

“Church Needs to Become More Pro-Poor and Pro- Marginalized,” Jose Thayil

Rev Fr Jose Thayil SJ just completed 65 years and has retired from Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth. AJRS interviewed him on this occasion. He continues to be the Rector of Papal Seminary, till December 3, 2017.

AJRS: Once you became 65 years young, you have reached the auspicious moment of looking back at your life in order to go forward. Can you please highlight some of the main events of your life?

Don't regret over the past mistakes, but go ahead with optimism and hope. Becoming 65 years young is not a time to retire from life, but to start experimenting in new areas. Old is Gold.

AJRS: You are retiring from JDV, after teaching there for about eleven years. Prior to that you have been teaching at Regional Theology Centre (RTC), Patna for 15 years. What, do you think, are some of the challenges that Indian theology faces?

Indian theology needs to become more contextualized. Some attempts were made in the Regional Theology Centers. Now that many RTCs are closed down, these attempts are also given up. Indian theology needs to respond to the socio-economic and political situations of India. Indian theology needs to take into consideration the multi-religious aspect of India and the rich cultural heritage.

AJRS: You have been the rector of Papal Seminary for about seven years. A rare privilege indeed! You have been an active member of ARMS and you are currently its President. Earlier you had been the moderator of philosophy students at Papal Seminary. What are your impressions of the young seminarians?

Seminary formation has to take place in an atmosphere of freedom. Otherwise seminarian will follow rules and regulations out of fear and not out of conviction. Seminar-ians by and large are very good people. They need constant support and encouragement to bring out the best in them. Personal accompaniment is very essential for giving them the right motivation to become good and dedicated priests.

AJRS: Right from the beginning you have been working for human dignity and upliftment of children. Can you please throw some light on your doctoral dissertation and its relevance for our times.

My doctoral dissertation was on “Child labour in India and the Social Teachings of the Church”. Children are the future of any society or nation. Therefore they have to be taken care with utmost care. In India we still find many child labourers in factories, workshops, agricultural labour, housework, etc. Therefore, children are not able to enjoy their childhood and get the necessary education. Many parents are happy to send their children for some work in order to get some additional income to run the house. Many children are also physically abused by their parents, relatives, teachers and so on. Children have their own dignity and they are not to be treated as future adults, but as children in their own situation with their own rights.

AJRS: In your own way, you have changed the landscape of both JDV and PS. Your love for animals and your com-

mitment to a green environment, together with the activities of Tarumitra, have fostered the greening of the campus. Please tell us the lessons you have learnt from your ecological commitment.

Ecological concern should not be equated with just planting of trees and taking care of them. That is only one of the aspects of eco-preservation. One of my concerns was to reduce electricity consumption from the electricity department (Grid). Most of the electricity that they produce is through thermal power generation. Though electricity does not pollute where it is used, it is a great pollutant where it is produced through thermal power generation. Solar electricity generation is one of the ways to reduce air pollution. In Papal Seminary, we have already installed 15 Kilo Watt solar power generating unit and we plan to install two more 15 Kilowatt solar power generating units. Thus we hope to take care of half of our electricity requirement through Solar power generating units. Most of the cooking in PS is done through steam cooking. Steam is more efficient in cooking and cooking gas is used only for frying purposes.

AJRS: For many years, you have been relating to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in various ways. You have interacted with many young priests in various parts of India. What are some of your dreams for the Indian Church?

I would dream of a Church where the Bishops, clergy, religious and the lay leaders would be more prophetic, challenging the unjust practices of our politicians and church leaders. I would also dream of a church where there would be greater equality between church hierarchy and the laity, men and women, religious superiors and subjects, etc. The church has to be more open to people of other faiths and positively try to become agents of peace and harmony.

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AJRS: When you look back to your past and forward to your future, what are some of the lessons that you have learnt, which could be valuable to the young religious of today?

I believe that the church leaders have to practice what they preach. People can't be taught human or Christian values, they have to be caught by them. Young religious have to be optimistic about themselves, others, the world

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and the different situations. Young religious should not be caught up in the electronic media culture, but should find sufficient time for things that are most important for their life.

AJRS: To the readers of Asian Journal of Religious Studies, do you have any special message?

Asian Journal of Religious Studies is catering to the needs of the simple priests, religious and lay people. This journal tries to impart some human and Christian values through its short articles. My suggestion to the readers of this magazine is that they try to put into practice some of the values that the articles place before them. May the good Lord bless you all abundantly.