don't make assumptions on their behavior based on our information.<sup>xviii</sup>

Prejudices thrive on all aspects of life. In the context of ISIS, terrorism, and war, people do not want to believe that there is anything good about Islam! To my surprise, as it is going to be a surprise to many here, I found in several YouTube videos<sup>xix</sup>, projects done by youngsters on *prejudice* against Islam. Students disguised a holy book as the Holy Quran (with its outer cover) and read a couple of shocking verses from the book and asked for people's reactions.

- a. "If you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant... You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters."<sup>xx</sup>
- b. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet."<sup>xxi</sup>
- c. "If two men, a man and his countryman, are struggling together, and the wife of one comes near to deliver her husband from the hand of the one who is striking him, and puts out her hand and seizes his genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; you shall not show pity."<sup>xxii</sup>
- d. "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death."<sup>xxiii</sup>

After reading verses like these, the people were then asked: 'what were your initial thoughts?' They said 'ridiculous', 'I didn't know that this kind of stuff is in this book', 'How could anyone believe in this? It is unbelievable to me', 'Cutting off people's hands... I mean, apparently, that's just the ways they are, but... if you have been raised with this book and these kinds of thoughts it's going to influence the way you think.' 'To me this sounds like they want to oppress you and force you to believe what they believe.' 'The woman wants to help and as a result her hands get cut off, so... that's not a good thing, yeah.'

There was a further question asked: 'If you were to compare this to the Bible, what are the biggest differences?' And the respondents said: 'Hearing this, I would think the Quran is more aggressive... especially with things like cutting off people's hands.' 'I think the Bible mostly has lot of positive things in it.' 'The story in the Bible is told very differently.' 'The biggest difference is what you just heard here, which is the role of the woman.' 'The Bible is

a lot less harsh and a bit more peaceful.’ ‘The world is changing and I think they should have to adapt to it.’ ‘Most of our people have experienced the freedom to make their own choices and freedom of speech. And having that freedom allows you to think differently.’ ‘It bothers me that some people see these old writings as the absolute truth.’ Further questioned: ‘But then, couldn’t we just get rid of books like these?’ the answer is ‘Well, they are really old so we can’t do anything about them...’

After this, the surprise was revealed: ‘These ‘beautiful’ verses from the Quran... are actually from the Bible!’ (see foot/end notes) And the responses were: ‘What the (fuck!)’, ‘Seriously’, ‘Wow, I did not see that coming...’ ‘No, not at all!’, ‘That’s really unbelievable! That is sick... really sick.’ ‘Are you actually for real?’ ‘Very well done... you really got me.’ ‘It’s all just prejudice really, I always try not to be prejudiced myself but apparently I already am. It’s just something you do unconsciously. It has a lot to do with the media of course...’ ‘It’s important to just keep thinking rationally when it comes to these things, try to think logically about things and use it to your advantage.’ ‘Of course I’ve heard Bible stories when I was young and I went to a Christian school, but... I really had no idea this was in there.’

Unfortunately, every religious community has some kind of an *image* about the other, both positive and negative. The negative image about the other becomes the prime cause for prejudice and hatred. These images become so stereotyped that they easily give way to religious prejudice. Many negative impressions about religious neighbours are built on prejudice. Unfortunately, media too play a key role in projecting *irrationally* such images.

But reason says that not everyone is harmful or to be suspected, as the *stereotyped*<sup>xxiv</sup> images project him or her to be. Most people are loveable and loving, serviceable and soft-hearted, helpful at critical moments, peace-loving and just. Experience too subscribes to this truth about our religious neighbours and their behaviour. Hence it is important to remove such stereotyped images about our religious neighbours. Our vision gets blurred or coloured as we grow in stereotyping as we are unable to see the *real* other. We may have to say a *blind no* to such stereotyped images, even though, at times, our limited experiences may prove ourselves right.

It is also possible that our real (external) differences (religious and cultural) create ideas that keep us off from one another. Our dressing habit, the religious marks we wear, the language we speak, our association with our own religious community, even our profession and eating habits... all these give us an identity. And this identity marks us different from the rest – *the other*. But this need not baffle us. People are different from one another by family and association, by knowledge and profession, by interest and habit, by action and behaviour, leave alone the economic and other disparities. When each of these dimensions could make us different and yet allow us to mingle and to interact, religious differences

should also be treated in the same manner. As we privatise religion too much, we have difficulties in seeing the other as our *neighbour*. We look at them as *strangers*.

Another important cause of prejudice is that very often we are *ignorant* of our religious neighbours – who they are and why they profess what they profess, the meaning behind their rituals, the reason behind their particular belief in God and other doctrines, the functioning of their churches and other organizations, the reason for undertaking certain activities, celebrations, etc. We may not relate to them freely, perhaps. At times we give a loose hearing, take in as they come from unknown sources and without properly informed, or perhaps engage in loose talks or hoard only those things that hurt us long time ago! It is necessary to consciously remove from our daily agenda all that lead us to suspicion and fear, ill will and hatred in order to plan and work together. Knowledge enlightens and helps in removing prejudice.

We do this *knowledge* exercise with students, called the *train game* to know what we really think about our religious neighbours. Each compartment of the train carries a group of people belonging to one faith. The train keeps moving in a zig zag manner and comes to a stop at a given time. At this train stop, each group of believers (Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc.) from each compartment puts down one or two impressions, either positive or negative, and raise a few questions about those who travel in the other compartments. The exercise is repeated a number of times until all opinions are pooled together for sharing and discussion.

There is obviously a glaring difference between an adolescent and an adult in their responses. Generally, there is an acceptance of differences in professing various religions and accept generously the free exercise of religion.

Question to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students:

1. “Who is God and what is God-realization”: God is the creator. And God created everybody equally. God is everywhere. God is with us. God is like us. God is supporter, protector, and punisher. God is one’s belief. We should have belief in God but this should not become fundamentalism. We haven’t seen God. But in all our love-action, God is with us. Devotion, Meditation, and Service are expressions of God realization.
2. “What do you think about Christians, Muslims, Hindus...?” They are ‘nice’. All are ‘good’, ‘helpful’, and ‘kind’. They go to church, temples, and mosque and pray to their Gods. They have their own prayers and worship. More than these general comments, the kids are unable to distinguish people as purely ‘religious’.

