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**Reclaiming the Dynamics of Ignatian Spiritual Conversation:
Towards Constructing a Spiritual Conversation Paradigm for
Ongoing Apostolic Discernment in Bihar, India**

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**RECLAIMING THE DYNAMICS OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL
CONVERSATION: TOWARDS CONSTRUCTING A SPIRITUAL
CONVERSATION PARADIGM FOR ONGOING APOSTOLIC DISCERNMENT
IN BIHAR, INDIA**

A thesis by

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Presented to

The Faculty of the

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL)

Berkeley, California

April, 2020

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General Introduction

Seventeen years ago, in 2002, I landed in Patna, the capital of Bihar, India, to become a Jesuit. Patna lies in the east of India adjacent to Nepal and approximately 292 miles to the west of Kolkata. From the outset, my Jesuit formation has been in the midst of the people of Bihar. A few months after my arrival, I was sent to stay in a village with Christian families for a month. That was the first time I entered into conversation with people whose language and culture were not familiar to me, coming from south India. The place where I was born and raised was very strong in Catholic faith. I lived everyday among the Christians without much exposure to live with people of other faiths. Even less was I exposed to the inhuman caste oppression which I encountered for the first time in Bihar. In home parish, there was, however, less interaction between the pastors and the faithful because the pastors maintained their distance from the people. So, staying with the people was a new experience for me altogether.

As the days passed by, I learned the basics of the Hindi language, thus gaining some confidence in conversing with them. During our conversations, I heard many stories regarding the American Jesuit missionaries as well as local priests' work in their community, and about their faith journey in the midst of oppositions from other caste groups. The experiences and memories they shared with me involved their joys and sufferings, dreams and desires, inner convictions, and faith in God. In their stories, I could hear their faith-in-action. The Spirit was active in their sharing. It was an enriching experience. The practice of staying and conversing with the people was intense during the second year of my novitiate. In order to remain close to the people the second year novitiate training was amidst the people in the village for the whole year. I gained

confidence in speaking and listening to people. Later, every year I was sent to stay in the villages for a month as part of summer camp. I learned from experience how to speak and listen to people in their context.

However, during my theological studies, for two years I used to visit families in a nearby parish on the weekends as part my ministry. My conversations with these families revealed something I had not anticipated. I came to know that many families had deserted the Christian faith. Many looked at parishes just as a place for quality education. Almost all of the families expressed their grievance against priests no longer visiting and conversing with them. They wanted to share their life experiences with their pastors but face-to-face communication between the pastor and the faithful was less frequent. Furthermore, I discovered that the Jesuit missionaries had built the missions through conversation with people.

For pastors in Bihar, personal visits and conversation had been the primary means of keeping the faith alive and discerning apostolic ministries among the people here. When spiritual conversation with people stopped, the pastors prioritized the ministries as their projects. It became hard to discern apostolates collectively for which the spiritual conversation was a means. All these experiences with the Christian communities in Bihar raised in me some pertinent questions about Ignatian spiritual conversation: how did the missionaries evangelize in the diverse social and cultural milieu in Bihar? Was spiritual conversation, which the missionaries used, a part of the Ignatian way of proceeding in the apostolate? Could we reclaim the method of Ignatian spiritual conversation to revitalize and explore new apostolates? How could Ignatian spiritual conversation include the social, economic, and cultural realities in which the people of Bihar find themselves?

How could we discern future ministries in collaboration with people in the light of present Jesuit apostolic preferences using spiritual conversation as a means? I undertake this study in order to answer the above questions and to reclaim the nuances of the dynamics of Ignatian spiritual conversation in the Jesuit tradition for ongoing discernment in Bihar today.

This thesis attempts to reclaim and re-imagine the privileged and time-tested tool of Ignatian spiritual conversation in order to discern the apostolic ministries in the diverse socio-cultural, religious and ecclesiastical context of present-day Bihar, India, as a response to the Society's and the Church's call to discern the actions of the Spirit in the lives of the people. My research further explores the way of proceeding in spiritual conversation among the people, through which the founding Jesuit fathers of the Bihar mission began their apostolic ministries, in order to construct a paradigm for an effective ongoing discernment and rejuvenation of apostolates among the people of Bihar.

Furthermore, the General Congregation 36 has drawn the Jesuits' attention to the importance of spiritual conversation in apostolic discernment. "Spiritual conversation creates an atmosphere of trust and welcome for ourselves and others. We ought not to deprive ourselves of such conversation in the community and all other occasions for decision-making in the Society."¹ It further goes on to say: "It [discernment] begins in contemplation of God at work in our world and allows us to draw more fruit in joining our efforts to God's design...Consistent and participative discernment is our way of ensuring that ongoing apostolic planning, including implementation, monitoring, and

¹ *Thirty-Sixth General Congregation Documents*, Private edition (Rome: General Curia, 2017), 19. This document will be quoted as GC 36 with decree and paragraph number. For this quote, GC 36, D.1, no. 12.

evaluation, is an integral element in all Jesuit ministry.”² These statements indicate the need for listening to God’s voice through the people in spiritual conversation in the process of discernment. The discernment has to include people with whom we work in order to hear the voice of God. The discernment process, thus, becomes a collective process. In order to discern effectively, the collecting of their voices necessarily involves spiritual conversation. Within the Ignatian *charism*, spiritual conversation is the door opening into, and potentially even the culmination of, apostolic action.³

On 16 March 2020, the Patna Jesuits began the hundredth year of the arrival of the first five Jesuits. This centenary year is an important moment for the Bihar church as a whole. As the Jesuits, along with the Church, stand at the threshold of the new century, we are looking back at past blessings as well as looking forward to the future with hope. The Church is in the process of discernment. It is a time of retrospection, reflection, and action—past, present, and future in conversation. At this juncture, I desire to recapture the spirit of the missionaries who established the missions through their tireless work, especially the Spirit of spiritual conversation. I use interdisciplinary methods in this thesis to articulate my arguments and the experiences of the people, giving priority to historical methods. My research will employ the written materials of the founding fathers of the Society of Jesus, some extant mission archival letters of the Patna mission, the writings of the missionaries about their personal experiences, obituaries of some Jesuit

² GC 36, D.2, nos. 4-5.

³ Rolphy Pinto, “Transcendence and Immanence II: Ignatian Spirituality and Spiritual Conversation,” *The Way* (July 2018): 77.

pioneers, and current research which deals directly and indirectly with spiritual conversation.

Clarification of the Meaning of the Term ‘Ignatian Spiritual Conversation’

Before outlining the organization of the chapters, it seems important first to clarify the specific usage of the term ‘Ignatian spiritual conversation’ in this thesis, since the term is understood variously by different persons. The term ‘Spiritual Conversation’ is frequently used in Ignatian spirituality and recent Jesuit documents.⁴ Over the centuries, the term and the dynamics have acquired very rich and varied meanings with certain nuances. Ignatius coined the expression *converser segun nuestro instituto (to deal according to our Institute)*.⁵ That expression referred not only to a particular way of relating but also to a characteristic and essential dimension of the Society. The terms ‘to converse’ and ‘conversation’ as verb and noun are frequently used ones in Ignatian literature. They have their two root forms ‘*conuersa*’ and ‘*conversa*,’ which appear 316 times in his letters and 39 times in other places.⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, began his letter in March 1546 using the phrase ‘in regard to conversing’ (*para conversar*) while writing to his companions Laínez, Salmerón, and

⁴ John W. Padberg, ed., *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 31st-35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009). General Congregation 31, nos. 79, 81, 115, 213, 236, 262, 275; General Congregation 32, no.247; General Congregation 34, nos.101, 210, 540; General Congregation 35, nos. 19, 115, 174; General Congregation 36, D.1, no.12. In all these documents, the phrases ‘Spiritual Conversation,’ ‘conversation,’ ‘friendly conversation,’ ‘familiar conversation,’ and ‘conversation about the spiritual matter,’ are used. In the usage, all of them have the purport of mutual in-depth personal sharing to help one another and discern God's action. There is no intellectual discussion or debate implied.

⁵ German Arana, “Spiritual Conversation a Privileged Apostolic Instrument of the Society of Jesus” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, XXXVI, no. 108 (1/2005): 24

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

Favre.⁷ Before this letter, he had written one more to his companions Broët and Salmerón in 1541, instructing about speaking with others. He would treat in these letters as to how they should deal with others in speech and conduct.

However, during Ignatius's time, the Latin *Conversi* meant 'to turn oneself around with or among others,' 'to associate and deal with.' The Spanish *conversar* had two meanings: 1) to associate and deal with others and 2) to speak familiarly with them by words or to dialogue.⁸ According to Father Dario Restrepo, the term *conversar* for Ignatius meant both a) association in daily life, a living together with others (*conversari as versari cum*, to have dealings with), and b) oral conversation, communication, and apostolate.⁹ On account of the generous meaning of the term, Ignatius seemed to have used this term a few times as equivalent to 'conversing spiritually.'¹⁰ So, for Ignatius, conversation refers to both the word communicated and personal treatment. It could also signify the relationship with someone (conversation-treatment) and/ or talking with another (conversation, dialogue) depending on the context.¹¹ In other words, it is a way of establishing a loving relationship by seeking to help the other.

⁷ Dario Restrepo, "'Spiritual Conversation' according to St. Ignatius of Loyola," trans. Philip J. Dougherty, *Communications*, no.6 (February 1976): 1.

⁸ Editor's footnote in Dario Restrepo, "'Spiritual Conversation' according to St. Ignatius of Loyola," 1.

⁹ Dario Restrepo, 2.

¹⁰ Dario Restrepo, "Conversación" in *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (A-F)*, ed. Jose Garcia de Castro (Madrid: Ediciones Mensajero, 2007), 472. According to Thomas H. Clancy, the two closely allied concepts of dealing with someone and conversing with someone overlap and, in most cases, can be used interchangeably. See. Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God*, (St. Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 11.

¹¹ Ibid.

The spiritual conversation was primarily done in the practice of Spiritual Exercises, the search, and selection of candidates, the ministry of reconciliation, confession, etc.¹² The conversation has, without a doubt, the meaning of “depth of treatment, of a certain familiarity and intimacy, a gentle and close encounter with people.”¹³

Today, Ignatian spiritual conversation could mean a mutual self-revelation in which the participants bring to the fore the deeper realities of their lives.¹⁴ Since spiritual conversation involves two or more persons, it is one-to-one or a group and face-to-face dialogue with specific intentionality and intimacy.¹⁵ It is not a spiritual direction. In the spiritual direction, the guide helps the other to notice God's presence and also to find words for talking about that presence because he/she is not used to doing so. The guide helps the other grow directly in his or her relationship with God.¹⁶ While some spiritual direction can be mutual, the finality in spiritual direction is not mutual sharing but discerning guidance in prayer, life, and service. It is not strictly based on mutual self-revelation.¹⁷

¹² German Arana, 26-29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ Howard Gray, “Spiritual Conversation,” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 596.

¹⁵ Rolphy Pinto, “Transcendence and immanence II: Ignatian Spirituality and Spiritual Conversation,” *The Way*, 57/3 (July 2018): 77.

¹⁶ George W. Traub, “Do you speak Ignatian? A glory of terms used in Ignatian and Jesuit circles” *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W. Traub, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 390. *See also* Frank J. Houdek, *Guided by the Spirit: A Jesuit Perspective on Spiritual Direction* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1996), 8.

¹⁷ Howard Gray, “Spiritual Conversation,” 596.

What we share in spiritual conversation are one's personal experiences and life stories. While sharing the experiences mutually, one tries to find God in those experiences while paying attention to one's emotions, desires, dispositions, and dreams. The dialogue presupposes trust, acceptance, and a desire to learn from one another.¹⁸ "Spiritual conversation involves an exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of that which touches us most deeply. It tries to take account of spiritual movements, individual and communal, with the objective of choosing the path of consolation that fortifies our faith, hope, and love."¹⁹

In active listening, the listener welcomes the speaker's words as an expression of the Holy Spirit. "Both speakers and listeners seek to understand how God is at work in their daily life."²⁰ Within the context of Christian faith, the subject matter of spiritual conversation includes reflection about how one finds God in everyday realities of life, the sinfulness and forgiveness, the enduring significance of the life and death of Christ, and the challenges of living an authentic spiritual life.²¹ The term 'conversation' in Ignatian understanding, on the other hand, would usually signify a type of relationship which will serve the growth of the interlocutors according to the Spirit of Christ.²²

¹⁸ Luz Marina Diaz, "Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation," *The Way*, 55/2 (April 2016): 43-45.

¹⁹ GC, 36, D.1, No.12

²⁰ Michael Hansen, "The Ignatian Guide to Spiritual conversation" 1, accessed on January 15, 2020, <https://3eh4ot43gk9g3h1uu7edbbf1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/2019/05/The-Ignatian-Guide-to-Spiritual-Conversation.pdf>.

²¹ Howard Gray, 596.

²² German Arana, 25.

Moreover, spiritual conversation within the Ignatian *charism* is the door to, but at the same time, the culmination of apostolic action.²³ It was an apostolic tool to help others, primarily in the reform of the person. The person is helped to “undertake a new life, to assume new decisions, or to consolidate a process of evangelization that is passing through a phase of intense personal appropriation.”²⁴ But the spiritual conversation is also mutual sharing of the movements and stirrings in the hearts of the interlocutors through which God speaks in order to recognize the will of God for both. There is apostolic objectivity in the conversation. In other words, they discern the calling of God and respond to that calling as a result of the spiritual conversation.

Hence one could safely say that Ignatian spiritual conversation involves mutual face-to-face sharing of one’s life stories and experiences; it involves intentional speaking and active listening of one’s dreams, driving desires and aspirations with the sole purpose of discerning the will of God and for the good of the interlocutors; it is a way of establishing a loving relationship seeking to help the other as God wants. In this thesis, Ignatian spiritual conversation would entail the senses of a) face-to-face encounter, b) intentional speaking and active listening to understand the deepest desires and aspirations in the process of discerning the will of God and c) associating and dealing with others in a loving relationship.

Organization of the Chapters

The first chapter begins with a brief account of the socio-economic and ecclesiastical context of Bihar today to set the context for the current Jesuit ministries

²³ Rolphy Pinto, 77.

²⁴ German Arana, 107-108.

where the Jesuits have engaged in mission. It further explores the tradition of spiritual conversation in the Patna province by reviewing the mission activities of the first missionaries. I focus on some prominent Jesuits who started missions and the people with whom they worked. The goal here, rather than to present a history of all the missions' development, is to show how the Jesuit missionaries approached the people and how they discerned and chose their ministries with the people within the complex cultural milieu of Bihar. It will also shed light on the interconnection between spiritual conversation, discernment, and apostolate.

The second chapter delves into the nature and practice of spiritual conversation in the nascent Society of Jesus. It explores how the spiritual conversation began and how Ignatius and his companions engaged in conversation in different stages of their lives among themselves as well as with other people. This chapter will bring to the fore the theological underpinnings, the intricacies, and nuances of the practice in their lives and writings in order to enlighten and clarify the meaning of practice for today's Jesuits to apply it creatively to the present context.

The third chapter presents a spiritual conversation model for the Patna Jesuits to reconnect and creatively engage with people and to explore new possibilities in their ministries in the context of Bihar. The model will be based on the spiritual conversation practice of the first missionaries of the Patna province and the founding fathers of the Society. This chapter is also a response to the call of General Congregation 36 to make use of spiritual conversation in the apostolic discernment process.

Chapter One: The Context of Bihar today—the Place of Spiritual Conversation and Apostolic Discernment

1.0. Introduction

Ignatius of Loyola was a man of sensitivity to person and context. While giving the Spiritual Exercises, he paid much attention to the person's age, temperament, education, ability, and so forth because a retreatant came from a particular context.¹ He adapted the Exercises and approaches to the needs of a person. *The Official Directory of 1599* affirms this fact saying, "Account should be taken of each individual's character and temperament."² He further advises the director on discretion saying, "in view of the difference among persons who make the Exercises or of the spirits by which they are moved, to alter the exercises or prescribe others appropriate for individual needs."³ He seemed to follow the same attitude and approach in conversing with others. He was well aware too that a human person forms himself/herself in a particular socio-religious, cultural, and politico-economic context. He paid much attention, especially in dealing with persons by keeping the contextual aspect in mind. He carefully studied persons, situations, and places in conversation before sending anyone on a mission. So it is pertinent to give a brief overview of the Bihar context to the reader to get a fair grasp of the situation, people, and place of Patna Jesuit ministries.

¹ George E. Ganss, trans. and ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 4th Indian edition (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2011). In this thesis, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* will be cited in abbreviated form as *SpEx* with the paragraph number. As for this quote *SpEx*. Nos. 18, 72, 205.

² Martin E. Palmer, trans. and ed., *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 317.

³ *Ibid.*, 304.

In the first part of this chapter, I would like to explain briefly the demography, socio-cultural, religious, and economic situation of Bihar today in which the people of Bihar find themselves. It provides a springboard for us to start the conversation from the experience which Ignatian spirituality values most. In the second part of the chapter, I will deal with the origin and expansion of the Patna Jesuit mission. As I explore the origin and expansion of mission historically, my focus will be on the starting of the missions in the first four decades. Besides, more attention will be paid to some of the pioneering missionaries, people, and the way of proceeding in spiritual conversation as the missions originated and developed. This will show how the Ignatian spiritual conversation has been a part of the Patna Jesuit mission from the inception and how spiritual conversation paved a way of proceeding for the later apostolate and discernment.

1.1. Bihar Context

1.1.1. Demography of Bihar

Bihar is one of the twenty-eight political states, located in the eastern part of India with Patna as its capital. It is an entirely land-locked state. The state lies mid-way between Kolkata in the east and Uttar Pradesh in the west, Nepal in the north, and Jharkhand in the south. The word ‘Bihar’ comes from the root word ‘Vihar,’ which is Buddhist monastery or Buddhist communes. It is said that this place was a place of Buddhist monks in the ancient and medieval periods.⁴ The Bihar plain is divided into two unequal halves by the river Ganga which flows through the middle from west to east. In India, the state occupies the twelfth rank in the area (58,510.17 square miles) in which

⁴ Arunima Kumari, *Encyclopedia of Bihar* (New Delhi: Prabhat Books, 2013), 1.

rural and urban areas are 57,325.84 square miles, and 680.40 square miles, respectively.⁵ According to the national census 2011, Bihar is the third largest populated state in India, with 104.1 million.⁶ The density of the population in Bihar (1,106 persons per square kilometers) is nearly three times higher than in India as whole (382). Still, the population rate is growing. The estimated census for 2018 is 122.0 Million.⁷ The state has been divided into 38 civil districts in which there are 45,103 revenue villages, whereas the number of towns is only 199.⁸ One could notice the largest population concentrated in rural areas. The human interaction happens very quickly. It is all the more feasible for human interactions in villages where there is some openness among the people to share their life with others.

1.1.2. Social Context

Bihar is ‘a paradigm of the paradox that is India’: an India that is rich and poor, affluent and impecunious at the same time.⁹ Bihar has been one of the most socially backward states in the whole country. When one tries to analyze the social context of Bihar, one cannot but look at the caste system, which is very strong in this state. Caste system or *Varna* (color or caste) system in Hindu society is a hierarchical social structure

⁵ “Government of Bihar State Profile,” accessed on January 5, 2020, <http://gov.bih.nic.in/Profile/default.htm>.

⁶ States Census 2011, accessed on January 5, 2020, <https://www.census2011.co.in/states.php>.

⁷ Bihar Economic Survey of Bihar 2018-2019, 2, accessed on January 10, 2020, <http://finance.bih.nic.in/Reports/Economic-Survey-2019-EN.pdf>.

⁸ Government of Bihar State Profile. <http://gov.bih.nic.in/Profile/default.htm>. According to the Economic Survey of Bihar 2019, there is no less than 88.7 percent of the state's population reside in rural areas.

⁹ Jose Kalapura, “Bihar” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of South Asian Christianity*, ed. Roger E. Hedlund, Vol.1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 95.

consisting of four *Varnas* or classes, namely: *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (businessmen) and *Shudras* (servants).¹⁰ People are divided based on their birth and occupation. The *Brahmins* are considered to be superior to all other castes. They always maintained their ritual purity and social prominence in the hierarchical structure. The *Shudras*, on the other hand, always remained serving the other three caste groups. The caste system is too vast and complex to be explained. Any attempts to unravel their origin and history becomes frustrating and painful because of competing theories.¹¹

The Dalits occupy the lowest rung in the caste ladder.¹² As a noun or adjective the word ‘Dalit’ means “broken, oppressed, depressed, crushed [under foot], split, opened, duntrodden, destroyed, torn apart, burst, etc. and comes from the Sanskrit term *dal* which means to oppress, crack, break or tear asunder.”¹³ The meaning of the term reflects their social, economic, emotional, and spiritual brokenness and powerlessness of these people for centuries. The high caste groups looked at them as ‘unclean’ from birth and polluting socially and ritually. Therefore they were called untouchables ‘*Acchut*.’¹⁴ There

¹⁰ Sagarika Ghose, “The Dalit in India,” *Social Research*, Vol.70, no. 1 (Spring 2003):84.

¹¹ See James Massey, *Roots: A concise History of the Dalits*, (pp.11-73) (Delhi: ISPCK, 1991); S.M. Michael, ed., *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, 2nd edition, (introduction pp 13-41), (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2007); Michael Amaladoss, “From Caste to community in India: religions challenging status inequality,” *Vijdyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol.77/8 (August 2013): 569-582. These authors deal with the competing theories of the caste system in India regarding Dalits. All of them agree that the caste system is an inhuman social system.

¹² They, in fact, fall outside the four castes hierarchical system. The terms ‘Dalits’ and ‘Untouchables’ are interchangeably used. However, in all government documents, the Dalit communities clubbed together as Schedule Caste (SC). Earlier, the Dalits were called the ‘Depressed Classes.’ Now the Dalits call themselves as such for pride, self-assertion, and cultural identity. *See* for the detail evolution of the term Rabindra Kumar, *Dalit Exclusion and Subordination*, (Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications, 2013), 9-29.

¹³ Dionysius Rasquinha, *Towards Wholeness from Brokenness: The Dalit Quest* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 82.

¹⁴ Sagarika Ghose, 87.

are 23 Schedule Caste communities (15% total population) in Bihar. The *Brahmins*, the *Bhumihars* (landlords), the *Rajputs* (warriors), and the *Kayasthas* (scribes) are forward castes of Bihar who held economic and political power till 1980. Then the *Shudras* started to ascend in political power.

The practice of untouchability is still alive in the form of exclusion, segregation, and injustice in social and religious places. The dominant and forward caste groups continue to perpetuate the inhuman caste system.¹⁵ Their social status as untouchables remains the same in relation to other caste groups. The strict adherence to professions, which defined castes, however, is breaking down slowly. “There was nothing to prevent an ordinary shopkeeper from rising to be a wealthy merchant or a rich merchant from sinking to the position of a servant.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, the lack of education, caste system, and economic and political powerlessness further deepen the imbalance between the rich and the poor, thus directly impacting the marginalized.

1.1.3. Economic Context

The economy of the state is basically dependent on agriculture. Many big rivers like the *Ganges*, the *Gandak*, the *Kosi*, the *Sone*, and the *Mahananda*, make the land very fertile. According to the Economic Survey of Bihar, more than 50% of the population is directly involved in agriculture. High population pressure on land is felt more in rural areas where land is the principal source of livelihood for the majority of the population.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jeffrey Witsoe, “The Process of caste empowerment in Bihar” in *Resurrection of the State: A Saga of Bihar*, ed. Sunita Lall and Shaibal Gupta (New Delhi: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2013) 47.

¹⁶ R. R. Diwarkar, *Bihar through the Ages* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1959), 697.

¹⁷ About 53 percent of the workers were agricultural laborers, and about 74 percent of the workers in Bihar are engaged exclusively in agriculture. *Economic Survey of Bihar-2019*, 153.

However, the distribution of the land is not equal. The British Land Settlement Act 1793 benefitted the landlords who were appointed to collect revenue. Since then, the high caste groups had taken advantage of the situation because of their education. The low caste people are left with little or no land. They have been working for the high caste people for centuries. The mass landless poor, particularly the Dalits, took a violent path to reclaim their rights. It led to a blood bath between the upper caste and lower caste people until 2000.¹⁸ The feudal war for land raged for more than 30 years.

At present, poverty, unemployment and underemployment have been pushing the people, in general, the poor in particular, to inter-state migration in search of job and livelihood. The Bihar migrants are ubiquitous in India today. No one can miss Bihar laborers doing menial jobs anywhere. The quest for survival and decent living makes them endure any hardships and living conditions when they move to other states. “Mass poverty has driven numerous Biharis [people of Bihar] out to distant areas in the country to seek mostly unskilled jobs. Today one can see Biharis employed in some of the most gruesome jobs in a different part of the country.”¹⁹ Often they are unpaid and underpaid. Besides, they are rejected and derided as outsiders.

1.1.4. Present Religious Context

Bihar is so diverse in regions with major world religions such as Hinduism (82.69%), Jainism (0.02%), Buddhism (0.02), Islam (16.87%), Christianity (0.12%),

¹⁸ Sanjay Kumar, *Post-Mandal Politics in Bihar* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd., 2018), 14-18.

¹⁹ Muchkund Dubey, “Bihar’s economic development: Problems and prospects,” in *Resurrection of the State: A Saga of Bihar*, ed. Sunita Lall and Shaibal Gupta (New Delhi: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2013), 135.

