



**Holy Cross Indian Province of
Priests
Justice and Peace Committee**

Vol. 1 No. 2

July 2002

Editorial

Dear Confreres,

Thank you for your appreciation of the first JPC Newsletter published in January 2002. In this second Newsletter, you will find a **Reflection on Freedom** for the coming recollection in your community. Since our independence day is nearing, we thought we could reflect on this theme.

We have just completed the study on Social formation. A detailed report on the same was sent to you and the Administration. Now, we begin a fresh study on our **Apostolic Ministries**. You will find here an introduction to the same by Fr. Leo and an answer sheet to be filled. Kindly spare some time and send it to Fr. Leo by the end of August.

You will also find in this Newsletter an Interview with Fr. Thampi, some JPC news and a few passages for your reflection and information. We have reduced the number of pages to 8 for an easier and quick reading. Kindly send in your comments.

Leonard

JPC NEWS

* John was elected the JPC Secretary. In the future, the JPC Newsletters will be shorter, but we may occasionally send some communiqués. Leo (in charge) and John will conduct the JPC study of the Province's apostolic ministries. The Recommendations will be presented to the Provincial Administration by the end of January 2003.

* John will invite people to collaborate in preparing the **Holy Cross Social Handbook**. Sr. Mary Turgi (Director of the Holy Cross International Justice Office) and Frs. Simon, Gordon and Roque have already accepted to be involved in this project. The Pune scholastics will be approached in the near future.

* The JPC will make its recommendations for the 2003 Provincial Chapter through whatever Committees the Provincial Administration sets up. We however recommend that there be a JPC Committee during the Chapter.

* Some confreres have expressed their appreciation for the **JPC Report on Social Formation**. Since no further suggestions were received, **the text distributed in early May stands as our final Report**. At the end of June, the JPC officially submitted to the Provincial Administration its document on the

JPC Objectives, Organization and Action Plan and its Report on Social formation, which was also given to the Chairman of the Formation Committee.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN INDIA TODAY

In Oct.-Nov. 2001, a Preparatory Committee “identified the following tasks as **the most important challenges confronting Catholic Education in India today**: 1) **Understanding the forces shaping India today**: the rise of Hindu nationalism, the resurgence of the marginalised, the rise of communalism/casteism, globalisation, the present political scenario, etc. 2) **Clarifying our vision regarding the society ‘we want to create through our education’**: Education for what? Education for whom? Education to justice, peace and harmony. 3) **Revamping, coordinating and networking of the various educational structures within the Church in India** with a view to make them more active, accountable, responsive and united in the face of national challenges.”

Here are a few extracts of the “Final Statement and Action Plan” of the **National Consultation on Catholic Education in India Today**, organised by the *CBCI Commission for Education and Culture* on 23-27 Jan. 2002 in Delhi. “**A vision and spirituality (of communion and unity in diversity) are the need of the hour** because, on the one hand, the evils of economic globalisation, religious fundamentalism, the Hindutva ideology and the spectre of increasing poverty threaten to destroy the social, democratic and secular fabric of India, and on the other, the resurgence of women and subaltern groups (Dalits, Tribals, unorganised labour) is being systematically opposed and their aspirations ignored. *Against these, the mission of the people of one faith is to work with people of other faiths, to fashion new understandings of community.* Instead of the narrow and divisive Hindutva view of nationalism based on ‘one culture, one religion’, **we need to foster respect for the identities of India’s diverse peoples, religions and cultures.** The materialistic consumer mono-culture of economic globalisation inevitably leads to the ‘marketisation’ of education and repression of the poor. *This needs to be countered by a definite ‘pro-poor’ stand...*, not merely by giving them place in our institutions but by working to create in the minds of students, parents and public a sense of solidarity with the poor.”

“It is Jesus Christ who inspires all Catholic educational activities. He came to offer people life in all its fullness and to transform society by creating a new world order based on freedom, justice, love and peace.” “Catholic education becomes ‘Good News to all’ when it addresses the ultimate concerns of life, especially of those most disadvantaged in society.” **The aim of Catholic Education in India Today is “to meet the challenges posed by communalism and economic globalisation, by promoting a counter-culture of harmony and solidarity based on a spirituality of communion** as a basis for *Learning to Live Together*, in and through our Catholic educational institutions”.

The **Action Plan** has **3 long-term objectives**:

“1) Helping the educative community of every institution to become aware of the challenges of communalism and economic globalisation, and the need to promote harmony and solidarity;

2) Involving the educative community in planning, implementing and evaluating intra- and inter-institution initiatives, such as dialogue and common worship, that foster such a culture.”

