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Manufacturing Change From the Ground Up

THE BIHAR SOCIAL INSTITUTE AND THE INTELLECTUAL
APOSTOLATE IN PATNA, INDIA

by George Kearney

Imagine for a moment you are presented with the following challenge (suspend your disbelief and assume you are also given a paid leave of absence from your job to work on it): Address the persistent problem of abject poverty and the consequent social ills plaguing a country of nearly 1 billion people, growing at a rate of close to 2% every year. In this country, just over half the school-age children go to school. 40% of the urban population and 50% of the rural population live below the poverty line. According to the U.S. Department of State, child labor laws are rarely enforced. Minimum wage laws vary drastically from place to place and, when enforced, guarantee nothing more than an arguably livable wage.

When Mary Wallitsch and her husband Herman visited India to see Fr. Ted Bowling, SJ, Mary’s brother, they were struck by these problems. “A lot of work needs to be done over there,” Mary says, reflecting on her visit to India. “There are so many many people and so many problems.”

But how can you, one person, or even one government begin to affect change in such an environment?

Mary and Herman think the answer is education. In 1991 the government of India took a different approach. They made sweeping economic reforms that resulted in higher growth rates, lower inflation, and significant increases in foreign investment. Ten years after these changes, widely heralded as effective measures, roughly 40% of the one billion residents of India still live in pov-





In 1921, five Jesuits from the United States were invited into Patna Province, located in the state of Bihar in Northern India. Today there are more than 300 Patna Jesuits. The roughly 60 Jesuits from the United States have been augmented by Indian vocations.



Mary and Herman Wallitsch (left) with Jerry Drinane, SJ, Eileen Reott, and superior of the Delhi Region, Joseph Mannarvelil, SJ



Rabindranath Tagore,
national poet of India,
(1861–1941)

ciety, which is marred by communal disharmony, hatred, and violence.... It is high time we develop a culture of understanding toward one another's religions, and respect for each other's faith."

The first speaker in the series was Mr. K.K. Muhammed, Superintending Archeologist in the Patna Circle of the Archeological Survey of India. On April 9, 2001, he presented the inaugural lecture on "Akbar and the Jesuits: Religions in Dialogue." In his talk, Muhammed focused on the great religious diversity and dialogue that has characterized India since the Emperor Akbar invited the Jesuits into his court in 1580, thereby inviting them to India, where they were free to begin working.

erty. The perplexing question remains, how can significant change begin to occur on such a large scale?

Enter the Jesuits of the Patna province in India, who created a center of research, study, and action designed to directly address contemporary national and international social issues. Fr. Jose Kalapura, SJ, and a team of four Jesuits now run the Bihar Social Institute (BSI) in Bihar, a state in Eastern India, immediately south of Nepal.

The goal of BSI's Jesuits is to study India's social problems in such depth and detail that they can then postulate clear, concrete, and workable solutions. As a first step, BSI has sponsored the Arrupe Memorial Lecture Series, designed to foster discussion and debate on a broad range of contemporary social issues.

Then Provincial William D'Souza, SJ, introduced the first lecture: "More than ever before," he said, "discussion and practice of dialogue are very relevant in today's so-

With India and Pakistan's dispute over the region of Kashmir escalating, and tensions between different religions and cultures more evident, BSI's mission seems particularly pertinent. The mission is to actively seek better understanding of social, economic, political, cultural, and religious realities of people in Bihar in the hope of facilitating planned and directed change. This idea that change must be predicated upon knowledge and understanding demonstrates very clearly the unique character of the Jesuit intellectual apostolate. The intellectual labors of Jesuits around the world are grounded



in real world issues. Intellectual work is not removed from social work; rather it serves as a central element in the social apostolate, informing and directing the work of thousands of Jesuits around the world.

Supporting a lecture series, however, might not seem to be the most logical first step to bring about social change. What can really be accomplished by listening to a bunch of speakers? In order to answer this question, it's necessary to consider BSI's two-pronged approach to "transforming society."

First, the Institute seeks to influence those with whom the balance of power resides, the Indian intelligentsia and policy-makers. Emotional pleas simply don't work at that level. Fr. Kalapura insists, therefore, that scientific study and well-documented research are absolutely necessary. Without this intellectual capital, the Jesuits have nothing upon which to build their arguments, or to begin their social transformation, or to serve the people of Bihar.

Secondly, on a grassroots level, BSI facilitates social change by sharing its extensive knowledge of Bihar through workshops, courses, and training programs. In a sense, BSI serves as a think tank and research center for the ministries of the province and other social works around Bihar. The Arrupe Memorial Lecture Series is one of BSI's most significant immediate accomplishments, because it has opened the doors to a fruitful dialogue about the need for social justice and the need for understanding all religions.

