

## Age-old India

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News rich with hope: world economists are expressing their admiration for the astonishing economic growth in this Asiatic country, the greatest increase per capita since its independence in 1947. As a result of the accelerated economy, India is finding itself in a phrase of deep transformation. However, with thousands of years of culture, philosophy, religion and its great population (second in the world) behind it, India has the possibility of maintaining its identity for a long time yet. The face of India, sculptured by its long history, will take a long time to change.

On arrival in India, so many old memories seem to come alive, memories accumulated from the time of infancy. They are part of the subconscious. We Basque Carmelites from Navarre, of my generation, were practically initiated with India in its various aspects: evangelization, ethnography with the various casts, costumes and philosophies. We devoured so many missionary reports in "*La Obra Máxima*", reading about "*La India y sus problemas*" (1951), and "*Perspectivas misionales. Los Carmelitas en Malabar*" (1959). In every house of the Province there were two or three ex-missionaries from India. More than 30 missionaries from the Province still remain in Vijayapuram and the seminary of Alwaye. Many were those who were always speaking about India: e.g. Frs Angelo Maria and Lorenzo Arteaga at Amorebieta, Fr Veremundo Arteta at Villafranca, Frs Salustiano and Mariano at Amorebieta-Larrea, Frs Biagio, Nazario and Juan Crisóstomo at Vitoria, Fr Vidal at Bilbao, and Fr Diego!

We could not pass over the visiting missionaries, because they spoke to us about India: Fr Michelangelo Bátiz, Fr V´ctor de San Miguel, Nereo Zubicaray. The monthly missionary day in our colleges always evoked India. I remember the excitement at Vitoria when we received Mons. Joseph Antippethy, Archbishop of Verapoly. We could say the same about assisting at Mass in the Syro-Malabar rite at Bilbao with two Indian bishops.

Touching down in the country, I sought to open wide my eyes to capture the most I could of the reflection of the memories evoked, from what lay before me. I arrived to experience the end of the monsoons which had brought such terrifying rain. Those who fear the heat should not come to India. What use are cold showers and fans? (For sweating immediately afterward, would say the wise humorist in reply).

## Strategic Bombay

This is a good landscape to introduce us to the Indian universe. The foundations were laid here for the Carmelite Mission to the Great Mogul. Often our missionaries disembarked here after crossing from the European ports of Marseille, Genoa, Amsterdam, ... The great missionary, Ven. Fr John Vicente Zengotita, for example, recalls his first contact with India in this place: "This satisfaction, which is truly great, never left me for an instant from the time I set foot on the soil of India. I sang a Te Deum to the rhythm of my long steps along the quay of Bombay port, where I disembarked ...."

Today it is called Mumbai. It is the gigantic capital city of the state of Maharashtra with its more than 23 million inhabitants. More than half of Spain! It must be the city with the greatest density of population in the world: 56,000 person per square kilometre. Palaces and hovels exist side by side, ignoring each other. Shanty towns increase without raising excessive urban preoccupation.

What is characteristically unique leaps to the eyes of a Westerner. First of all there is the landscape with high coconut trees. There is the colour and liveliness of the market streets, the dress of the women with their harmonious saris. Traffic is tense. God protect those who travel in these trains where you cannot enter except with a great strong shove from behind and continue on the journey with doors that cannot be closed, because people are hanging on with half their body outside, with hand grasping on whatever happens to give support. What happens to the passengers seated placidly on the roof of the train should it stop without warning? The same could be said for some of the public buses, with clients attached somehow to the outside near the rear.

At Bombay I had my first contact with the Indian Carmel. I visited three communities of the Karnataka-Goa Province. St Joseph's parish and the "Anubhar" spirituality centre have a large courtyard in common. Here I saw my first monument to the victims of abortion. The surrounding areas are quite depressed, with many slums and the inevitable social problems and needs. The parish is the largest in the Archdiocese and the church is very well attended. Even though it is huge, vast, it is often overcrowded during ceremonies. It offers a long list of activities, of groups or services. Many attend the morning Masses, before going to work.