Sikhism (0.02%) and other religions (0.01%).²⁰ There are so many other small religious sects as well. Every aspect of life is suffused with religious significance, and its manifestations abound in every corner of the state in the form of shrines, temples, and pilgrimage centers.²¹ All these religions emerged and flourished in constant conversation as well as tension. Festivals and pilgrimages go on round the year.²² While celebrating festivals and undertaking pilgrimages, people express their faith visibly by taking up mass processions. Listening and speaking about religions form part and parcel of the religious ethos of the people during the religious festivities. Though the Hindus are an overwhelming majority, they are mostly respectful of other religions. Though the world has gone ahead with advanced modernized communication technologies, these technologies have not entirely replaced the essential ethos of people's desire to share one's experiences and listen to other's experiences face to face.

1.2. Ecclesiastical Context

The Christian population in Bihar is a minority group constituting only 0.12 percent. Though they are a minority, the Christian faith has its root more than three hundred years of history in this part of India. The Jesuit presence dates back to 1620. At that time, the governor of Patna was Muqarrir Khan. He had been an ambassador of King Jehangir to the Goa government. He was baptized there. After becoming the governor of

²⁰ Bihar Religion Census 2011, accessed on 15 January 2019, <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/10-bihar.html>

²¹ Arunima Kumari, *Encyclopedia of Bihar*, 139.

²² The famous holy and pilgrimage centers are: Bodh Gaya for Buddhists (Buddha got enlightenment here); Pawapuri for the Jains (Mahavira's place of *nirvana*); Maner for Muslims (Sufi saint Sharaffiddin Maneri lived and taught); Deohar for the Hindus (Shiva temple); Patna city for the Sikhs (last Guru Govind Singh birthplace); Mokama for Christians (Our Lady of Grace church).

Bihar. He invited Jesuits to Patna. Fr. Simon Figueredo and Fr. Michael de Faria came from Bengal. However, due to opposition for converting the Muslims, they had to go back after a year.²³ The Capuchin missionaries came to Patna at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But their mission focus was on Tibet. Later due to persecution, they moved to Bettiah (1745), the capital of Bettiah kingdom, north Bihar. The Capuchins' evangelizing work saw an intermittent history till the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in 1921. As the Jesuit missionaries inherited the Patna mission from the Capuchins, it had seen many ups and downs over the years. Due to war in 1763, important documents, registers, and all the other papers in the archives of the Mission were burned by the rebels.²⁴ The Jesuits' arrival marked a new phase in the expansion of the missions and shift in the focus of communities. They engaged with socially different groups of people from inception. They started their mission first among the Anglo-Indian Catholics. Then they moved their attention to Santal tribal community in Bhagalpur, southeast Bihar.²⁵ After laboring in this community for almost ten years, they shifted their evangelizing mission to the Dalits, the most oppressed community, after handing over the former mission to the Franciscans (Third Order Regular). At present, the Patna and the adjacent dioceses are comprised of mostly Dalit Christians, namely *Chamars* (also called *Ravidasis*), *Dusadhs*, *Musahars*, *Paswans/Pasi*, and *Doms*. The Dalit Christians are

²³ Daniel D'Souza, *A History of the Catholic Church in North India* (Mangalore: Desmond Rebello, 1991), 18.

²⁴ Joseph A. Gschwend, *The Mission of Patna, India*, (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University, 1925), 10.

²⁵ Santals or Santhals are one of the aboriginal groups in the present Jharkhand state, south of Bihar. They are also called *Adivasis* (native dwellers). Their language is called *Santali*. *Adivasis* refer to all the original inhabitants of Indian subcontinent.

located mostly in rural areas in the north, south, and west of Patna.²⁶ Last year 2019, the Patna Archdiocese celebrated its centenary of becoming a diocese.

1.3. The Arrival and Starting of Patna Mission by American Jesuit Missionaries

The Supreme Pontiff, Benedict XV, by his Apostolic Letter *Nova in Indiis*, erected the Diocese of Patna in 1919. The mission was entrusted to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus and Right Reverend Louis Van Hoeck S J was consecrated as Bishop of the new diocese on March 6, 1921. Fr. Vladimir Ledochowski, then Father General of the Jesuits, assigned the Mission to the Missouri Province of the United States.²⁷ Henry Pascual observes Father General's invitation to the American Jesuits for the mission in India thus: "They were called upon to evangelize another continent in far-away Asia, in a country which had already cast a spell of mystery and challenge. America had been called upon for the first time in the history of the Church to go forth and evangelize the East [India]."²⁸ He further adds that the Father General invited the American Jesuits for the missionary task despite the lack of missionary traditions, problems of climate, food, geography, and culture. But the Jesuits of Missouri Province took up the challenge with a generous spirit.

²⁶ Siji Varghese and Jose Kalapura, "Bihar: Dalit Christians/ Ravidasis," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of South Asian Christianity*, ed. Roger E. Hedlund, Vol.1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 97.

²⁷ Henry Pascual Oiz, *Blessed by the Lord: A History of the Patna Jesuits 1921-1980*, (Patna: The Patna Jesuit Society, 1991), 4. Father Louis Van Hoeck was a member of the Province of Belgium. He had been rector of Manresa House (tertianship), at Ranchi, about 150 miles to the south of Patna, and was superior of the mission of Tongo of the same district. He was a missionary among the tribal people.

²⁸ Henry Pascual Oiz, 5.

The first band of five American Jesuits, namely Fr. Edward Anderson, Fr. Patrick Troy, Fr. William Eline, Fr. Henry Milet, and Fr. Thomas Kelly, arrived Patna on March 16th 1921.²⁹ As they began their new mission, they needed to keep their eyes and ears open to the new context, particularly to the people, place, and cultural ethos though the mission was quite old. At that time, other Jesuits were working in different mission areas in India, and their mission methods and apostolic thrusts differed based on the directives from their respective mother provinces and the specific local contexts.

The beginnings of any mission are challenging. The Jesuits missionaries to Patna mission were from another country. The beginnings are uncertain times; they had no precedent and no formula. At that juncture, one could either venture into the mission with an innovative path or take any time-tested and familiar path. Nevertheless, somehow the letter of the Jesuit General seemed to give them some direction to the mission. He seemed to have tried to draw from the tradition of the Society of Jesus how to engage in mission through conversation. At the same time, he kept before the missionaries the importance of context and dialogue while explaining the hardships the mission would involve. It is very pertinent to quote from the summary of Father Henry Pascual Oiz about what the General wrote to them:

You are very few, so your ministries should be kept within due measure. Do not undertake more than your strength can bear. Be sure to go slowly at the beginning until, with the acquisition of knowledge of the place and of the people, you can find out by experience what means effective in this mission. Have much patience in all circumstances. Work hard at learning languages, following in the steps of St. Francis Xavier, for it is well known how hard he endeavoured to learn the language of those regions...See to it that you prepare catechists and other helpers from among the people themselves, so that both you and your co-workers enter into friendly dialogue with the Indians. The more intimately you know the life and

²⁹ "Missionaries Leave for India," *Woodstock Letters*, Vol. L. no.1 (1921): 118.

the mentality of India's poor and uneducated, the more certain and more easy will be the winning of souls to Christ.

Do not allow yourselves to be drawn away from bringing the Gospel to the Indians by the ministry to the Europeans. Beware also of replacing Indian customs and thinking as Americans think and act. Preserve rather than change religious usages, as it is proper. Impart to the people a solid formation of Christian life.³⁰

Some of the terms clearly reflect the components which Ignatian esteemed highly in his dealing and conversing with people—‘learning language,’ ‘entering into friendly dialogue,’ ‘knowing the life and mind of the people more intimately’ and so on. The letter also points out that customs should not be replaced. To keep these recommendations alive, they had to have high sensitivity, understanding of, and closeness to people. So, from the beginning, they wanted to enter into conversation with people with the Gospel message. This is contrary to the accusation, which is often heaped against the Christian missionaries that they converted people through money. One of the early missionaries, Father J. Sontag, wrote his experience thus: “I found the people very well disposed. I took great pains to insist that we were offering no money or anything of that sort, and they were unanimous in saying they asked for nothing but the true way of obtaining *Mukti*—salvation.”³¹ He wrote this after a few years of the missionaries’ arrival, clearly indicating that the evangelization needed to follow a different method to understand this desire. Even the philanthropic works, which were given to people of all faiths, were the result of the discernment to reach out to the needy, particularly the new converts who suffered acute poverty. One of the well-known Bihar historians acknowledges this fact: “With the advent of Christianity as a proselytizing religion,

³⁰ Henry Pascual Oiz, 15.

³¹ Joseph A. Gschwend, *The Patna Mission*, 30.

which penetrated the lower strata of society more through education, philanthropic activities and social welfare, than by force or fraud...³² There was already some aspiration to hear the Good News among the people.

1.3.1. The Mission Work among the Anglo-Indians

When the band of first five Jesuits reached Patna, they quickly took charge of the parishes left by the Capuchins. All five were in different parishes. They did not have time to acquaint themselves with the place. The Catholic Christian community to whom the Jesuits rendered ministry consisted of Europeans and Anglo-Indians. The Catholics were railway workers, officials, soldiers, and tradesmen. The missionaries found it easy to move about the English-speaking community. Fr. Kelly wrote about the community: “I find these people very good-mannered, and it is a pleasure to work for them...I find the work here, most agreeable, and the climate, though hard at times, is always bearable.”³³ One could envision spiritual conversation in the realm of personal meetings, catechism, preaching, and administering of sacraments.

However, even in the conversation and dealing with the English-speaking community, there was a certain quality that attracted others. For instance, Father William Eline, who was the first mission superior, spent almost twenty two years at St. Stephen Church in Danapur, south of Patna. This parish consisted of mostly European soldiers and officials and some native Christians. His remarkable charity and his willingness to

³² R. R. Diwarkar, 677.

³³ Henry Pascual Oiz, 20-21

give his time and attention to others was an inspiration to the non-Catholics.³⁴ Even the Hindus and Muslims started to respond to the Christian faith.

Meanwhile, there was zeal in the missionaries for reaching out to others, but they were faced with financial and personnel constraints. The mission superior had to carefully discern to employ men and means to develop the mission. He tried to get first-hand information about other areas by going on visits along with the Bishop or a Hindi-speaking missionary. The visits provided an ample opportunity to know the lives of the people directly. As a result of many visits and because of his zeal, he was able to plan and inaugurate later many big projects such as educational work, work among the depressed classes, and small industries like shoe-making.³⁵

1.3.2. Evangelizing Mission in the North of Bihar

Among the first five Jesuits, Father Thomas Kelly was sent to Bettiah to take care of the Christians there. Bettiah refers to a small town in Champaran District in North Bihar. Since this place was a central location for missionary activities during and after Capuchins, generally this place is called Bettiah mission or Bettiah Christians.³⁶ From here, the Jesuit missionaries projected their evangelizing activities to the adjacent areas—Chakni, Ramnagar, Narkatiaganj, Chanpatia, Lauriya, Chuhari, Dosaiya, Sugauli, and Gahiri. The Capuchin missionaries had already established and nurtured Christian faith communities in some of these places.

³⁴ Ibid., 24.

³⁵ Jim Cox, *We band of brothers*, Vol.2 (Patna: The Patna Jesuit Society, 1996), 67.

³⁶ Louis Prakash, “Bettiah Mission, Tribal Mission and Dalit Mission in Bihar Three Streams but One Socio-Religious Movement,” *Indian Church History Review*, Vol. XXXIV, no. 2 (December 2000): 134.

The Capuchins had followed their own mission strategies. They seemed to have involved in debates with the Brahmans and believed in the witness of their personal life through austerity, fast, and prayer. Besides, by focusing on the quality of Christian faith among the people, they waited to administer baptisms to the catechumens until they had faced certain hardships from the family and other caste groups for their faith.³⁷ The converts of Bettiah were drawn from high caste groups of respectable social standing. In fact, not many Dalit or outcast figured among them.³⁸ Furthermore, the Capuchins followed the 'Mission Compound System' in which they brought and kept the Christian community close to the mission.³⁹ Of course, this system provided a close space for interaction between the pastor and the faithful. It must have helped to deepen their faith. However, when the Jesuit missionaries arrived Patna, all the Capuchins had left the place. The new missionaries had to follow their own missionary path.

As the Jesuits took care of the spiritual needs of the existing community, they wanted to evangelize others in West Champaran district. But then, they encountered the serious issue of the caste system. The age-old caste system was like a formidable wall to reach any community. They were at the crossroads of the caste puzzle. At that juncture, Paul Dent, one of the missionaries, wrote how he discovered the inhuman condition of the caste system and the caste intricacies through a conversation with a boy who wanted

³⁷ Peter Tete, *A Short History of the Expansion of the Catholic Missions in North India* (Ranchi: St. Albert's College, 1997), 104-112.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 108

³⁹ Jose Kalapura, "Conversion and change of Socio-Religious Structures: A study of Christianization of the Ravidasis in Bihar, 1930-2000," *Indian Church History Review*, Vol.XLV, No.1 (June 2011): 23.

to leave night studies early at Our Lady of Victory Mission at Gahiri close to Bettiah mission.

I cautiously enquired the reason, and was told that he was *bhuk se mar jate hain*—dying from hunger. I suggested that he might be able to live another hour and a quarter, and added that a roommate of his, another little pagan student, who was leaving early that night, might cook that evening meal also. “Then,” said I, “as soon as studies are over, you can run home and sit down at once to a nice hot plate of rice.” He burst out crying at this, and said: “But I can’t! I can’t eat his food! I’m a *Kayashth* [scribe] and he’s a *Bhumihar* [landlord]!” That began my ramblings into the caste system in Patna Mission. Rambles I shall call them, for such they are, odds and ends of reading at tired ends of evening time, questionings in a thousand places and times, glances of inquiry as my bicycle hurried through the crowded little bazaars on my frequent and interesting missionary expeditions.⁴⁰

This experience led him to keep his eyes and ears open to the reality of the people around when he made visits to non-Christian families. He found four castes groups rejected by upper castes. The *Doms*, who were seeking baptism, were the “unclean of the unclean” in the caste system. They tended swine, cremated the dead, and did the menial jobs. The *Chamars* were the leather-working caste. Their touch was considered polluting by the high caste. Also, *Dusadhs* were again another “unclean of unclean” caste groups who worked as guards. All these caste groups were denied temple entry. The most despised was the *Doms*.⁴¹ He further notes that “man [the *Doms*] was walled away from sympathy for and interest in and contact with his fellow man by the caste system.”⁴² There were hundreds of other castes in the mission, which were considered to be unclean. But the dealings with the *Doms*, the *Chamars* and the *Dusadhs* struck cord with the missionaries’

⁴⁰ Paul Dent, “Rambles in a world of caste: India’s Social Strata,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol.II, No.3 (March 1928): 68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71

⁴² *Ibid.*

spirituality and the aspirations of Christ. The inner stirrings of Paul Dent is quite revealing: “With such have my rambles been, the low castes, the poor castes, poor enough to have the Gospel preached to them, suffering enough, living near enough to the border line of starvation to appreciate, if so they will, the cross that bears down heavily and that mightily uplifts.”⁴³ In their struggle, the missionaries perceived Christ’s suffering and his desire to save them—“The waiting Christ who, as of old at Jerusalem, sits outside the walls weeping for those that know not the things are for their peace.”⁴⁴ They entered first into a friendly conversation with the outcasts and then moved to converse about faith.

The Doms were rejected and despised by the other castes. The high caste considered their touch polluting. But the missionaries found that they were lovable people.⁴⁵ The Doms had some deep-seated desire for the liberating message of the gospel from the clutches of caste oppression as they were asking for baptism. Knowing their desire for the Christ and their economic poverty, Father Henry Westropp started the cottage industry at Our Lady of Victory mission in Gahiri south of Bettiah in order to alleviate poverty and provide spiritual nourishment for the aspirants at the same time. It provided a place of spiritual conversation for the catechumens in addition to jobs like weaving cloths, carpets, etc. Catechumens were instructed in faith; participated in sacraments. The institute gave a sense of solidarity with the worldwide Catholic

⁴³ Paul Dent, “Further Rambles in a world of caste,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. II, no. 8 (September 1928):190.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Aloysius S. Pettit, *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. XII, no.2. (February 1938): 47

Church.⁴⁶ The missionaries gave jobs to those who expressed a genuine desire to become Christians. The jobs were not enticement because those who expressed the desire for the new faith had to go through often many persecutions. Later, Father Marion Batson described the situation: “To become a Christian means exile from friends and relatives, to lose one’s job and to be cursed and hated by one’s own; and here that is about everything. I wonder how many of us would be willing to make the same sacrifice. When there is a mass movement, it is quite different, for then converts have company and do not have to make the leap alone.”⁴⁷ To become a Catholic meant ostracism from their caste, separation from parents, and friends, and a subsequent life of poverty and disgrace.⁴⁸ They needed social and economic support.

When the missionaries found people’s desire for Christ, they started to visit them. Father Aloysius Pettit, one of the well-known missionaries in this area, moved from village to village, talking to the low caste *Doms*, *Chamars*, and *Dusadhs* in Bettiah. His conversation built confidence in them and their worth as human beings.⁴⁹ He listened to people’s struggles in general and also explained about Christian faith. We find from his report that he seemed to have followed a system in the conversation with people:

For the last two months, I have been trying something a bit novel for us. Instead of running around from village to village trying to get in a word here and a word there under adverse circumstances, I have been building grass houses in central places, then going to stay there for a week, and calling the Christian Doms, among whom particularly I am working, to me to camp for a week, to be fixed up spiritually. And thus from Monday to Saturday, I, with my catechists, stay for

⁴⁶ Paul Dent, “The Why of Ghyree’s Converts” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. II, no. 10 (November 1928): 223.

⁴⁷ Marion Batson, “Bettiah has a Mela,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol.IV, no. 2 (Februray, 1930):34.

⁴⁸ Calvert Alexander, “His Lordship, the Bishop,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. III, no.6 (June 1929):124.

⁴⁹ Jim Cox, *We Band of Brothers*, Vol. 2, 197.

‘refresher’ course in Christian Doctrine. On Saturday we come back home for the Sunday Mass, a rest again and a start on the next Monday morning...For they are a scattered people, a few living on the outskirts of one village a few of another.”⁵⁰

This system seemed to have worked well for him and others who followed him in the evangelizing mission later.

1.3.3. Conversation and Evangelization Mission among the Santals

In 1929, there was a change in the leadership of Patna Jesuit mission as well as Patna diocese. Fr. Bernard Sullivan became the Bishop of Patna as Louis Van Hoeck was appointed Bishop in the newly erected Ranchi diocese. On the other hand, Fr. Peter Sontag succeeded Fr. William Eline as superior of Patna Mission the same year. The new Bishop carried forward faithfully the plan of action of his predecessor, particularly the promotion of education.⁵¹ At the same time, both the leaders heard a new voice calling them to start the mission among the Santals in Bhagalpur. The Belgian Jesuits worked among these people whose area was part of Bengal Mission. Three times in sixty years, the Belgian Jesuit Fathers had attempted to win these charming aborigines for Christ.⁵² But somehow they could not succeed. Consequently, Archbishop Edward Mooney, the Apostolic Delegate of India, asked the Jesuits in Patna to take up the mission. The Santal land of Godda subdivision, which was 140 miles east of Patna, was thus detached from

⁵⁰ Aloysius S. Pettit, *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. XII, no.5 (May 1938):130. See what his report says the following month: “For when one tries to spend nearly a week in one center, and the centers just seem to grow of themselves, the amount of work in attending to the Doms of Champaran begins to look formidable. At present I have rendezvous in Chakni, Ramnagar, Narkatiagnj, Sikta, Chainpatia, Lauriya, Chuhari, Dosaiya, Sugauli, Ghyree; and am looking for a foothold in Ramgarhwa and Araraj and Motihari; and by that time will be seeing other localities where one would have a good chance for a week’s ‘conversation’ with Doms. As it is, I take nearly all of my catechists with me everywhere I go, for I can generally give them plenty of work in helping with the instruction of the people who come to any one center.” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. XII, no.6. (June 1938): 162.

⁵¹ Pascual, 71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 82

Calcutta diocese and given to Patna Jesuits. The Jesuits' focus turned then towards the Santals.

Frs. James Creane and Henry Westropp were the first pioneers to enter into the lives of these people. The new mission demanded a new approach. The Santals were tribal people. Their social context is entirely different from the one in which the Jesuits were working. Their life revolved around the community. They did not have a rigid caste system as it was prevalent in many mission stations elsewhere. "From the first, it was clear that the Santal aborigines there were different in many ways from their Bihari neighbors. They did not have the obstacle of caste to hold them back; they actually talked of becoming Catholics at Father Creane's invitation, and his tours of their country made him realize the splendid opportunities that this new field offered."⁵³ They were found to be cheerful, honest, truthful, and hospitable.⁵⁴ Father James Creane immersed himself into the lifestyle of the people. He opened the first mission in 1927.

The people with whom he worked were Santals, Mahles, Pahariyas, and Kamars. The first three were aboriginal tribes. Whereas the Kamars were Hindu blacksmiths but spoke Santali and lived like Santals. He moved among the people from village to village. His simplicity and endearing spirit attracted the natives. Mostly he traveled to far-flung villages by bicycle, occasionally (though somewhat rarely) by motorcycle or car, and most frequently on foot.⁵⁵ When he visited the villages, he generally talked to the people and heard their life stories. He tried to get the first-hand knowledge of an individual's

⁵³ John Morrison, "The Santal Tramp goes home" *The Woodstock Letters*, Vol LXXVIII. No.3 (July 1949): 229.

⁵⁴ Peter J. Sontag, "Delightful people," *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. IV, no.6 (June 1930):132-133.

⁵⁵ Jim Cox, *We Band of Brothers*, Vol.1, (Patna: The Patna Jesuit Society, 2005), 35.

disposition towards the new faith. He wrote: “We visited most of the houses once or twice daily. Often the occupants were not at home, but when we found them in, they were usually quite docile in learning the prayers and expressed a willingness to become Christians sooner or later.”⁵⁶ There was a deep desire in the people for the new faith which they wanted to share with their pastors. “Add to all this the individual talks that the Fathers and the few catechists have with the people in something like fifty villages of Santals, and you will have a fair idea of how the apostolic work for souls is carried on amongst these people who show that they can believe in Christ and who are not impeded in their desires to follow Him.”⁵⁷ The frequent personal contacts dispelled the mistrust among the natives towards the pastors. The priest enjoyed the confidence and goodwill of the people for miles around. They came to him in their troubles and trusted him implicitly.⁵⁸ The mission picked up momentum. The result was that the number rose from 6,107 Catholics in 1927 to 21, 240 in 1928. Though this number included converts elsewhere, the majority were Santals.⁵⁹

The lifestyle of Father James Creane was a necessary space for the people to be open to conversation. For years, his only home was one that the Santals gave in their villages. Michael Lyons, another Jesuit missionary observed his visit to Father James Creane in these terms:

The Fathers working among the Santals must live in the houses of the Santals, heavy mud affairs with cane and thatched roofs, dwellings that are, however, warm, simple and neat...Father Creane and I spread out straw on the floor and

⁵⁶ James A. Creane, “The first of the Mahles,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. V, no. 3 (March 1931): 65.

⁵⁷ Francis I. Stoy, “A Peep at Bhagalpur” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. IV, no.3 (March 1930):74.,

⁵⁸ Charles P Miller, *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. III, no.5 (June 1929): 116.

⁵⁹ Pascual, 84.

slept on that I always slept very well until Father Creane would call me for another day of traveling, talking, and teaching.⁶⁰

A mud house often became a school, dispensary, residence, and all, thus allowing constant interaction with people. Since the Christian population was scattered in the villages, the pastor made an effort to go to their places to contact them; strengthened the converts in the faith whom he had made, and told all those who listen about the Figure of the Cross, which he always carried with him.⁶¹ The personal visits bore fruits in two ways—firstly, they nurtured and deepened the faith of the people and secondly, it opened up the possibilities for new converts and discerning new apostolates.

For the missionaries, the process of conversation with people was not easy. They had to make a lot of adjustments, sacrifices, and self-denial. They put up with sickness, harsh climate, and participated in people's hunger and poverty. They observed that the language they spoke was the most challenging language unknown to Europeans and Americans. There was no Santali literature.⁶² They had to learn the language in order to enter the world of those people. For instance, Fr. Raymond Conway stayed for a short time among the Santals. In the Santal field, he spent most of his time studying the Santali language and acquainting himself with the customs and attitudes of the people. While he was there for a short while, he had already begun to endear himself to the hearts of the Santals.⁶³ Furthermore, there was nothing called privacy, which was highly esteemed in

⁶⁰ Michael Lyons, "Three weeks with the *Santal tramp*," *Jesuit missions*, Vol. V, no.5 (May 1931): 116.

⁶¹ John A. Morrison, "Looking on in Santalistan," *Jesuit Missions*, Vol.VII, no. 7 (July-August 1933): 149.

⁶² James Creane, "Patna Mission," *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. II no.6 (June 1928):126.

⁶³ Pascual, 85.

their native country. “Stop at a house in a village to talk to someone, and in a few minutes a large crowd is around, just staring and listening... but a good missionary does not mind the utter lack of privacy, because to do so would offend [the Santals], and that is precisely what the missionaries what to avoid.”⁶⁴

The conversation with the Santals did not merely consist in spiritual matters. Instead, the missionaries were trying to understand the people’s social reality around. Ninety-eight percent of the people were illiterate. So the missionaries opened a school for the new converts in Bhagalpur. It had two purposes: the children could be trained in faith, and the missionaries could converse with the parents through the children. The school was not a place to settle securely with boundaries but a place to lead to further contact and conversation with people. They started visiting the families through schoolboys. Interestingly the boys themselves talked to their parents about the gospel message.⁶⁵

The flourishing Santal mission lasted for ten years under the loving care of the Patna Jesuits. In 1938 five members of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis arrived in Patna from their headquarters in Loretto, Pennsylvania, to replace the Jesuits in Bhagalpur. It would have been hard to leave the mission because during the first missionary meeting of the Jesuits of Patna Mission in 1933, the priorities for the mission had been set. The uppermost in the list was “field work among the Santal people.”⁶⁶ However, the handing over the mission to the Franciscans marked a new phase for the Jesuits in the Patna mission. They had to leave the Santali speaking mission to focus

⁶⁴ John A. Morrison, “Looking on in Santalistan, ”149.