3. "How do you understand your God in relation to others?" This is a tough question for school children below 15 yrs to answer. But the simple answer from them is, 'My God for me and your God for you'. While further questioning, 'What about him/her who worship other gods?', there is a smile on their face, but quickly respond 'I accept others' (as worshiping other gods) or 'at the least tolerate'. 'I should not mock at them', 'I should not debate with others about their religion or their gods.' 'Nothing should be provocative or disdain them.' 'I should be slow to anger, should be tolerant', 'I should try to understand', 'All should live in peace, avoid conflict...' This is not the age for them to become 'fundamentalists' or pro-Right Wing!

These answers seemed genuine as I counter checked with them on the following questions.<sup>xv</sup> "Do you have friends from other religions", "Have you gone to their homes?", "Have you visited their holy places?" (temple, church, mosque, etc.), "The real religion is what I profess.", "I like all religions. All religions are for good – your comment?", "Religious fanaticism is not good", "It is good to have many religions", "Is it good to read from other religious scriptures?", "Religions are helpful to lead an ethical life. If you choose between 'religion' and 'ethics', which would you choose?", "Who is said to be a 'good' Hindu, a 'good' Christian, a 'good' Muslim?..."

98% of 280 9<sup>th</sup> Grade students (boys & girls) acknowledged that they have good friends from other religions.

94-95% said that they had been to their homes and religious sites.

93-95% said that they like and respect other gods and goddesses.

94-96% mentioned that they like all religions and their followers.

85% endorsed that having many religions is good.

87-95% said that morality is the best way of life. Religions should help in the process. Religions and gods (and goddesses) are meant to lead a moral life.

98% condemned Religious fundamentalism.

97% said 'World Peace' is possible.

97% said that scriptures from all religions should be read during School Assemblies.

4. 'What sort of Religion you believe in?' – A religion that makes one good, kind, and serviceable (other virtues, ideals, and values follow: Honesty, Peace, Justice, Non-violence, Brotherhood/Sisterhood, Harmony...) Implicitly, the kids believe that religion is useful to society and they have a role to play.

5. 'Is it Religion or Ethics? What would you choose?' - The kids generally answer, "Both religion and morality are significant. But while weighing between religion and morality, it is morality that stands out. One should consider/love it more than life."
6. 'What do you want to be?' - Some say, 'I want to love people', others say, 'I don't want to harm anyone', and yet others say, 'I want to promote unity and peace', 'I want to promote brotherhood/sisterhood', 'I want to be compassionate to all creatures'...
7. 'Who is a 'good' Hindu, a 'good' Christian, a 'good' Sikh, a 'good' Jain...' - "One who speaks the truth, who helps others, who loves, who befriends, who is looks at all equally, who prays... is a 'Good' Hindu/Christian/Muslim... It is enough to have 'Good' people than 'Good' religions!"
8. 'What are the thoughts and action that promote diversity and harmony: 'feeling' ONE and 'feeling' GOOD, being PATRIOTIC and feeling ONENESS, friendly and neighbourly relationships, pleasing communication, understanding and respecting people, respecting parents and women, being hospitable to people, being broad-minded, patience and toleration, self-discipline, no criticism, and pre-judgement, living and letting others live peacefully, respecting equality of religions, knowledge of scriptures, interreligious marriages, enhancing employment opportunities, giving opportunities and working together...
9. 'What are the thoughts and Action that harm diversity and harmony: sense of superiority and egoism, practice of untouchability and discrimination, partiality, reservation policy, comparing others on the social and material status, superstitions, obsession with religion, intolerance, criticism, and attacks of others' religious practices, impatience, not allowing freedom, domination, illiteracy and ignorance, indiscipline, existing divisions in society, insensitive to social wellness...

The question-answer finally boils down to the idea that all are practically the same as human beings – being human and at the same time imbibing God-ness in each. But unfortunately the disposition, attitude, and answers tend to become narrow, critical of others, intolerant, justifying, prejudiced, etc. as they grow up into adults.

College-going students are critical about civic issues related to religious communities (like Rights, Reservation, Propagation of Faith, etc.). From 2005 to 2010 I was heading the *Department of Religion and Value Education* in Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, Madurai Dt., Tamil Nadu State. As it was an autonomous University College, it was possible for the college to revamp curriculum, introduce new courses, and have our own evaluation process. Knowing the growing fundamentalism and intolerance in the country (India), we introduced a course on

“Religion in Society” with an objective to facilitate the students in understanding how religious we are in our beliefs and practices and how we are able to live with other religious communities with trust and love. In the process, students were helped to understand what religion could mean traditionally and as it is lived in society, highlighting religion as a relationship between God and the humans that implied a relationship among and between the humans and nature.

In the same course, students were helped to become aware of their religious position regarding caste that divides the Indian society, women who often are neglected, and nature that suffers degradation and hazards. Students were also helped to look into their religious resources (scriptures, life of saints-sages, spiritual tradition, etc.) to discover the prophetic elements that treat life with dignity and care. Students discussed and debated on themes that brought out the best in religions in order to enhance life and on contentious issues that needed correctives in contemporary time. In the process, some religious scholars helped the students in explaining the meaning in context, sorting out issues, unearthing the resources, etc. The Department did prepare a set of lessons and worksheets, especially in dealing with religious conflicts and religious harmony.

Presently, in our institute (Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions - IDCR), we pay attention to the training of college students in *InterReligious Awareness and Practice (IRAP)*. IRAP is basically an awareness of the global/Indian religious and cultural situation of diversity, its beauty and at the same time the challenges, sources of conflict and harmony, need for understanding, intermingling and sharing, and in the process, shedding prejudices and irrational thoughts and emotions<sup>xxvi</sup> (such as dislike and hatred), and promoting positive tolerance, love, and peace – *Love Harmony* and *Live Harmony*, in summary form!

We could practically see how the students enjoyed the usefulness of these inputs, discussions, games, visits, etc. and how they learnt something new and hard, and how they expressed their happiness in discovering their own religious potentials (perhaps for the first time!). They did say how the course led them to understand the other in their differences and to forge ahead as one society.

