
10. Jesuits' Efforts to be Sustainable vis-à-vis Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) and its Implications to India

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Introduction:

On 19 February 2019, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Arturo Sosa SJ, announced four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) for 2019-2029. The UAP was promulgated at the end of a 16-month-long process involving various levels of the Society of Jesus across the globe. On 6th February 2019, Pope Francis affirmed the UAP in his confirmation letter to Fr. General saying that the preferences were "in... agreement with the current priorities of the Church." In his letter addressed to the whole society, Fr. General wrote: "During the next ten years, the following preferences will guide us in incarnating the mission of reconciliation and justice in all the apostolic services to which we, along with others, have been sent."

1. To Show the Way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and Discernment:

The life of a Jesuit is characterized by his profound encounter with Jesus in the practice of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, of which discernment is an integral part. This spiritual experience and practice need to become an intimate encounter with God in all things and be shared with all our collaborators and with those we encounter in our daily lives. Pope Francis insisted that "the first preference is crucial because it presupposes as a basic condition the Jesuit's relationship with the Lord in a personal and communal life of prayer and discernment." Therefore, this preference is an "opportunity to renew our presence in the heart of human history". This preference invites Jesuits and their collaborators "to gain a deeper experience of the Spiritual Exercises and to offer the Spiritual Exercises in as many ways as possible". Our life is governed by the choices and decisions we make all the time. Ignatian

discernment is a process that guides us to make the preferred choices at the personal and communitarian levels. This preference invites Jesuits and their collaborators "to promote discernment as a regular habit" and "make regular use of spiritual conversation and discernment" in our implementation of the preferences at all levels of life and mission. This involves living a "faith that is incarnate and consistent, a faith that enters into dialogue with other religions and with all cultures, a faith manifested in works of justice and reconciliation, a faith lived in a community that becomes a testimony of Hope." This apostolic preference poses a huge challenge and an opportunity in the multi-religious and multi-cultural context of India, where Christians account for about 2 percent of the population. Moreover, there is a concerted effort by majoritarian groups to malign Christian service with accusations of religious conversion. The challenge is to adapt the Spiritual Exercises, discernment, and spiritual conversation according to the context and needs of the people we serve and encounter in our daily lives. Such an effort can make Jesuit service light of hope in the darkness of despair.

2. To Walk with the Poor, the Outcasts of the World, those whose Dignity has been Violated, in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice:

According to the second apostolic preference, Jesuits and their collaborators are invited "to walk with individuals and communities that are vulnerable, excluded, marginalized, and humanly impoverished." The path that is sought to be taken is "one that promotes social justice and the change of economic, political, and social structures that generate injustice; this path is a necessary dimension of the reconciliation of individuals, peoples, and their cultures with one another, with nature, and with God." This calls for a greater commitment "to care for migrants, displaced persons, refugees, and victims of wars and human trafficking.

This includes the commitment "to defend the culture of indigenous peoples." One of the strategies to achieve these goals is to strengthen "political democracy by imparting good civic formation, especially among those at the base of the social pyramid." Another strategy is to promote social organizations committed to seeking the Common Good to help counteract the diverse forms of neo-liberalism, fundamentalism, and populism.

Accompanying the impoverished requires credible studies, analysis, and reflection to understand in-depth the economic, political, and social processes that generate such great injustice; and contribute to the elaboration of alternative models. The goal of this ten-year effort is to promote "a process of globalization that recognizes the multiplicity of cultures as a human treasure, protects cultural diversity, and promotes intercultural exchange." India is plagued with issues of poverty and communities discriminated against based on caste, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, region, and so on. The Dalits are discriminated against based on their caste, occupation, or descent, the tribals, and other ethnic groups are discriminated against based on their ethnicity, and the minorities are discriminated against based on their religion. Most of the poor of the Indian region belong to the lowest strata of society with little possibility for upward social mobility. The call to "walk with the poor" provides many avenues for greater committed service for marginalized people of India. Firstly, this call inspires us to renew our commitment to work towards the empowerment of all marginalized sections of society through training, capacity building, and awareness of their rights and entitlements in the country. There are several socially relevant legislations and welfare measures for the economically and socially disadvantaged people of India, however, the poor have little or no access to them due to corruption and bureaucratic hurdles. Therefore, there is a need to provide handholding support and assistance to these poor communities, in collaboration with other organizations, movements, and campaigns, so that they may be able to access their rights and entitlements guaranteed to them by the State. Secondly, with the rise in fundamentalism that breeds narrow sectarian nationalism in Indian, minorities and other vulnerable communities are at the receiving end of violence and oppression by State and non-State actors. Under these circumstances, this apostolic preference inspires us to provide support or assistance to them and express our solidarity with the struggle of these communities for justice and dignified life. Thirdly, due to natural disasters, violent conflicts, development-induced displacement, and extreme poverty, there is a large-scale movement of people to safer and more prosperous or urbanized regions. They are known as distressed migrants, refugees, or even state-less people. These people are extremely vulnerable and dependent on others for assistance. This apostolic preference urges us to accompany, serve and engage in advocacy for these people.

