

flame

JESUITS AND FRIENDS IN ASIA PACIFIC TODAY November 2010



Buddhist dialogue flowers



many sparks one fire
many stories one history
many dreams one vision



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for Arrupe residence

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for Asia

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Asia Pacific snapshots



Provincials name cooperative projects

The mid-year meeting of provincials held in Seoul in July chose migration, the environment and the development of Colégio São José, Timor Leste as three apostolic projects in which the whole Jesuit Conference will immediately cooperate.



Death of Bishop Claver

In July, Bishop Cisco Claver died. His contribution to the Philippines, to the Asian Catholic Church and the Jesuit Conference was great. He was Bishop of Malaybalay, wrote Cardinal Sin's letter that helped bring the Marcos regime to a peaceful end, and encouraged young Jesuits throughout Asia to commit themselves to social ministries.



PUSKAT celebrates 40 Years

PUSKAT, the Indonesian Province media studio, celebrated its 40th anniversary on August 15. PUSKAT makes audio and television programmes, and runs training programs in media. The celebrations have included seminars for the PUSKAT staff.



St Ignatius Day Ordination in Dili

Plínio Martins was ordained a priest in Dili on St Ignatius Day. He celebrated his first Mass in the Church where as a boy he was an acolyte. Plínio taught in Micronesia for two years and completed his theology training in Australia. He is now working in the Colégio São José in Dili.



Encounter with Islam

Throughout January 2011 about ten young Jesuits will meet in Indonesia to encounter and reflect on Islam in the Indonesian context. This is the first meeting of the Asia Pacific Theological Encounter Program, established by the Jesuit Conference.



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'I leave you at a door open to great merits, yet not without many perils and labours'.

Planning at the frontiers

The language of our Jesuit documents is bold, the vision wide and generous, and the inspiration powerful. We need only to think of such phrases as: sent to frontiers, fires lighting other fires, the Inseparable link between faith and the promotion of justice, reconciliation with God, with others and with all creation.

Although the gap between the needs and our resources always seems great, such a call gives many opportunities. This is why we have to plan and make priorities. Fr General Adolfo Nicolás has suggested a process for this planning, by looking out to our frontiers, the horizons to which we are called. First we examine the needs of the world in which we live. Frontiers are presented to us by the realities of the world around us. Then we analyse and reflect together on these realities in the light of our faith. The horizons of the Gospel of Jesus Christ should orient our encounters with the situations and people we deal with at the frontiers. The third step in this process is planning. Our planning and projects should flow from the discernment to identify frontiers.

Speaking in Mexico recently, Fr Nicolás encouraged us to develop an Ignatian imagination. Ignatius taught us to use all our senses in contemplation, echoing the gaze of the Trinity looking on the needy world and considering how to save it. So Fr Nicolás encouraged Jesuits to attend steadily to the human reality of the world that opens before our eyes and hold ourselves ready to respond to it.



Asia Pacific provincials recently studied a conference-wide 'Social Mapping' of the context of our Jesuit mission today. (www.sjapc.net) After their reflection, the provincials chose some common projects on which they ask the Jesuits of Asia Pacific to work together over the coming years: Migration, Reconciliation with Creation and Support for education in East Timor in transition from Colégio de São José.

In order to own these common projects we must look together at our resources and how we can build them. Large priorities, like migration and the environment, call us to attend to the smell and the noise of our world and of our own lives.

In many countries of our region asylum seekers, whom persecution has forced from their own nations, are treated cruelly and inhospitably. Migrant workers and trafficked women and children, too, are exploited and abused with the tacit approval of both sending and receiving countries. They need companions and advocates. The first step is to notice them and to ask how as Jesuits we can cooperate across our region to care better for them.

Throughout the Asia Pacific region, the environment is under threat. Its exploitation threatens the culture and the economic welfare of the poor. Deforestation, strip mining, degraded river systems, and erosion drive people off their lands, affect the livelihood



of fishermen, threaten rural communities and endanger the urban poor. The problem is global. Matteo Ricci's last words to his companions were: 'I leave you at a door open to great merits, yet not without many perils and labours'. His life inspires our response.