Here are some of their experience-sharing, realization, and on how the programme influenced them, and their future:<sup>xxvii</sup>

- “I have become a more responsible and informed individual”
- I have “learnt a lot about religion” and “changed my views about other religions”
- “It has brought in a lot of change in me. It has honestly changed the way I think about other religions.”
- “I learned to listen from this program”
- The program “helped me in understanding people better.” “We learned to respect each other for what we are.” We “became more accepting.”
- The program has “made me turn to my religion for a support system”
- The program “broke that wall in me of maintaining distance” from religious people

- “Now I have a lot of respect towards other religions and mine as well”
- “The program broadened participants’ perspectives, helped them realize their biases, deconstructed their preconceived notions about religions, and led them to replace discrimination with acceptance
- “From strangers we became friends”
- “I now know what others think of my religion”
- “So many religions have the same values”
- “A lot of people my age are of similar thoughts. I can frankly and openly speak about my thoughts.”
- “When I hear people discussing wrong facts, I will speak up”
- “I will surely try to be tolerant when someone is boasting about his faith and is feeling proud of himself”
- “I will be considerate of other peoples’ viewpoints”
- “I shall respect all religions as my own”
- “I want everyone to get educated and get the same information and knowledge that we got from IRAP, so IRAP must be taken . . . to everyone”

It was a moment of happy discovery to the department faculty in Arul Anandar College and in IDCR and the interest in students to know more and more correctly. They needed more skill-training in how to handle hard question-answers, sort out differences while in debates, etc.

The College-goers raise these ‘unsolved’ questions on 3 major religions:

- On Christianity and to Christians – Why Jesus alone is the Saviour? What is the need for conversion if all religions mediate salvation? Why do Christians hesitate to enter our temples? Why there are so many churches and differences among them? What is the need for the Pentacostal preaching in the street corners and the distribution of leaflets? Why are they so extremely Right?
- On Islam and to Muslims – Why are the Muslims so fundamental about their God and about their religion? Why do they still accept Jihad, commonly understood as waging ‘religious war’ (like the Pentacostals)? Why and how do they become Terrorists if brotherhood is preached by Islam? There is often a fear evoked when we think of a Muslim – Why? Why is there an image about Muslims in India as backward (in thinking, in cleanliness, etc.)? Why is there no Family Planning (in the interest of money, manageability, etc.) among the Muslims?
- On Hinduism and to Hindus – Why there are so many gods and goddesses? Hindus generally believe that there is One God – which God? Why there is a fundamentalist tendency in Hinduism and among the Hindus when it is normally understood as a

religion that accepts pluralism and giving space? RSS is dangerous to the communal harmony in India because of their several Right Wing activities, targeting Christians and Muslims – Why are the common Hindus and the Hindu intelligentsia generally keep silent about this and do not speak against this? What is holy about the cow? Why do the Hindu fundamentalists make much of conversion while there are many socio-economic problems and evils in India? Is there a way to annihilate caste from the Hindu religious and philosophical thinking?

- There are several pending issues and problems related to *Religion and Politics*:<sup>xxviii</sup> In India, the Sikhs seek justice to the riot victims of 1984. The Muslims seek justice to the destruction of Baber mosque on Dec. 6, 1998 and the Gujarat riots in 2002. The Christians seek justice to the (Kandhamal) Odisha riots in 2004. The Hindus seek justice to the several bomb blasts and terrorist attacks in India engineered by the Muslims, and the massacre of several Kashmiri Hindu pandits in Kashmir valley, and the unfortunate infiltration of terrorists from Pakistan and Afghanistan and the lethargy of their Muslim governance, etc. The ‘Ambedkarist’ Neo-Buddhists (Dalits, predominantly) raise the issue of the Annihilation of Caste (caste system believed to be an offshoot of Hindu religion), and the general aversion of the caste-Hindus on Dalits.
- Apart from these, there are other issues like Secularism, Minority Rights, Reservation, etc., often raised by the Hindu Nationalists and Fundamentalists and the more general problems of persisting poverty, unemployment, human rights violations, ethnic cleansing, displacement, terrorism and war, climatic hazards...

All these questions and issues are genuine and common. They need socio-religious and economic justifications. Religious communities should engage in common and communitarian agenda.

***Critical, rational dialogue is a guided, graded training from school times:***

Our school children are NOT ours as they move out of our schools. They have to face the world. But what kind of rapport (and with whom) do our children have outside of our classroom, outside of our school campus? Are there healthy trends outside to acquire? Or are they prone to getting ‘spoiled’ or brainwashed! Several times I have thought like this: Isn’t it too late to address College students, in their critical adult age, to pick up such ‘broad’ attitude? Are we too late and, perhaps, too hasty in transforming an ‘adult’? Is it appropriate? Can we blame these youngsters? What kind of training and experience have they had in their schooling to discuss about such (sensitive) ‘religious’ and ‘interreligious’ issues now? Can there not be a graded training already from the adolescent stage and from their school age in understanding religions, religious communities, healthy live-together, mutual trust and cooperation...? Have we taken

this for granted that our children know these? Or are we assuming that they will grow in these? Or have we left it with their parents?<sup>xxix</sup>

Both during the course on *Religions in Society* in the College or during the *IRAP* in IDCR, it is my experience that 'critical' dialogue and learning causes ripples. Dialogue and discussion become 'tough', 'dis-tasty', 'uncomfortable' and, perhaps, 'dangerous' (to say the extreme) when the positive and negative side of religious communities surface the discussions. Dealing with 'prejudice' and 'intolerance' were really tough. Misunderstanding, exaggeration, and conflicts are bound to happen when we critically look at religion, its fundamentalist trends and practices. Media looks for such glossy events and the general public believes what media portrays.

We also needed to be sensitive to the 'hard core' defensive attitudes and perspectives of students while they discussed about social issues involving religion. There were no simple answers to the age-old customs and perspectives. For instance, conversion is part of the missionary mandate and activity of Christian churches all over the globe. But it is offensive to the Hindus in India. It is implicit denigration of their religion. Similarly, there is Jihad in Islamic tradition. Caste is problematic in Hindu society as it is linked to their religion.

There are students who wouldn't like to talk about religion owing to the havoc it causes in Indian subcontinent and other parts of the world (war and violence!). Some consider the talk of religion 'otherworldly' and 'unnecessary'. Some express religion as the 'opium' (of society and the weak) in the strict Marxian sense. To bring the students to get to talk about religion was a sensitive and a hard job, but useful and successful in creating 'familiarity' and 'happy' tolerance between one another despite religious and other differences.