⁶⁵ Pascual, 82.

⁶⁶ Pascual, 100.

more on the Hindi-speaking areas of Patna. By that time, the superior had more men at hand to venture into new areas.

1.3.4. Conversation and Evangelization among the *Dalits*

As they took leave off the Santal mission, they were faced with a new challenge. Either they could maintain the existing missions, or they could venture into new areas and communities. Given the caste structure, they needed to discern to whom to take the gospel message. Interestingly, in the first Patna Mission Meeting in 1933, the Jesuits fixed one of the mission priorities as establishing the Church among the caste Hindus-- that is high caste Hindus, and the Muslims. Both the Hindus and the Muslims comprised up to 99% of the population in Patna Mission.⁶⁷ But they had seen the lives of the Dalits and the inhuman conditions while working in Bettiah, Gahiri, and other missions north of Patna. On the one hand, there was stiff opposition from high caste groups and *Arya Samaj*⁶⁸ against conversion, but on the other, the Dalits were more disposed to receive the Good News.

As the Jesuits turned their attention to Dalits from Santal's mission, there was already a massive Depressed Class Movement in India led by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the President of the Association for the Depressed Classes. He and seventy million of the lower castes of Hindus decided to withdraw from the oppressive Hindu fold. The caste system disenchanted them. They were asking for social justice from a religion that would give them a status in the community. The low caste people were at the crossroads of their

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Arya Samaj, (Sanskrit: "Society of Nobles") vigorous reform movement of modern Hinduism, founded in 1875 by Dayananda Sarasvati, whose aim was to re-establish the Vedas, the earliest Hindu scriptures. They vehemently opposed people's conversion to Christianity.

faith life. The Catholic missionaries read the signs of the times and increased their effort to propose to those who were searching for the liberating truth, the Gospel of Christ.⁶⁹ At the time, Father Peter J. Sontag, the superior of the Patna mission, gave an invitation to go to Christ's poor with gospel message:

Catholics justly glory in the mighty, world-wide organization of the Church. But in the face of a situation like the present, when more than sixty million souls, Christ's predilect (sic) poor, are standing with wistful eyes at the parting of the ways, of which one leads Christward, the other into wilderness, it makes a Christ-loving soul, soul-loving heart almost break with anguish to think of what might, of what would almost certainly happen these next few years if we, Christ's privileged ones, could meet them with the truly Christ-like gesture!⁷⁰

His meaning of the meeting was to listen to the deepest desires of the Dalits. The time-tested missionary path seemed to be contacts and spiritual conversation to understand their desire and respond to them. Father James Creane, meanwhile, tried to explore the possibilities of reaching the Hindus while he was working with the Santals. He visited villages and talked to many low caste groups such as Kurmis, Kumhars, Chamars, Kamars, Kodas or Koras, Hajjams, Ghatwars, Mals, Doms, Dhangars, and Jolahas (Muslims). One of the crucial things he seemed to look for was *inner disposition* of these caste groups. He came to understand their inner motives through the conversation. Often there were mixed motives to embrace Christian faith. So only a few caste groups showed genuine faith and disposition.⁷¹ The gospel message seemed to have touched the deepest

⁶⁹ Pascual, 111.

⁷⁰ Peter J. Sontag, "A world movement of sixty million souls: which way lies life," *Jesuit Missions*, Vol X. no. 9 (October 1936): 238.

⁷¹ James A Creane, "Into New Lakes," *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. IX, no. 1 (January 1935): 10-11; James A Creane, "Into New Lakes," *Jesuit Missions*, Vol IX, No. 2, (February 1935): 36-37.

longing of the Ravidasis to be loved, to be accepted, and to be appreciated and to live life with dignity and freedom.⁷² They showed readiness to embrace Christian faith.

Though there were mass conversions taking place elsewhere in India, it was not the case in Bihar. Conversions in Bihar occurred only in small family groups or among individuals. Along with the few other Dalits, a considerable number of Ravidasis became Christians, largely due to Kinship ties, family and marital relations, famine conditions, and the impact of the charisma of some missionaries.⁷³

1.3.4.1. Evangelization of South and East of Patna

Patna and the adjoining regions in the south are known as Magadh because *the Magahi* language is spoken here. In Bihar, each region exhibits its own uniqueness in social and cultural values with a language and tone different from the others.⁷⁴

Historically the Dalits' conversion began first in this part of Bihar. In May 1936, Fr. Westropp, along with his catechist, remained a day or two while his catechist went about the villages, particularly looking for one family. The catechist had baptized a dying child belonging to the Depressed class in the Patna hospital. He found the family in a place called Rais, four miles south of Barh (43 miles east of Patna). Soon he took Fr. Westropp to the village. Then nearly all the men of the village were baptized. The Dalits of the

⁷² Vimal Kishore, "Incarnational Spirituality and the Patna Jesuit Mission in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries Bihar (India)," STL thesis submitted to the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, 2011, 62.

⁷³ Jose Kalapura, "Conversion and change of socio-religious structures: A study of Christianization of the Ravidasis in Bihar, 1930-2000," 23.

⁷⁴ Sanjay Kumar, *Post-Mandal Politics in Bihar*, 2.

neighboring villages started to approach the priest, asking for baptism.⁷⁵ Since many were asking for baptism, priests, usually two resident priests, were sent to stay in the mission stations. It was just the beginning.

Fr. Marion Batson was another Jesuit pioneer to found places and to expand the mission centers south of Bihar. He stationed himself at Mokama, 56 miles east of Patna. It was his first assignment. He projected his mission activities from that place by establishing schools and mission centers. Later numerous mission stations with resident priests came up in south and east of Patna, namely Gaya, Mokama, Bakhtiarpur, Kherwara, Bihar Sharif, Nawada, Bar Bigha, Jehanabad, Fatwa, and Hilsa. All these mission stations are big parishes in Patna archdiocese now.

Fr. Marion Batson's personality itself was very endearing to the people. He seemed to be one of the engaging Jesuits. Life, enthusiasm, human interest abounded in him. He could make friends with anyone. His friendliness, humor, and interest in people broke down the traditional barriers of 'master and servant.' He showed so much interest in knowing the persons. He knew them by name, showed interest in them, their work, and their families. He would share his dreams with his own Jesuits and ordinary people about the future and listen with interest in their ideas and suggestion.⁷⁶ Pascual summarizes his personality thus:

He had the charism of winning friends and influencing people. He could chat as freely and unaffectedly with rajas[kings] and government officials as with might watchmen, street urchins or a fellow traveler in a third-class train carriage. A joke, a kind word, a pointed question made them all his friends. From his lips would pour such a stream of anecdotes and personal plans, that the listener could not

⁷⁵ Pascual, 109-110. Cf. Paul Dent, "History of Patna Province," *Patna Province Jesuits: 1960-1985*, (Patna: Provincial of Patna Province, 1985), 16.

⁷⁶ Jim Cox, *We Band of Brothers*, Vol.1, 10-15

help feeling that he would wide their purses to help him, and the poor gave him their loyal and devoted friendship.⁷⁷

The fruit of his effort in approaching individual persons would gradually lead to mass conversions. The later missionaries would continue in the same spirit of conversing while attracting thousands to Christian faith. One should be continuously reminded that the people were asking for baptism voluntarily despite violent opposition from the Bumihars (landlords) for their conversion. But the Dalits were ready to risk their lives against the caste Hindus. Fr. Charles Miller remarked: “It has been my good fortune that during the past ten years my work has brought me into intimate contact with many of the depressed class people, and I have, as a priest, watched the action of grace in their souls, and marveled at the purity of their lives amidst unfavorable surroundings. I can testify to their heroic fortitude in adhering to Christ, despite the sneers, the scoffing, the raillery, the threats, nay, even the physical violence, because of their belief in a Crucified God.”⁷⁸

On the part of the Dalits, they became aware of the invitation of the liberating voice of the Spirit through the missionaries in conversation. Once they were convinced of their innermost desire, they were ready to take responsibility for it. There are two popular heroic events, though there are many, which I would like to mention here, showing how they were ready to risk their lives for their convictions. On May 27, 1936, sixteen men from Ravidas caste of the Dalit community wanted to embrace Christianity at Ondha, Nalanda District, south of Patna. They were prepared well by the catechist in faith. Fr. Micael Lyons, who was working in Mokama areas, came to Ondha. All of them

⁷⁷ Pascual, 114.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 112.

expressed their desire for baptism. As soon as the landlords heard that, almost forty men came with sticks to beat up and ostracize the Dalits if they dared to convert to Christianity. Sensing threat to their lives and their families, four out of the sixteen ran away. But the rest stuck to their decision and were willing to be baptized irrespective of the threat. The priest was convinced of their determination to follow the religion he preached, and the twelve were baptized on that day.⁷⁹

This incident took place in Bihar Shariff close to Mokama:

In 1939 Fr. Batson used to visit that place from Mokama. As in other places, the persecution started. One prospective convert and his wife were flogged mercilessly and threatened with death if they continued in their desire to become Catholics. Yet they persevered in their decision. The wife, still very young, had the courage to face her persecutors, and dared them to slash her throat, saying, “Kill me, if you so wish, but I will die a Catholic!” The husband escaped and tried later to rescue his wife. He was caught, beaten, and left for dead. Finally, he made his way through the jungle to safety in Nawada, where he intended to bring his wife as soon as he recovered, and with her to receive baptism.⁸⁰

1.3.4.2. Conversation and Evangelization of West of Patna

The west of Patna is often referred to as Bhojpur (called then Shahabad District).

In this part, people predominantly speak the Bhojpuri language. The Jesuits wanted to expand the mission in this region, particularly among the Ravidasis. Ara, Piro, Buxar, Shahpur, and Sasaram to the west of Patna became the strategic places of evangelizing work. These places propelled the later development of other mission stations in the adjoining areas. The missionaries who entered in this region had the experience of

⁷⁹ Prakash Louis, “Bettiah Mission, Tribal Mission and Dalit Mission in Bihar three streams but one socio-religious movement,” 146-147.

⁸⁰ Pascual, 118-119.

pioneering work in other parts of Bihar. Frs. Westropp, Nicholas Pollard, Bertram Ernst, Welzmilller, and Joseph Mann worked hard to establish the first Christian communities.

In 1937, Fr. Westropp rented a house in Ara and started moving around the villages along the railway lines. He stayed here for two years, with 200 villages on his visiting list. Meanwhile, Fr. Welzmilller made a bamboo house with a straw roof overhead in Buxar. He had thirty mission centers forty miles in diameter from Buxar.⁸¹ He cycled around the villages visiting his flock. He had time for everyone, no matter what their need was.⁸² While writing about his village experience, he shared how he engaged in conversation: “It was a real joy to sit and talk with these good villagers, explain the truths of the Faith, hear their troubles, give them what medicine I had, and partake of their meager fare. The main trouble here was the ban which the Hindus had imposed on the baptized as regards water. They must carry it a mile until we can get a well for them.”⁸³ He talked to people and listened to their everyday struggles. They ranged from faith to their social and economic issues, which affected their lives. Bertram Ernst, too, followed the footsteps of Welzmilller in engaging with the people when he became pastor to Piro parish. During his stay from 1946 to his last illness, he would always go to meet his people in far-flung villages and cared for his sheep near and far. He visited them, chatted, encouraged and gave simple remedies, rushed them to hospital, married, and buried

⁸¹ Pascual, 122-125.

⁸² Jim Cox, *We Band of Brothers*, Vol.1, 268.

⁸³ Father Francis J. Welzmilller, *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. XII, no.3, (March 1938): 78.

them.⁸⁴ Their regular visits brought about familiarity between the missionaries and people and strengthened the faith of the new converts.

1.4. Institution and Conversation Mission

Bishop Louis Van Hoeck insisted on education and schools for new converts. The goal of education was to help the Christians to provide a close interaction between the missionaries and the pupils, thus deepening both faith and relationship. The Khrist Raja High School (Christ the King) was the first Jesuit school that started in 1927 in Bettiah. It was primarily for the boys. Those boys who had the aptitude for studies were sent here from other mission stations. One missionary clearly articulated the vision of the school, at that time in these terms:

From the very outset when the opening of a mission high school at Bettiah, Patna Mission, India, was being considered, the thought that was uppermost in our minds was that it was to be not only in name but in very fact a mission school—a school which not only provide thorough Catholic training for our Catholic boys, but in which the non-Catholic students would also receive such religious instruction as would best prepare them, at least, for accepting the faith. For this, it was thought insufficient that pagan boys should attend the Catechism classes for the Catholic boys; indeed, this was considered as positively undesirable. Instead, a daily half-hour of religious-moral instruction adapted to their particular needs was chosen, and has since been faithfully adhered to.⁸⁵

Gradually a network of six village schools was started. They had two purposes. Firstly, it was to reach out to the non-Christians with “Christian ideas and train them to Christian prayer.”⁸⁶ However, it was not hoped to get beyond making these children “Christian at heart” and *well-disposed* for the further instruction. Secondly, it was believed that

⁸⁴ Pascual, 125.

⁸⁵ A Patna Missionary, “Our Village Schools,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. VI, no.11 (December 1932): 248

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

through the contact maintained through the village schools, an attitude, in the adult population, of friendliness, a sense of belonging in a way to the mission, confidence in the Fathers, security that they are dealing not with a transitory propagandist but with a stable, strong organization, etc.; in fine, to create eventually an atmosphere in which a concerted drive for conversions may be possible.⁸⁷

The spirit of dialogue did not remain with the priests alone. They imbibed the same to the teachers in the school in dealing with the students. The teachers in Khrist Raja High School were very friendly with other religious boys. They knew the teacher as a familiar friend. Then they sat with him in religion class they had not the least fear of being proselytized, perverted, or covertly dragooned into any undue change of belief. On the other hand, they were equally sure that he was going to tell them the whole straightforward case for Christianity, not primarily a challenge to their assent, but rather a tribute to the honest human intellect's right for truth—the whole truth.⁸⁸ George A Dertinger puts quite candidly how they engaged in the conversation: “Daily, also, some favorite Hindu fetish of a couple of thousand years' honorable standing come up for review. ‘Father, that passage of Scripture just read teaches that Baptism is necessary for salvation; what about Abraham who wasn't baptized?’ ‘Father, the Commandment says, ‘Thou shalt not kill’; therefore, it is a sin to kill animals.’ The mission has not yet discovered a more happy way of reaching India's young thoughtfals (sic) than are these daily round tables at Khrist Raja.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ George A Dertinger, “Khrist Raja High School, Jesuit Missions,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. IX, no.3 (March 1935): 70-71.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Moreover, the Patna diocese did not have a seminary. The school served as a place of discernment for prospective native clergy. “It is here that the missionary strengthens the newly-acquired Faith of the neophyte and gives it backbone; here during four to six years he forms in the new convert the habits of prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments and gives him the Catholic view of life. To the older Catholics themselves, the school is the center of Catholic culture, and the only means of social advancement, for in India, education is the only path to social and economic progress. Finally, the school is the nursery of religious vocations.”⁹⁰ From the Apostolic School of Khrist Raja, six young men then joined the seminaries; two for the vocation of Jesuit Brothers, and four for the priesthood.⁹¹ Andrew Remy and Bernard D’Cruz were the first native priests from this school.

Further, the Victoria Mission Stamp Bureau was a master idea of Father Westropp at *Our Lady of Victory* mission at Gahiri. The canceled stamps were sent from Missouri and elsewhere. He engaged the *Dom*, *Dusadh* and *Chamar* widows, and crippled old men to sort out the canceled stamps. The catechist used to sit with them, teaching catechism and prayers. They could engage themselves in close conversation with regard to their faith. At one time, there were ninety-seven of those old women working there. The missionary wrote about this job thus: “Unless I give them work, and easy work at that, I would never be able *to reach them* [emphasis mine]. In India, the women usually reign supreme at home in the matter of religion. Gain the women to Christ, and you are almost

⁹⁰ Charles P. Saldanha, “The Jesuits in India,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. VII, no.5 (May 1933):133.

⁹¹ Dertinger, 84.

sure to getting the rest of the family.”⁹² Interestingly, he further goes on to say that the lack of supply of the canceled stamps made the Jesuits impossible to teach the Word of God. He expressed the whole stamp business summarily in these words: “And does the Stamp Bureau pay? Yes and no. If we consider cold cash only, there is little profit. But the work is the means of giving employment to people who would otherwise be inaccessible, of implanting in their hearts the seed of the Gospel which, in God’s good time, is bound to develop.”⁹³ The industry was just the beginning of starting the spiritual conversation to extend it to villages.

Father Westropp had also begun other industries like cloth-making and weaving factories. At their peak, they would employ two hundred people. This work also included the raising of mulberries and silkworms, and everything needed to get to the finished product.⁹⁴ These industries had two sole purposes. The first was to provide employment to the poor Christian converts to help them economically. The second was to engage the converts and prospect converts in conversation in the form of catechizing, instructing, and listening. The place was a space for the converts themselves to listen and support each other because they were trying to live their Christian faith in a hostile Hindu environment. As the missionaries started hostels, village mission centers, and orphanages along with schools, they envisioned the spiritual conversation as an integral part of them. The spiritual conversation was carried out in the form of close association with students in those places and in the form of formal religious instructions.

⁹² John A. Kilian, “Jesu Ki Barai or Ram! Ram!” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. II, no.5 (May 1928):119.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jim Cox, *We Band of Brothers*, Vol.1, 195.

1.5. Conversation and Collaborative Mission

Spiritual conversation and collaboration have gone hand in hand in the Patna Jesuit mission from the outset. When the first missionaries took over the mission field from the Capuchins, there were hardly enough Jesuits to tend all the mission stations. As they began their mission, there were nine native diocesan priests, ten Irish Christian Brothers, eighteen sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, ten sisters of the Holy Cross, five sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, and eleven sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis.⁹⁵ Given the number and nature of work, the Jesuits needed others' help. They shared their vision with these religious men and women and the apostolic ministries were carried out collaboratively.

One could imagine that the Jesuits could not possibly carry out the spiritual conversation with everyone, particularly women due to rigid caste and patriarchal systems. For instance, the spiritual conversation would not have been easy for the missionaries with the Dalit women. But, the religious sisters could converse with them easily. It is all the better if they were to be natives. Bishop Louis Van Hoeck somehow realized the importance of the native women religious. He started the native religious congregation of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart Sisters in 1926. The main intention was to take the local people along as collaborators in the mission. The Sacred Heart Sisters taught in Jesuit schools, had medical dispensaries and went from village to village catechizing and administering to the sick and dying.⁹⁶ When Bishop Bernard Sullivan received the first vows of eight native members of the above congregation, it

⁹⁵ Pascual, 29

⁹⁶ Bernard Sullivan, "Patna's Native Sisters," Jesuit *Missions*, Vol.XI, no.3 (March 1937): 66.

was expressed that they knew the language, the customs, and the heart of India.⁹⁷ Bishop Van Hoeck wanted the sisters to keep alive the ethos and customs of the land; he wanted them to eat and sleep in Indian fashion.⁹⁸ Later, Bishop Bernard Sullivan would invite the Medical Mission Sisters (1939), Sisters of Apostolic Carmelites (1940), and Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky (1947) to Patna to start health and education ministry.⁹⁹ And also, the Jesuits recruited the native vocations from south India, particularly from Kerala, Mangalore, Goa, and elsewhere. Here one can see that the evangelizing work, which necessarily involved spiritual conversation, was a collaborative work of both the natives and internationals.

The collaborators were not only the religious and clergy but also the catechists were the lifeline of spiritual conversation. The missionaries were helpless without the catechists. They were well trained in how to talk to people and explain Christian faith. They went with the pastors to prepare the people for baptisms. They talked to the prospective Christians; taught them the rudiments of prayer. In visiting Christian families, the contribution of the catechist was very significant because he was one of the people, a member of their own race, a man thoroughly acquainted with their languages, their habits, their religious and social customs.¹⁰⁰ These appointed, paid religious intermediaries acted as instructors of religion, school teachers, and coordinators of

⁹⁷ "Native Sisters," *The Woodstock Letters*, Vol. LVIII. no.2 (1929): 472.

⁹⁸ Michael Lyons, *Jesuit missions*, Vol. II, no. 10 (November 1928): 88.

⁹⁹ Mary Shruti Joseph, *The Role of Consecrated Women in the Missionary Activity of the Church: A Missiological Study in the Context of Bihar, North India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2014): 166-167.

¹⁰⁰ Charles P. Miller, *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. IX, no.2 (February 1935).

common worship in villages and mediated between the priest and the people.¹⁰¹ In other words, they prepared the ground for a more in-depth conversation between the faithful and the priests when the priests went to meet them. They understood the mind and heart of the missionaries by their close interaction. At the same time, they knew the people's desire for God and the gospel message. In fact, they themselves preached the gospel through the spiritual conversation.

1.6. The Transition and the Challenges

The Patna Jesuit mission entered a new era in 1962. The Patna Vice province became a full-fledged province that year. At the same time, the Second Vatican Council began ushering in a change in the Catholic Church itself. Besides, India was into a sovereign state by then. Due to government restrictions, the number of foreign missionaries started to dwindle, and more and more native vocations were encouraged. Even in leadership, the natives began to lead the province. Meanwhile, the 31st General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1965-1966) wanted to incorporate the teachings and vision of Vatican Council II. It brought new vigor and vision, and practical applications to the mission work in Patna province. The propagation of the faith among the non-Christians and conversion could not be the only aim of the mission work. For the non-Christians, the Church in Patna needed to become a sign of total liberation.¹⁰²

At that time of transition, the Jesuits were called to listen to various voices. Henry Pascual Oiz points out three voices the Jesuits were called to hear in Bihar: 1) *the voice of*

¹⁰¹ Jose Kalapura, "Conversion and change of Socio-Religious Structures: A study of Christianization of the Ravidasis in Bihar, 1930-2000," 32.

¹⁰² Pascual, 305-308.

Mother India. The leaders of the country were extolling the merits of Indian civilization and culture after the independence in 1947. The focus was on identity, freedom, Indian traditions, and secular values. 2) *the voice of the Church*. The voice of the Church after the Second Vatican Council reminded the missionaries that Christian life could be accommodated and adapted to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Gospel message had to take into account the particular traditions. In other words, inculturation was emphasized. 3) *the voice of the Society of Jesus*. Based on 31st and 32nd General Congregations, the Society of Jesus focused on the aspect of faith that does justice. The insertion of communities among the poor, so that Jesuits may work for them and with them, or at least may acquire some experience of their conditions.¹⁰³ In addition, the voice of Pedro Arrupe seemed to have given a positive direction in dialogue, co-responsibility, and justice. “From a Society seeking to reform the individual to a Society seeking to modify social structures.”¹⁰⁴

All these voices moved the Patna Jesuits to move into villages amidst the poorest of the poor, particularly the *Musahars* (rat-eaters). Individual Jesuits moved to poor hamlets to stay with them. The spiritual conversation, which was a means for embracing new faith, became a means to discern the desires and aspirations of the downtrodden. The Jesuits took up projects to uplift them socially and economically based on the dealings with the poor.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, the Jesuit formation like novitiate and theology were taken

¹⁰³ Ibid., 322-323.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 324.

¹⁰⁵ Social action centers such as Bihar Dalit Vikas Samiti (BDVS), Rural Development, Adult Education started in Bettiah (later known as Rural Education And Development-READ), Manthan, Sampurna Vikas Samiti (SVS), and Seva Sadan are some of the prominent centers started by individuals for social empowerment of the poorest of the poor.

to villages where one could closely interact with the poor. So, one could safely say that spiritual conversation is understood in terms of knowing the lives of the poor and helping them in their total liberation.

In the last twenty years, the Patna Jesuit province has seen many changes in the formation structure and apostolates. Most of the Jesuit parishes have been handed over to the diocesan clergy with the view of establishing local church. The second-year novitiate training, which was among the people, was shifted to town, thus limiting the proximity to the people. The first two years of theology studies which was conducted within the province focusing on context, was suspended and shifted to the national center due to decreasing number. The village camps have become infrequent. Many social action centers have become formal schools now. There is a more inclination towards establishing and maintaining schools and colleges and preparing personnel for them. Though the education apostolate is good in itself, it creates an inward focus by pushing the Jesuits for success and standard. One can attribute many valid reasons for these changes. But it is undeniable that the Jesuits' and clergy's proximity to and conversation with people has become less.

1.7. The Components and Method of Conversation in Patna Mission

The Jesuits from the beginning seemed to have followed spiritual conversation as a method in the evangelizing mission. Gradually their way of proceeding in the mission set a conversation paradigm that the later Jesuits tried to follow. From their way proceeding, we could draw some elements of spiritual conversation as they emerge from the practice. One could discern two levels in their spiritual conversation: a conversation with people and collaborators and conversation among the Jesuits.