Mark Raper SJ



Arrupe turns twenty

This year, the Arrupe International Residence at Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines celebrates its 20th anniversary. Fr Norris Seenivasan was one of the early students there. He is now the prefect of studies and is also studying psychology at the Ateneo. He first came first to Arrupe in 1993.

Norris says the first time he experienced what it means to be a part of a truly international community was on a trip to Niagara Falls in Canada.

‘I was amazed, not by the falls, but by the large number of people I saw visiting the place coming from all over the world’, the Malaysian Jesuit recalls. ‘And that is something I’ve experienced here in Arrupe. For the first time I was meeting Jesuits from all over the world.’

Established in 1990 as a centre for international scholastics studying theology and philosophy, today the Arrupe International Residence is home to 52 scholastics from 15 different nationalities.

Originally, most of the residents in Arrupe were Jesuits from Malaysia and Singapore

who were unable to study in their home countries. Over the last few years, the majority of the students have come from East Timor and Myanmar. Two Kenyans and two Sri Lankans also live in the community.

The Jesuits studying at Arrupe are given the opportunity to work in Manila on weekends. They go to parishes, orphanages, jails and hospitals, as well as serving people in the squatter areas. During their summer vacation, some of the students travel to Mindanao where they work in parishes with indigenous communities.

The Rector of the Arrupe International Residence, Fr Koichi Matsumoto, says that all Jesuits can feel at home in the residence even though they can use only English

to communicate with one another. In fact, he argues, communicating in a common language helps the residents explore other things they have in common.

‘We Jesuits have the same experience, the Spiritual Exercises. We spent two years in the novitiate – so that is a common experience. We are from very different cultures, but we are one because of our spirituality, one spirituality’, says Koichi.

The 20th anniversary will be a time to reflect on how much the centre has contributed to Asia. Koichi is confident that the contribution is great.

‘Graduates from this place are scattered all over the world, many working in Asian countries’, he says. They are the future leaders of the Jesuits.’

TWENTY YEARS AGO

On the occasion of its opening, Fr Kolvenbach shared with the community his hopes for the Arrupe International Residence.

‘In naming your community after Fr Arrupe you are accepting all that he continues to represent for our contemporary Society. We must continue to be men renewed in the Spirit if we are to renew in the Spirit.

‘You are to be men of that Kingdom which will always be international because it is essentially universal.

‘Yours is a residence, a place where men dwell in simplicity of life, in mutual support, in ongoing reconciliation, in hard work and in hospitality.’



Sanctuary at Xavier Hall

Earlier this year there were fierce political demonstrations in Bangkok. In May the protesters occupied much of the area near Xavier Hall, the main Jesuit residence in Bangkok. It was on the edge of the fighting between protesters and police.

At the height of the conflict, the Jesuit Community was asked to make Xavier Hall a place of sanctuary. Fr Bernard Arputhasamy, director of the Jesuit Refugee Service Asia/Pacific, describes how the community responded.



‘On the morning of Monday May 17, Fr Paul Pollock, Jesuit Superior of Xavier Hall Community and Thailand, invited a small team to organise the sanctuary. We planned simply: no weapons, food and drink, security, contacts for Red Cross and others in case of

emergency, overall coordinator, mats to sleep on and so on.’

Bernard continues, ‘At 2.15pm on Wednesday the first group of “Bangkok refugees” arrived at our gates to seek sanctuary. The women working with us asked permission to check the women’s belongings for any kind of weapons before allowing them to enter the sanctuary. They were visibly distressed. They had run away from the group of Red-shirts.’

The situation at Victory Monument deteriorated later in the day. Repeated gun shots interspersed with fire crackers and bomb explosions were heard. Bernard takes up the story, ‘At 6.30pm as we were about to begin Mass, we heard two very loud explosions just outside Xavier Hall. We rushed to the gates to see what was

happening. First the Dokya bookshop went up in flames, followed by the Centre One Mall. The 7-Eleven was also ablaze. Another group arrived at 6.45pm to seek shelter.