## 2. Fundamentalism, Intolerance, and Violence:

Fundamentalism<sup>xxx</sup> is a conservative movement or a point of view, characterized by a return to the fundamental principles by rigid adherence to those principles, and often by intolerance of other views. Often it has a militant face in opposition to modernism, liberalism, and secularism, insisting on the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture not only in matters of faith and morals but also as a literal historical record, and thus adhere strictly its teachings and law. The word arose with the Evangelical movement in the United States in the late 1800 and early 1900. Fundamentalists are those who adhere to the theology of this movement. But, now a day, every religion has its fundamentalist face.

Fundamentalism, as some say it growing out of ignorance and resulting in intolerance, causes a menace in many counties. In South Asia, India and Nepal are predominantly Hindu countries; Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh are Muslim countries; Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma) and Tibet are Buddhist countries. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2016 Annual Reports<sup>xxxi</sup> of these countries portray a 'negative trajectory' with regard to their religious/interreligious situation. These countries, even constitutionally, vouche on the one hand a 'secular' trend in safeguarding religious minorities but, on the other, restrict them in one way or other from free exercise of their religions. There are intra-religious

misunderstandings and intolerance between various groups and sects within the same religion. For instance, one could see the differences between the Sunni, Shia, and Ahmedia groups among the Muslims in Pakistan. In all these countries, there is much of intolerance and closed mind-set on the part of the Governments and majority religious communities toward religious minorities. And they differ perhaps in intensity and frequency. For e.g., questions on equal protection to minority religious groups, discriminatory legislation such as blasphemy laws, interreligious marriages, inheritance and property laws, etc., marginalization of groups, hate campaigns, targeted killings, extremist activities, rights violations, freedom of speech and media, anti-conversion, foreign missionary activities, restrictions in religious education, verifying religious affiliation (in certificates, passports), threats against bloggers, discrimination in government funding, restriction of access to worship places, etc. These and such other things keep people in prejudice, suspicion, fear, doubt, insecurity, etc. leading them to intolerance and communal violence.

Is being a fundamentalist something wrong? 'Being rooted' can also imply in it. Many often quote this: "You must first be rooted in your own religion. And then you can spread your wings." Knowing, believing, and vouching a 'religious' truth or an expression of a truth is good and right in every sense. But implied in this is a sense that acknowledges the same in others too! I cannot be held right when I deny the same in others. Usually, there are a few trends in approaching a religious truth (say about God and God-experience). 1. What I say is absolutely correct and what you say is absolutely wrong. (For e.g., I believe in One God and there is no other god) 2. What I say is absolutely correct but you are not excluded from it (For e.g., It is my God who saves the whole world, including you) 3. What I say is absolutely correct but you are not wrong (For e.g., I believe in my path and you believe in your path) 4. What I say is absolutely correct but we share something in common (For e.g., The attributes of my God and your God are alike) 5. What I say is absolutely correct and what you say is also absolutely correct (For e.g., Perfection cannot be defined or determined or delimited) 6. All are the same (For, e.g. All paths lead to the same goal. All rivers lead to the ocean)... There could be other shades of perception and meaning, forming other trends. People perceive and believe religion to be in a variety of ways.

In all these, No. 1 is the 'fundamentalist' trend, negating the others. The way of perceiving a religious reality in an 'absolutist' manner could also imply certain flawed premises (logically wrong). Many of the metaphysical realities like God, salvation, after-life... are beyond logic and scientific explanations. We can't say 'blue as blue' or 'pink as pink'. The image and meaning of God is multifarious, according to the reading and re-reading of scriptures of each religious tradition. The Hindu Swami Vivekananda and others would vouch that Hinduism and the Hindus have naturally acquired a *broad* space and spectrum for accepting many names and forms in their God consciousness. But this is not so in Abrahamic religions, although there are commonly accepted elements in these religions. But the God believed in these religions cannot be other than the Yahweh, the Trinity, and Allah! It is hence difficult for Christians and Muslims in India (and perhaps, everywhere) to include all deities and their manifestations in their umbrella belief. And for Christians in India (Lay, clergy, and religious – so also the Jesuits), Hindus are 'the

other'! And what 'they' believe and practice are 'very different' from ours!

**Ethics is basic and common to all Religions:**

Does holding on to one's perception of truth (a doctrinal fundamentalism?) bring about estrangement among one another and harm social harmony? So far religious beliefs and practices are confined to their respective followers. Even though religious communities have their own core beliefs and experiences, they are also *communitarian* in their general focus, perhaps because of the do's and don'ts (ethics) mentioned in their scriptures! For instance, every scripture abound in ethical quotes for every season and occasion! Whether 'I believe in One God' or not, I have a religious/social commitment to one another because of certain minimum, common codes of conduct – 'Thou shall not lie, steal, do harm...' Such a Decalogue is seen in all religions and observed by their communities.

One may be an 'absolutist' but such a perception need not cause hatred on others. Rootedness need not deny or shun differences. And all share in the same *Humanum* or part of the biosphere, where all life-forms considered as sacred in some sense. They all have their right to life and the right to engage. It is this ethics that is basic to ecology and environment. Religions teach this basic ethics. Atheists too have the same ethics, though not motivated by religions. There must be an accepted common, minimum code of conduct and programme based on love and focused on goodness. Personally, I would like to see the practice of this basic ethics within and outside the classroom in all our educational institutions, offering space to one another for mutual support, encouragement, and enrichment, in dignity and respect, despite differences.

In diversity contexts, Indians generally say that one should follow the dictates of one's religion (where there is a diversity of gods, worship, temples, rituals, practices, etc. it is better to follow what one's religion believes and admonishes) – the doctrines, the rituals, and the ethics. The doctrinal area is too personal and perhaps 'exclusive' to a particular religious group. What is 'common and inclusive' and more important to social living is the ethics, perhaps, religious ethics (like the Decalogue) – be good and do good, live in peace, help one another, remove prejudices and wrong ideas about others... We may follow different religions and worship various gods – but we must have a 'common' ethics based on love & service and focused on social amity and harmony.

