

“INTER-CULTURAL LIVING”

As a follow-up of the 17th General Chapter of the Society and its Congregational Directions, the National Mission Secretary, Fr. Baptist D'Souza SVD, organized a three-day seminar for all the confreres in India, on the theme: “Inter-cultural Living in the Society of the Divine Word”, at St. Arnold's Seva Sadan, Indore, from February 7-9, 2014. The seminar was inaugurated with the concelebrated Eucharist, presided over by Fr. Nicholas Martis SVD, Provincial Superior of INC Province. In his homily, he highlighted the importance of Inter-cultural Living in our context. After the breakfast, all the participants of the Seminar – about 120 of them – gathered in Brother Florinus Ochs Hall. The National Mission Secretary officially welcomed the resource persons and the participants. The resource persons were: Fr. Robert Kisala SVD - Vice-Superior General, Fr. Stanislaus Lazar SVD - General Mission Secretary, Fr. S.M. Michael SVD – ASPAC Zonal Coordinator, Fr. Thomas Malipurathu SVD – former General Formation Secretary and Mr. John Dayal – journalist, activist and a well-known lay national leader. A short video presentation by Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra was part of the welcome address.



The first speaker of the day was Fr. Thomas Malipurath. In his address he brought out the SVD General Chapter concerns on the intercultural living, with examples from the Bible. After the coffee break in the morning and for the rest of the day, Fr. Robert Kisala was the resource person. In his presentations, he highlighted the importance of the experiences of Inter-cultural Living in the Society and skills required for our Inter-cultural Living. He affirmed that inter-culturality is part of our SVD DNA. In our world of today, people constantly meet each other, going beyond one's cultures due to immigration, urbanization and globalization. In this context, intercultural living helps us in our mutual transformation and enrichment and consequently in our mission. In his theoretical analysis of culture, he explained the framework for assessing it, attitudes towards cultural differences and Milton Bennett's development model: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration. In this model, one needs to move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

On the second day of the seminar, Fr. S. M. Michael highlighted the ecological influences on a particular culture which can be observed when any two cultures are compared. After about four decades of study and research on culture and anthropology, he has come to the conclusion that ecology, power, values and



visions play a vital role in one's cultural living. We need awareness, knowledge and skills to appreciate and understand others' culture and live inter-culturally. We need to understand also that no one culture is perfect; there are always positive and negative aspects in any culture; a point that was stressed repeatedly in his presentation. This knowledge should enable us to understand our own culture while also being able to appreciate the positive aspects in other cultures. In this process we need forgiveness, respect and empathy. Consequently, Fr. Michael also stressed the importance of mission: we *should*, therefore, share the values of the Gospels in order to change the weaknesses of the cultures wherever we work as missionaries. Since the topic was very concrete and applicable to all the participants, there ensued a very lively discussion.

In the afternoon, Fr. Stanislaus Lazar spoke on the theme of New Evangelization in the Catholic Church and the Divine Word Missionaries' call to participate in the New Evangelization. He challenged us to take up new methods and expressions in our mission. It was followed up by group-discussions. The participants were divided into six groups and questions on the obstacles/challenges, ways and means to enrich one's cultural living and new methods in our mission were discussed and the report of the group discussion was presented on the following day. In the evening seminarians from Vidyodaya seminary felicitated the guests and entertained the participants with a short cultural program and the day ended with a fellowship meal.

On the final day of the seminar, Mr. John Dayal openly expressed his candid opinion, on the Catholic Church and hierarchy. He has been attracted to the Catholic Church due to the aspect of faith in the Church and its social concern and action. According to him, the Church has to renew and empower the laity. He expressed his concern that the Divine Word Missionaries could actively be involved in the area of communication (religious and social), translation of Church documents into regional languages (which in itself is a labourious task!), gender justice, students' movements, labour and domestic workers' movement. Another urgent need is to set up a national 'think tank', and we could be an integral part of this. During the forenoon session, the report of the group discussion was presented. Needless to say, there were plenty of suggestions and opinions. It was opined that some of the suggestions could be taken up by the National Mission Secretary as part of the agenda for the Planning Forum next year.

At the end of the session, the chief organizer of the seminar, Fr. Baptist D'Souza, thanked all the people who were responsible for the success of the seminar. The participants were happy and expressed their satisfaction at the overall organization of it. It was an exercise worth undertaking.

**Report by Fr. S.M. Michael SVD
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