3. To Accompany the Young in the Creation of a Hope-filled Future:

The youth are the hope for the future of the world. On the one hand, they create opportunities for the future through their innovative and creative spirit, and on the other hand, they bear the brunt of the challenges in our world such as "reduced job opportunities, economic instability, political violence, multiple forms of discrimination, degradation of the environment, and other social evils". Young people have been opening up to the future with the hope of building a life of dignity in a reconciled world that is in harmony with the environment. Young people are the principal protagonists of an anthropological transformation that is coming to be through the digital culture of our time, opening humanity to a new historical epoch that involves new ways of structuring human life in its personal and social dimensions that can be a light for the path toward justice, reconciliation, and peace.

Young people are drawn toward an intercultural human society that celebrates diversity rather than cultural homogeneity. Young people aspire to exercise true freedom that opens up creative spaces facilitating the emergence of a humane, intercultural society. The third apostolic preference invites Jesuits and their collaborators to create and maintain spaces for young people to allow them "to develop their full potential as human beings." Accompanying young people calls for personal, communitarian and institutional conversion as it "demands authenticity of life, spiritual depth, and openness to sharing our life-mission of justice, reconciliation, and peace.

In the Indian context, the large number of Jesuit institutions that cater to the education and well-being of young people is an opportunity to stimulate their creative minds toward building a new world that is just, equitable, harmonious, peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous.

Educational institutions, in particular, must blend academic excellence with social relevance, rootedness in cultural diversity with openness for the transformation of cultures, competence in existing knowledge with the creative generation of new knowledge, acquisition of skills with the building of convictions for ethical goals, respect for tradition with critical thinking.

4. To Collaborate in the Care of our Common Home:

In the encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis calls on all human beings to share the responsibility for the care of creation. He points out that the ecological crisis and climate change are affecting the most vulnerable people, such as indigenous peoples, urban poor, migrants, and refugees. The environmental degradation caused by the dominant economic paradigm is inflicting inter-generational damage jeopardizing the life of future generations. Therefore, the fourth apostolic preference invites Jesuits "to collaborate with others in the construction of alternative models of life that are based on respect for creation and on a sustainable development capable of producing goods that, when justly distributed, ensure a decent life for all human beings on our planet."

This includes efforts at in-depth analysis of the ecological crisis and promoting discernment on decisions that help restore the delicate ecological balance. This apostolic preference calls for an "ecological conversion" of Jesuits and their companions in mission to ensure that their lifestyle is environmentally friendly and to promote an eco-friendly lifestyle worldwide.

India has borne the brunt of environmental degradation and climate change with frequent floods, droughts, cyclones, and other natural disasters occurring every year. Pollution, declining forest cover, and shrinking Himalayan glaciers are posing severe threats to the future of the sub-continent. Jesuits in some regions of India have already been engaged in the promotion of environmental movements, such as "Taru Mitra", promotion of renewable energy like solar power, and organizing people's movements to oppose displacement and destruction of the environment. This apostolic preference invites Jesuits to build on these efforts and promote an eco-friendly lifestyle at the personal level, community level, and institutional levels. The goal may be to promote a waste-free, pollution-free and eco-friendly society throughout India.

Conclusion:

The UAP is a call to all Jesuits and their companions in their mission to be guided by the Spirit of God so that they may focus their energies and resources on the implementation of the UAP, which require personal,

communal, and institutional conversion, to respond to the cry of the earth and its peoples. This involves intellectual depth in analyzing the socio-economic and political realities, efficient management of economic and financial resources, and strengthening of the bonds of collaboration and networking with partners in our mission of justice, reconciliation, and peace. India has a rich spiritual heritage of many religious and cultural traditions, which needs to be harnessed for collective action for the Common Good of the people of India. The UAP challenges us intellectually to explore alternative economic development paradigms that will address the problems faced by India and globally as well. The UAP also challenges our apostolic approaches so that we develop strategies that will promote democracy with the dignity of all citizens, economic growth with equity, development with ecological sensitivity, and social justice with reconciliation and peace.

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