‘When the curfew ended the next morning, the damage to the buildings and surroundings in the Monument became clear. So did the hurt of the people. On their faces were written sadness and shock at what they saw. Two corners of burnt buildings, streets scattered with rubbish, road blocks, the visible military and police presence, fire engines and fire fighters, onlookers, and passers-by on cars and motorcycles.’

Later the refugees were able to leave, and the protesters ebbed away. The community was privileged to be able to offer sanctuary, but glad that few people had to accept it.

The challenge now was to find meaning in this painful and sad time.

Bernard recalls his favorite symbol, the lotus flower. He says,

‘It is planted and grows in muddy water. Out of the muddy water, a beautiful flower grows! We were planted in the muddy water of the Bangkok people’s suffering, and wounded by the violence. We have been wounded by all kinds of violence. From these wounds in our hearts we hope that a beautiful flower of peace and compassion will grow.’





Unusual business on Culion

In May 2009, Loyola College on the Philippines island of Culion was on the verge of disaster. The school's main funding source in Spain collapsed, leaving it with a huge tuition bill and with little hope of paying it.

Fr Xavier (Javie) Alpasa was brought in to help change the situation. He had experience. Before joining the Jesuits he graduated in Business. He enjoyed the high life, and worked his way up the corporate ladder. But after experiencing the 1995 World Youth Day in Manila, he decided to become a Jesuit.

Javie's business skills did not go to waste. At the novitiate he was given responsibility for the retreat house finances, and helped turn them around. At Ateneo de Naga University he raised 19 million pesos in funding for the school. Then, assigned to Payatas, the garbage dump site, he helped form a social enterprise called Rags2Riches. Women were able to turn the scraps of cloth they gathered there into high fashion items sold in city stores. The program won awards worldwide, and introduced Xavier to social enterprise.

Since arriving in Culion in May 2009, Javie has set up a cooperative for local merchants. They can bypass the 'middle-men' from nearby islands and so bring down the price of groceries for everyone. He has built a new retreat centre and helped introduce a new tourism enterprise degree at the college. But his biggest project has been opening the Hotel Maya.

Located on a rocky outcrop overlooking the sea, the Hotel Maya has become the symbol of a new era for Culion. For a hundred years, the island was a leper colony, cut off from the outside world. Even though the island has been leprosy free for ten years, the stigma of its past remains. The hotel is planned to support the school through tourism, but also to open the community to new possibilities.

‘The hotel has become the flagship, symbolising everything’, says Javie. ‘If the hotel is earning, it means all the other support enterprises will be earning.’

The links between the school and hotel are more than financial. Tourism and hospitality students from the school train at the hotel, hoping to be employed at some of the local resorts. They also plan tours and activities for the hotel’s guests, and develop other new initiatives such as a souvenir shop.

To the islands

These enterprises have also helped the indigenous

Filipinos to whom Jesuits on Culion minister. They include the Buluk-Bulukan people who occupy 41 islands, eking out a subsistence existence. Fr Marlito (Lito) Ocon says that discrimination against indigenous people in the Philippines is on the wane.

‘There may have been a little discrimination because indigenous people are darker than us, but slowly the people from the mainland recognise that we are the same. Maybe a few may still laugh at how they dress and present themselves, but slowly the consciousness of the people is changing. There is a greater awareness now about indigenous people and the younger people want to help them.’

By boat to Mass

Every week Lito and Javie, who is also the parish priest of Culion, travel hundreds of kilometres to reach the 52 chapels scattered around the islands. They guarantee one Mass at each chapel every month, a promise that keeps them constantly on the move.

They have also worked to develop the resources of the islanders. They have organised a group of volunteer teachers to spend time on the islands teaching adults and children to read and write. The cooperative instigated by Javie has also been significant in reducing the cost of staples brought in from the mainland and allowing the fishermen to demand a market rate for any excess fish they catch.

‘We’re trying to unite the fisher folk as part of the cooperative so the fishermen don’t get deceived by the buyers’, says Javie. ‘Now that the cooperative is stable and growing, I want to teach them how to save.’