1.7.1. Conversation with people

1.7.1.1. Regular Visits to the People

The pioneering missionaries walked miles and miles into the villages to meet the people where they were. Their visits necessarily involved spiritual conversation. There was a deep desire in them to share the gospel message with the people. The regular visits brought about familiarity and intimacy between the faithful and the pastor. Their visits to the villages also removed, though not completely, an air of suspicion among the other religious communities.¹⁰⁶ In some cases, it brought about reconciliation. For the new converts, the visits were a moment of joy to share their life experiences. But at the same time, they looked forward to listening to their pastors. On the other hand, the pastors could listen to the faithful face-to-face who were striving hard to keep their faith alive amidst opposition and hostile condition. The Christians often faced discrimination and alienation in the caste-ridden society. It is only sporadically that did any high caste people tread the path of the Dalit villages. So the regular visits strengthened their faith and gave moral and spiritual support to the new converts. It was a sign of acceptance of the other as dignified human beings. Father Charles P. Miller wrote from his mission station Gajhi in 1935 about the necessity of visit in these terms: “what is one visit in a year! A village may have to be visited several times in a week before even the well-

¹⁰⁶ Father Nicholas Pollard was working in Shahpur close to Ara mission, west of Patna. He came to the Patna bishop pleading him to be removed because the Rajputs, the high caste people, were opposing his work. At the request of the bishop, he went to the house of the Rajput, whom he thought the biggest trouble-maker of all. When he sat with the high caste man and explained to the attentive Rajput the purpose of the mission work, the desire missionaries have to end poverty and be of service to all. That was the end of all the Rajputs' opposition. *See Pascual*, pp.174-175.

disposed are ready ‘to cross the line.’”¹⁰⁷ They seemed to have sustained this practice in all the mission stations.

1.7.1.2. Dwelling among the People

The staying of the missionaries among the Christian communities provided a close interaction and involvement in the life of the Christians. It was an opportunity for the pastor to observe the lifestyle and customs very closely. They could articulate the Christian faith in the terms people understood. Above all, their stay gave stability to people’s trust. The presence of the missionary among the villagers seemed to tell them that the Church was there and that the missionary had come to stay. The first converts felt that they were attached to something permanent, and it gave them an air of confidence which they had not felt before.¹⁰⁸ The spiritual conversation was a participation in the poverty, sickness, and helplessness of the new converts.

In 1978 there was a Clergy Consultation in Patna to find new ways of evangelizing. Father Felix Farrell reiterated the aspect of being present to the people, which carried with it the meaning of the spiritual conversation. He called it the ‘method of presence.’ He articulated very emphatically in these terms:

I feel sure that the method exists, and is that which we can call pure and simple ‘*upasthiti*,’ our *presence*. It is nothing new, whether you see it as a method in its own right, or the basis of all methods...So, what I propose in this idea of *presence* is simply being there to meet, to talk to and to listen to people; to show the Way, the Truth, the Light and Life; to lay hands on the sick, to lead them to pray...Our presence should rather awaken men to the presence of God in their suffering.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Charles P. Miller, “Patna, India,” *Jesuit Missions*, Vol. IX, no.2 (February 1935): 50.

¹⁰⁸ Pascual, 126.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 338-339

He further goes on to say that the pastor's present must reflect in a manner that will make Christ present to them.¹¹⁰

1.7.1.3. Intentional Listening and Sharing

The spiritual conversation was sensitive to cultural and social differences. For instance, the Santals were animists. They had not faced caste discrimination. Whereas the Dalits were oppressed by the high caste groups. The dehumanizing untouchability practice separated them from others. When they were sharing their in-depth experiences, the missionaries did not merely lend a listening ear to the person in front of them. Instead, they tried to listen to God's voice in their sharing. The back and forth speaking and listening was a moment of revelation to listen to God's voice in the socio-cultural situation. The missionaries needed to be sensitive to their own inner stirrings of the Spirit. The listening itself involved certain openness of mind and heart and sufficient quality time because the people's sharing was intimately linked with their socio-economic-cultural condition. In other words, they were called to listen to the whole person. The listening was a process of discernment for both the people and the pastors as to where God was calling them to act.

1.7.1.4. Care for the Whole Person

There was genuine love in the missionaries to the persons in conversation. They wanted to help them; they desired their growth as dignified human beings and God's children. It is quite self-evident from the way the missionaries moved about in squalid low caste villages. They had a reverence for the downtrodden while conversing with

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 339.

them. They considered the Dalits as human beings worthy of God's love and acceptance each time they approached them closely. The spiritual conversation looks for spiritual, material, and psychological growth. In other words, there was a desire for the holistic and total liberation of the person.

1.7.1.5. Learning the Customs and Language

In any conversation, language becomes paramount importance. By speaking to the people in their own language, one makes oneself understood and understands the other. The Jesuits from the beginning of the mission focused on learning the language of the people. They learned Hindi, Santali, Oraon, Bhojpuri, etc.¹¹¹ They translated the prayers to the local languages so that the faithful could easily follow. Paul Dent was one of the well-known Jesuits in Patna who had an excellent grasp of Hindi and Sanskrit. He could get invitations from the Central College in Banares and the *Maharani* (queen) of Burdwan to lecture. He insisted that the medium of communication should be in Hindi, which was the *lingua franca* of the people. Later, Jesuits tried to learn even now the local dialects of the faith communities such as Bhojpuri, Maghahi, and Maithili in which the real ethos of the people lie.

1.7.2. Conversation among the Jesuits

The second level of spiritual conversation among the Jesuits took place in a formal set up. It was carried in the form of manifestation of conscience to the superior and mission meetings. The spiritual conversation among the Jesuits first began with the Mission Superior visiting his subject in the mission field. He could listen patiently to the

¹¹¹ In fact, Francis Xavier Ory was expert in Oraon language and customs. The people could not believe he was a foreigner.

experiences of the missionaries with the people. Often the conversation became a privileged space for revealing the experiences of the missionary with the people and his discernment. Having visited and listened to the members in different parts of the mission field, the superior brought the different voices in conversation during the Patna Mission meeting in 1933. In the meeting, their discernment led to prioritize future work. The three priorities, namely the fieldwork among the Santals, establishing the church among the caste Hindus, and education of the Jesuits, were the result of their spiritual conversation and discernment among the Jesuits. Later the spiritual conversation became part of Province Days.

1.8. Conclusion

This chapter gives a brief overview of the beginning of Patna Mission by the American Jesuits. They believed that they could convert ‘pagans’ in thousands when they arrived Patna. Undoubtedly their enthusiasm was spurred by the works done by Father Lievens in Chotanagpur mission (present Jharkhand) south of Patna. Even the Jesuit general cited the example of Francis Xavier and Father Lievens as models for evangelization. But their method of conversion did not seem to work. For instance, Lievens worked among the aboriginal people who were very receptive to the gospel message. Besides, if the tribe head chose to become a Christian, the rest followed. On the other hand, Francis Xavier was on the constant move from India to Japan. He kept baptizing people so that no one would go to perdition. There seems to be little evidence in the sustained engagement with the people in the process of discernment. Furthermore, one cannot deny the fact that there was some colonial political support for him.

But the Patna Jesuits, as they began their mission, were faced with a strange situation of the rigid caste system. After a few years of ministry, Fr. Peter Sontag seemed

to have wondered why the expected result did not take place in conversion in one part of Bihar while the other part mainly south of Bihar could boast of mass conversion. Bishop Louis Van Hoeck replied, saying, “Our field in Patna is as different from Chotanagpur Mission as night is different from day.”¹¹² He meant that Patna's mission people are different; they needed a different approach in the mission.

The Patna missionaries, therefore, took to the spiritual conversation method. They engaged people in a sustained spiritual conversation; visited them in their places; listened to their life stories. They needed to adapt themselves to different people differently. The Dalits and Santals, on the other hand, doubted the new religion and the missionaries initially. They took time to see their own deepest desires, discerned gradually their vital decision of changing their faith with all their consequences. The regular contacts, sharing, and listening brought about clarity where God was calling them to respond. After the Patna Mission became a province, the practice of spiritual conversation was used to discern the apostolates for the total liberation of the poor.

¹¹² Pascual, 81.

Chapter Two: The Nature and Practice of Spiritual Conversation in the Society of Jesus

2.0 Introduction

Ignatius of Loyola was a soldier by profession. He was not a born conversationalist. Even after his conversion, Ignatius wanted to lead his life in obscurity, away from the public eye. However, as he moved along in his life, he learned to discern the will of God. Ignatius felt that he was called to serve the Lord through active ministries rather than spending his life in a monastery. In order to serve the Lord, Ignatius also realized that he needed to gather some companions. He shared his dreams and desires for the Lord with them. He learned what we call spiritual conversation today by conversing with people from different walks of life. The spiritual conversation became part and parcel of his desire to serve God. All the same, Ignatius came from a noble family. His noble birth brought along with it a certain way of dealing with officials and authorities. In regard to Ignatius' natural gift for dealing with others before his conversion, Juan Polanco affirms that "he was a man of prudence and capacity in the things of the world, and that he knew how to deal with men of different character, especially when it came to reconciling differences and quarrels."¹ He further goes on to say that the Divine Majesty withdrew him from the world and wanted him to use his natural gifts for God's service and glory and to the good of souls.²

As Ignatius was recovering from his wound at Loyola after the battle at Pamplona, he imagined a certain lady and how he would present himself to her including

¹ Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, *The First Biographies of St. Ignatius Loyola*, trans. with an introduction and notes Joseph A. Munitiz (Campion Hall, Oxford: Way Books, 2019), 41.

² Ibid.

what words he would use to address her. He considered her status and position. He wanted to adapt himself to her nobility in his dealings. He even thought of the means that he would take to go to her place of living.³ His vision of dealing with the other combined both words and manners. Progressively, he acquired a particular way of proceeding in conversation with others in spiritual matters. This chapter deals with the spiritual conversation in the nascent Society of Jesus, particularly in the life of Ignatius and his companions; the different kinds of people whom they engaged in spiritual conversation; and the way of proceeding at different stages of their lives. Additionally, this chapter will show the instructions of the founding Fathers of the Society for conversing with people and explore specific aspects of the theological underpinnings of the spiritual conversation. Finally, some core aspects of spiritual conversation will be described based on the observation of the tradition of the conversation.

2.1. Spiritual Conversation at Loyola, Montserrat, and Manresa

For Ignatius, the battle of Pamplona in 1521 became a life-changing moment. As he fought to protect the fortress from the French army, a cannonball shattered his right leg while seriously injuring the other. Consequently, he was confined to his room at Loyola. He wanted to spend time reading books of valor, but he was left the option of reading only two books—*Vita Christi* by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony and *Flos Sanctorum* by Jacopo da Varazze.⁴ These books opened a dialogue between God and himself. As he reflected on the texts, his desire for worldly feats and the lives of Christ

³ Parmananda R. Divarkar, *Testament and Testimony: The Memoirs of Ignatius of Loyola* (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2013), 19. Hereafter this source will be cited as *Autobiography* with paragraph number. No. 6.

⁴ Candido de Dalmasas, *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits His Life and Works*, trans. Jerome Aixala (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), 43.

and the saints stir in him conflicting feelings. He learned to listen carefully to those inner stirrings and reflect on them. In this process of discernment, there appeared the new interlocutors in the internal conversation—God and the evil spirit.⁵ As he put forward proposals and arguments to follow the paths of the saints with austerity and simplicity, he felt consoled whereas the desire for worldly feats left him dry and sad.⁶ He realized the good spirit gave him consolation while the evil spirit caused desolation in his soul. He learned to listen to himself and God. He could marvel at the difference in him that the dialogue between God and him brought about.⁷

As he continued his reading and reflection with the resolve to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he wanted to communicate in words what was in his heart. The immediate persons with whom he wanted to converse were his family members. His conversation was full of devotion and seriousness concerning God and his actions.⁸ Gerald Coleman observes that it was the beginning of the spiritual conversation apostolate: “He was so full of what had been happening within him that he spontaneously talked about it to the rest of the family. This brought him to a new discovery—the apostolic possibilities of conversation, of talking about the things of God. Later he deliberately set out to help others by such conversation. He noticed that, in telling his own story, he had a good

⁵ Dario Restrepo, “Conversación,” in *Diccionario De Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, ed. José García de Castro, Madrid, 2007, 473-474.

⁶ *Autobiography*, nos. 6, 7, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no.8

⁸ Pedro de Ribadeneira, *The Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Claude Pavor (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2014), 17.

effect on others; and perhaps here was the first germ of that desire to ‘help souls.’”⁹ Though he realized that the conversation on things of God benefitted him and others, he would carefully choose the persons to engage in conversation once he left Loyola. After regaining health, he took the solitary path of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He did not want anyone to accompany him. He desired to put his trust in God alone. His short stay and vigil at the shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat was preparation for his new way of life as a pilgrim and general confession, which lasted for three days. The sacrament of confession and the confessor became a privileged space and person, respectively, for his spiritual conversation. It was a space to open his interior or “an account of conscience to another person and a spiritual colloquy at the same time.”¹⁰ Here Ignatius revealed to the confessor his decision to a new way of life for the first time.¹¹ Father Chanon, his confessor, listened to the plans of that nobleman to become a penitential pilgrim; Ignatius saw in the reactions of the confessor a confirmation of his plans.¹²

On his journey to Barcelona 1522, he detoured to a small town, Manresa, ‘to note some things’ in his book. His intention of spending a few days lasted for eleven months of intense prayer, penance, trials, and illuminations. He spent seven hours of prayer on his knees. Though he went for confession regularly, he suffered from intense scruples driving him to the point of thinking to end his life. Gradually God deigned him to

⁹ Gerald Coleman, *Walking with Iñigo: A Commentary on the Autobiography of St. Ignatius* (Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2002), 22-23.

¹⁰ Dario Restrepo, “Spiritual Conversation According to St. Ignatius of Loyola,” trans. Philip J. Dougherty, *Communications*, no.6 (February 1976): 6

¹¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, trans. Philip Endean and Joseph A. Munitiz, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 20.

¹² Gerard Coleman, 39-40.

overcome the temptation of scrupulosity. There were many days he was very eager to converse on spiritual matters and to find people who were receptive to them. In addition to confession, he continued to seek spiritual persons with whom he could converse in Barcelona as well. But he could not find them.¹³ Significantly, his conversation with a laywoman at Manresa seemed to have helped spiritually. He himself acknowledges that “she alone seemed to enter more deeply into spiritual matters.”¹⁴

In Manresa, while Ignatius himself was looking for the persons to converse with, some spiritual persons came to converse with him on spiritual matters. “Besides his seven hours of prayer, he busied himself, helping in spiritual matters certain souls who came there looking for him.”¹⁵ They wanted to talk to him because even though he did not know spiritual matters, his speech revealed great fervor and eagerness to go forward in God's service.¹⁶ During his sojourn at Manresa, a group of pious women gathered around Ignatius. They called themselves ‘Iñigas.’ Most of them were from high ranks and helped him materially; they took care of him in sickness. He helped them with spiritual conversation and the Exercises. As a result, they showed a great desire for apostolic work, particularly in the works of mercy.¹⁷

¹³ Ignatius of Loyola, *Personal Writings*, 28, 30.

¹⁴ *Autobiography*, no.37.

¹⁵ *Autobiography*, no. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, no.21.

¹⁷ Javier Osuna, *Friends in the Lord*, trans. Nicholas King, *The Way*, ser. 3 (London, 1974), 25.

Ignatius took up the spiritual conversation as an apostolate, which won for him the goodwill of the people of Manresa.¹⁸ Juan Polanco wrote that what Ignatius wanted to communicate came from his experience: “In fact, he always had this desire to communicate to others what God was granting him, since he found by experience that what he passed on to others not only did not grow less in himself, but rather grew all the more.”¹⁹ He also points out that the conversation and the Exercises are two different things—“He would also enter into conversation—apart from the Exercises—with many persons.”²⁰ Spiritual conversation paved way gradually for the Exercises.

Ignatius kept up his devotional practices, but at the same time, he engaged in works of charity around Manresa with the poor and the sick and the conversational apostolate.²¹ During the day, he spent thinking about what he meditated upon or read that day. He ate what people gave him and slept in the hospice.²² Laínez describes Ignatius’ way of proceeding in the personal conversation in these terms. “Ignatius would enter into conversation with the persons when they invited him to eat with them.” “During the meal, he would stay silent; then after the meal, basing himself on what had been the subject of conversation, he would discourse on the things of God, paying particular attention to topics and customs...”²³ He would continue this habit of conversing later in a wealthy

¹⁸ Candido de Dalmases, 56.

¹⁹ Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

²¹ Dalmases, 58. Ignatius also gave some simple Exercises to those who were disposed to receive them. The Exercises and the conversations brought about changes in the lives of the people.

²² Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, 50

²³ *Ibid.*, 8.

Spaniard's house as he was waiting for the ship in Venice: "...[Ignatius] would never speak at the table except to answer briefly; but he listened to what was said and noted some things which he took as the occasion to speak about God, and when the meal was finished, he did so."²⁴ Ignatius' conversation progressively moved from personal benefit to benefitting others, from remaining in the sacrament of confession to open apostolate as he moved along from Loyola to Manresa. In Manresa Ignatius realized the importance of the spiritual conversation in helping others. Ignatius even abandoned his former excesses and cut his nails and hair for the purpose of the apostolate because it involved dealing with people.²⁵

2.2. Spiritual Conversation at Barcelona, Alcalá, and Salamanca

Ignatius's mind was fixed on Jerusalem to remain and help souls as he left Manresa. God, however, had other plans in store for him. He could not remain in Jerusalem as he planned since it was not God's will that he remained in those holy places, a judgment he learned in conversation with the guardian of the place.²⁶ In 1524, he returned to Barcelona and took up studies under a Master Ardevol who taught grammar. Even his decision to study was to help others spiritually. Here again, he was tempted by new insights into spiritual matters, thus hindering his academic progress. He soon realized that it was a temptation. So, he wanted to share this with someone. After praying, he decided to ask his master to listen to him. "So when they were seated, he told him exactly all that went on in his soul and what little progress he had made until then for that

²⁴ *Autobiography*, no. 42.

²⁵ Javier Osuna, 12.

²⁶ *Autobiography*, nos. 46-47, 50

reason.”²⁷ This conversation with his master helped him overcome his temptation. After two years of learning, his master recommended him to go for further studies in Alcalá, Spain.

For the first time, Ignatius attempted to gather companions in helping others in Barcelona. The three companions who shared his ideals were Calisto de Sa, Lope de Cáceres of Segovia, and Juan de Arteaga of Estépa. Little John, a French boy, joined this group later in Alcalá.²⁸ They formed a bond of close friendship among themselves. They begged for food, lived a poor life, helped each other in their necessities, and engaged in the works of mercy and conversation apostolate. Ignatius, who had more experience in spiritual matters, was their leader and their friendship was strengthened through regular conversations. They used to meet in the courtyard of a hospital or in the room where Ignatius was staying, conversing in three or the whole group.²⁹ They followed a certain regularity. It was a great novelty at that time to come together for conversation. They not only conversed among themselves but also carried forward the conversation apostolate with the people, thus the ministry of conversation was becoming a collaborative ministry.

While Ignatius continued his studies at Alcalá, he actively engaged in the apostolate of the spiritual conversation even to the point of arousing suspicion among the authorities. Here, one could find more revelation in the way of proceeding in spiritual conversation, particularly in the structure, persons, and content. The audience was mainly ordinary women drawn from different walks of life. There were widows, wives of the

²⁷ Ibid., no. 55.

²⁸ Barton T Geger, “The *First First* Companions: The Continuing Impact of the Men Who Left Ignatius,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 44/2 (Summer 2012): 10

²⁹ Ibid., 35-36

saddler, the baker; young women, *beatas* [pious women], women of questionable behavior, young girls of sixteen or seventeen years of age; and there were servants, a few men, students, and friars.³⁰ The conversations and the Exercises spurred them to commit themselves to a life of prayer, regular masses, pilgrimages, and works of charity. Ignatius did not move them to do so; rather, they found God's will through the means of conversation and the Exercises. He seemed to have even dissuaded a mother and a daughter from going for a pilgrimage.³¹

In order to make this apostolate effective, they started meetings in small groups and in individual conversations with those who came to see them. “The little groups formed at the hospital, in the house of Andres the baker (where two of them were staying), in the house of a *beata* called Isabel the Prayerful, and in other private houses.”³² Ignatius gave the audience information about the gathering before a day or two. The whole way of proceeding in the conversation reveals how seriously the little group engaged in this ministry. The conversation became much more intense. Surely enough, it drew the attention of the Church authorities for their lack of ‘studies’ in the matters of faith and not being in any religious order. Consequently, the inquisition authorities wanted to examine them through formal trial.

When the group was brought to trial at Salamanca regarding their ministry, Ignatius replied, “We do not preach, but we do speak familiarly with some people about

³⁰ Osuna, 26, 37.

³¹ Osuna, 25-26.

³² *Ibid.*, 37.

the things of God; for example, after dinner with some people who invite us.”³³ The conversation involved commandments, mortal and venial sins, the powers of the soul, examination of conscience, gospels, and saints. Moreover, those who came to look for them sought advice about scruples or temptations or to pour out their difficulties or share their plans.³⁴ The trial at Salamanca unceremoniously shut their mouths till they could do four years of theological studies in order to engage themselves in conversation with people and to speak about mortal and venial sins. Realizing the need for theological studies to help others, Ignatius decided to go to Paris. Interestingly, he talked to his friends first and then decided to go to Paris: “Therefore, after talking about this and making arrangements with his companions, he set off alone for Barcelona on his way to study at Paris...”³⁵ He left this group of friends behind with the hope of getting them to Paris if he could make arrangements for them there.

2.3. Spiritual Conversation in Paris

Ignatius arrived in Paris in 1528. His stay would mark another significant phase in the spiritual conversation. It would take place in the academic circle. As he began his studies in the college of Montaigu, he did not engage himself initially with the ministry of conversation as he did before at Alcalá and elsewhere due to not knowing French.³⁶ However, the following year he went begging to Flanders and came back, and then he intensified his conversation and the Exercises with the students, mainly the Spanish

³³ *Autobiography*, no.65.

³⁴ Osuna, 37-38.

³⁵ Pedro de Ribadeneira, 63.

³⁶ Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, 63. See also Javier Osuna, *Friends in the Lord*, 45.

speaking ones.³⁷ He would interact with students marked by the diversity of characters and situations, diversity of temperaments, talents, and age.³⁸ They were drawn from different socio-economic backgrounds and internal dispositions. Andre Ravier observes that “on the whole, Iñigo was not selective—not selective enough—according to some; he excluded no one; he had no preliminary reluctance regarding anyone, provided that the desire to serve God in poverty and charity motivated that soul. His judgments were not “closed,” but open to the workings of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ Peralta, Castro, and Amador were the first ones with whom Ignatius conversed and gave the Exercises. They were transformed and took to begging and poor way of living like him. This caused great commotion in the university because the former two were from noble families.⁴⁰

In September 1529, Ignatius moved from the College of Montaigu to the College of Saint Barbara. At that time, Master Peter Faber and Master Francis Xavier were sharing the same room and studying in the same college. The former was a French shepherd from Savoy, and the latter was a Basque nobleman from Navarre. Each was of different temperaments and goals in life. Peter Faber was pious, reserved, sensitive, affable, tranquil exterior, and studious, but he was wrought with inner turmoil, particularly scrupulosity and despair. On the other hand, Francis Xavier was anxious to

³⁷ Dalmases, 110.

³⁸ André Ravier, *Ignatius of Loyola and the Founding of the Society of Jesus*, trans. Maura Daly, Joan Daly, and Carson Daly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 61. In the letter to Martin Garcia, his brother, Ignatius gives conversation as one of the reasons for not writing to him so long: “The first was the hindrance of my studies and constant conversation—not, however, of a temporal nature.” See Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg, and John L. McCarthy, *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006) 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Autobiography*, nos. 77-78.

acquire a great name on earth and among students. He was talented in athletic skills.⁴¹

Ignatius first associated with these two. In the process of the conversation, he could enter into the very soul of Faber and help him remedy the inner struggle. Peter Faber describes his experience with Ignatius in these terms:

For after providence decreed that I was to be the instructor of that holy man, we conversed at first about secular matters, then about spiritual things. Then followed a life in common in which we two shared the same room, the same table, and the same purse. As time passed, he became my master in spiritual things and gave me a method of raising myself to a knowledge of the divine will and of myself. In the end we became one in desire and will and one in a firm resolve to take up that life we lead today...⁴²

Peter Faber was much helped to overcome his scruples by Ignatius. Furthermore, he discovered his deepest desires to serve God. Soon Ignatius won over for God's service Francis Xavier, Simão Rodrigues, Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón, and Nicolas Bobadilla.⁴³ In addition to conversation, he used different means to build close friendships among the companions. He helped Faber with money; Francis Xavier with students for tuition; Laínez with some advice on temporal affairs; Nicolas Bobadilla with a stay at the university; and Simão Rodrigues with a long conversation.⁴⁴

All of them wanted to commit themselves, serving the Lord by serving others. Each one discovered for himself what God asked of him. Simão Rodrigues is very definite in his recollection of the first companions' lives in Paris, and that each

⁴¹ *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, intro. Edmond C. Murphy and John W. Padberg (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 16-17.

⁴² *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, "The Memoriale," trans. Edmond C. Murphy (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 64.

⁴³ With three more, Paschase Broët, Jean Codure, Claude Jay, who joined later, the group of ten is often referred to as 'Founding Fathers,' or 'First Companions.'

⁴⁴ Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, 68-69.

companion was filled with zeal for God but “without knowing what the other was doing, each of them decided to renounce the seductions of the world, to sail to Jerusalem, and to choose the kind of life the others had already chosen.”⁴⁵ This statement shows how each one has discerned his own vocation but did not know all of them were called for the same purpose. This zeal for the service of the Lord came to the fore as the will of God for all through constant dialogue. Then he mentions: “What happened to him [Nicolas Bobadilla] happened to the other Fathers as well, for only after each one of them freely and of his own accord had decided to dedicate himself wholly to the service of God and to the above mentioned way of life, then each one learned that the others had consecrated themselves to a similar way of living. When they learned this, words could not express how much joy, how much happiness, how much consolation and strength they experienced to persevere in their resolve.”⁴⁶ A lengthy time of face-to-face conversation and sharing of life took place before they did the Exercises in a complete form. The Exercises was the confirmation of what they found in the conversation as the will of God. In the case of Peter Faber and Francis Xavier, the conversation went for more than four years before they could do the Exercises. Simão Rodrigues repeatedly emphasizes that they talked about the time to carry out their hearts' desires, manner of living, and the kind of work.⁴⁷ “It is by conversation that Ignatius won companions for himself, and by conversations that Ignatius prepared people for the Spiritual Exercises, where these

⁴⁵ *A Brief and Exact Account: The Recollections of Simão Rodrigues on the Origin and Progress of the Society of Jesus*, trans. introduction and commentary Joseph F. Conwell (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 9. This source will be cited as Simão Rodrigues with paragraph numbers.