**Christian identity is *inclusive*:**

Christianity does not *exclude* anyone. It embraces the other as the other: 'whatever is true and holy!' This is the same as saying 'To be GOOD religious is to be GOOD interreligious'. Our experience of God invites us to understand the experience of God in others, and this *new* experience in turn (entry into another's space) further deepens our knowledge and understanding of our own experience of God. This is the *new* way of being 'Christian' and being 'theChurch'! That is, a Christian as a Christian recognizes his/her own Christian-ness in others. The Spirit of God is the consciousness or the idea of the *Holy, God's compassion, ever-giving selfless love*, etc. It blows where it wills, flowing back and forth, and making space for one

another, like the water drops causing ripples. God-experience has this power of mutual giving and receiving. For e.g., God-experience unfolds itself in general openness to the other, respect and reverence for the others' spiritual experiences, appreciating the other for their religious/spiritual contribution, positive acceptance of the other, etc. This is the first reform, the 'reform of the attitude', as Pope Francis would say.<sup>xxxii</sup> The Pope invites the Church to 'get out of the sacristy, engage with people', eventually 'opening up' to new perspectives and possibilities. In being open, one discovers a new identity. Such an opening does not deny one's rootedness in tradition but rather grows with others.

### **Challenges to *Religious Inclusion* (opposite of Religious Fundamentalism):**

There can be opposition or least support from one's own religious groups and institutions to this kind of 'opening up'. Showing interest or being in dialogue with the other is often misunderstood as being 'syncretic' or 'diluting' faith! Believers generally wouldn't like their faith to be diluted. By being so, there could be a total shut down on one's side! For e.g., a 12-year old Muslim girl Maryam Asif Siddiqui won the Hindu Bhagavad Gita recitation contest in Mumbai (India) in February 2015. Maryam<sup>xxxiii</sup> said that the text was an 'inspiration' and she had the 'interest' in the exercise of recitation. How did she receive such an inspiration or developed an interest in it? There could be reasons like the parents' upbringing, environment, and other circumstances. The event was much lauded by many, including the Indian Prime Minister Modi. Similarly, Ms. Suhana Syed, a 22-year old Muslim girl took part in the reality show, singing a Hindu Song in March 2017. There was a standing ovation and unanimous appreciation from all the judges. The judges did say that the Muslim girl's effort in singing a Hindu devotional song was a welcome note in the Indian context of fundamentalism and religious intolerance, and giving voice to a needed religious harmony and bettering the amity between Hindu and Muslim communities. The girl's bold step was quite challenging but her performance addressed a troubled context.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Unfortunately, she was trolled on social media. And some Islamic organizations<sup>xxxv</sup> condemned her for singing the Hindu song, blaming her parents, etc. In my own perception, the girl developed a talent for singing, and perhaps developed a taste for devotional singing, and in this case a song that touched her aesthetic sense, a Hindu song. It was, in my opinion, an exercise on 'Indian' secularism,<sup>xxxvi</sup> respecting all religions and their traditions. ('sarva dharma samabhava' – considering/treating all religions equally)

Fundamentalism has its many prongs! Fundamentalist attitude and disposition can express itself in all aspects of civic life – religious, political, economic, cultural, and historical – and can show itself in governance, management, marketing, etc. Fundamentalism can have inbuilt prejudices, reservation, and even hatred. For e.g., a Religion-based Nationalist fundamentalist governments may have reservation in releasing prisoners for their own reasons. Religion-based fundamentalist groups have specific choices on issues like triple-talaq. Religion-based fundamentalist movements will be hard on others when they violate their religious sentiments. (e.g. Cow slaughter, Meat ban, Aggressive Vegetarianism...) It has its own rulings on appointments, admissions, and other internal processes. To the least, the fundamentalists will not approve of others criticizing them or any of their affairs, be it religious or otherwise, and

would maintain a sense of domination and cultural identity.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### How can we respond? Common Minimum Guidelines:

1. **Personal/collective Introspection:** As an adult Christian and a Jesuit, it is first and foremost a spiritual exercise for each of us to discover the God in me (and in my tradition) and, simultaneously, in (or in relation to) others. I need to make my God-experience real, tangible, and meaningful to this world, a world that lives in diverse human, spiritual and religious thirst, agnosticism and atheism, egoism and greed, in view of promoting a Bio/God-centred life and people's engagement. Our understanding of God and God-experience would substantially demonstrate the kind of God we believe in.

We, as Jesuit educators, need to be convinced of plural God-experiences, giving way to one another with compassion and understanding. It requires openness to learning and holding conversation, and without jumping into quick judgements. It is interreligious attitude, which implies mutuality, accompaniment, and accommodation – giving space to one's thinking and acting. Such an attitude would evoke a fundamental question: what do I/we do to our children in their spiritual/religious empowerment?

2. **Creating a *mind-set*:** Motivated by the Church and Society traditions, our task is to create a 'mind-set' that shapes us and our future together with our parents, teachers, and the students, or harness energy to synergize our school context. It may be good to talk about the 'mind-set' in a teacher or a student when we talk about God-consciousness. On the one hand, it is natural and family-bred (nurtured in a family) to think of one's own god as 'the God' and to pray to him or to her. On the other, one also needs to have an 'inter-religious' mind-set to understand the other as s/he is. It is a must to every Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Sikh-Jain-Buddhist... teacher and student. We call this awareness a 'state of mind', a 'transcending mind' with the purpose of connecting with one another, acknowledging and at the same time transcending differences (rooted and having wings). It is possible to create (or to enhance) such a mind-set through *Interreligious Awareness and Practice* (IRAP), through education and exposure, immersion and engagement. And periodic question-answer sessions are important for clearing doubts or for better understanding.

Creating or evolving this 'mind-set' is the *New Pedagogy*, geared to Educational Renewal in schools. Networking and synergizing the minds and hearts of school children (coming from different religious and cultural backgrounds) are important in ushering the necessary changes in themselves and the outside world. Clearing the dark shade of life seen in poverty & hunger, injustice & corruption, natural/human-made disasters, terrorism, war & violence, migration, religious fundamentalism and intolerance... and promoting the positive shore of life in 'Building Bridges, Transcending Differences, and Crossing Boundaries' are possible through training and engaging students in cross-religious/cultural immersion. This,

according to me, is one the basic expressions of God-experience in the context of diversity of perspectives.

The New Pedagogy is an experiment. It is an experiment in 'Expanding our Relationship' beyond the boundaries of being OUR school children to THEIR 'being placed' in the neighbourhood, in the wider society, with a ready-willingness to open up to others in conversation, exchange, dialogue, and cooperation, and in view of facing challenges while accepting differences.