Although the soil here is not conducive to farming, Javie and Lito and their band of volunteers are experimenting with ways of coaxing crops from it. They have also enlisted the people to make souvenirs to sell at the Hotel Maya.

The key to all the Jesuit work on Culion is self-reliance. So Javie launches projects and leaves others to manage them.

‘What I do is put in structures and systems and empower people, instead of them relying on me’, he says.

The future of Culion will depend on how they manage its greatest resource – its natural environment – and whether they can establish a niche for themselves in the tourism industry. The school is working to create a tourism board for the island, to ensure that tourism does not damage the local ecology.



‘We are hoping that before visitors leave here they will fall in love with the place and will continue to contribute to it after they have gone’, says Javie.





New learning from Fiji

Fr Arthur Leger's new job has taken him far from his beginnings. The only Jesuit born in Fiji, he has become Director of the East Asian Pastoral Institute at a time of new challenges. He brings great skills to the task.

The East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) has a formidable reputation. For many years it has given religious and lay people from across Asia Pacific the opportunity to update their theologies, reflect on their lives in the church, and discover the broader flavour of the Asian church.

'This may be the first time that they've ever been with other Catholics from other places in Asia', explains Arthur.

Many leaders of the Asian churches have taken its courses, and have found great inspiration in them. 'My archbishop in Fiji came here six times', says Arthur. 'Many of the sisters, brothers and priests who studied here are now superiors. Fr Adolfo Nicolás, once director of the EAPI, says it is the most

effective ministry in the whole of Asia.'

But Arthur sees that today new questions are being posed, particularly by Pope Benedict.

'A lot of our modules are still responding to post-Vatican II paradigms and concepts which I think are no longer relevant', he says. 'Asia is the centre of the Catholic Church, so there is a move back to mission. How do you do missionary work in China, in Thailand, in Burma? At EAPI we have the resources to find answers.'

Arthur's own work in developing ethical leadership leads him to see it as central to the EAPI curriculum. The format of EAPI courses, which allows people from different backgrounds to

spend time together, creates space for leadership training.

'Leadership is a big new concept', he says. 'The jargon of church leadership has to meet the jargon of corporations and governments. And we need to be able to pass these skills on to clergy.'

Recent sex abuse scandals provide useful lessons in leadership, says Arthur. 'It's a great opportunity for us to review our leadership style. It's important to understand



how we manipulate and abuse power. People learn these skills in business schools, but the church needs to acquire them too.'

Arthur was born in Fiji. He met Jesuits after entering a diocesan seminary, and joined the Jesuit Noviceship in Pulau in Micronesia. After a career in education, Arthur has more recently been a strategic planning consultant with the Jesuits, working in East Timor, Cambodia, Thailand and Micronesia.

He feels both the blessing and the challenge of being Fiji's only Jesuit.

'A lot of people, including the archbishop, are proud of me. How to serve the region as a Jesuit has been a struggle. But I think being at EAPI I may be able to help.'



The word of God is not chained

Fr Lawrence Andrew is familiar with controversy. He is the editor of Malaysia's *Herald Catholic Weekly*. The Malaysian government is currently appealing a High Court ruling that endorsed their right to use the word *Allah* in print — including in their Malay editions.

The *Herald* had taken the government to court in 2007 after several years of sustained 'harassment', during which the government threatened to ban the newspaper and consistently refused until the last minute to renew its annual publishing permits.

'Malay Muslims opine that *Allah* is a proper noun for Lord God Almighty or in Malay *Tuhan yang Maha Esa*', writes Fr Lawrence in a recent editorial. 'However the word *Allah* is purely linguistic as both Christians and Muslims use it in Indonesia and in other parts of the world where the Arabic language is the medium of communication.'

Sixty per cent of Malaysia's population is

made up of ethnic Malay Muslims. Religious minorities and groups of ethnic Chinese and Indians claim that the government is trying to stir Muslim sentiment in an attempt to maintain power. The government claims that the use of the word *Allah* by Christians is offensive to Muslims.