⁴⁶ Simão Rodrigues, n.9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 12, 13, 14, 18, 19.

conversations, more precisely directed, retained the character of dialogue.”⁴⁸ The conversations among them continued throughout the year to keep their desires alive “even though they were living in different areas, now in one of their houses, now in another, taking a meal together in charitable fashion and conversing with each other.”⁴⁹ All seven of them lived together, interacted closely, and established a community of friends.

Having learned one another’s desire to serve God, the seven companions entered into deliberation in 1534. During the deliberation, they talked about: the time and the way to carry out their heart's desire, their vows, and their ministry after returning from Jerusalem and bringing the gospel to the unbelievers.⁵⁰ While the deliberation progressed, they agreed upon some points, but they were also indecisive on some.⁵¹ They first commended the matter to God in prayer. Then they took specific issues to conversation. Javier Osuna points out some of the elements of the deliberation from the writings of Simão Rodrigues which were imperative in the conversation and discernment: a) when they were in disagreement about staying in Holy land, they postponed the definitive solutions to another time when they would attain greater spiritual clarity but take provisional decision and continue the dialogue and seek the will of God; b) they would

⁴⁸ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “Cura Personalis,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, XXXVIII, (1/2007):14.

⁴⁹ Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, 70. See also Laínez narration of this gathering in pp.16-17; and Pedro de Ribadeneira’s mention of it in p. 113.

⁵⁰ Simão Rodrigues, nos. 12-14.

⁵¹ They were not agreed on their way of living after the pilgrimage. Ignatius, Laínez, and Xavier were inclined to stay in the Holy Land, where Faber and Rodrigues seemed to desire to return to Europe and place themselves under obedience to the Roman Pontiff. The final judgment on this matter was delayed until their arrival in Jerusalem, and was to be decided by a plurality of votes. See Simon Rodrigues, footnote no. 3, pp. 14-15.

remain docile and open to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who will speak to them in the opinions of the other companions as well as in the experience and the circumstances of their stay in the holy land; c) the minority voice was valued among the majority even though the minority voting was taken into consideration. They had complete trust in the communication of the Spirit to the group. In this dialogue, the minority took on an essential role of its own, since the voice of the Spirit must be discerned in them too. They helped each one to examine his certainty in the process of discerning God's will.⁵² Despite age difference and cultural background, all had the freedom to express their convictions as they discerned before the Lord: "...together they sought the will of God, and accepted it in faith after long discussions in which they could hear the opinions of all, and after continuous prayer, this will was made clear to them in the opinion of the majority."⁵³

After the deliberation, they bound themselves in vows on the feast of the Assumption 1534 in the chapel of Denis on Montmartre.⁵⁴ Though Ignatius was their spiritual master, they established themselves some mutuality, trust, and desire to listen to each other to discern God's will. There were total freedom and respect for the individual. Ignatius did not influence anyone. He allowed the Lord's free communication to each one and made one's decision.⁵⁵ The spiritual conversation helped to see God's will for them collectively.

⁵² Osuna, 55-57.

⁵³ Ibid, 63.

⁵⁴ Osuna, 58.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 52.

2.4. Conversation in Venice and Rome

Venice and Rome occupied a significant phase in the life of the first companions. They made some crucial decisions, which finally led to the founding of the Society of Jesus. The point of interest at this stage is how the conversation played out in their deliberations and way of proceeding in the discernment. In 1534, the seven companions had taken the vow to undertake the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord and neighbor. Accordingly, they left Paris and arrived in Venice in January 1537 against their plan to arrive in May. Ignatius had been waiting for them from the previous year. Then four more companions were added to the original seven numbers—Paschase Broët, Jean Codure, Claude Jay, and Bachelor Diego de Hoces. According to Javier Osuna, they had three deliberations as a group while awaiting for their ship to Jerusalem in Venice. All these deliberations took place in an atmosphere of prayer, reflection, Eucharist, and dialogue with each other in their collective search for the will of God.⁵⁶

Firstly, they deliberated and decided to give part of their time to serving in the hospitals and going to Rome to obtain the Pope's blessing for their journey to Jerusalem.⁵⁷ Soon they realized that the ships to the Holy Land were suspended due to war. Seven of them were ordained on June 24, 1537 (Bobadilla, Codure, Laínez, Rodrigues, Xavier, and Ignatius to the priesthood; Salmeron to the diaconate; Favre, Broet and Claude Jay were already priests). So, they went about preaching and hearing confessions for a while. Again they entered into a second deliberation in which they decided to wait in Venice another year to see if they could travel to the Holy Land and to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 74-77.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 70

prepare for their first mass.⁵⁸ However, at last, their dream of the Holy Land completely vanished when the passage to Jerusalem became impossible. As a result, they engaged in the third deliberation at San Pietro in Vivarolo in Vicenza in which they decided to offer their first mass (Ignatius decided to wait a little longer), to look for candidates for the society in the Italian universities and to identify themselves as *Compagnia di Gesu* (Society of Jesus).⁵⁹

The spiritual conversation among the companions had to be seen in a new light after their ordination in Venice. "With the priesthood, the ideal of imitating Jesus Christ and the Apostles in preaching the gospel through towns and villages was almost a reality, and the group now had the features of a sacerdotal and apostolic community."⁶⁰ The companions were then priests. They involved themselves in ministries such as confessions, sermons, public, and private preaching, offering mass, and exhortation.⁶¹ On the one hand, they exercised their priestly ministries, but on the other, they closely involved themselves with the poor by helping them in the hospitals and distributed the alms gathered from their begging.⁶² So, one can assume, since they all wanted to imitate Christ, that they carried out the usual apostolate of conversation with people, though they also exercised ministries specific to priests. They must have found the conversation

⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 77-78. See also Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, p.24.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 72.

⁶¹ Cf. Diego Laínez and Juan Polanco, pp. 25-26. Ignatius narrates how Faber, Laínez, Codure, and he preached in Vicenza: "The four went to different piazzas and began to preach on the same day and at the same hour, first shouting loudly and summoning the people with their caps. Their preaching caused a great stir in the city..." *Autobiography*, no.95.

⁶² Osuna, 75

apostolate much more feasible as priests because of the access it gave them to many people.

As the companions had already decided the alternative to Jerusalem's journey, they arrived in Rome in 1538 to offer themselves to the Supreme Pontiff to send them on mission as he thought expedient. The following year he started sending them on the mission. This posed a serious problem of getting dispersed from one another. So far, they had not thought of starting a congregation, but then they wanted to deliberate if they would respond to the Pope's call as a body or as individuals. They also wanted to deliberate about giving obedience to one among them as the small community took shape into a stable body.⁶³ "We were in perfect accord in singleness of purpose and intent; namely, to discover the gracious design of God's will within the scope of our vocation...the question of which means would be more efficacious and more fruitful, both for ourselves and for our neighbor."⁶⁴

The deliberation started in Rome in mid-March 1539 and ended on 24th June, covering three months. The deliberation of 1539 in Rome followed more or less the method used in Paris and Venice. However, one can get rich details about their way of proceeding in which conversation was an integral part. The communitarian dialogue of this deliberation left behind a great inspiration for the subsequent generations in the Society in the discernment procedure. First, they formulated the issue into a question. The first question was whether they must stay together as one body. The second question was

⁶³ Ibid, 92-93

⁶⁴ *The Deliberations of Our First Fathers (1539)*, 1, accessed on February 11, 2020, https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1539_deliberationsofourfirstfathers/

whether they should take the vow of obedience to one of their members who would be elected as superior. Since they were actively involved in the ministries, they did not want to interrupt them. Each day one point was proposed for spiritual conversation and for the subsequent discussion. During the day, they commended the matter to God at mass and prayer and reflection. At night they gathered together to present their reasons for and against based on their reflections.⁶⁵ The first question was quickly resolved because all were unanimous in remaining as one body. The second question proved hard to resolve. The companions decided to wait actively hoping for the light of God but at the same time using all human means.

In order to find a solution for the second question they proposed in three spiritual steps. André Ravier summarizes the steps thus:⁶⁶

1. That each one goes about prayer, penance, and meditation in such a way as to strive to find peace and joy in the Holy Spirit regarding obedience, working his hardest to want to obey more than to command equally for the glory of God and the praise of his Majesty.
2. That no one speaks to anyone of this matter, that the companion does not question it so that he would not undergo any pressure nor be influenced to obey rather than not to obey—nor the reverse; that each seeks only in prayer and meditation what would be best.
3. That each should imagine that he did not belong to the group, even that he would never belong to it, so that by this device, he might not be influenced to judge according to his own emotions, but that he might be freed of them to express his opinion before the group on obedience or nonobedience (sic) and that he might be able to support his ideas on how he believed the service of God would be the greatest and which would best assure the future of the Society.

⁶⁵ Dalmases, 165-166.

⁶⁶ André Ravier, 85-86. For the detailed account of the process, see “The Deliberations of Our First Fathers (1539)”

Finding peace and joy, awareness of influence from within and without, and internal freedom are the critical elements in sharing their discernment with the group. They had differences of opinion and ideas as they brought their own discernment to dialogue in the community. They acknowledge this truth at the beginning of the deliberation: “No one should be astonished that among us, weak and frail men, this difference of opinion should have arisen, since even the princes and apostolic pillars of the most holy Church, and many other holy men with whom we are in no way worthy to be compared, experienced a similar diversity of opinion and, at times, were in open conflict.”⁶⁷ But they were firm in the help of God in the whole process. They listened to each other’s inner stirrings resulting from prayer and reflections. They prayed, reflected, and weighed every reason and embraced unanimously to obey by majority votes. Andre Ravier observes regarding the comparative “It is better for us” in the decision in these terms: “This comparative, to which the numerous comparatives of this text correspond, signifies that there was a choice—that to sustain and to adopt the contrary option would have been possible, that there would have been good reasons and, finally, that they did not repudiate in any way the liberty and equality of the early group.”⁶⁸ He further notes that Ignatius in his administration and the *Constitutions* tried to safeguard liberty, and spiritual equality from within the structures of obedience.⁶⁹ The conversation among the companions did not take place in complete unanimity and agreement in their opinions, but all were given a chance to express in words their discernment. Moreover, in this conversation and

⁶⁷ The Deliberations of Our First Fathers (1539), 1.

⁶⁸ Ravier, 88.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

discernment process, Diego de Caceres was also included though he did not yet belong to the group but lived with the companions.⁷⁰

2.5. Spiritual conversation in *Cum ex Plurium* (Since from the words of many) and the *Constitutions*

The first companions' deliberation led definitely to the founding of the Society of Jesus. In order to get the approval of the Society of Jesus from the Pope Paul III, they had a draft document containing their way of life. *Cum ex plurium* contained the proposed papal letter in 1539, for approving the companions' way of living, along with five chapters of the Formula of the Institute. The letter was central to the Formula.⁷¹ The introduction of the letter narrates the ministries they did, namely public preaching of the word of God, private exhortation, hearing confessions, directing people in holy meditations, serving in hospitals, pilgrimaging, teaching children and the uninitiated and performing the works of charity.⁷² There was no direct mention of conversation in their apostolic work list. However, in the same paragraph, there appears the phrase "*veteris conuersationis exempla (quod uos facitis) renouare*"—renew the models of the ancient Christian way of living (as you are doing).⁷³

Through his analysis of the phrase, Joseph F. Conwell points out that for Ignatius, *conuersatio* meant a way of living or way of acting, a way of being with or way of

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Joseph F. Conwell, *Impelling Spirit: Revisiting a Founding Experience 1539, Ignatius of Loyola and his Companions* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997) 17.

⁷² Ibid., 4-5.

⁷³ Ibid.

dealing with people. It went beyond the meaning of dialoging.⁷⁴ Their ministries and their way of proceeding in conversing with others merge as a way of living. “Their ministry of the Word falls under *verbo*, but it is ratified by *conversatione*, that is, by the example of their lives. The Word leads them to act and calls others to action as well. They ratify by action, by the way they live, the Word they preach, and what they preach in turn ratifies the way they live, so that Word and action become one in a spiral that leads to God. *Conversatio* includes everything they do. Even their ministry of the Word becomes *conversatio* [Christian living]...”⁷⁵ Unfortunately, the introduction and conclusion of the letter did not find their place in the papal bull *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* because of some modifications. However, some of the ministries found a way in the Formula. German Arana is firm in saying that since it was the first juridical document defining the Society, Ignatius must have consciously avoided the term ‘spiritual conversation’ from the known canonical language of diverse ministries.⁷⁶ All the same, one could positively see the ministry of conversation extending to all other ministries.

Though the ministry of conversation was not formally included in the Formula, it found its way in the *Constitutions* of the Society in clear terms as a ministry.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 216-218.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 228. Cf. Diego Laínez puts how the first Fathers words and living went hand in hand in these terms: “Wherever we went, some good was done because we always entered into conversation about God and also because we avoided giving them any bad example.” See Diego Laínez and Polanco, 19.

⁷⁶ German Arana, “Spiritual conversation a privileged apostolic instrument of the Society of Jesus” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, XXXVI, no. 108 (1/2005): 26.

⁷⁷ John W. Padberg, ed., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996). “He should also consider which of his subjects should deal with their neighbors inside the house or outside of it, and for what length of time they should do this, in spiritual conversations, conducting exercises, hearing confessions, and also in preaching or lecturing or in teaching Christian doctrine”; “They will likewise endeavor to benefit individual persons in

dynamics of conversation run through the whole of *Constitutions* of the Society. However, some parts of it are very intentional regarding conversation. The first and second parts deal with the selection and admission of the candidates wherein the candidate and examiner engage in face-to-face conversation. The candidate is asked to recount the significant events in his life and to describe those personal experiences that influence his affective relationship with God.⁷⁸ The examiner, on the other hand, shares the expectation of the Society. Both try to discern the will of God in an atmosphere of dialogue. Once the person is inducted into the Society, the conversation is a means to strengthen the union of minds and hearts. In the sixth and the seventh parts of the *Constitutions*, the conversation becomes a decisive factor in discerning and sending the member on the mission. The superior and the subject engage in a heart to heart dialogue in the account of conscience. Both try to know each other's desires and expectations for the mission. Here persons become the most important factor. The dialogue is a search, a revelation, and an encounter with the Spirit to send the right person on a mission.

2.6. Guidelines for Dealing with Persons by the Founding Fathers of the Society

Once the Society of Jesus was approved, even before the approval, the members were dispersed in different parts of Europe and elsewhere on the mission. Wherever they went, they continued to engage in spiritual conversation with people. One does not find a way of proceeding explained clearly in any official documents of the Society like the *Constitutions*. All the same, since conversation involved words and dealing and

spiritual conversations, giving counsel and exhorting to good works, and in giving the Spiritual Exercises.” Nos. 437, 648. Hereafter this source will be quoted as *Constitutions* with the paragraph number.

⁷⁸ André de Jaer, *Together for Mission: A Spiritual Commentary on the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. Francis C. Brennan (Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2001) 27.

associating with people, some guidelines, instructions, and advice, which were given for dealing with others, could be associated with spiritual conversation as well. Some of the founding fathers of the Society have left with rich information on dealing with others in their writings. They were not prescriptive but descriptive. They continued to evolve, depending on the context.

2.6.1. Ignatius of Loyola

Ignatius has left some detailed instructions about conversing in his *Spiritual Exercises* and some of his letters. The *Spiritual Exercises* was the primary source for him as he dealt with others in spiritual matters. Though overall, *Spiritual Exercises* is about dealings between the retreatant and God, he pointed out precisely the manner of conversing between God and the retreatant, and the retreatant and the director. “When we are conversing with God, our Lord or his saints vocally or mentally, greater reverence is demanded of us than when we are using the intellect to understand.”⁷⁹ All the prayers involve the whole person in conversation with God. He/she brings his/her memory, will and intellect, reason, and affectivity to God.

In the meditations and contemplations, one of the important parts is colloquy, wherein the retreatant enters into dialogue with God the Father, the Son, Our Lady, angels, and saints. “A colloquy is made, properly speaking, in the way one friend speaks to another.”⁸⁰ Though colloquies are kept at the end of the prayer, the conversation could

⁷⁹ George E. Ganss, trans. and ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 4th Indian edition (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2011). No.3. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* will be cited in abbreviated form as *SpEx*.

⁸⁰ *SpEx*, no. 54. See colloquy mentioned in nos. 53, 62-63, 147, 156, 159, 168, 199.

be at the beginning and middle as one is interiorly moved.⁸¹ In other words, the whole prayer is an intimate conversation. In the Exercises, the contemplations, which are proposed for the retreatant in the second and the following weeks, are episodes of Jesus' life. Almost all the passages are taken from the scripture involving biblical characters in conversation.⁸² In order to know, love, and follow Christ, one is called to observe, consider, and contemplate what they are saying. "By my hearing, I will listen to what they are saying or might be saying, and then reflecting on myself, I will draw some profit from this."⁸³ Before speaking, contemplative listening is vital. This way of listening and speaking makes one know God's desire and one's own desire, thus leading one to hear His call. The familiar conversation between God and the retreatant becomes very transparent at the end of the retreat as he/she offers himself/herself entirely to God and joins in His labor.

In the dealings between the director and the retreatant, the director has "not to treat retreatant severely or harshly but gently and kindly." The director should try to understand the inner movements of the other person without influencing with his/her opinion or convictions—"while standing by like the pointer of a scale in equilibrium, to allow the creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and the Lord."⁸⁴ And also, he/she should adapt to the dispositions of the retreatant to help

⁸¹ Martin E. Palmer, trans. and ed., *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 316. No. 129.

⁸² Give the numbers of the contemplation

⁸³ *SpEx.*, nos. 115, 123, 194.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, nos. 7, 15, 17.

the other. The presupposition at the beginning of the Exercises is the guiding principle for both:

That both the giver and the maker of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it. Further, if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved.⁸⁵

In the predisposition, the mutuality of admonition, respect for the other, and mutual search for an acceptable position between the seeker and the guide are absolutely crucial.⁸⁶

Ignatius wrote thousands of letters to various persons. Their content was person-specific in dealing with many aspects of life. Among all the letters, two letters are well known for conversing and dealing with others. In 1541 Ignatius prepared instructions to Fathers Broët and Salmerón, who were commissioned by Pope Paul III to go to Ireland. Pope entrusted them with the mission of curtailing heretical ideas. Ignatius gave explicit norms that in all their dealings, they should be slow to speak and say little, especially with their equals and those lower in dignity and authority. They should be ready to listen for long periods and until each one has had his say.⁸⁷ The most important aspect of this letter is that they should consider others' temperaments and adapt themselves. "Look first to their disposition and accommodate yourselves to them. If they are of a lively temper,

⁸⁵ Ibid., no. 22.

⁸⁶ Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001), 61.

⁸⁷ *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, "To Fathers Salmerón and Broët," trans. William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 51.

quick and merry of speech, follow their lead in your dealings with them when you talk of good and holy things, and do not be too serious, glum, and reserved. If they are shy and retiring, slow to speak, serious and weighty in their talk, use the same manner with them, because such ways will be gratifying to them.”⁸⁸ While dealing with persons suffering trials and discouragement, they should “behave pleasantly, conversing at length and showing much contentment and cheerfulness, both interior and exterior...”⁸⁹

Ignatius wrote one more instruction to Lainez, Salmaron, and Claude Jay for dealing with others in 1546. The context of those instructions is that of Pope Paul III, who asked three Jesuit theologians for the Council of Trent. Ignatius points out that “much can be achieved by associating and dealing with large numbers of people for the salvation and spiritual progress.” But one should be vigilant and favored by God’s grace. While instructing on speaking and listening, he says, “I would be slow to speak, deliberate and loving, particularly when expressing a judgment on matters that are or might be treated at the council. I would be slow to speak and careful to listen, keeping still in order to grasp and understand the speaker’s ideas, feelings, and inclinations, so as the better to respond or keep silence.”⁹⁰ This is considered to be the Ignatian golden rule in a conversation wherein the rule of loving attention, empathy, and patience help one understand the other's internal knowledge.⁹¹ One tries to know “God’s promise for more

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg, and John L. McCarthy, *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, 66.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 128-129.

⁹¹ German Arana, 43.

life, more love, and more freedom” through those desires, ideas, and inclinations.⁹² In all these instructions, the primary goal for Ignatius was the greater glory of God and the service of one’s neighbor.

2.6.2. Peter Faber

Peter Faber was one of the first companions of Ignatius from Paris. He was well known for giving the Spiritual Exercises and conversing with others. He brought reform in the lives of the people in Germany and elsewhere by his holy life and spiritual ministries. At the time of his mission in Germany, the political and religious condition was in turmoil. The violent fights and accusations between the Lutherans and Catholics on matters of faith were quite serious. In that context, Peter Faber endeared himself through his ministries of conversation to both Catholics and Protestants. From his personal writings, one could get a sense of how he associated and conversed with others; his understanding of conversation; and his instructions to others regarding conversation. He gave much emphasis in his personal journal to the Holy Spirit, who lives in and moves a person’s heart.

So I asked the Lord to grant me in the birth and in the growth of my labor and in what I say and write the same spirit as in their conception. That will come about when the first movement, then the reflection, the expression, and lastly the execution have all been influenced by the same spirit. From this I concluded that our Teacher and Master was to be imitated even to his manner of speaking...And we should desire to edify the hearer in the way the Holy Spirit has edified us when he gave us a knowledge or an awareness of it. From this I gained a special understanding of this text, ‘Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert,’ and of this, ‘he came by the Spirit into the temple.’ In them one perceives a special awareness of the Spirit which takes hold of a person and moves him to act or to speak without leaving him to himself and to his own personal experience alone.⁹³

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, “The Memoriale,” no.52.

One has to understand the working of the Spirit in oneself first so that one can see it working in others. “It is in the Spirit that we ought to live out the remainder of our lives and to work in all things for the service of our neighbor and for the praise of God.”⁹⁴ When one grows in loving intimacy with God, the person will be “able with more assurance to go down among his neighbors, seeing them and listening to them, and so on.”⁹⁵ Faber’s prayer was always in the form of dialogue with the Trinitarian God as a primary partner and then followed Our Lady, angels, saints, and so on. He discerned God speaking to him in the stirrings of his heart. Desire is one of the key words in his spiritual experience because God himself gives all desires for his work. God is its source and in whose Spirit it is suggested.⁹⁶

On March 7, 1546, Peter Faber wrote a reply letter to Diego Laínez, who asked him for some advice about dealing with the heretics of northern Europe. Peter Faber gave him some important points along with other details on how to deal (converse) with the heretics:⁹⁷

1. Anyone wanting to help the heretics of this age must be careful to have great charity for them and to love them in truth, banishing from his soul all considerations which would tend to chill his esteem for them.
2. We need to win their goodwill so that they will love us and accord us a good place in their hearts. This can be done by speaking familiarly with them about matters we both share in common and avoiding any debate in which one side

⁹⁴ Ibid., no. 194.

⁹⁵ Ibid., no.66.

⁹⁶ Ibid., no. 139. See also for detail analysis of Peter Faber’s understanding of desire in Brian O’Leary’s *Pierre Favre and Discernment* chapter six “Favre’s Spiritual Vocabulary: The Key-words *Desiderium, Affectus, Devotion, Cor*” (Campion Hall, Oxford: Way Books, 2006), 56-71.

⁹⁷ “To Diego Lainez, on Dealing with Heretics,” *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre*, trans. Martin E. Palmer, 379-380.

tries to put down the other. We must establish communion in what unites us before doing so in what might evince differences of opinion.

3. A man who can speak with them on how to live well, on the virtues and on prayer, on death, judgment, hell, and the like—matters that lead even a pagan amendment of life—will do them more good than another who is filled with theological authorities for confounding them.

Moreover, he would express his conviction, in another letter to the scholastics in Paris in 1541, that words and arguments alone do not suffice to bring about reconciliation with heretics. Rather, deeds and a life visibly dedicated to Christ will speak in great measure.⁹⁸ He brought about change in personal lives and reconciliation among people effectively through conversations and his way of life.

2.6.3. Luís Gonçalves da Câmara

Luís Gonçalves da Câmara joined the Society of Jesus in 1545 in Coimbra, Portugal. Ignatius trusted him to narrate his life story to him at the end of his life, which came to be the *Autobiography* of Ignatius. He did not write any guidelines for the spiritual conversation. Nevertheless, he noted down meticulously the dealings of Ignatius as a General Superior of the Society of Jesus in Rome. The *Memoriale* of Luis da Camara comes as a precious resource to peep into his personality and dealings with others. His notes comprise the entries from 26th January 1555 to October 1555. Within these entries, da Camara tries to articulate numerous qualities and facets of Ignatius' dealings with others with concrete examples as he observed him day in and day out: "How he behaved, as much in prosperity as in adversity, how he treated the perfect and how the imperfect, he dealt with someone who was tempted, and how with those at fault, whether he tolerated what was bad and how greatly he cherished what was good, how he would

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

administer punishment, and how he gave signs of love, how he formed novices and how he treated those who were old and tired.”⁹⁹ He himself observed that his opinion changed after meeting Ignatius personally and talking to him.