3. **Revamping and revitalizing Campus Ministry:** In the background of the Church and the Society's teaching, we need to 'spiritually' engage non-Christian students and teachers (and others as well) in our schools. We could enhance their God experience through engaging them in simple spiritual and devotional exercises like interreligious prayer, devotional singing, scripture reading, religious tours, common retreats, paying special attention to the students of other religions in their spiritual immersion and animation by creating a system of *spiritual mentoring*. Can our schools think of spiritual animators/counselors (not for just Catholics alone)? Time to time, we could arrange spiritual talks to the non-Christian parents and teachers of ours in our school premises and also learn from others their spiritual richness in order to precipitate hard-line thinking, fundamentalist trends, and to enhance familiarity and easy *religious inclusion* without undermining their identity or dignity.
4. **Training of Trainees (including Jesuits):** The objective is to develop an attitude and mind-set conducive to a multicultural and multi-religious living. This is done as in IRAP through basic learning and exposure, critical dialogue on issues, and collaboration. It may be useful to find out the level of interest the Jesuits (and Christian teachers) have towards non-Christian students and teachers, through a serious (re)consideration on their early (Christian-family) upbringing in their surroundings, their theology of religions, understanding of God, evaluating their views about their neighbour's religious rituals and (sometimes queer) practices, their readiness to participate in others' rituals and worship, their readiness to learn from other religious scriptures, etc. An adult response to the above considerations and a willingness to be trained are necessary in a plural context.
5. **Preparing a concrete set of Integrated Exercises:** Level 1: On Relationships and strengthening of ties, Introducing Religions, Religious communities (with differences), Religious Prayers, Devotional Songs, Religious Rituals and Practices, Saints and Sages, Religious Sites and Tours, Religious Code of Conduct Level 2: Society and Community Development, Prejudices vis-à-vis Building Trust and Cooperation, Recognizing strength in the other, Forming Harmony Clubs in Schools, Forming Interreligious Youth Club in the Neighbourhood/Apartment, Collective leadership and engagement, Common sports,

celebration, and meal, Participating in religious rituals and visits to religious sites Level 3: Role of Religion in serving Humanity/Nature, Reality of the Other (stranger?), Religious contentions and clarifying, Religious conflicts and harmony, Interreligious dialogue and understanding.

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<sup>i</sup> *Executive Director & Dean of Research* Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions (IDCR)

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Sudipa dutta Roy: Education In The Vision Of Swami Vivekananda (July 2001) <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Education-in-the-Vision-of-Swami-Vivekananda-1.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> The Characteristics of Jesuit Education, pp. 7-8

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> As quoted in 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus – Rowing into the Deep, South Asian Edition, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, Gujarat, 2017, p. 50

<sup>vi</sup> It is to reflect on God's indefatigable love and thus to gain such a spirit in myself. It is worth noting the exercise of this contemplation 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> points: "to look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in men giving them to understand; 21 and so in me, giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation and making me to understand; 22 likewise making a temple of me, being created to the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty; reflecting as much on myself in the way which is said in the first Point, or in another which I feel to be better." And "to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth - that is, behaves like one who labors -- as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc." And "to look how all the good things and gifts descend from above, as my poor power from the supreme and infinite power from above; and so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc.; as from the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters, etc."

<sup>vii</sup> In a letter dated 1 June 1551 to Antonio Brando, a scholastic, St. Ignatius answers: "Over and above the spiritual exercises assigned for their perfection—namely daily Mass, an hour for vocal prayer and examen of consciousness, and weekly confession and Communion—they should practice the seeking of God's presence in all things, in their conversations, their walks, in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, and in all their actions since His Divine Majesty is truly in all things by His presence, power, and essence." [Counsels for Jesuits, 39-46, p. 43 specifically.] (John Borelli: Ignatian Charism for Dialogue, Georgetown University, Washington DC, 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2016) In Indian wisdom, God is seen as "saguna" Brahman, suggesting God's immanence: "Isavasyam idam sarvam yad kinca jagatyam jagat" is the Upanishad statement. (Ishovasya Upanishad, Verse 1 - "This all is of God") [http://www.prabhupadaconnect.com/Isopanisad\\_mantra\\_one.html](http://www.prabhupadaconnect.com/Isopanisad_mantra_one.html)

<sup>viii</sup> A sense of accommodation or a mind to see the diversity: "In order that both he who is giving the Spiritual Exercises, and he who is receiving them, may more help and benefit themselves, let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save his neighbor's proposition than to condemn it. If he cannot save it, let him inquire how he means it; and if he means it badly, let him correct him with charity. If that is not enough, let him seek all the suitable means to bring him to mean it well, and save himself." (Presupposition) (Father Elder Mullan, SJ: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola Translated from the Autograph, Published as PDF-document by ixtmedia.com, the Digital Catholic Bookstore, 1914 - <http://jesuit.org/jesuits/wp-content/uploads/The-Spiritual-Exercises-.pdf>)

<sup>ix</sup> "learn the surpassing worth of conversation; be slow of speech; be considerate and kind especially when deciding on matters under discussion; pay attention to the whole person; understand the meaning, learnings and wishes of those who speak; be free of prejudice; (Counsels for Jesuits, Selected Letters and

Instructions of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, edited by Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J., Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985, 9-12, 10-11 specifically. Ibid. John Borelli) The Jains have a rationale for dealing with an argument with understanding and compassion. They believe in the theory of *anekanta*. That is, reality is complex and multi-faceted. One cannot comprehend it totally beyond one's time and space, capacity for knowledge, perspective, and attitude. It suggests that each will have a contribution to make to the fuller understanding of that reality.