3) To set up “a CBCI Centre for Educational and Cultural Research, Coordination and Networking” (*CRI Letter* No. 1/2002, 24-30).

Catholic Education becomes 'Good News to all'!

“True”, a naughty boy giggled standing in front of
An English medium school and said, “Except to the poor!”

RESPONSE OF RELIGIOUS TO THE CHALLENGES OF FUNDAMENTALISM AND COMMUNALISM

John Desrochers

The 2002 CRI Plenary Assemblies of Women and Men, respectively held at Ernakulam (Jan. 3-7) and Kolkata (Jan. 17-20), reflected on **The Response of Religious to the Challenges Posed by Fundamentalism and Communalism in India Today**. *The Statements of these Assemblies do not only provide useful information, but also invite every religious to rethink his/her own response – his/her own ideas, attitudes, behaviour patterns, activities and contributions.* Let us therefore sum up and reflect on these Statements.*

I. Statement of the CRI Men's Plenary Assembly

While having “their origin and sustenance chiefly in political manipulations and conflicting socio-economic forces” that use religion to achieve sectarian goals, fundamentalism and communalism “are also provoked by the image projected by the Church in general and the **religious institutions** in particular. Not too seldom these come across to people as centers of power and prestige... The resulting isolation obscures the good that is done in them and arouses the envy and opposition of those with vested interests and the uninformed.” Some Christians have moreover recourse to fundamentalist responses and methods of proclaiming the Gospel.

The challenges posed by fundamentalism and communalism cannot however be met by our own fundamentalist attitudes or by reactionary self-defence or silence and inaction. “Rather, *as disciples of the compassionate and crucified Lord Jesus, we must stand up courageously to those who manifest these attitudes, by positively reaching out to them in love and selfless service, even to the point of death.*” We must indeed “reach out in love to those who do not understand our life and ministry”, especially **by attitudes of listening** (involving openness, sensitivity and friendly interaction), **compassion** (leading to service and forgiveness) **and critical discernment** (which frees us from hasty condemnations and helps us to own up and correct our mistakes). **Our behaviour and activities must foster peace, harmony and universal solidarity.**

“**In today's context the following would seem more urgent and significant:** **1. Befriending and being at the service of all people in our neighbourhood.** **2. Showing due respect and reverence to people**” of other faiths and “the things and places they hold as sacred. **3. Intensifying... inter-faith dialogue... at all levels.** **4. Multiplying and strengthening the ministries meant to empower the poorest, the marginalised and the weaker sections of society such as Dalits, Tribals, women and children.** Such empowerment calls for the participatory mode of functioning, the religious being catalysts and animators. **5. Responding to the human needs of the poor without consideration of caste or creed,...** (though) such actions may be interpreted as proselytisation through allurements. **6. Taking a stand against human rights violations...** and promoting justice in favour of the oppressed. **7. Being slow to arrive at conclusions when anything hostile is done to the Christian community...** **8. Becoming more media-friendly**” and projecting the right image. **Inspired by a new mentality, all religious should acquire and adopt these attitudes.** “Remaining constantly alert to our call to live the radicality of the Gospel, **we need to be critical of ourselves, our life-style, our structures and the events of day-to-day life** to discern the call of the Spirit to become truly prophetic in our time.”

* The full proceedings and texts can be found in the 2002 CRI Letter no. 1, 4-24 & no. 2, 3-60.

II. Statement of CRI Women's Plenary Assembly

“The real and perceived threats and offences, recalled from the past history and interpreted *in a particular manner by the proponents of Hindutva as adversely affecting* the identity, dignity, security and continuity of Hindu culture, have prompted its advocates to forge their peculiar strategy to *promote* ‘cultural nationalism’ – one race, one religion, one language and one culture. (This) policy evidently forbodes ill for the democratic structures and cultures of the land and the existing plurality of religions, races and languages, *and adversely affects the commitment of the nation towards social transformation as well as economic well-being.*” In fact, the ill-effects are already visible. Our democratic institutions – the legislature, executive, judiciary and mass media – “have been made *largely* subservient to the Hindutva ideology”.