According to Da Camara, Ignatius gave importance to the person in his dealings. He tried to know the person through conversation as the person revealed himself/herself. Not only did he know those he was talking to through and through, but they themselves appreciated that he knew them and understood them entirely.¹⁰⁰ “One he treats with great rigor, another with great gentleness, and after the event, one always saw that such was the remedy, although beforehand one had not understood. But he always inclines more towards love, indeed to such a point that everything appears as love. And because of this he is so beloved by all; there is no one in the Society who does not love him greatly, and does not himself think that the Father loves him very dearly”¹⁰¹

Ignatius carried out the predisposition of the Spiritual Exercises in his life. He insightfully understood that human beings tend to find fault easily. When one puts good interpretation about the other person, the person disposes himself positively to enter into conversation. Da Câmara observes: “Our Father always speaks well of everyone, and even with those who know about some faults, he does not talk about them except when it is absolutely necessary in order to find a remedy for them.” He further goes on to say that “to do this he looked for what would be worthy of praise in those with whom he did not

⁹⁹ *Remembering Iñigo, Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, trans. Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2005), 5. This source will be quoted as *The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara* with paragraph number.

¹⁰⁰ *The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, no.199.

¹⁰¹ *The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, no. 86.

have good relations or who were the object of criticism so that he could relate such things when he was told something bad about those people.¹⁰²

Ignatius spoke to people after a lengthy reflection about the issue. He didn't incline the person to his side simply by using attractive language. Rather, he provided detailed facts so that the other comes to know the issue clearly and then reflects on it themselves. Da Câmara recalls how Ignatius dealt with issues: 1) he never used emotions to persuade, but facts; 2) he did not adorn facts with words, but rather with the facts themselves, relating so many and so decisive circumstances that they convinced, by their own force as it were; 3) his account was simple, clear and distinct.¹⁰³ Ignatius was articulate in what he was saying, "He will narrate a past occurrence ten, fifteen, or more times entirely as it occurred, so that he places it before your eyes..." Ignatius dealt one issue at a time but thoroughly. His conversation was so orderly that he said nothing by chance, without having thoroughly reflected on it.¹⁰⁴ Further, Da Câmara remarks thus:

The Father's way of speaking is always factual, with very few words, and without any reflection about the facts, but simply telling them. In this way he leaves it to his listeners to make the reflection, and draw conclusions from the premises. And in this way he is astonishingly persuasive, showing no inclination to one side or the other, but simply narrating. Where his art comes in is that he touches on all the essential points that can persuade one, and leaves aside all the others which are beside the point, as seems necessary.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, Ignatius emphasizes modesty as an important virtue in dealing with others. Modesty is not something one puts on artificially. For him, external behavior and

¹⁰² Ibid., nos.91,93.

¹⁰³ Ibid., no.99.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., no. 202.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., no. 227.

expressions are the reflections of one's internal disposition of humility and self-abnegation. He especially could not tolerate one thing in conversation among both the Jesuits and outsiders: this was to speak pompously and authoritatively. He disliked these phrases: "It is necessary that we do so and so; there is no other possible way than this; the truth of the matter is so and so," and other similar modes of expression. He reproved them, and he considered such manners so bad that he criticized them.¹⁰⁶

Ignatius gave importance to listening to the persons dealing with temporal affairs. It is important to make some sound decisions because they have firsthand experience. He showed absolute constancy in his decision because he followed a procedure in listening. Da Camara describes: "The reasons for this that come to my mind are the following: the first reason is that he reflects carefully on each matter before coming to a decision; the second is that he prays very much about each subject and is enlightened by God; the third is that he takes no decision with regard to matters that concern particular persons without listening to the opinions of those who are expert in the matter; he asks their opinion about nearly everything."¹⁰⁷ He listens to himself, to the concerned person, and the experts' opinion. In the discernment process, he considered all these. The means chosen for the person was the result of two-way communication: the communication with the person and the communication with God. "I frequently thought that the origin of this lay in the lengthy communication and discussion he had with God before deciding on any particular business."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., no.204.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., no. 282.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., no. 16.

2.6.4. Jerome Nadal

Jerome Nadal is another known personality in the nascent Society of Jesus for knowing the heart and mind of Ignatius. Ignatius, therefore, sent him around Europe in promulgating and interpreting the *Constitutions* as well as the charism of the society. In the Sixth Exhortation written in 1573-1576, Jerome Nadal gives some vital information regarding spiritual conversation while reiterating the way of proceedings of Peter Faber and Ignatius. He places spiritual conversation in ‘any other ministries whatsoever of the Word of God’ of the Formula of the Institute 1550. One of the aspects of the private spiritual conversation, according to him, is that it has “greater liberty and effectiveness because one can fit the words to the disposition and reaction of the individual.”¹⁰⁹ When one encounters the other person, the person should not start talking about avoiding sin or acquiring virtues. One needs to begin the conversation from the disposition of the other: “The conversation should begin naturally. With a soldier, one talks of war, with a merchant about his business, with a noble about government or political affairs of his country, with clergyman about the news of the Church and its government.”¹¹⁰ One should follow his/her lead to other pious topics. According to the circumstances and disposition of a person, the conversationalist should adapt his/her conversation.

Further, he reveals that spiritual conversation is not a prerogative of the Jesuits or any religious persons. It should be taught to others so that others carry forward this practice. “We should urge our penitents and the friends with whom we dialogue to learn

¹⁰⁹ Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God* (St Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 52.

¹¹⁰ Clancy, 54.

the art of spiritual conversation themselves so that they may help members of their families and household, their friends and relatives. Women can thus aid other women.”¹¹¹ Most importantly, the spiritual conversation can be practiced communally. A group might come together to talk about godly things while someone presides over the conversation.¹¹²

2.6.5. Peter Canisius

Peter Canisius was one of the first-generation Jesuits. He was influenced by Peter Faber to join the Society in 1543. The fourth general Superior, Claudio Aquaviva, asked him how a Jesuit can be most effective in dealing with his neighbor. Peter Canisius gave him some guidelines in reply in 1583, drawing some points from the practice of spiritual conversation of the founding fathers, namely Ignatius, Francis Xavier, and Peter Faber. Among many norms, the following stand out uniquely in comparison with those who gave instructions on dealing with others. Firstly, he says that God burns for the salvation of everyone; the conversation is a means to accomplish that.¹¹³ Secondly, he was deeply emphatic that the person engaging in the ministry of conversation should be a man of prayer.

If you want to help others by your conversation, you should take the means necessary to make yourself an instrument closely joined to God, your Sovereign Creator, and capable of being used by him. These means are a taste for solid virtue and spiritual things, a pure intention to serve God alone, a special familiarity with God in exercise of piety, a sincere zeal for souls, and especially love which ought to burn in the heart of him who wishes to set others on

¹¹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 59.

fire...something which greatly helps in all this is to see God in all things and to raise your spirit to him often...¹¹⁴

Thirdly, he points out the things which are offensive in dealing with others, or which keep the other person away. These points are not mentioned explicitly by other Jesuits mentioned above.

The offensive things are those words or actions of ours which flow from impulse or an unsettled state of soul, those things, namely, which betray our arrogance or vanity or indicate levity or boldness or timidity or rudeness or a lack of reserve or pride—in short, whatever is out of harmony with simplicity, moderation, and a mature manner of acting or speaking. Such things are not serious sins, but they often prejudice the good we want to do. Things we blurt out, sentences spoken without reflection, especially when they are contentious or contrary or bitter or concern those absent—this is what hurts people.¹¹⁵

Fourthly, he gives importance to prudence. The one who deals with others should have the simplicity of a dove and the prudence of a serpent. Here prudence is understood to be knowing oneself and then one's neighbor. Knowing the person is not for judging but for helping.

It is a foolish doctor who sets out to treat others without first looking after himself and diagnosing his own maladies and correcting his bad health habits. Such a one will rightly hear, "Doctor, cure yourself," especially concerning a disease which is evident to all. It is the part of prudence to know the character, condition, and habits of the man you are dealing with so that you can, like a conscientious doctor, prescribe the needed medicine according to conditions of time and place.¹¹⁶

2.7. Theological underpinnings of Ignatian spiritual Conversation

Ignatius began his spiritual conversation with others from his God-experience. As he moved along in his life, the experiences of God and academic learning strengthened

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

his convictions. Ignatius' spiritual conversation was theologically rooted in the understanding of God, human person and the world. The following are some of the key theological underpinnings which informed his spiritual conversation with others.

2.7.1. The Conversation of the Trinitarian God

The understanding of the Trinity is fundamental for Ignatius in his spiritual journey. He was in constant conversation with the Trinitarian God from the moment of his conversion at Loyola. However, the illumination of the Trinitarian God in Manresa became a decisive experience for him, which would remain with him all through his life.

One day while saying the Office of Our Lady on the same monastery, his understanding began to be elevated as though he saw the Most Holy Trinity in the form of three musical keys. This brought on so many tears and so much sobbing that he could not control himself...nor after eating, could he stop talking about the Most Holy Trinity using many comparisons in a great variety of and with much joy and consolation. As a result, the effect has remained with him throughout his life of feeling great devotion while praying to the Most Holy Trinity.¹¹⁷

We do not have the content of the illumination of the Trinity. Instead, he described his experience of the Trinity. While narrating various illuminations at Manresa in his *Autobiography*, he narrates first his experience of the Trinity and then the illumination regarding the creation of the world. By linking these two, Pedro Arrupe observes that it is “the infused intellectual illumination about the divine Essence and the Trinity of Persons in a generic way and, more concretely, about two of its operations *ad extra*: the creation and the Incarnation.”¹¹⁸ The creation comes from the Trinity. He, further, sheds some light by saying that the Cardoner illumination belongs to the end of the First Week and

¹¹⁷ *Autobiography*, no.28.

¹¹⁸ Pedro Arrupe, “The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 33/3 (May 2001): 9.

the beginning of the Second Week Exercises.¹¹⁹ In the contemplation on the Incarnation in the second week of the Exercises, one can see how the three Divine Persons are in conversation gazing at the world and planning for humanity's salvation. "Let us work the redemption of the human race."¹²⁰ Ignatius makes a comparison of the Divine Persons with the people on the earth engaging in conversation. The retreatant is called to listen to the conversation of the Trinity as well as the people on the earth. The comparison hinges on the 'persons' themselves, what they are saying, and what they are doing.¹²¹ For Ignatius, the creation and the Incarnation are flowing from the Trinitarian conversation and returning to the Trinity through the mediation of Christ. Soon after the illuminations at Cardoner, Ignatius moves to people, leaving behind his individualistic and introspective life. He engages in spiritual conversation, his first ministry. In other words, he found the God he was looking for and moved to people to communicate as well as to listen to the same God in the lives of the people. The Trinitarian charism of the Society, which began in Cardoner, Manresa, was confirmed in the Trinitarian vision of La Storta in 1538, wherein Ignatius and his companions were called to be collaborators in God's service.

For Ignatius, people are the reflections of the Trinitarian image of God. They, therefore, deserve respect and reverence. This comes out quite eloquently in three of his letters written in 1547, 1552 and 1556: "Behold likewise your neighbors, images of the most holy Trinity and capable of enjoying His glory whom all the world serves, members

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁰ *SpEx*, no.107.

¹²¹ David Lonsdale, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 46.

of Christ, redeemed by so much pain, opprobrium, and blood”; “They [those sent on missions] should make little account of external appearances, and look upon the creature, not as fair or attractive but as bathed in the blood of Christ, as the image of God, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and so forth;” and “In general, when you deal with the neighbor, let your eyes be averted, and try not to think of this one or that one as handsome or ugly, but rather as the image of the most holy Trinity, as a member of Christ and bathed in His blood.”¹²²

Furthermore, Ignatius’ Spiritual Journal reveals his intimate conversation with the Trinity. It contains the height of his Trinitarian mystical experience as he was deciding on the poverty of the Society in 1544-1545. Ignatius mentions the Trinity explicitly 170 times, and nearly every page refers to Ignatius’ prayers to and experiences of the “Most Holy Trinity,” the “Divine Majesty,” the triune “God,” the “Three Divine Persons,” the “Father,” the “Son,” and the “Holy Spirit.”¹²³ His intimate conversation with the Triune God was his way of knowing and discerning God’s will.

2.7.2. The Communication of the Eternal Word in the Incarnation

One of the fundamental elements of Ignatian spirituality is its Incarnational character. In the Spiritual Exercises, the Incarnation is not a static metaphysical concept explaining the mystery of the Incarnation, but it is understood as a process or dynamic movement.¹²⁴ “What the Divine Persons are doing, that is, bringing about the most holy

¹²² *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. William J. Young, 125-126, 268, 425.

¹²³ Harvey D Egan, *Ignatius Loyola the Mystic* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 68.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

Incarnation, and other such activities.”¹²⁵ The Eternal Word became flesh to dwell among the people in their life situation.¹²⁶ The Incarnate Son manifests human’s dignity and ultimate nature which consists of radical openness to God.¹²⁷ In other words, the Eternal Word enters into face-to-face dialogue with human beings in the Incarnation. It empowered humans to enter into conversation with God and one another in the process of salvation. “Here we have a Christology that starts from above, descends to the level of human being, and ascends again to the divine plane.”¹²⁸ For Ignatius, the Incarnation unites Jesus with the whole creation. He, therefore, was able to find and respond to God in others. That is why he could find, according to Jeronimo Nadal, God in all things: “In all things, actions and conversations, he used to feel and contemplate the presence of God and have a relish for spiritual things. Thus, he was a contemplative in action, which he used to explain by saying that we have to find God in all things.”¹²⁹ Finding God in all things is a worldview or vision of search and response. The Incarnation made it clear that finding God is not to leave out things but “to find God *in* things, *all* things, seeing God

¹²⁵ *SpEx*, no. 108.

¹²⁶ Ignatius uses two terms--Divine persons and Eternal Word [SpEx no.109]. The Word (*logos*) refers to one of the persons, Jesus, in the Gospel of John. According to Carlo M Martini, the Greek word *logos* could mean five meanings in the context of this gospel: 1) word, *raison d’être*, of reality; 2) creative word: God spoke, God created everything with the word; 3) revealing word: Jesus, *logos* of the Father, that is, word that reveals the Father; 4) wisdom that presides at creation (perhaps this would go better immediately after ‘creative word’), creative wisdom; 5) the personal being, the Son of God who comes among us in Jesus, takes flesh and is Jesus who reveals the Father. See Carlo M. Martini, *The Ignatian Exercises in the light of St. John*, trans. Joseph Gill (Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1981), 19. All these meanings could be attributed to Ignatius’ use of this term in this context.

¹²⁷ Pavulraj Michael, “Avatar and Incarnation: Gita Spirituality and Ignatian Spirituality at the Crossroads,” *Gregorianum*, 97, 2 (2016): 330.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 332.

¹²⁹ M. Nicolau, “What Nadal meant by *Contemplativus in actione*” *Centrum Ignatianum Spirituality* 8 (1977) 7-8 as quoted in Michael Pavulraj, “Ignatius and his Understanding of God” *Gregorianum*, 95 no 1 (2014): 140.

and seeing things in their proper relationship to God.”¹³⁰ Therefore, contemplating this mystery, the retreatants place themselves in the center of an incarnational movement. Just as Mary, who carries in her womb the Incarnate Word, goes out to meet Elizabeth, the retreatants begin a movement of incarnation in history to help, in order better to love and to serve.¹³¹ In the whole Incarnation and Nativity scenes of the Exercises, the most crucial aspect is that one should turn his attention to the persons and their words and actions. All three should be taken together, not separately.¹³² Ignatius understood that the Incarnation of Jesus sets in motion all other conversations in people’s lives. One is called to find the Incarnate Word in the lives of the people as the Word itself is active and alive amidst people.

2.7.3. The Interior and Exterior Communication of the Holy Spirit

Ignatius did not develop a theology of the Holy Spirit in his writings. He was very discreet in mentioning the name of the Holy Spirit explicitly. In the Spiritual Exercises, he is very much Christocentric. However, he was well aware of the movements of the Spirit in his heart since his experience in Loyola, especially in the process of discerning the diversity of spirits as he was recovering from his injury. Later, his mystical experiences at Manresa and La Storta reveal the presence of the Spirit in the Trinitarian experience of God. The most overwhelming presence of the Spirit could be found in his

¹³⁰ Joseph F. Conwell, *Walking in the Spirit: A Reflection on Jeronimo Nadal’s Phrase “Contemplative Likewise in Action,”* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2003), 58.

¹³¹ Emmanuel da Silva e Araujo, “Ignatian Spirituality as a Spirituality of Incarnation” *The Way*, 47/1-2 (Jan/April 2008): 75.

¹³² *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599*, 321.

short spiritual diary wherein he wrote how much the Holy Spirit pervaded his consciousness in his dialogue with each person of the Trinity. He followed the guidance of the Spirit throughout his life. “Ignatius was following the spirit, he was not running ahead of it. And yet he was being led gently, whither he did not know.”¹³³

At the end of the Fourth Week of the Exercises, Ignatius keeps the meditation on the Ascension of Our Lord in which Christ our Lord commands his Apostles to wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem before embarking on the mission.¹³⁴ For Ignatius, the Holy Spirit is the one who confirms the mission of the Apostles. “How the Son first sent the Apostles to preach in poverty, and afterwards, the Holy Spirit, giving His Spirit and the gift of tongues, confirmed them, and thus the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit all Three Persons confirmed the mission.”¹³⁵ Henceforth, the Holy Spirit was to carry forward the salvific mission of Christ in the world. In other words, Christ is laboring in the world in and through the Holy Spirit for the salvation of all by inviting others to be co-laborers in building the Kingdom of God.¹³⁶ On the one hand, the Holy Spirit, who imprints the interior law of charity and love, moves and directs the persons’ hearts with

¹³³ Jerome Nadal, “Dialogi,” no.17, in *FN* 2:251-53, as quoted in Pedro Arrupe, “The Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism,” 22.

¹³⁴ *SpEx*, no.312

¹³⁵ William Young, *The Spiritual Diary of St Ignatius* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), 16.

¹³⁶ In the gathering of the Ignatian Spirituality Group in 2009, Santiago Arzubialde emphasized the need to integrate the theology of the Incarnation with the process of return or reintegration of the created in God by means of the Spirit. He proposed five moments in the dynamic of salvation: 1) the presence and participation of the Word and the Spirit in the creational event 2) the presence of the Spirit ‘in and above’ the humanity of Jesus 3) the definitive revelation of the Trinitarian Being in the Paschal mystery 4) the Spirit, gift of the resurrected Christ, extending His mission 5) the theology of the kingdom of God which is the consummation of the world through Christ in the Spirit in the direction of the Father. See Javier Melloni, ‘The Theological Framework of Ignatian Spirituality’ *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* XL 3/2009, 40

much grace to respond to God's call, but on the other, the Spirit is actively present in the world.¹³⁷ The Spirit is therefore present both interiorly and exteriorly. Human words give shape to the inner movements of the Spirit, as God directly deals with the creature. The Spirit opened the possibility to seek and find God in all peoples, places, and times mainly to find its voice in one's own heart and others'.¹³⁸ Since God is in every creature in its essence, presence, and power, he does not exempt the creature's speech from this belief. We see God in all things: even in the true, necessary, and reverential word which reveals God.¹³⁹ That is why Ignatius could seek God in the desires and aspirations of others while conversing and dealing with them. Even dealing with a diversity of persons has to be taught by the unction of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁰

2.7.4. Jesus' Ministry of the Word

Jesus' proclamation of the salvific message to people became a fascination for Ignatius and his companions. They wanted to imitate Jesus and his Apostles in their lives, even going to Jerusalem. They saw Jesus moving about towns and villages, spreading the good news, while contemplating his mission in the Second Week of the Exercises. The imitation of Christ and his Apostles was not just mimicking but engaging people where they were in word and deed. In the contemplation on 'the Call of the King' and the mediation on the 'Two Standards,' Jesus gives a gentle invitation to labor with him and

¹³⁷ *Constitutions*, no.134.

¹³⁸ "These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" I Cor 2: 10-11

¹³⁹ Peter Hans Kolvenbach, *The Road from La Storta* (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 162.

¹⁴⁰ *Constitutions*, no.414.

participate in his glory. Though Jesus calls each one to a different mission, Ignatius has understood the preaching ministry as engaging people in concrete reality. Jesus chooses persons to walk with him in “synagogues, villages, and castles.” He sends them throughout the whole world, to spread his doctrine among people of every state and condition.¹⁴¹ When Jesus engaged himself in the mission of his Father, he preached publicly as well as engaged in conversation privately with his disciples and others like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, the disciples of Emmaus, etc. Besides, his preaching was not just empty words or monologue. He sympathetically heard people’s cries and agonies and rendered remedy; thus, his words became life-giving words. Spreading his doctrine or engaging in the ministry of the Word necessarily requires particular disposition and mannerism. One should have humility and readiness to undergo even humiliation because when one goes on the mission of the Word, all may not accept the message readily.

2.8. Conclusion

The Ignatian spiritual conversation was a novel apostolate started by Ignatius. The single goal of this ministry was to help oneself and the other in face-to-face conversation to serve God better. The whole dynamics of the spiritual conversation came out of Ignatius’ personal experience with God. His personal experience with God in Loyola and later, the mystical experience at Manresa gave him a desire to share the experience with others in order to lead others to a similar experience. The conversation led many to personal transformation in their lives. Besides, it helped many to discover the deepest

¹⁴¹ *SpEx*, no. 91, 145.

desires of their lives, particularly their vocations to serve God and others. Initially, Ignatius looked for someone to converse with at Manresa and elsewhere. However, he himself was sought after by others to be helped later. The way of proceeding in the conversation saw many vicissitudes from Manresa to Rome. In the beginning stage, the spiritual conversation was a modest way of helping a person grow in intimacy with God. Later it became an instrument in discerning vocations and other apostolates.

The first companions of the Society of Jesus used spiritual conversation as a way of discerning God's will collectively as they made major decisions in their lives. The practice of conversation took place both in charismatic and structured ways among the people. Though the conversation did not find a place in the list of apostolates among the formal documents of the Society of Jesus, it was widely carried out by the first and subsequent generations of Jesuits. It was not only one apostolate but also extended to all other apostolates of the word of God, like a confession, public preaching, works of mercy, etc. However, Ignatius and other Jesuits gave many instructions and guidelines for dealing with people in which conversation was an integral part. The guidelines were not restrictive or normative because the nature of spiritual conversation focused on persons and context. Accordingly, the practice was flexible. Most importantly, the spiritual conversation included people from all walks of life in the search for God's will in their lives.

Chapter Three: A Spiritual Conversation Paradigm for Discerning Ongoing Apostolate

3.0. Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis, we saw how the first Patna Jesuit missionaries began their mission through spiritual conversation and discerned new apostolates amidst the people in their concrete reality. They consistently associated with ordinary people, particularly the low caste groups at the margins of the society. Spiritual conversation began at the grassroots level. They listened to their aspirations and dreams and discerned God's will based on those conversations. In the second chapter, we saw that Ignatius began spiritual conversation as an apostolate to help others. Later, when Ignatius and his companions were faced with the question of 'What ought I to do?' at different stages of their life and mission, the spiritual conversation became a means to discern God's will collectively. The Jesuit tradition shows that spiritual conversation, discernment, and mission form one whole in the Jesuits' life and mission. However, today in the context of Bihar, there are fewer the Jesuits or Church leaders at large engaging in conversation with the people in their concrete life situations in order to inform discernment about new apostolates. To complicate matters, there is a lack of genuine desire among the church leaders to engage in conversation with the people in the process of apostolic discernment. So, drawing on the rich Jesuit tradition and some current spiritual conversation practices, I offer in this chapter a spiritual conversation paradigm as a resource for the Patna Jesuits to reconnect and discern apostolates with the people according to Jesuits' charism.

Given the historical background of Bihar, listening, and speaking are integral to the ethos of the people of Bihar.¹ Such an ethos resonates with the components of spiritual conversation, such as intentional speaking and active listening. Here the majority of the people still give utmost importance to face-to-face personal conversation and dialogue. There is, therefore, a need for the Jesuits to renew and to reimagine the time-tested tool, spiritual conversation, which will have cultural receptivity to the practice, but also its benefits can extend beyond Jesuit ministries as an effective way to engage people. On the other hand, poverty, illiteracy, migration, unemployment, gender inequality, a plurality of religious practices, rigid caste, and patriarchal family systems are present realities of Bihar. These could pose a significant challenge for the Jesuits to discern the right apostolate because all of them are pressing issues.

Clearly, the Jesuits as one body are committed to the mission of Christ through the people of Bihar. The strength of the Patna province is that the Jesuits are from different parts of India—Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Jharkhand, Bihar, Goa, etc. Each one brings his own wealth of cultural experiences, creativity and approaches to mission. The variety in cultural background enriches one another as they work together

¹ For instance, Buddha and his ardent follower, Emperor Ashoka, engaged people in preaching, conversation, and discourses and moved about Bihar to spread the new religion. After his enlightenment Buddha was busy wandering for forty- five years through this region preaching his dharma or "Law." They believed in mass contact—in meeting people of the countryside personally. Secondly, in 1917 Gandhi began his first freedom movement in West Champaran, north of Patna, where he wanted to free indentured laborers in the indigo plantation employed by the British. Indigo plantation subjected laborers to inhuman conditions without proper wages and living conditions. Gandhi stayed with people and listened to their stories, dreams, and aspirations. He took the initiative to release them from the bonded labor by raising voice against the British. It is here that mass movement for the freedom of India began concretely. See Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher, *Spread of Buddhism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3; R R Diwarkar, *Bihar through the Ages*, (Calcutta: Orient Longman Private Ltd, 1958), 195-197; Avanindra Kumar Jha, *Studies in the History of Modern Bihar*, (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 2008), 39-41.

by adapting to the local culture. People easily receive the Jesuits into their community because they transcend any caste affiliation. Besides, there is a zeal to go to the poor particularly to work among the Dalits irrespective of one's cultural background. The variety of social ministries is an eloquent witness to this. At the same time, there is a need to give concrete shape to the richness in the diversity of the Jesuits and their zeal.