There is another spirituality centre in the peripheral suburb of Vasai. Its building is not yet finished, but it is already functioning. Its main purpose is to welcome young people. According to a territorial agreement of the Indian Carmelites, there is another foundation at Bomay, Shalini Vahaban, that belongs to the Manjumel Province.

### **Goa, Capital of the missions**

Goa is the Christian version of the sacred "Mecca" of the missions. St Francis Xavier, who died in sight of the coast of China, filled with missionary fervour, is buried in Old Goa in the church of "Bom Jesus". From his mortal remains, the holy patron of the Missions seems to prompt all the questions on the urgency and priority of evangelization. He seems to echo the compelling statement of Paul VI in the period after the Council, "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize" Here it is also a duty to remember the exceptional Basque missionary, the Venerable Fr John Vincent of Jesus Mary. He wrote many pages on fire with intimately lived missionary fervour which came to mind as I stood before the tomb of the saint. It is sufficient to read his article published in "El Monte Carmelo"(1901, pp.115-118). For me it was a time of precious grace to recollect me in prayer for all the missionary intentions that Carmel carries in its heart.

The epicentre of the spread of Christianity in the East, the central seat of Portuguese "patronage", Goa served for the spread of missionary Carmel in Asia. Her strategic position was advantageous for the development of the Persian mission and foundations in other territories of the Portuguese colonial empire. The first Carmelite to visit this city was the Roman, Benigno di S. Michele. Fr Leandro del la Anunciación, from Burgos, made the first foundation in 1619. It was not an easy undertaking for the Carmelites of the Italian Congregation because of the divergence between the "Patronage" and the missionary directives from Rome. The undertaking was successful through a stratagem devised by the above-mentioned missionary from Burgos. The Archbishop, Cristobal Sâ Lisboa organized a procession of many saints in order to celebrate the apparition of Christ on Boa Vista mountain. Fr Leandro obtained permission to introduce the statue of Bl. Teresa of Jesus. The pleased Archbishop went to admire all the statues. On arriving at the Mother Foundress, his attention was caught by an envelope in her hands, which he took and opened to find inside a petition for the Carmelites to have permission to establish themselves in Goa. Moved by this Teresian desire and his own deep personal devotion to Mother Teresa, the prelate authorized the establishment of the Carmelites within the confines of his patriarchal see. Thus the Burgos friar obtained his difficult objective.

It was in Goa that the first Carmelite seminary and novitiate was established in the East. An historical fruit of this were the proto-martyrs of the Teresian family, Denis and Redemptus (+1638), who were beatified by Leo XIII in 1900. The ruins of this building can still be seen in old Goa. In the sacristy of the present monastery in Goa-Margao can still be seen the statue in granite of Our Lady of the Scapular which came from the old church and monastery after they were destroyed in the unfortunate happenings of 1834 caused by the anti-religious laws of Portugal. The historian, Mariano Gomes, after years studying the historical documentation and untiring contact with the authorities thought that the time had arrived for the Order to return to this place which vividly recalls the first moments of Carmel in Goa.

Even today in Goa you can still find much Carmelite missionary history. The Margao house was built in 1938 to commemorate the third centenary of the martyrdom of Blessed Denis and Redemptus. In the monastery cemetery is the tomb of Fr Lucas Gómez (+1970), who also came from Burgos, as did his brother Fr Silverio di S. Teresa, General of the Order. Here also rests from his countless missionary efforts the friar from Alava, Fr Nemesio Alzola (+ 1995). The Carmelite presence was fulfilled by the Goa-Mapusa monastery which houses the young pre-postulants. Among the present 24 candidates, I single out one who converted from

Hinduism to Catholicism and now has the approval of his family to enter Carmel. Further away, at Goa-Xellim, is the pre-philosophy house. It is the equivalent of a special year after profession.

I could not leave Goa without visiting the Carmelite nuns at Chicalim. It is a lovely community of 14 nuns with two novices, who have loaned sisters to help other communities. The monastery orchard is a garden of delights for the local monkeys, stubborn in their desire not to abandon their favourite place.