Far from being based “on the dictates of *fear or prejudice springing from sectarian perceptions or interests*”, **our response must be objective, adequate and mature.** “*The bedrock of such a response should be first and foremost our common citizenship in the federal set-up, with due sensitivity to the diversity that is a distinctive mark of our collectivity.* Equally important is... that, while we critique the current realities/happenings in India, we... also introspect to see the part we may have played. Mutual enrichment through creative interaction *among the diverse races, cultures, religions and ideologies...* should be the hallmark of our approach. Then understanding, appreciation and acceptance of the sacredness of all religions and *the values and rights of all cultures* will prevail. **The promotion of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-racial Indian society needs to be fostered at any cost.** *In other words, the re-affirmation of a sovereign democratic socialist secular republic is our concern and commitment.*”

To achieve this goal, the Statement insists on the following: 1) need for concerted and coordinate CRI action at all levels; 2) systematic study and monitoring of Hindutva and its impact on civil society; 3) deepening our Judeo-Christian heritage and its integration in the Indian cultural ethos; 4) formation based on “a profound Indian Christian experience, study of the Indian Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, social sciences..., a philosophy of the human person *that highlights the dignity and value* of every citizen, a sound theology of religions, the affirmation of pluralism”, etc.; and 5) emphasis on the Indian context in all our studies. It also mentions **a key resource:** “*Our collective embrace of all authentic humanistic, ethical, moral and spiritual forces in our land secures for us allies across religions, cultures, races and ideologies.*” We commit ourselves to collaborate with God’s plans and designs for our country and our people.

“Problematic Dalits”

Thinniam is a tiny hamlet near Lalgudi taluk in Trichy! On 20th May three Dalits from here Murugesan, Karuppiyah, Ramasamy were dragged before one Rajalaxmi the Former village president! They were slashed with hot iron rods inflicting deep wounds. Then the worst happened! They were asked to bring in a plate human excrete and were compelled to eat it! When they hesitated they were again slashed with hot iron! These three men had exposed before the village how Rajalaxmi had swindled their money paid for a land ownership. Some of us took up the matter and are fighting for justice. But the Dalits could not stay back in the village out of fear! Therefore, I sheltered them in my place! They were my guests for some days! Church authorities never uttered a word against this atrocity!

Look at some of our own circular letters and reports! “Problematic dalits, Problematic Dalit area...” are some of the words found in them! I was personally thanking God! If only I had been in one our established institutes I might have been running around asking some good people to shelter them!

Leonard

INTERVIEW OF FR. THAMPI

ON THE SOCIAL APOSTOLATE*

Q. In your personal opinion, how can our Indian Province of Priests live the Holy Cross option for the poor in its apostolic ministries? And how do you see the Province's involvement in the justice and peace ministry?

A. *Holy Cross has a holistic vision and the responsibility of the administration is to realise this vision.* This vision involves the formation of its members, fulfilling ministerial aptitudes, providing opportunities for its members for ministerial fulfillment and addressing and responding to the needs of the people. **In our particular social milieu, and as a congregation, our option for the poor has special significance.** *An option for the poor is a choice that has to come from below as much as from above.* The responsibility of the administration will presently rest primarily on providing ministerial options and choices to its members, and in this act it would have to address the aptitudes and needs of its members for involvement in the social apostolate. *I believe that the administration is open and ready to respond to members who are desirous and interested in being involved directly in an option for the poor. It also needs to make choices in opening such options for its members.* But, more pragmatically, even in the present ministerial situations, it ought to make a preferential option for the needs of the poor (the poor being people who experience impoverishment at any level, whether materially, psychologically or spiritually).

Q. How do you foresee the development of the social apostolate in our Province?

A. Following upon the above, I believe that an attitude has to be created in our membership. Only then can realistic choices be made for involvement in the social apostolate. *It has to begin with the formators and the formation programme where such an attitude and taste will have to be inculcated.* Once this is done, the next step will be the choices we make in ministry.

* *The interview questions were given by John and answered in writing in mid-June 2002.*

The Second Asian CSC Justice and Peace Meeting

At the first Asian meeting in Agartala in Nov. 2001, it was proposed to hold a second meeting in Bangalore in Oct. or Nov. 2002 on **The Respect for Minority Rights or The Rights of the Marginalised.** The coordinator, Bro. Philip, has formed a Committee to organise this meeting/seminar. Since the Holy Cross International Justice Office has fallen behind in its programme and will be working on ecological issues from June or July 2002 to May 2003, Fr. Al Mahoney suggests that we reconsider the theme of the Second Asian Meeting. It also seems that the International Office has hardly any funds for such meetings. For various reasons, some Asian JPC members question whether this second meeting should be organised at all, at least for now. **The Organising Committee comprising sisters, brothers and priests met on 8th July and decided they will not organize such a meeting for now!** *Regional and local meetings will be more useful for the time being.* **The Second Meeting will thus be held in Bangladesh in Oct. or Nov. 2003.**

THE JPC MANDATE

In the light of its consultation of the community before the May retreat, the JPC has finalised its document on **The JPC Objectives, Organisation and Action Plan**. It has presented it to the Provincial Administration at the end of June and is awaiting the latter's response. Here are the changes introduced in the original document (published in our January 2002 Newsletter).