Considering the complex nature of Bihar society and various issues and the plurality of the Patna Jesuits, spiritual conversation still offers a way forward in discerning new apostolates and collaborating with others. This model proposes that the Jesuits begin spiritual conversation at the grassroots level, as the first missionaries did, with the people, particularly villagers, leading to discernment at various levels to choose apostolates. It will show the discernment always rooted in conversation between people and the Jesuits. In the first part of this spiritual conversation model, I present: a) the Jesuits' understanding of mission, b) the essential dispositions needed for the Jesuits for conversation, and c) guidelines for the discernment of spirits in spiritual conversation. In the second part of the spiritual conversation model, I show the step by step procedure for conversing and discerning apostolates amidst people.

3.1. Ignatius' Conversational Vision of God, Human Person, and the World

For Jesuits and others to engage in spiritual conversation, they should be aware of Ignatius' vision of God, the human person, and the world. Ignatian mysticism holds that the Trinitarian God is in constant conversation among themselves and with the world. The Eternal Word became flesh in Jesus in the concrete reality of human life because God saw the world as good. He enabled humanity to engage in conversation with one another as brothers and sisters even while discerning God's will. The Risen Lord is still at work in all peoples and cultures through the power of the Holy Spirit. He continues his

salvific work in the world as he gently invites the people of goodwill to be his collaborators through conversation and discernment. “Because God is involved in all of our life and thus God’s call precedes us even in the most ‘secular’ activities, we can expect that God is already at work in all our systems, structures, and institutions long before we become part of them. We believe that God has a plan for us, society, and the world. It is our call first as humans and then as Christians to join God’s work in the world...”² The conversation between God, humans, and the world continues even now. The General Congregation 34 describes God and the world dynamics that “both in our personal lives of faith and our ministries, it is never a question of choosing either God *or* the world; rather, it is always God *in* the world, laboring to bring it to perfection so that the world comes, finally, to be fully *in* God.”³

The God of Ignatius is laboring now in the joys and sorrows, dreams and aspirations, hopes and expectations of the people of Bihar in their cultural milieu today. Spiritual conversation is a way to listen and respond to God’s call as God reveals Godself in their personal and socio-economic, political, and cultural experiences. In order to perceive God’s action in the lives of the people of Bihar, the Jesuits need to fully immerse themselves into their life. Learning local languages, lifestyle and customs orients the Jesuits towards entering into people’s world thus paving way for conversation and attentively listening to the whispering of the Spirit.

² Elizabeth Liebert, *The Soul of Discernment: A Spiritual Practice for Communities and Institutions*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 40.

³ GC 34, D.4, no.86.

3.2. The Jesuits' Understanding of Mission Today

Jesuits' understanding of their mission today flows from the mystical visions of Ignatius at the Cardoner River and in La Storta. He understood in those visions his call to serve God through others. His desire to serve God began in the form of conversation with others. The dynamics of conversation and service, therefore, are inseparable. It is clearly articulated in the Constitutions that the end of the Society of Jesus is the salvation and perfection of the members' own souls and to labor strenuously giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbor.⁴ One's own salvation is linked directly to others' salvation. In the process of aiding in the salvation of others, the first Jesuits discerned the will of God through constant engagement with people and chose ministries, which would bring greater praise and glory to God.⁵ A series of conversations between Jesuits and people was a way of proceeding in the mission. Even the last General Congregation 36, which articulates present-day Jesuit mission as reconciliation and justice, is the result of personal prayer and conversation in Jesuit communities and works, as well as conversation with the people with whom the Jesuits share the mission.⁶ Helping souls is understood by the Church and the Society of Jesus as collaborating with the Crucified and Risen Lord's labor in building the Kingdom of God in justice, peace,

⁴ John W. Padberg, ed., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 24. Hereafter, this source will be quoted as *Constitutions* with the paragraph number. *Constitutions*, no.3.

⁵ For instance, the nuances in the Formula 1550 itself bears witness to the fact that Ignatius had to expand the scope of the ministries among the people, which prefigured in the Formula 1540. The Jesuits' experiences in the mission brought about this change. The ministries of reconciling the estranged, assisting, and serving those who were in the prisons and hospitals were added after ten years of direct engagement with people in the mission places. See *Constitutions*, Formula, no.1

⁶ Arturo Sosa, "Our life is mission, mission is our life," *Letter to the whole Society*, 2017/8, 1.

joy, love, and reconciliation. In other words, the mission is understood to be how we work together as one people of God.

On 19 February 2019, Fr. Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, promulgated four universal apostolic preferences for the world-wide Jesuits for the next ten years in line with the mission of the Church. They are: a) To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment; b) To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice; c) To accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future; and d) To collaborate in the care of our Common Home.⁷ Some thought that they are apostolates to be carried out in the mission places. But in another letter regarding the assimilation and implementation of the preferences, Fr. Sosa clarifies the meaning of the preferences. He says, “The preferences provide a spiritual path. They do not seek merely to establish static apostolic ends or actions but, rather, they are a *dynamic means* for us to continue to be led by the Spirit of renewal . . . [they] are orientations, not priorities. A priority is something that is regarded as more important than others; a preference is an orientation, a signpost, a call. Preferences are not just about doing but about being; they involve our entire life.”⁸ The preferences orient one to become closer to people and listen

⁷ Arturo Sosa, “Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019-2029” to the whole Society, 2019/06, 1.

⁸ Arturo Sosa, “Assimilating and implementing the Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019-2029” to all Major Superiors, 2019/13, 1. Fr. Arturo Sosa reiterated the same point in his recent address to the Jesuits of South Asian Conference: “The aim is to unleash a process of apostolic revitalization and creativity that makes us better servants of reconciliation and justice. They are a mission from the Holy Father. The UAPs [Universal Apostolic Preferences] are not different apostolates to be done, they are not a “to-do list”... They are meant to be constitutive and integral dimensions of every apostolate of every Jesuit. Every apostolate that is done must have all these 4 Preferences embedded and integrated in them.” Fr. General’s talk to the JCSA, Kathmandu, 26 February, 2020, 3.

to their cries in their local context, thus becoming closer to Christ and listening to Him to act in a particular way.⁹ The apostolic preferences give great scope for creativity and sensitivity to local context in the process of execution. When a Jesuit enters into a spiritual conversation with other Jesuits or with ordinary people, he needs to hear the Spirit's voice in the light of these preferences. At the same time, it is not to say that the Spirit will not guide beyond these preferences. The Spirit, however, ordinarily speaks in and through the contexts of particular people, places and cultures. The Jesuit needs to have an attentive ear to listen to the Spirit's call. So, to hear the Spirit's call most deeply requires that spiritual conversation becomes a habitual way of interacting with people in mission.¹⁰

3.3. Some Crucial Dispositions for the Spiritual Conversation

Ignatius focused much of his attention on some of the dispositions required for entering into prayer. Those dispositions did not apply only to prayer but were carried forward in real-life as well in relationship and conversation with others. The practice of spiritual conversation by the first companions points out some essential dispositions they cultivated before and during spiritual conversation. These dispositions seemed to have made their spiritual conversations effective and fruitful in their mission. The following dispositions in the way of proceeding in spiritual conversation emerged from their practice. Today the Patna Jesuits need to embrace them in order to enter into fruitful conversation with a wide variety of people in their living conditions. The following are

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Arturo Sosa, "Our life is mission, mission is our life," 3.

the essential dispositions as they approach conversation with the people that will ultimately help to effective and fruitful discernment of future apostolates.

3.3.1. Personal Experience and Familiarity with God

Personal experience with God is fundamental to Ignatian spiritual conversation. Ignatius did not follow any theory about knowing God. When he discovered God's action in his heart, he earnestly sought after and grew in it over the years. He noticed God at work in his own experiences and the daily events of others. His language expressed his experience; his conversation was an effort to translate the experience into words.¹¹ In observing and reflecting on his own inner movements, he could discern God's call for action. During the deliberations among the first companions in Rome, they continued the practice of praying, reflecting and conversing. They first commended the matter to God for light and inspiration. Then they brought their personal experiences in prayer to conversation seeking God's will together. The conversation among them was the result of conversational experiences with God. The more familiar they became with the knowledge of God at the experiential level, the more they could articulate God's will for themselves.

The experience with God provides new knowledge to the person which Ignatius calls 'interior knowledge.' It is the felt knowledge that involves the affections; it belongs to the 'interior' (or heart) of the person knowing, and it penetrates beyond the immediately obvious to the 'inner' mystery of the meaning of the person or truth known.¹² Prayer helps people move beyond what they are familiar with. The interior

¹¹ Dario Restrepo, " 'Spiritual Conversation' according to St. Ignatius of Loyola," trans. by Philip J. Dougherty, *Communications*, no.6 (February 1976): 4.

¹² Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998), 4.

knowledge is gained by meditating and contemplating the life of Jesus, as shown in the gospels. “Putting oneself in the presence of God will frequently consist of putting oneself in the presence of the holy humanity of Jesus in whom dwells all the fullness of divinity.”¹³ Since Ignatius believed in the personal communication of God to each individual, he respected each one’s experience of God in any given matter. All the methods of prayer in the Exercises clearly show that they are just a means to position oneself in such a way as to facilitate a personal experience with God through which one dialogically discovers one’s own desire as well as God’s desire before venturing into dialoguing with others. When a Jesuit in Bihar engages in a conversation with, say, a high or low caste person or a Hindu or a Muslim, he should be aware that the interior knowledge of God is already present in their own experiences. The interior knowledge is embedded in their affective experience. The Jesuits’ personal experience and familiarity with God enlightens them more and more to recognize the interior knowledge in others in conversation.

3.3.2. A Sincere Desire to know the Will of God

Ignatius highly valued desire because he recognized that God worked in and through human desires. Ignatius came to understand the force of desire because he saw in it a kind of reflected light from the eternal action of the divine spirit and the constant presence of God.¹⁴ He also came to understand that every person has a core desire implanted by God to live a life that God intended for him/her. As we examine Ignatius’

¹³ Alexandre Brou, *Ignatian Methods of Prayer*, trans. William J. Young (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1949), 50.

¹⁴ Ignacio Iparraguirre, “The ever youthful and dynamic character of Ignatian Spirituality,” trans. Aloysius J. Owen, *Communications*, no.1 (November 1974): 7.

and the first companions' practice of conversation, we see that they always began by first searching for God's will as revealed in their deepest desires. When they discovered God's will in their desires, they then set out with great zeal to help people discover their core desires to serve God.

Though there are many desires competing in human life, there is a core desire which transcends all others and gives meaning to life. We find the ultimate will of God for one's life and actions in that core desire. One must consciously search one's own soul, but at the same time, we need others' help to articulate what we really want. It is not easy to know either our own deep desire or the deepest desires of others. Such knowledge unfolds gradually in the process of a close relationship and familiar conversations. As the founding fathers of the Society of Jesus shared their own leanings and inclinations, their personal and superficial interests gave way to choosing God's will. "Desire comes into its own as the condition for discerning what our choices are and how to choose authentically."¹⁵

Therefore, the whole point of Jesuits' listening is to help the ordinary villagers articulate their deep desires. For instance, for a low caste man in Bihar, the deepest desire could be to rise in life from the caste oppression. Or a woman's deepest desire could be for equal treatment in a patriarchal society. In addition, among the Jesuits, there should be a desire to help people know their own desires in order to discern apostolates in accordance with God's will.

¹⁵ Philip Sheldrake, "Desire" in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 233.

3.3.3. Indifference and Inner Freedom

Indifference is pivotal in the Ignatian way of making choices. It is not apathy or distancing oneself from any involvement. The proper understanding of spiritual indifference is that it is preparatory to a choice to live a life that God wants.¹⁶ It involves certain interior balance, equilibrium, and freedom to choose something more for God's glory and service of the other than for ourselves. In other words, it is a readiness to hear a new and fresh voice from God in the discernment process. "Indifference should also be thought of in a positive way; and regarded positively it is an affective space within which the movements of the Spirit can be sensed and things seen in relation to the signs of God's will, an affective silence making possible an unconditional listening."¹⁷ Indifference is linked with inner freedom to choose the better for God's service. When a person becomes aware of fear, ambition, anger, insecurity, prejudice, bias, and self-serving preoccupations, which would influence one's choices, one becomes more and more interiorly free to choose. Many things, like moods and the environment, may influence one's freedom. Therefore, indifference is necessary to look at things objectively. "Indifference can demand the courage to be counter-cultural, especially when there is pressure to conform, to fit in, and to comply, to be friends with the world of ambition and competition."¹⁸ Indifference is crucial in the individual and communal conversation while seeking to do God's will because it helps the member to be open to welcome all dialogue partners' words without any inordinate attachments. It does not

¹⁶ Howard Gray, "Indifference," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 367.

¹⁷ Michael Ivens, 31.

¹⁸ Howard Gray, "Indifference," 368.

mean we lack respect for our own gifts and preferences, but it means that our love of neighbor is based on our transcendent love of God.¹⁹ Indifference and inner freedom allows us to choose God's will truly and not our own.

3.3.4. Humility and Spiritual Edification

In Christian spirituality, humility has gone through various nuances in practice. For Ignatius, the practice of humility has to be modeled on Christ, who refused to cling to divine status in order to become human. Jesus' humility was expressed in his reverence for and patience with others, his treatment of persons around him. He showed his humility in service to the poor, washing the feet of his disciples and forgiving and reconciling even enemies.²⁰ Ignatius saw humility in dynamic action. His use of the phrase 'loving humility' (*humildad amorosa*) in his *Spiritual Diary* echoes the fact that humility is shown in loving action.²¹ In the context of spiritual conversation, humility would mean, as shown in practice above, to show respect and reverence for the person in front of us, irrespective of age, status, religion, gender, and culture. Pride and language eloquence does not need an overpowering hand to make someone feel very small. Humility is being mindful of even the feeble voice of the persons struggling to articulate their experiences during dialogue. In the Exercises, Ignatius explicitly describes growing

¹⁹ Robert E. Doud, "Ignatian Indifference and Today's Spirituality," *The Way*, 52/4 (October 2013): 95.

²⁰ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, "Humility," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 349.

²¹ George E. Ganss, trans. and ed., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 4th Indian edition (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2011), 175. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* will be cited in abbreviated form as *SpEx* with the paragraph number.

in humility as divesting oneself of self-love, self-will and self-interests.²² He often associates humility with spiritual edification in the *Constitutions* and says that edification is an expression of inner disposition in dealing with others.

All should take special care to guard with great diligence the gates of their senses (especially the eyes, ears, and tongue) from all disorder, to preserve themselves in peace and true humility of their souls, and to show this by their silence when it should be kept and, when they must speak, by the discretion and edification of their words, the modesty of their countenance, the maturity of their walk, and all their movements, without giving any sign of impatience or pride. In all things, they should try and desire to give the advantage to the others, esteeming them all in their hearts as if they were their superiors [Phil. 2:3] and showing outwardly, in an unassuming and simple religious manner, the respect and reverence appropriate to each one's state, so that by consideration of one another they may thus grow in devotion and praise God our Lord, whom each one should strive to recognize in the other as in his image.²³

These sentences show how the Jesuits have to present themselves to people. The external manner of showing respect and reverence for the person in front of them should reveal the true humility of heart. Concretely for the Jesuits' context in Bihar, humility would mean that the Jesuits go regularly visiting and exploring new people and families in villages. It is moving out of one's comfort zone of institutions to the dust and squalor of the villages where the majority of people, particularly the poor, live. Humility is readiness to sit and talk with the low caste people who often live sordid living conditions and are not sophisticated in expressing themselves. Humility is also a willingness to adapt oneself to the lives of the people.

²² *SpEx*, no.189.

²³ *Constitutions*, no. 250.

3.3.5. The Purity of Intention and Openness to the Holy Spirit

The purity of intention, or right intention, is a key term in all endeavors in Ignatian spirituality. One has to ask the grace in prayer that all intentions, actions, and operations should be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine Majesty.²⁴ While making major decisions, Ignatius recommends that “the eye of our intention ought to be simple, only looking at what we are created for, namely, the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of our soul.” He further clarifies that one should not bring the end, that is serving God, to the means, but the means to the end.²⁵ The purity of intention allows the interlocutors to engage in radical openness to the Spirit in the search for God’s truth for the good of the individual and the community.

In spiritual conversation, right intention is to accept other’s words as the revelation of the Spirit without condemning them because the same Spirit can take different roads, moving one toward this course, and others toward an opposite one.²⁶ However, the presuppositions in the Exercises will help the Jesuits to interpret others’ words and even correct wrong understanding: “If one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love.”²⁷ For instance, it can happen in conversation with high caste men that

²⁴ *SpEx.* no.46. Cf. *Constitutions*, no. 288: “All should strive to keep their intention right, not only in regard to their state of life but also in all particular details, in which they should always aim at serving and pleasing the Divine Goodness for its own sake and because of the incomparable love and benefits with which he has anticipated us rather than for fear of punishments or hope of rewards, although they ought to draw help from these also.”

²⁵ *Ibid*, no. 169

²⁶ Dario Restrepo, “Spiritual Conversation According to St. Ignatius of Loyola,” 18.

²⁷ *SpEx*, no. 22.

they speak derogatorily against the low caste groups and women due to caste and gender prejudice. In such a situation, the Jesuit has to correct the other person's view because his knowledge of this presupposition informs his conscience that that all are created by God with equal dignity and respect. Purity of intention is a movement from self-centeredness to God-centeredness and other-centeredness.

3.3.6. Trust in God and Conversation Partner

In a multiple religious, cultural, and political context of Bihar, prejudices and biases often come along with the persons who interact in day to day life. Yet, spiritual conversation calls for trust in one another and the guidance of the Spirit. The Jesuits should not forget that spiritual conversation involves God's grace more than a learned process and skills. Those who are engaged in dialogue have to surrender themselves to the Spirit, who is the authentic teacher of pluralistic and universal conversation.²⁸ Only the prudence, unction, and discretion through which the Spirit communicates could lead to a worthwhile conversation; this presupposes profound respect for its direction in oneself and others. "Out of respect for our freedom, God is not in the habit of crushing us or violently imposing himself on us. On his part, there is a call, and on our part, there is the trust of faith. Every interpersonal conversation is based on faith and trust in the other, and God wishes this to be so between himself and us too."²⁹ Only trust in God and others can eliminate fear, prejudice, and biases in conversations among the individuals, thus

²⁸ Restrepo, 15.

²⁹ Peter Hans Kolvenbach, *The Road from La Storta* (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), 172.

enabling the members in conversation to listen to the Spirit's voice truly. It makes one transcend oneself to seek 'more' for God.

3.4. Guidelines for the Discernment of Spirits in Spiritual Conversation

Spiritual conversation and discernment go hand in hand. Spiritual conversation involves listening to and speaking about one's affective experiences. They are to be perceived and interpreted correctly regarding whether they arise from the good spirit or evil spirit. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius gives rules for discernment of the spirits. "The rules aid us toward perceiving and then understanding, at least to some extent, the various motions which are caused in the soul: the good motions that they may be received and the bad that they may be rejected."³⁰ Ignatius' rules are concerned with inner, private events, the movements in the individual discerner's own mind and heart prior to even his/her overt acts which flow from these inner movements.³¹ The motions could be acts of intellect such as thoughts, lines of reasoning, and imaginations; or of the will such as love, hate, desire, fear and so on; or of affective feelings, impulses, inclinations, or urges such as peace, warmth, coldness, consolation, desolation, etc. These could originate from ourselves under some control of our free will or from a good spirit or from an evil spirit.³² These motions could arise spontaneously in the ordinary as well as in the intense spiritual conversation in the process of discernment. One has to be aware of the directions of these movements that we experience within ourselves but also in others during the

³⁰ *SpEx*, no.313.

³¹ Jules J. Toner, *A Commentary on Saint Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits*, (St. Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1982), 11.

³² George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 191.

conversation. Moreover, one has to notice the origin of the inner movements expressed in words so that superficiality or eloquence does not hide the inner stirrings of the Spirit. It can also be helpful for the Jesuit in the conversation to notice the beginning, middle and end of the conversation to confirm that it has been oriented towards God's greater service and the good of the neighbor.

3.5. A Spiritual Conversation Model for the Jesuits in Bihar

This section will show that the starting point of discerning ministries will always be in conversation with local people. This conversation will extend from first contact through communal discernment wherein the local people are full participants in the process of generating possible apostolic priorities. In the communal discernment step that starts with forming small groups, the representatives from the people will join the group of discerning Jesuits for the process before sending the apostolic priorities to competent authorities for decision and execution. In order to carry out the process of exploring new apostolic possibilities, some Jesuits could ideally be set apart for this task since this process takes time and energy. The following steps gradually build a conversation-based discernment of apostolic priorities in which the people's needs, desires and aspirations form the foundation. In the light of the present universal apostolic preferences which give a specific orientation or a path, the paradigm envisions spiritual conversation between the Jesuits and the socially and economically marginalized groups in Bihar. The focused groups will be the Dalits because their voice is not often heard, and their needs and desires are different from other caste groups and communities due to historical reasons.

These marginalized groups would mean the Dalit groups other than those with whom the Jesuits are working now.³³

3.5.1. The Collection of Data

Before venturing into conversation, the Jesuits need to study about the people with whom they are going to converse. The data should consist of their socio-economic status, their history, their cultural and religious practices. The data could be gathered from various disciplines of studies. However, the mere data collection of facts and figures from different disciplines is not sufficient to enter into the discernment process. They give preliminary information and guidance for the Jesuits to focus on a particular group of people in addition to background information to understand people. In order to discern God's will much more authentically, the collected data has to be filled in with the data of people's experiences through personal dialogue. New apostolates cannot be undertaken merely through the analysis of the facts and figures because various disciplines put out the findings to suit their goals. In other words, the data from various academic disciplines and the experiences shared by people have to be taken together to make the apostolic discernment much more authentic to people.

3.5.2. Associating with People—the Presence

A respectful association with people comes from the belief that the Risen Christ, far from being absent from the world's history, has begun a new presence in the Spirit, drawing all men and women from a world broken by its sins into his liberty, justice, and

³³ There are twenty-three Dalit caste groups in the government list but so far the Jesuits have been working with only five caste groups namely *Ravidasi (Chamar)*, *Paswan/Pasi*, *Musahar*, *Dusadh*, and *Dom*.

reconciliation.³⁴ God labors and works for humanity in all the creatures on the face of the earth.³⁵ Ignatius and his companions' presence to one another as friends in the Lord and their living close to the lives of the ordinary people, particularly the poor, is a reflection of their belief in the presence of God in others. Spiritual conversation becomes quite easy where there is familiarity among the persons. The first missionaries of the Patna province inserted themselves into the lives of the people. On the one hand, their presence among the poor and their living in the mud houses bore witness to their mission, but on the other, they made themselves easily accessible to people to converse in their context. Their living among the people was a 'participation in life.'³⁶ Jesuits are both 'men for others' and 'men with others.'³⁷ This way of proceeding invites each Jesuit to turn his listening heart to learn from others the presence of God in real-life situations. In other words, the daily dealing with people helps the Jesuits to enter into the other persons' world and see the reality from their perspective. At the same time, it gives a chance for people to learn about the intention and motivations of the Jesuits as well. The constant presence among the people helps both to know if and when they are disposed to discern God's will collectively.

Finding God in all things is a loving response in deeds by turning our whole self to the persons in front of us, including being present physically to the other. Since Bihar

³⁴ GC 34, D.2, no.5.

³⁵ *SpEx*, no.236.

³⁶ Joseph Velamkunnel, "Patna: A Mission Moulded from Mud Houses" in *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, ed. Augustine Kanjamala (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1996), 204-205.

³⁷ GC 34, D.13, no.4

consists of multiple castes and religious people, regular association is necessary to dispel doubts and to create an atmosphere of openness and acceptance among the low caste groups. In order to enter into the world of the Dalits, it will demand that the Jesuits to stay among them at least some time. The familiar conversation would bridge the gap in the relationship and bring about needed trust and confidence to share their core desires, dreams, and aspirations to the Jesuits. For instance, when any new person enters the Dalit hamlets, they become very cautious because of historical reasons. The high caste groups and political leaders have taken advantage of them rather than helping them and empowering them over the centuries. So, without first associating and conversing with these people lovingly, the Jesuits cannot win their confidence and give special attention to the voices and experiences which are marginalized in the society. Besides, they do not often express directly and verbally their aspirations; thus, their lives go unnoticed.

3.5.3. Active Listening to the Private Stories of the People

When a Jesuit becomes sufficiently familiar with the people through regular contacts, the other person usually narrates his/her day to day struggles and joys of life. The Jesuit cannot expect that the ordinary people would be talking about God directly or prayer experiences in clear terms very often. The philosophical ideas and religious beliefs are inseparably connected to people's worldview in India. Their stories would necessarily include their God-experiences though sometimes their sharing may seem to have nothing to do with the 'spiritual.' So, active listening is paramount in this context. It is a listening that surpasses ideas and words and focuses on the whole person and the inner movements. Fr. R.C. Chacko summarizes what active listening involves in these terms:

Active listening means welcoming non-judgmentally whatever the person says, no matter what you think about what is being said, or what you think about the

person. Each person knows best his or her own experience... You are listening to a person's experience that is unique and precious. Active listening means allowing oneself to be affected by the other. Active listening is demanding, for it requires humility, openness, patience, and involvement. It means listening to the other now as he or she is speaking, and not concentrating on what one will say next. Active listening also requires freedom to know, to encounter; a spiritual poverty that I do not have the answers for everything; I need others; God speaks to me through others.³⁸

In the process of listening, both the speaker and the listener become vulnerable. When a Dalit shares his/her life struggles, the immediate impulse of the Jesuit could be trying to solve the problems or fix the issues of the speaker. But the listening itself is a discernment process because the essence of discernment is not about making decisions or about resolving questions or problems. "It [Discernment] is fundamentally a way of being. It is about seeing how the Spirit is at work in our lives and our world. It is about learning how to feel where the Spirit is moving and to learn how to follow that direction."³⁹ As the Jesuits listen actively, they notice the inner movements in themselves and others. Noticing is the foundation of all discernment; a noting heart is a discerning heart.⁴⁰ They need to notice, especially those experiences that reveal the speaker's deep quest and inclination towards God and the Kingdom's values or those that take one away from God.