- <sup>x</sup> To face the world and its challenges: our school children are placed in the world, the goodness of which is to be discerned and to be appropriated, to be aware of the snares and temptations of the world and to win over them, to heal the broken world with love and compassion, to offer oneself in selfless service, etc.
- <sup>xi</sup> From early times, the Jesuit missionaries in the East were involved in cross-cultural encounters. They did not consider these cultures and traditions as alien or inappropriate but shared the same origin from God. God was present in these cultures and traditions. These missionaries learnt to be open intellectually after seeing the "complex spiritual potential in people whose beliefs and practices could no longer be dismissed as demonic and replaced wholesale with imported Christian truths. Only several generations later, Roberto de Nobili, writing from the scene of his own experiments in adaptation in south India, would reverently recall the exemplary transformation Xavier had undergone and the effect it had on the missionaries to follow him." (Francis X. Clooney: A Charism for Dialog - Advice from the Early Jesuit Missionaries in Our World of Religious Pluralism, Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, VOL 34, NO 2 (2002) <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/jesuit/issue/view/493> The experience was similar to that of St. Peter in the Act of the Apostles: The voice spoke to him the second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." (Acts 10.15) Matteo Ricci admired what he discovered in China and he had high esteem for the Chinese. Clooney points out similar situations in other places, by St. Thomas to the Americas, Jeronimo Lobo to the Ethiopians, Jean de Breffeu to the Hurons in Canada, and so on. Clooney remarks that these missionaries knew that the local people were 'capable of reasoning and open to persuasion' and hence 'education was possible and necessary'. And we need to know the people whom we speak to and educate them in such a way. It has immediate implications to our own educational presuppositions and methods as we respond to different tribes, traditions, and ethnic groups.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid. p. 75ff 36<sup>th</sup> GC enumerates situations of heart-breaking conflict in many parts of the world, including Syria, South Sudan, Colombia and the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Iraq, and so many other places. The new document would insist on the responsibility of Jesuits in studying 'the Governance of Jesuit networks and other forms of ministry (like interreligious dialogue and reconciliation), which extend beyond a Province or Conference,' in order to become a meaningful instrument in the hands of God.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Dialogue and Proclamation 1991
- <sup>xiv</sup> [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/Dr%205\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/Dr%205_ENG.pdf)
- <sup>xv</sup> [http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/Dr%205\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/Dr%205_ENG.pdf) (no. 129, 145)
- <sup>xvi</sup> [Religious pluralism](#) existed in classical [Islamic ethics](#) and [Sharia](#), as the [religious laws](#) and courts of other religions, including Christianity, Judaism and [Hinduism](#), were usually accommodated within the Islamic legal framework, as seen in the early [Caliphate](#), [Al-Andalus](#), [Indian subcontinent](#), and the [Ottoman Millet](#) system. (Weeramantry, C. G. (1997). [Justice Without Frontiers: Furthering human rights. Volume 1](#). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. p. 138 ISBN 90-411-0241-8; Sachedina, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein (2001). The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism. [Oxford University Press](#). ISBN 0-19-513991-7) In medieval Islamic societies, the [qadi](#) (Islamic judges) usually could not interfere in the matters of non-Muslims unless the parties voluntarily choose to be judged according to Islamic law, thus the dhimmi communities living in [Islamic states](#) usually had their own laws independent from the Sharia law, such as the Jews who would have their own [Halakha](#) courts. ( [Mark R. Cohen](#) (1995). [Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages](#). [Princeton University Press](#). p. 74. ISBN 0-691-01082-X) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion))
- <sup>xvii</sup> The Times of India (daily newspaper) highlights that 13% of Hindus think of Muslims as "highly patriotic", 33% of Hindus count a Muslim as a close friend, and 74% of Muslims have a close friend among Hindus. (Survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) across four Indian states of Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, and Odisha) (Times of India, updated on April 5, 2017)

- (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/only-33-of-hindus-count-a-muslim-as-a-close-friend-survey/articleshow/58018664.cms>)
- <sup>xviii</sup> “Weight prejudice: Myths and Facts” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92rWQ-O1b1Y>)
- <sup>xix</sup> “How do people respond to Bible verses if they think they're from the Quran?” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhrYHh\\_SEKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhrYHh_SEKU)), “BIBLE DISGUISED AS QURAN SHOCKING SOCIAL EXPERIMENT + REACTIONS 2015” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jErLx1L1CWs>), “Holy Quran Experiment Downingtown West” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Og6yF2PEugE>), “Holy Quran Experiment in California” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9milc2nSBvg>), “The Holy Quran Experiment In London” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oc2zwGDHvMU>)
- <sup>xx</sup> Leviticus 26.15, 29
- <sup>xxi</sup> 1 Timothy 2.12
- <sup>xxii</sup> Deuteronomy 25.11-12
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Leviticus 20.13
- <sup>xxiv</sup> The booklet prepared by a team of persons from ASTHA, Xavier Institute of Communications, Mumbai under the direction of Myron J. Pereira SJ, *Partly True and Wholly False: A Study Guide on Communal Stereotypes* (Published by Indian Social Institute, Lodhi Road, New Delhi) theorizes about the mechanics of the mind and image building. It expounds the common myths and prejudices about Hindus, Muslims and Christians, and searches for solutions dealing with *stereotypes* in daily life. The booklet offers *simple suggestions* to tackle stereotypes we come across in daily life: 1. Start with a person from a different community you come across every day. Ask yourself: what is my stereotype regarding him/her? Critically examine this stereotype. Is it justified from personal experience? Supposing it is, how often do you act on this stereotype when dealing with this other person? Has the result been more harmonious behaviour, or its opposite? Is there place for better communication here? 2. If someone remarks in your presence – “Sikhs are a violent community,” “All riots begin with Muslims,” “Hindus are rigid and superstitious,” “Christians are easy-going drunkards,” (and so on). Are you able to set the record right? Or would you easily agree? Would you be able to discuss the issue with the person involved? Is there place for more accurate information here? 3. Finally we can initiate dialogue which would lead us to know and appreciate the different ways in which people behave. This dialogue may take the form of working together on a common project beneficial to different groups.
- <sup>xxv</sup> There were other questions to which they gave the following answers: a) ‘How do you define God?’ - God is omniscient, omnipresent, all-powerful, a God who rewards & punishes, helpful & protecting in times of need and vulnerability, consoling & encouraging in times of adversary, pain and sorrow, and saving & liberating from sin and evil... b) ‘How do you perceive/understand God?’ - In a temple, church, mosque.... In scripture reading, praying, devotional singing and certain other aesthetic experiences, alms giving or charity, serving in temple, etc., pilgrimage, offerings, ritual practices... in symbols and forms, pictures and images... in moral and good conduct... Conversely, in opposing which are evil, corrupt, unjust, occult and spurious, superstitious... c) ‘How do you relate to God?’ - Through prayer, meditation, devotional singing, reading scriptures, performing and participating in rituals, serving, charitable giving... d) ‘What is the meaning of God-experience?’ - God-experience is something extraordinary, unable to express, but experience deep within a silence, a peace, a joy, energy, an absorption, a possession and... as one experiences the joy and absorption as one listens to music, play, scenic beauty... To many, God-experience is expressed in being good, leading a moral life, helping and serving others, becoming & representing the Voice of God...
- <sup>xxvi</sup> My book *Religions in Public Life – A Practical Guide to Religious Harmony* (Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2004) deals with a section on how much do we know about our religious neighbours and the images we have about them, and the means of removing stereotyped images about others and unwanted prejudices. (pp.32-50) Another book *Practice of Interreligious Dialogue – A Formation Manual of Education and Training of Clergy and Religious* (same publishers, 2006) is written exclusively for Religious Clergy and Religious, especially *Formators* giving the basics of Dialogue in all its aspects, appending in summary form useful documents of the church and the Society of Jesus.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Ross Feehan’s Report