I. Aims and Objectives

3. *(The second sentence now reads.)* **Whenever appropriate, the JPC takes a stand on important issues and speaks in the name of the Holy Cross religious – with the approval of the Provincial Administration.** *(The third sentence [as well as II.2 in the next section] is dropped, but the last two sentences are kept.)*

4. *(This number now reads.)* **The JPC finally promotes justice in Holy Cross communities and institutions, especially with regard to the treatment of confreres, collaborators and workers.** If certain injustices are not locally addressed, Holy Cross religious and other people can ask the JPC to consider the matter and offer its recommendations to the Provincial Administration.

III. Action Plan

(In no. 5, **the study on religious poverty and life-styles will be taken up before the one on relationships with our collaborators/employees.** Nos. 3 & 4 were slightly modified and the no. 6 was replaced by a new item. These passages now read as follow.)

3. Making some **public declarations/statements on justice and peace issues** in the name of Holy Cross with the approval of the Provincial Administration.

4. Organising the **2004 Retreat** on “*Holy Cross Religious and the Practice of Justice*”.

6. Proposing relevant justice and peace reflections and recommendations for the October 2003 Chapter.

The Latest...News!

The Provincial Council has accepted the **JPC Mandate!**

JPC STUDY ON APOSTOLIC MINISTRIES

Leo D'Souza

The challenges facing apostolic religious life today are varied. There are new challenges to mission from increasing secularisation, youth unrest, the impact of mass media, the decline of the family, the need for religions and cultures to dialogue, the ever growing gap between the 'developed' and 'developing' worlds and so on. As our JPC document points out, “India is still confronted with terrible problems of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, socio-economic inequalities, untouchability/caste and women's/tribal oppression. Of late, globalisation, communalism and environmental destruction compound these problems, which are rooted in unjust structures legitimised by wrong ideas and values.”

There is therefore a great need to find new forms of religious life and ministry. Today's challenges call religious congregations to read the signs of the times, adapt themselves and be apostolic servants of Christ's mission in an ever changing world. For this, *they need strategic*

leadership and the wisdom and courage to take collective action in the light of their charism and vision, people's needs and the resources available. "For the kingdom to come in this world, disciples must have the competence to see and the courage to act" (Const. 14).

Constitution 19 adds: "Periodically we review how well our ministries fulfill our mission. We must evaluate the quality, forms and priorities of our commitments as to how effectively they serve the needs of the Church and the world." After its Report on Social Formation, **the JPC now ventures into the study of the social dimensions of our apostolic ministries.** *We will try to assess how well our various ministries in the South are faithful to our option for the poor and our justice/peace and other social responsibilities. Still more importantly, we will also try to suggest some concrete ways in which we can better fulfill our social mission in all our ministries and in our specialised social apostolates.*

All confreres are therefore invited to join our search and help us to offer the best possible recommendations to the Provincial Administration in our Jan. 2003 Report. **In this process, we will hopefully clarify our own ideas, challenge our routine and easy-going responses, discover new ways of serving the people better, and inspire one another to act generously and resolutely** – which is probably more important than our final Report!

This is how we will proceed. **In the first stage,** *we ask the members of the Province who are actively engaged in the apostolate to answer four personal questions* – without necessarily giving their names! For this purpose, we have selected five basic categories of ministries: (1) psycho-spiritual (PRH & counselling), (2) educational (school & youth work), (3) pastoral (parish & catechetics), (4) social, and (5) formation. We therefore request you to reflect in depth on the enclosed "**Matter for Personal Reflection**" and send me your replies **by the end of August.** It would be excellent if some confreres would even come together and share their personal experiences and reflections. A consolidated report of this sharing would be most welcome!

Then will come **the second stage.** *By mid-September, we will circulate a questionnaire (to be replied by the end of October) among all the members of the Province* to evaluate the social dimensions of our present ministries, get suggestions on the possibilities of improvement and even try to discern God's will on our mission in India today. We will make the questionnaire as good as possible by consulting some other congregations and updating our readings on the subject. *The questionnaire will also request you to consult some of the people we serve.*

We thus hope to make a significant contribution to the apostolic orientation of our Province. If needed, important decisions could be taken during the 2003 Provincial Chapter. We greatly count on the indispensable and precious collaboration you have promised the JPC at the consultation before the retreat – that is, 3-4 hours of your time per year! Many thanks in advance!