In his address before the first Arrupe Memorial Lecture, Fr. Kalapura cited Rabindranath Tagore, the national poet of India, in elaborating upon the mission of the Institute, "Our attempt is to realize an India which Tagore prayed for: an India 'where the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free, where

the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls, where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever widening thought and action....Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake."

Tagore did not pray for a land of plenty, full cupboards or bountiful buffets. He prayed for minds primed for thought and action. The implication seems to be that the greater problems can only be solved by "widening thought" which will undoubtedly be followed by action.

If India or the rest of the world is to "awake," as Tagore suggests, it will not be the result of generosity and good works alone. Nor will it be the result only of shrewd, well-trained, critical minds, but rather by means of a comingling of the two that results in a carefully calculated, compassionate way of proceeding through the world, a way the Jesuits continue to strive for in India and around the world.

In his address Fr. Kalapura also said, "The Institute will give a human face to knowledge. Our knowledge will not be used to rule, but rather to serve."

Charlie Mann says he saw a similar willingness to serve in his uncles, Fr. Ed Mann, SJ, and Fr. Joe Mann, SJ, who spent their lives living and working in India. "Both of my uncles were so devoted and driven to serve others." Fr. Joe lived in India from 1928 to his death in 1985. His brother, Ed, lived there from 1938 to 1970. These two brothers from Chicago became central figures in the development of the Patna Province of the Society of Jesus. In his career, Fr. Ed established Xavier Teacher's Training Institute, the novitiate for the province. He also founded, and built, sometimes seemingly single handedly, St. Xavier's School in Delhi. He served as Provincial of Bombay and was elected President of the Catholic Religious of India. In his last project, Fr. Ed helped create Navjyoti Niketan a catechetical center for all of northern India.

Of his uncle Ed, Charlie Mann says, "you'd never know he'd accomplished so much. He was so humble. He would do anything to help other people. His philosophy was that nothing was out of his way. If you needed something, it was on his way, always."

The creation of the Bihar Social Institute, a brand new Jesuit initiative "would have been right up their alley," Charlie says of his uncles. "All the Americans hoped native Jesuits would one day take over. Fr. Ed and Fr. Joe would have been very excited about this new project. Their hearts and minds were always in India."

Jesuit hearts and minds remain at work in India today, continuing to innovate, and always thinking of ways to manufacture change. ■



Giving a human face to knowledge: Archbishop Benedict J. Osta, Apostolic Carmel Sister Doris D'Souza, Mr. K.K. Muhammed, Jose Kalapura, SJ, and Joseph Vellaringatt, SJ.



Jesuit International Ministries

Seeking Truth and Values

NEW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE JESUIT TRADITION

College of St. Thomas in Moscow and Antonio Ruiz de Montoya School in Lima seek greater dialogue and understanding.

Thanks to the companionship of Chicago Province friends and family, Peru Jesuits have earned full university status for the Antonio Ruiz de Montoya School.



"It is our hope to be able to offer new possibilities of dialog and exchange that may contribute to the breaking down of old prejudices and suspicions," says Fr. Stanislaus Opiela, SJ, rector of St. Thomas, a new Jesuit college in Moscow.

In Moscow, Fr. Tadeusz Pikus, a Polish priest, founded the College of St. Thomas in 1991. Six years later the apostolic administrator for the area asked Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, if the Jesuits would assume leadership of the school.

Fr. Kolvenbach readily accepted the offer. Though creating a university essentially from scratch was a formidable task for the Society, he couldn't pass up an opportunity to help reintroduce Christianity to a society just freed from the fetters of communism which had so limited the practice of religion.

St. Thomas has since evolved into a college of philosophy, theology, and Church history affiliated with University of Moscow. The college is

open to students from all faiths. The Jesuits at St. Thomas publish a magazine called "Point," which they hope to grow into a journal of general culture uniquely tied to the school. They also run a religious, cultural, and social center, which is designed to complement the instruction provided at the school. Of the entire operation, Fr. Stanislaus Opiela, SJ, rector of the college and professor of philosophy, says, "it is our hope to be able to offer new possibilities of dialogue and exchange that may contribute to the breaking down of old prejudices and suspicions."

Similar goals motivated the Peruvian Jesuits who founded Antonio Ruiz de Montoya School of Education, Philosophy, and Humanities (ARM). Also opened in 1991, ARM's objective is to provide quality edu-

cation in the Ignatian tradition for men and women, to pursue truth, affirmation of values, and defense of human rights. ARM also hopes to develop in its students a critical mind and the capacity for dialogue so they may use their educations to contribute positively to their world and work for justice. The school's ability to do so was enhanced on February 7, when the National Council for the Authorization of Operating Universities officially granted ARM status as a university in Peru. Despite serving different cultures on different continents and being separated by thousands of miles, BSI, St. Thomas, and ARM are unified in their Jesuit heritage, their desire to bring about social change, and, their goal of educating women and men for others.