'They think when we use the word *Allah* we are trying to convert them to Christianity. And if they become Christians, that this will be a threat to the nation because the stability of the Muslim population will become shaken. We are saying that this is not a threat to the nation, don't bully us, we are all equal citizens, let us move forward', says Fr Lawrence.

But he fears that the case is indicative of a move towards the Islamicisation of Malaysia — and one that Christians have unwittingly encouraged. 'In the 1980s there was already a movement within the country to bring about a greater Islamicisation among the people of Malaysia. They asked Catholic schools to take down crucifixes. We said, "We can still reflect our faith". So we took them down', says Fr Lawrence.

'Then we were told we cannot teach Catechism in school hours. So we decided to do it half an hour earlier, before school. We encouraged this Islamicisation process by giving in, but we weren't aware of it.'

Fr Lawrence says the government is drawing out the appeals process deliberately, to thwart the newspaper's continued use of the word *Allah*. But the Jesuit has remained defiant.

'Malaysian Christians use the word in Mass and in everyday conversation. Even in the Hail Mary we use the word Allah. The government's not going to change us. It's our heritage, it's a language of ours too.'



Theology for many cultures

The Bible has been translated into more than 2,000 different languages, and is read in all corners of the globe. But how do people of different cultures read and understand its texts?

These are questions that Fr Mario Francisco, the President of the Loyola School of Theology, wrestles with. He says that it can be very enlightening to look at how Christian concepts have been integrated into Asian cultures.

‘For example, the Tagalog word for baptism is binyág, which is not a Spanish word. It is curious that the Spanish missionaries came here and found there was already a word for baptism. I looked at dictionaries and found out the word originally referred to the Muslim rites for purification. So the Spanish missionaries took it and said that from now on, that’s what you use for baptism.’

The Loyola School of Theology is based at Ateneo University in the Philippines. Originally established in 1965

as a school for seminarians, the school now has around 330 students, half of whom are priests and religious, and half are lay people. The school is attached to Ateneo de Manila University, and



offers degrees up to doctoral level. The school provides formation for a number of religious orders, including Jesuits. It attracts students from across Asia, from Latin America and Africa.

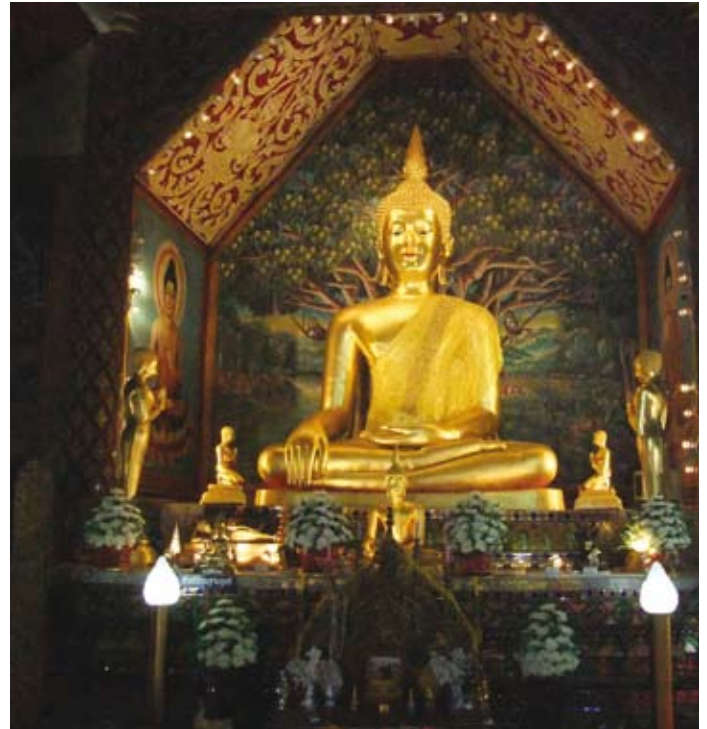
In 2004, the then Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania asked the school to prepare Jesuits for ministry within their different Asian contexts. This meant not only studying theological texts, but also looking at how theological concepts are understood by communities in different parts of Asia.

