

Abstract: The universal Church's greater awareness of the need to incarnate itself in different cultures is amongst the most precious blessings God is showering on us in the last years of this millennium. At the Second Vatican Council the Church experienced itself as a world Church and laid the theological and pastoral foundations for the realization that it is also a communion of local Churches, responsive to local experiences and problems in the context of mission.

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## Document

### **South Asian Jesuit Provincials Support Their Theologians**

The universal Church's greater awareness of the need to incarnate itself in different cultures is amongst the most precious blessings God is showering on us in the last years of this millennium. At the Second Vatican Council the Church experienced itself as a world Church and laid the theological and pastoral foundations for the realization that it is also a communion of local Churches, responsive to local experiences and problems in the context of mission.

Following this inspiration, Jesuits, like many others in South Asia, have engaged themselves in serious research, reflection and praxis in many areas of the Church's life, particularly in the areas of theology, spirituality, interreligious dialogue and inculturation. They are reconnoitering new theological grounds which span a wide spectrum of reality constituted by the complexity of a multicultural and multireligious continent. In addition to its ancient traditions, the continent is now being influenced by scientific and secularizing forces, economic upheavals, political uncertainties, environmental catastrophes, socio-cultural revolutions and fundamentalist religious uprisings. In India, the recent atrocities against minorities, including Christians, which have also directly affected some Jesuits, have made a dent in its commitment to a secular democracy.

It is in this context that we appreciate, support and encourage the work of our theologians and others to build up the local Church in India, and we want them to go even further and deeper, in fidelity to Christ and to the mission he has entrusted to us in the Church. We also note with satisfaction the demand by many Bishops at the Asian Synod for the autonomy due the local Churches in Asia. We regret that lack of enthusiasm within and various blocks from without the country have stalled the progress of inculturation in the sub-continent.

Living and working amidst such challenges, we, like many of our fellow Jesuits, are pained by the atmosphere of suspicion, not to say mistrust, created by recent decisions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about our brothers Anthony De Mello and Jacques Dupuis, which seems symptomatic of a general discouragement, even disapproval, of the direction that Asian theology is taking. We think that such suspicion has been a disservice to the whole Church. The late Anthony de Mello pioneered the integration of Asian and Christian spirituality and methods of prayer. He has helped thousands of people in South Asia and across the world in gaining freedom and in deepening their life of prayer, of which we have abundant testimonies and our own personal experiences. Jacques Dupuis taught theology for over twenty years in India before being appointed professor at the Gregorian University in Rome. His quest for a theology of religious pluralism is marked, both by his experience of the plurireligious situation in South Asia, and his

loyalty to the doctrinal, magisterial and theological tradition of the Church.

We do not claim that their work is above critical attention. In an evolving situation, open and constructive criticism and dialogue are healthy and welcome. But we wish that this is done in full appreciation of the Asian cultural and plurireligious context in which these and other theologians are working. We also need to be mindful of the legitimate pluralism in theology within the unity of Faith and of the subsidiarity in decision-making in a Church that is also a communion of local Churches. We think that there is a lack of appreciation of difference and of proper procedures, when decisions are taken unilaterally without a dialogue with the Asian Churches. We are afraid that such interventions are eventually detrimental to the life of the universal Church, to the cause of the Gospel and to the task of interpreting the Word to those who do not belong to the western cultural tradition.

We are grateful for the appreciation and support our theologians have received from many Bishops and the People of God, in Asia and the world. We invite all, bishops, clergy, and the laity, to continue to support them with a trust that is sympathetic but not naive, critical but not censorious, because we are convinced of the importance of the theological task both for our work of evangelization, education and social justice, and for our whole thrust towards the inculturation of our faith. We would like to assure our theologians of our own continued support and encouragement to go ahead, joyfully and in fidelity to God, to the Gospel and to the Church, with the difficult and challenging task of making the Word of God relevant to the situation in South Asia.

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