Reminder from the 2000 Provincial Chapter

As religious living in India today, we are confronted by the attractions of secularisation, consumerism and the quest for prestige and power. We are also deeply challenged by the poverty, divisions, injustice and inequality among our people. In this context, we desire to be authentic followers of Jesus and witnesses of His values, and to become men of hope, peace and service. Today our commitment commands us to be courageous, creative, sincere and dedicated men of God and apostles. Despite all our weaknesses we will strive to achieve these ideals.

FREEDOM – A Reflection for the August Recollection

Leonard

Suggested Procedure

1. Read the proposed **Reflection** in common. Somebody could also add a few thoughts for a specific group, for example the college religious.
2. Reflect personally for an hour or so.
3. Have group sharing.
4. Chalk out a plan of action for the coming month.
5. Seek God's blessings in the Eucharist.



Values Behind Our Options

We use our freedom or free will to make various options. Our freedom is God's gift. We can use our freedom in different ways, for various purposes. Let us look at some of the options we make as religious of Holy Cross.

As a religious community we opt for certain types of apostolates. As individuals, we express our preferences to our superiors and also choose some of our part-time ministries. On the other hand, millions of our people languish in poverty! Millions are made to live in subhuman conditions! *Yet, too often, our apostolates hardly meet their needs and aspirations.*

We meet hundreds of people, but what do we speak about? Frequently, we give homilies or conferences. But too often, their content has nothing to do with the struggles of ordinary people. And some or many of us even hardly take time to prepare them!

Some of us read very little. Is this a proper option? Others do read a lot, but what type of readings? We may mainly choose light readings and jokes... How do we manage the time at our disposal? Watching TV, chatting with friends on useless matters, enjoying some entertainments and so on, may take much of our time. Is this in any way proportionate to the time spent in relevant work or prayer? *How much time do I spend with/for the poor?*

What about our relationships and friendships? Are many poor and marginalized on our long list of friends? Does my busy or easy-going life-style permit many of God's children to enter my life? Or do I mainly look to pamper my privacy and private comforts? Some superfluous material goods and gadgets may be becoming important 'necessities' in my life!

What is in question in all these choices is my value system. Do my values lead me to use my free will to make the right options? Whom do I serve with my freedom, myself or the people? ***Often we justify our choices with various reasons! But times like recollections and retreats are blessed moments. The stark reality of life then stirs us and challenges us!***

The Scope of Our Freedom

The options of many people in the world are very limited, but those of a few like us, religious, are wide-open. In a way, being a religious today is a 'blessing'! Few professions, I

suppose, enjoy as much freedom! No other type of life, I guess, is more prone to be less accountable than that of a religious!

Think of a poor man in society and compare his freedom with that of any of us. His choices are so limited! His living conditions are determined, leaving him few options. His wife and children sometimes walk kilometers to fetch water. Intelligent children cannot continue their education. The poor work hard but earn little! They have no voice in society! They are the first to be victimised in any political or economic changes.

In contrast, the life of a religious is very different! There are so many choices before us... Many of us don't even know the price of the rice we eat! We work little but the comforts of life are guaranteed! **For what and for whom do we use this freedom of ours?**

Jesus and Freedom

Jesus had to make his options among the choices he had before him! His choices too were quite limited! Though he was divine, he took the form of a servant! (Read Philippians 2, 2-11). **Jesus made an option to shed his divinity and share the life of the poor.** When he lived this choice, his options were limited like those of any other poor man or woman.

Jesus' friends were the poor, the marginalized and the socially ostracized! He led the life of a poor man. His birth in a cave and death on a cross prove it all! *His concerns, actions and preaching were centered around social transformation.* He spent most of his time for his people. *He defended the poor and was their prophet. He served them.*

Though Jesus was not so poor by his background, he made an option for the poor and shared his life with them! The purpose of his sharing was to liberate them from social, political and religious clutches.

In Mt. 8, 1-4, a leper asked Jesus: "If you **choose**, you can make me clean." Today, the people, the poor, ask us religious: "**If you choose, you can help me.**" In freedom, through the vow of poverty, we made an option for the poor! But what happened after this option? **Do we share our life with the poor? Do we help them, serve them?**

Questions for Reflection and Sharing

- 1) *What are my main concerns and values? How are these expressed in my day-to-day options? Give some examples.*
- 2) *Is there a big difference between the options of Jesus and my own options? How can I somewhat bridge the gap?*

Suggested Action Plan

1. Choose a local area where many poor people live.
2. Visit them and spend time with some families.
3. Discover what you can share with them in order to empower them. (It may be your time, influence, talents, some goods or facilities etc.)

In the next recollection, discuss with others your experiences and involvements.