³⁸ R. C. Chacko, "Insights into the Process of Discernment in Common Steps for Spiritual Conversation" in *Re-orienting for Greater Apostolic Effectiveness*, (Jesuit Conference of South Asia (JCSA), 2018) 121.

³⁹ Office of the General Curia of the Society of Jesus, "*Discernment—A Way of Life*," accessed on 12 March 2020, <https://www.ignatianresources.org/home/discernment-in-common>.

⁴⁰ Charles Reutemann, "On Becoming a Discerning Person through Spiritual Direction," *Review for Religious* 51, no.1 (January-February, 1992): 48.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning, though it is a bit long, what Pope Francis says about three kinds of sensitivity in listening to others. They are intimately connected with Ignatius' advice on dealing or conversing with others.

The first kind of sensitivity is directed to the individual. It is a matter of listening to someone who is sharing his [her] very self in what he[she] says...The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired, or bored...Attentive and selfless listening is a sign of our respect for others, whatever their ideas or their choices in life. The second kind of sensitivity is marked by discernment. It tries to grasp precisely where grace or temptation is present, for sometimes the things that flit across our minds are mere temptations that can distract us from our true path. I need to ask myself what it is that the other person is trying to tell me, what they want me to realize is happening in their lives. Asking such questions helps me appreciate their thinking and the effects it has on their emotions. This kind of listening seeks to discern the salutary promptings of the good Spirit who proposes to us the Lord's truth, but also the traps laid by the evil spirit – his empty words and promises. The third kind of sensitivity is the ability to perceive what is driving the other person. This calls for a deeper kind of listening, one able to discern the direction in which that person truly wants to move. Apart from what they are feeling or thinking right now, and whatever has happened up to this point in their lives, the real issue is what they would like to be. This may demand that they look not to their own superficial wishes and desires, but rather to what is most pleasing to the Lord, to his plans for their life. Furthermore, that is seen in a deeper inclination of the heart, beyond the surface level of their likes and feelings. This kind of listening seeks to discern their ultimate intention, the intention that definitively decides the meaning of their life.⁴¹

The three sensitivities are crucial for the Jesuits when they listen to the experience of the Dalits which is unique in the caste social structure. Often people do not want to listen to them. There is also an assumption among some of the Church leaders that if they enter into conversation with them, the people just keep on asking favors. But the Dalits are looking first for acceptance as human beings and want to be heard. At the same time, they

⁴¹ Pope Francis, "Christus Vivit" Post synodal apostolic exhortation to young people and to the entire people of God. nos. 292-294, accessed on 13 March 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html.

want to share what they want in their life once they get sufficient confidence in the listener. The Jesuits need to perceive what each one wants ultimately in life and what he/she considers vital for him/her. In other words, the Jesuits should perceive through active listening what God is revealing through those people. What the people think important and share genuinely becomes the data for further discernment of apostolates.

3.5.4. Attentiveness to the Socio-Economic-Cultural Background in Listening

Human lives are shaped in a particular culture. Our life stories, too, are a part of larger stories of people around us. The cultural, personal, communal, familial, and faith stories are interwoven seamlessly. When people share some significant life events, they are closely linked with Bihar cultural experiences. While talking about their experiences, the Dalits use some metaphors, symbolic references and so on, which emerge spontaneously from their lived experience. “In spiritual conversation, personal stories are shared, and personal ‘narrative’ is analyzed within a social and religious context.”⁴² It is not about analyzing their cultural symbols with intellectual precision; instead, one has to be aware of them so as not to lose the meaning and message of one who is sharing life experiences. For instance, when the Dalits shared their life experiences with the missionaries, their stories were bound up with their caste oppression in a rigid caste structure. The missionaries tried to listen to their stories amidst the oppressive caste intricacies. They perceived God’s call to uplift them from social oppression. So, one tries to find God in people’s stories, which are embedded in their socio-cultural life, and to

⁴² Luz Marina Diaz, “Spiritual Conversation as the Practice of Revelation,” *The Way*, 55/2 (April 2016): 47.

identify what God is saying in and through their cultural milieu because God reveals Godself in peoples' personal story that is part and parcel of a larger history.

3.5.5. Forming Small Conversational Groups among the People to collect Voices for Apostolic Discernment

After having listened to people individually by staying some time or visiting regularly, the Jesuit will form a small group at the village level consisting of representatives from the people. The Jesuit would be the facilitator of the group's conversation. Fr. Arturo Sosa's advice is essential to select the representatives to form the group: "It is necessary to establish clearly *which person* will participate in the process of discernment, *why* they participate, and *under what conditions* they do so. The matter about which the *election* is to be made will determine who is invited to participate in the process. This means that each participant should know precisely and should freely accept both the reasons for which he/she forms part of the group that is discerning and conditions under which he/she does so."⁴³

Since people in the villages are from different castes, temperaments, education qualifications and religious practices, the Jesuits have to select some representatives carefully to form the small conversation group from their experiential knowledge of listening to people. The Jesuits should know the dispositions of the people being selected because the representatives will continue to be part of the discerning group in the local Jesuit communities. However, the representatives should be selected from different age groups, gender, expertise, and social standing to have a plurality of voices and experiences. They should reflect people's real aspirations authentically. On the other

⁴³ Arturo Sosa, "On Discernment in Common" to the whole Society (27 September 2017), 2.

hand, the representatives should have sufficient inner freedom, ability to reflect and articulate the experiences, maturity, and willingness to rise above personal interests and to participate in intentional speaking and active listening.

At the outset, the elements of spiritual conversation, especially *active listening* and *intentional speaking*, are explained to the participants. Alternatively, a kind of orientation must be given in this regard. Some of the above dispositions for the Jesuits for the spiritual conversation could be explained to all the participants, particularly concerning respect for the person and words, openness to others' views to seek the truth, and awareness of one's own inner movements during the process of the conversation. Prayers, Examen, and awareness exercises would be a great help to get in touch with one's inner freedom. Then the Jesuit could highlight to the group the data that he gathered from listening to people. For example, the Jesuit has gathered from his active listening individually to the persons that most of the Dalits expressed their desire to educate their children to live a dignified life. Thus they want school ministry. Some others expressed legal aid to secure the government benefits which have been denied to them. The Jesuit presents these two issues or any other to the group for conversation. After some individual reflection, each one shares with the group what one reflected on the topic.

Intentional speaking is crucial. Intentional speaking means to express one's experiences, feelings, and thoughts, sharing the truth as one sees or experiences it. It also means taking responsibility not only for what one says but also for what one feels.⁴⁴ There is no discussion or debate or argument. While speaking, one is neither trying to

⁴⁴ R. C. Chacko, 120

win over the other person with hidden motive nor giving up one's position due to the other person's persuasiveness. All are called to listen to themselves as they listen to each other. Indifference and inner freedom are required from all the participants. Everyone is given a chance to speak and listen to one another. While actively listening to others, the most crucial aspect is that the group recognizes the movement of the Spirit among them and the Spirit's direction to choose the issues for the good of all people. Whatever option the group chooses should reflect the desires and aspirations of the group authentically and the Gospel values of justice, equality, and love. The group could determine spontaneously the most important issues, which would affect their lives and be for the greater glory of God, to be taken for further discernment. If there is no sufficient consensus among the group members, the Jesuit could choose one of the options for further discernment based on Ignatius' advice: "Among other works, he should prefer those which are better—that is, the spiritual over the corporal, the more urgent over the less urgent, the universal over the particular, the permanent and lasting over those that do not last, etc.—in cases where he cannot do both. He should also remember that it is not enough to get a good and religious work started: he must as far as possible complete it and put it on a permanent footing."⁴⁵ The decision regarding the ministry that emerges here will be provisional. It will be carried forward to the Jesuits' discernment in the local communities.

⁴⁵ "To Those Sent on Mission," *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, Martin E. Palmer, John W. Padberg, and John L. McCarthy (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 393-394.

3.5.6. Spiritual Conversation among the Jesuits in the Local Communities

The different ministerial options that emerged from the small conversation group is the material for spiritual conversation and discernment among the Jesuits. Since it is a discernment process to choose a particular ministry, the local Jesuit community will include some representatives from the small group that proposed the ministry options. If need be, the Jesuits include some representatives from the people of other communities who will be affected by the decision and who are disposed to build a society of justice, peace, and reconciliation. Some of the aspects of the conversation, which the small conversational group followed, could be repeated here. However, the spiritual conversation will be intense and formal in order to discern and choose concretely one ministry. The goal and manner of the conversation and the needed dispositions for the discernment are explained to all participants—to seek the will of God and the good of the neighbor through the ministry.

The way of proceeding, which Ignatius and his companions followed in the deliberation of 1539 in Rome, could serve as a model. The topic for the spiritual conversation needs to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. The participants take the proposed points first for prayer. The person becomes aware of his/her inner movements such as joy, peace, confusion, agitation, disturbance, tranquility, and so on as he/she dwells prayerfully on the points proposed for discernment and conversation in the light of the Gospel. In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius presents three times for making a sound and good election. The second time talks about perceiving the movements of the Spirit through consolation and desolation.⁴⁶ It may be useful to apply it at this stage. As the

⁴⁶ *SpEx.* no.176.

participant progressively becomes aware of the level of inner freedom or lack of it, simultaneously, he/she listens to what the Spirit is communicating regarding the proposed matter.⁴⁷ Again one has to remember Ignatius's advice that “for what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the reality profoundly and in savoring them interiorly.”⁴⁸

After having had a familiar conversation with God in prayer and personal reflection, the participants share the inner movements to the group, mainly those experiences, feelings, thoughts, and stories that touch him/her most. When Fr. Arturo Sosa wrote about common discernment, he articulated the importance of speaking and listening thus:

The sharing is an opportunity to present to others with simplicity and without making speeches, what one has perceived as movements of the Spirit, or as the fruit of one's personal reflection on the point in question. On the other hand, our disposition to “listen to the other person” respectfully, without contradicting the spiritual movements that the other person has felt interiorly, can produce a spiritual echo or new spiritual movements in the person listening giving rise to a fresh way of perceiving things.⁴⁹

Each one listens to the other without commenting positively or negatively and with no ‘cross-talk.’ Intentional speaking and active listening are essential. While speaking, any interruption would make the speaker less free to express what the person has genuinely experienced in the presence of God and the movements of the Spirit. After everyone is heard, the participants could spend some time in prayer, reflecting on what each one shared and the movement of the Spirit in the group as a whole.

⁴⁷ Chacko, 120.

⁴⁸ *SpEx*. No.2.

⁴⁹ Arturo Sosa, “On Discernment in Common,” 3.

Then each one could share what resonated in his/her heart as others were speaking. It is not about agreeing or disagreeing, feeling good or bad. Rather one speaks about those things which resonated deep in his/her heart and which one perceived for the greater glory of God and establishing the values of the Kingdom of God in the world. Some of the questions proposed for the Jesuits' conversation by Fr. R. C. Chacko could be a great help: What did I hear? Was I struck by a common theme or thread? Is something I expected to hear absent? Where did I experience harmony/ dissonance with the others as they shared? What emotions am I feeling now? What insights occur to me? Is the Spirit telling 'us' something—as a group?⁵⁰ The responses will reflect the Spirit's movement of the whole group, thus becoming a communal discernment. The Spirit brings to the fore the will of God for the group through the words of others. Again, it is not debating and arguing to prove a point or win over the impression of others with ideas. Instead, one speaks from one's heart in freedom with the sole purpose of seeking God's will for the group.

3.5.7. Election and Decision-Proposal

Though from the previous step the discerners perceive clearly what ministry God wants them to choose, they need to use the two methods of the Third Time for making an Election as a means of further clarifying and confirming the tentative choice arrived at above. In the Exercises, Ignatius proposes three times for making an election. He gives two methods for making a sound and good election for the third time. In the first method, he proposes the exercitant to use reason enlightened by God to make a decision. "I should consider and reason out how many advantages or benefits accrue...on the contrary, I

⁵⁰ R. C. Chacko, 121.

should similarly consider the disadvantages and dangers...After I have thus considered and reasoned out all the aspects of the proposed matter, I should see to which side reason more inclines. It is in this way, namely according to the greater motion arising from reason, and not according to some motion arising from sensitive human nature, that I ought to come to my decision about the matter proposed.”⁵¹ Ignatius himself used the third type for the deliberation in Rome. Based on the propositions or points which emerged from intentional listening and speaking, the members could give suggestions and opinions as he/she reasoned in prayer. A discussion could be allowed to get clarity on the topic. Each one could give the pros and cons of choosing a particular ministry. But the active listening continues to animate the group. Through reasoning, the participants choose that which is for the greater praise and glory of God and one another. The final decision is taken for confirmation in prayer. “...with great diligence to go to prayer before God our Lord and to offer him that election, that the Divine Majesty may be pleased to receive and confirm it, it is conducive to his greater service and praise.”⁵² The group could pause a while. Then each one says in a word what the person feels about the decision. The peace and tranquility among the members regarding the decision is a sign of God’s confirmation.

The fruit of the whole process of discernment and conversation or the answer to the question sought is not complete in itself. The proposed decision is sent to the competent authorities for further decision and execution because the decision involves a new ministry. Therefore, the members submit the decision with complete indifference

⁵¹ *SpEx*, no.181-182.

⁵² *SpEx*, no. 183.

and openness to welcome the final word as the will of God. The whole discernment process is, therefore, to choose one out of several equally good options. While interpreting the will of God on the proposed matter and making a final decision, the competent authority takes into consideration the discernment process that the group has gone through. Without fail, the final decision has to be clearly communicated to the people and participants in the conversation and discernment process why the decision was taken in a certain way. When the ministries are discerned by both the Jesuits and people together, collaboration becomes more comfortable, and people own the responsibility for the ministries. The Jesuits are not planters of ministries but collaborators with people of God in one mission of Christ, that is, building the Kingdom of justice, peace, love, and reconciliation.

3.6. Challenges to Spiritual Conversation and Apostolic Discernment in Bihar Context

Though the Ignatian spiritual conversation is a time-tested tool to explore and discern new apostolates among the people, in the Bihar context, we can foresee some specific challenges as well. Firstly, the rigid caste and patriarchal structure of the society could prevent social interaction and participation of different communities in the spiritual conversation. However, there are many persons among all the high caste groups with good intentions and desire to collaborate with Christian leaders to promote the common good. There is a need to identify them. The regular visits to people will give an opportunity for this.

Secondly, there is some inhibition among the Jesuits to move out to engage in conversation with people other than the usual communities. The challenge calls for a conversion of heart. The conversion would imply intentionally turning the focus of the

mission to other castes groups, tribal and religious communities, because the Jesuits and other Christian leaders have worked so far only with a few Dalit groups for one hundred years now. The presence of the Church with only a few caste groups, has created a perception among other groups that she belongs only to those few groups. Mary Shruti Joseph points out that it could also be that the Church has inadvertently ignored other groups.⁵³ There is a need for a conscious effort to reach out to others.

Thirdly, given the resources that the Jesuits have, knowing this, the rich and powerful will be more willing to participate in the spiritual conversation than the poor because they want to get the maximum material benefit. In order to be faithful to the universal apostolic preferences, the conversation has to take a conscious stand to engage the poor, the voiceless marginalized, women, and children without undermining the other high caste groups which desire to work for others in the light of Gospel values.

Fourthly, the present Dalit Christian community has to be prepared to welcome other communities without fear. In other words, there could be a tendency for exclusivity. Finally, the present political climate could pose a significant challenge in associating with people, especially the poor, because the Jesuits' associating with the people at the margins of the society is interpreted as religious conversion. Dominant caste groups, ideologies, religious fundamentalism, political, and other external social pressures could pose some threat to entering into conversation with the marginalized. The big Jesuit institutions like colleges and schools, therefore, could play a constructive role in building cordial relationships with government authorities and other people of goodwill whose children

⁵³ Mary Shruti Joseph, *The Role of Consecrated Women in the Missionary Activity of the Church: A Missiological Study in the Context of Bihar, North India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2014), 149.

often study in the Jesuit institutions. The institutions should be the forum to disseminate the Jesuit values.

However, without associating and conversing with them, the Jesuits cannot make known to all people God's desire for their well-being, especially God's desire to bring the message of salvation to the last and the least in the society in particular. Despite the contemporary culture, which often puts utmost importance to faceless digital communication, and the complexity of Bihar society, which has marginalized the Dalits and the poor, the face to face Ignatian spiritual conversation provides a crucial element in the way forward in discerning God's will. Besides, Jesuits must discern the aspirations, dreams, and desires of God for the people, and in planning and collaborating with the people in mission today.

3.7. Conclusion

Spiritual conversation, discernment, and apostolic planning went hand in hand in the Jesuit tradition. In a diverse and ever-changing Bihar society, the Jesuits need to discern continuously God's will to serve God's people effectively. The social, economic, political, and cultural situation of Bihar is so complex that it can pose a challenge to choose the right ministries, which will reflect the universal apostolic preferences of the Society of Jesus and the Jesuit charism. Simply continuing the existing ministries could limit the Jesuits from exploring new possibilities in ministries to serve God through people better. Spiritual conversation is one of the best tools for coming to know people's real needs and God's will. It brings face to face the Jesuits and the people in the search for choosing the ministries for God's greater glory and the good of the other. The spiritual conversation model is a tool to explore new apostolates at the grassroots level. This model is rooted in the charism of the Society. It places the local Jesuits communities

and the Church leaders right at the center of the people's realities. The spiritual conversation paradigm nudges the Jesuits to see beyond the established thinking and doing ministries and bring about creativity in mission.

In addition, it calls discerners to pay close attention to the local context and needs. For too long, the ministries went from top to bottom. What the missionaries thought suitable for the people was decided and carried forward as ministries. But the people's role in the apostolic discernment was minimum. Whereas, this conversational model encourages people to participate in the discernment process and invites the Jesuits to discern apostolates at the grassroots level as collaborators.

General Conclusion

Ignatian spiritual conversation is a method of face-to-face conversation with a certain depth of engagement, familiarity, and intimacy. It is a practice of finding God in one's personal experiences, desires, dreams, and aspirations through personal encounters. The mutual sharing of experiences becomes an open door to apostolic discernment for the conversationalists. Ignatian spiritual conversation emphasizes the importance of intentional listening and active speaking, paying attention to the interior movements of the Spirit in us and others. This thesis attempts to reclaim and re-imagine this privileged and time-tested tool, with all its dynamics, as a way to discern apostolic ministries in the diverse socio-economic, cultural, religious, and ecclesiastical context of present-day Bihar. It offers an approach to re-establish and rejuvenate the spiritual conversation between the Patna Jesuits and the people in order to discern apostolates at the grassroots level. It explores the way of proceeding in spiritual conversation among the people through which the founding fathers of the Bihar mission and the founding fathers of the Society of Jesus discerned their ministries. It is also an attempt to construct a spiritual conversation model for an effective ongoing discernment of apostolic priorities in the local context.

When the first Jesuit missionaries landed in Bihar one hundred years ago, they encountered an entirely new cultural situation. They had to study the place and people carefully. Since the missionaries were from another country, North America, they had to discern how to give shape to their missionary zeal in that context. They often thought that they would be converting the 'pagans' in millions to the new faith as Francis Xavier did in the sixteenth century. But the new place and culture, the time and needs of the people required a different approach. The missionaries gradually realized that it was not possible

unless they closely associated and conversed with people. Through spiritual conversation which involved active listening, they discerned the dispositions and desires of some *Adivasi* and Dalit communities that showed genuine desire towards the Christian faith. They did not use any force or tricks to convert them. Instead, there was a careful weighing of desires on both sides to discern God's call and the human response. The Jesuits built the missions through constant conversation with the people. They walked or cycled hundreds of miles to meet people in their homes to listen to their struggles, pains, and joys. Though the Jesuits initiated the ministries, they did not take for granted people's core desires by doing whatever they wanted. They discerned the socio-economic and religious intricacies by inserting themselves into the lives of the Dalits and the *Adivasis*, particularly the Santals, through their presence and interaction. They discovered God's dreams for those people in their longing for God and socio-economic wellbeing. Consequently, the Jesuit missionaries expanded their horizon of mission beyond merely evangelizing ministries to respond to the socio-economic and educational needs of the faithful by establishing charity work centers, schools, hostels, and other beneficial programs and facilities, which were part of their proclamation of the Gospel to the people. Spiritual conversation was an end itself in helping the faithful as well as a means in discerning apostolates, thus providing a way of proceeding in the mission for the later Jesuits in Patna.

The spiritual conversation path that the Patna Jesuits followed in the mission was rooted in the Jesuit tradition and charism. It goes back to the spiritual conversation practice of the founding fathers of the Society of Jesus. It all began with Ignatius as he was recuperating in Loyola after the battle at Pamplona. He began his conversation with

God and started to notice his inner stirrings of consolation and desolation and their origin and direction. He spoke to the people close to him about what happened to him interiorly. Noticing his inner movements was the starting point for his discernment. Since he benefited from this conversation, he set out to help those who sought his help to grow in their relationship with God and one another and discern their vocations in life. He included in the conversation people of all genders, age, status, and walks of life as he moved along in his life from Loyola. Importantly Ignatius began his spiritual conversation with ordinary persons. The conversation was mutual. It gave importance to persons and words. Gradually he gathered companions to help others, thus spiritual conversation becoming a collaborative mission. Over the years, the practice of spiritual conversation saw many variations from the nascent Society. It was practiced in informal as well as formal circumstances. Whenever Ignatius and his companions faced any new challenge in their life and mission, they used spiritual conversation in their discernment to find God's will for them as a group. It was not just one among many ministries. Rather, spiritual conversation undergirded all ministries and became a Jesuit way of life and way of proceeding in mission.

Spiritual conversation, which the founding fathers of the Society and the first Jesuit missionaries used, was not frozen in history. General Congregation 36 and the recent writings of Fr. Arturo Sosa, the General of the Society, have emphasized the use of spiritual conversation in apostolic planning, particularly through communal discernment, thus bringing to light the importance of this tradition. Since the Ignatian spiritual conversation practice is flexible and sensitive to person and context, it can be used creatively in today's context. In addition, today it is being enriched by other Ignatian

spiritual practices like discernment rules, the examination of consciousness, and aspects of the Spiritual Exercises. Given the complex nature of living situations of Bihar people, spiritual conversation is the most relevant and useful tool to discern apostolates at the grassroots level.

From the recent Jesuit documents, it is clear that the Jesuit mission is not about Jesuits' considering what is best for the people but discerning with people what is best for the greater glory of God and the good of one's neighbor. The spiritual conversation model, as presented here, is a creative use of the practice for the Jesuits in Patna to reconnect with people and to look into new possibilities in mission. It invites us to move beyond the established way of working and thinking amidst the people to find a creative response to God's call in an ever-changing society like Bihar. It encourages the crossing of social boundaries for collaboration and networking. This model, which is enlightened and inspired by the Jesuit tradition, invites the Jesuits to include people in the discernment process and work as collaborators. In other words, it paves the way for collaborating with God, who is already at work in the world among people of goodwill.

Any model to be implemented in a context involves risks and challenges. In India, the political climate is unfavorable to minorities, particularly Christians. Some of the Hindu conservative groups, in collaboration with their sympathizers in power, envision Indian society structured by caste. Unfortunately, the majority of the Indian media favoring the present government amplifies their voices and propaganda, further marginalizing the voices of the poor and the minority. If the Jesuits do not pay close attention to the poor, their genuine desires and needs are overwhelmed by populism. So, the spiritual conversation model directs the Jesuits to go against the current by engaging

people to themselves hear God's voice authentically, and challenges the Jesuits to respond to people's needs according to the universal apostolic preferences.

Finally, this thesis is a concrete response to Pope Francis' call to discernment. He is emphatic about the discernment process in mission today and about inviting the church leaders to be in touch with people when he says that the shepherd should have the smell of the sheep. Speaking of discernment, Pope Francis challenges not only the Jesuits but also everyone in these terms: "To educate to discernment means, in fact, to flee from the temptation to seek refuge behind a rigid norm or behind the image of an idealized freedom; to educate to discernment means to 'expose' oneself, to go out of the world of one's convictions and prejudices to open oneself to understand how God is speaking to us, today, in this world, in this time, in this moment, and how He speaks to me, now."⁵⁴ It is a clarion call for us to enter into a dialogue with this God who speaks to us always and everywhere.

This thesis is also an invitation to other religious congregations, parishes, youth groups, and prayer groups to engage in spiritual conversation and discernment more effectively, following specific adaptations to circumstances. The guidelines for conversing and dealing with others, which we find in the founding fathers' writings, can be a rich resource on how to speak and listen, for instance, in inter-religious dialogue, student-teacher relationships in schools, and between formators and formees in religious congregations. This thesis is a springboard for further exploration to enrich the Ignatian spiritual conversation practice. It will especially help those who are interested in studies

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, "Pope Highlights 3 Aspects of Ignatian Style," accessed on 11 October 2019, <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-highlights-3-aspects-of-ignatian-style/>

related to reconciliation among caste groups and religious communities. Moreover, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) emphasizes the triple dialogue in the multi-religious context of India—dialogue with the poor, with culture and with religions. The Ignatian spiritual conversation encompasses all the three. It can become a foundational resource for interfaith engagement in active listening and intentional speaking. It will open up the possibility to bring to the fore one's religious experiences first before entering into intellectual discussions and debates. Let us continue to seek and hear God's voice, active and alive in all the people, places and cultures.

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