‘When people talked about Asian theology, basically they meant South Asian – Indian – theology’, says Mario. ‘People clamoured for a centre that generates theological reflection from an East Asian perspective.’

The ‘Asian mandate’ for the school has led to the development of new courses focusing on Asian contexts. Theologians from different parts of Asia have been invited to teach at the school. Loyola School of Theology faculty have also travelled abroad to speak to theologians in other centres. Three international forums have been held – in 2006, 2009 and 2010. They attracted international guest speakers and participants from across the region.

In putting together an International Theology Program, the school has encouraged students to reflect on what they are taught in the light of their own cultural context.

‘Whether they are reading scripture, or looking at the history of the Church, or reading a contemporary theologian’, Mario says, ‘students are made aware of context, and know that they are being prepared to be ordained priests for a particular context.’



Born for dialogue

Fr Cyril Veliath began to focus on Buddhism only when he was made director of Buddhist-Christian dialogue for the Asia Pacific Conference. The vitality of the dialogue was shown by the Jesuit meeting held at Chiang Mai in April.

Cyril knows Hinduism intimately. He says, ‘I was born in India of a Hindu mother and a Catholic father, and although my mother eventually accepted baptism and became a fervent Catholic, her culture remained Hindu to the end. I think this contact with my mother and her family evoked within me an interest in inter-religious harmony.’

After joining the Jesuits in India in 1968, Cyril came to Japan where he was ordained and then appointed to teach Indian philosophy at Sophia University. From 1990, he began working with a group of Hindu monks in Japan, called the Ramakrishna Mission. These monks are disciples of a 19th century Hindu saint named Ramakrishna, who claimed to have experienced Jesus Christ.

He says, ‘Every year we

celebrate the birth of Swami Vivekananda, a monk who was a disciple of Ramakrishna’.

He sees his work as director of Buddhist-Christian dialogue for the Assistancy to be mainly one of coordination. He expects that when one of the younger Jesuits completes graduate studies in Buddhism, he will inherit the role.

Cyril is a tireless communicator. ‘We have over 20 Jesuits in the Assistancy who work for harmony with Buddhism in various nations of Asia’, he says. ‘I keep in touch with them, I maintain a web site to upload articles, photographs, and other material they send me. I have uploaded ten lectures on Buddhist-Christian dialogue on to YouTube, and right now I am working on uploading ten other lectures on Christianity and Hinduism.’

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN JAPAN

Among Japanese Jesuits there is a long tradition of Buddhist dialogue. Its fathers were two German Jesuit Buddhist scholars, Fr Hugo Lasalle and Heinrich Dumoulin. Scholars at Sophia University have built on their foundations.

Fr Klaus Riesenhuber, a former philosophy professor at Sophia, teaches the technique of Zen meditation. Fr Thierry-Jean Robouam, who lived with Buddhist monks for several months, teaches both at Sophia and Koyasan University, and works for harmony with Buddhists and Muslims.

Two popular writers have also focused on Buddhism. For many years the late Fr William Johnston has promoted inter-religious dialogue, chiefly with Buddhists. Fr Kakichi Kadowaki, who taught philosophy at Sophia and wrote

Zen and the Bible, is a renowned Zen instructor.

The late Fr João Mira, was a master of the Shugendo or mountain religion of Japan and a specialist in the Japanese tea ceremony. Fr Miguel Lafont, director of the Center of Spirituality for Western Japan, has directed retreats and meditation sessions, using the Buddhist technique of Vipassana.

The strong connection between Sophia University and religious dialogue is also evident in the work of Fr Mark Koo, who teaches theology at Sophia and conducts research on Buddhism and Korean Shamanism. Fr Alex Varickmackal teaches Yoga and conducts dialogue with Zen monks, while Fr Francis Britto, a professor of linguistics, writes on Hinduism.

Jesus said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch'. LUKE 5.4



Fishing off Culion

ihs many sparks one fire
many stories one history
many dreams one vision