<sup>xxviii</sup> For details, see Vincent Sekhar: *Building Strong Neighbourhoods – Religion and Politics in Secular India*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2008 (ISBN: 81-889851-18-7)

<sup>xxix</sup> It is a 'moving' letter of a Hindu father written to his daughter: "A tide of righteous resentment is currently sweeping your country, targeted at its minorities and at a tiny, elite--yes, I among them--who call themselves liberal and secular. These are terms you may never hear, but you know them because you lived these ideals. When you were seven, you had two best friends. One was Muslim, the other was Christian. You shared in their lives, and they in yours. Along with the Sanskrit invocations you learned in school and those stories of the Mahabharata and Ramayana from your grandmother, you learned hymns at church, knew when maghrib prayers began and once suggested that we fast during Ramzan. We were fortunate to live in a neighbourhood of great diversity and togetherness. Did you know that your first Diwali was organised by Muslim friends in a completely Muslim neighbourhood?.. In my era, to not be a Hindu--or to be a secular Hindu--is to invite scorn and suspicion at best and hate and violence at worst. We, as secular Indians, lose friends every day, as India's majority buys into a narrative that minorities--especially those invaders -- must live at our sufferance. We, as Hindus, are now infatuated with the passions our new leaders have excited in us, and history tells us that mass infatuations do not easily fade. Around you, the signs of repression will be evident... But you, my dear, are a Hindu, however flawed a Hindu you may be if you have followed your parents' path. To be Hindu is to be privileged--I fear for your friends who were not--and you can always cash in on that privilege. As I and your mother told you, you can be anything you choose. If you embrace another religion and select as your partner someone from another religion--unless such marriages have been banned--you know we will always approve. After all, growing up, some of your friends came from inter-religious marriages, where both mother and father retained their religions and imbibed your friends with the best of both worlds. If you choose to be a Hindu, do remember the forgotten tenets of your religion and the wisdom of its scholars. You will find it ironic that Swami Vivekananda--yes, the same one eulogised by our great leader--said that quarrels and disputes over religion indicate the absence of spirituality, that his faith preached "universal toleration" and all religions as being true. Remember what the Upanishads say: "Sarve bhavanthu sukhinah...maakaschit dukha bhaag bhavet. May all become happy. May no one suffer. Recall that heritage of love and tolerance, not the heritage of hate that infatuates your nation, and fight for and find your place in your India..." (*Samar Halarnkar is editor, Indiaspend.org*: in *Hindustan Times*, updated on April 6, 2017) (<http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/as-new-india-rises-a-father-s-open-letter-to-daughter-on-staying-true-to-nation-s-crumbling-foundations/story-0WsnkGnfwqXM8fqk9pTgSI.html>)

<sup>xxx</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/fundamentalism>

<sup>xxxi</sup> <http://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report-chapters-and-summaries> (of various countries); On Afghanistan: <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Afghanistan%202015.pdf>; On Pakistan: [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_AR\\_2016\\_Tier1\\_2\\_Pakistan.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_AR_2016_Tier1_2_Pakistan.pdf); On India: [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_Tier2\\_India.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Tier2_India.pdf); On Bangladesh: [http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_Monitored\\_Bangladesh.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Monitored_Bangladesh.pdf); On Myanmar (Burma): <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Burma%202015.pdf>

<sup>xxxii</sup> Timothy Radcliffe: *A New Way of Being Church*: Pope Francis encourages us to be comfortable with uncertainty, *America* - *The Jesuit Review*, September 30, 2013 (retrieved on March 28, 2017 at 10.10 pm) <http://www.americamagazine.org/new-way-being-church>

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Maryam said, "My parents encouraged me to take part in the competition with a view that there is no need to hate any particular religion and it is important to know about the epics from religions to which they do not belong." "It was very interesting to read Bhagwad Gita as I have got a lot of information about life from it. The holy book has taught me the golden rules of life. It says that though there are many religions but humanity is the biggest religion among all." (<http://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai/12-year-old-muslim-girl-from-mumbai-wins-bhagwad-gita-contest/story-wHdE3HJ2MnkhKjceRpnLKK.html>) (retrieved on March 12, 2017 at 07.00 pm)

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Suhana's teacher father Syed Munir said she should not buckle under criticism, but pursue her passion for singing. "One should not pay heed to criticism and our entire family is standing by Suhana. We are looking forward to her performance in the coming episodes (of a TV reality show). We encourage her to focus on her singing. We are not bothered about criticism," he said.

(<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2017/mar/10/trolled-singer-suhana-has-family-backing-1579817.html>) (retrieved on March 17, 2017 at 09.00 am)

<sup>xxxv</sup> A page called Mangalore Muslims on Facebook said: "Suhana you have tarnished the Muslim Community by singing in front of men. Do not feel that you have achieved a great feat; people who learn to recite Quran in 6 months have achieved more. Your parents have encouraged you to show your beauty to other men, they will not go to heaven because of you. Please give up the pardah that you are wearing as you don't respect it. [sic]" (<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/suhana-syed-muslim-woman-abuse-threaten-hindu-devotional-song/1/899601.html>) (retrieved on March 09, 2017 at 09.35 pm)

<sup>xxxvi</sup> "The Preamble of Indian Constitution declares that India is a *Secular State*: "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic..." Ever since the declaration, *Secularism* has been one of the most contested words in political discussions in India. Though secularism dwells on the idea of freedom from religion, it also implies a positive freedom to be religious and each person in his/her own way. It envisages a kind of no-contact tolerance (a sort of let-live philosophy) in society and thus helps as a positive regulatory principle for general governance." Vincent Sekhar: *Building Strong Neighbourhoods – Religion and Politics in Secular India*, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2008 p. 44

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Oommen TK: Ch. 5 "Religious Minorities – Inclusion which Undermines Identity and Exclusion which Imperils Equity" in *Social Inclusion in Independent India – Dimensions and Approaches*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2014 (ISBN 978-81-250-6310-0) pp. 113-127