### **Our work in Mangalore**

India has great potential for the Church: through the abundance of vocations, the qualified teaching of theology in their universities and other teaching centres, through the missionary endeavour of their dioceses and religious families. The Church in India is becoming a central player. Here great international meetings are held on religious and ecclesial topics. It enjoys sufficient infrastructure. This was the reason that brought me to the mythical country of the Ganges and the Himalayas, of the wisdom of the "Upanishads", to the country of wandering holy men and solitaries, of the great religions, of famous persons, such as Gandhi, who followed a courageous program of "amisha" or non-violence, the land also of writers of calibre such as Rabindranath Tagore...

In Mangalore, facing the Arabian Sea, in the most easterly state of Karnataka, there are many Carmelite houses. We begin by mentioning the theological scholasticate and the large sanctuary to the Child Jesus of Prague. Carmel in India has greatly propagated this Carmelite devotion to the childhood of Jesus. It believes deeply in his promise: "The more you honour me, the more I will favour you". We also mention the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns who owe their beginning to the presence from 1870 to 1872 of Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified Baouardy. At present the monastery is enjoying a period of reflowering with six sisters in formation. The original historical monastery, in which the "Little Arab" had many of her ecstasies, is today the provincial house of the Apostolic Carmel. The Carmelite Missionary Congress for Asia and Oceania was held at Mangalore. On a richly verdant hill of coconut trees rises the "Institute of Indian Christian Spirituality". Its real name is "Ryshivana". The Sanscrit word has as its root *ryshi* which means an ascetic from olden times who lived in silence, solitude and contemplation. Here "*ryshy*" is an acronym for religion, yoga, spirituality, health. The word finishes with "vana", which carried the idea of a garden, or place that facilitates prayer, meditation, contemplation and experience of God. The name of the house, "Ryshivana" is rich in meaning. The very name carries a message.

In any case, the position of the house on Ranipura hill is spectacular, with its view over the majestic river Netrawati, which snakes along its meandering way. All this immense wealth of water is on its way to the Arabian Sea. Shortly before doing so it passes under a bridge that hides a grim record from the history of the Indian railways. At midnight on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1902, severe flooding caused the express train from Madras to Bombay to plunge into the river. On the train were travelling Mons. Bernardo Arginzóniz, ocd, Archbishop of Verapoly, and Mons. Benzinger, ocd, Vicar Apostolic of Quilon. Four friars were accompanying them. The two prelates were miraculously saved while numerous passengers died in the swirling waters caused by the strong rain.

The spirituality centre can take 100 people. Every province of the Order would be proud to have a building of such beauty. Because of its geographical position, the well running of the house, its facilities, its well programmed functioning, it greatly surpasses in splendour all of our houses of that type in Europe. A swarm of young friars, intelligent and enterprising, provided for all our needs and discretely kept a watchful eye over our movements.

In this atmosphere we carried out our reflection and dialogue on the topic of "*Carmel and the Mission in Asia and Oceania*". There were 39 taking part, with the General of the Order, Luis Arostegui, presiding. Also present were the Superiors, the Delegates from the Missions and those in charge of formation from all the Provinces of India (5), from their Commissariats (2), those in charge of all the missions in the country (with the exception of Chattisgarh, since we were recently there), the Superiors of Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan-Singapore, Tanzania (a mission conducted by India), and Kuwait. It was a happy sample of the wonderful cultural richness of Carmel in the East.

We listened with the greatest of interest to the reports on missionary activity carried out in each circumscription. Our reflection was directed by the leading exponents of the topic. The

General of the Order presented a solid and weighty conference on the Missionary Vocation of Carmel "from its mothers womb", as the happy phrase of the Venerable Fr Juan Vicente Zengotita puts it. Domingo Fz. sent his study on the characteristics that stand out in the history of Carmelite missions in Asia, a study crowned by Paul D'Souza who spoke to us of some unforgettable missionaries in Asia. Fr Felix Wilfred, SJ, developed the topic "The Church in Africa and Asia and its challenges", introducing us to the environment, the difficulties and the expectations of the Church in the continent. The pressing problems, the currents and trends of this Church were related to us by Fr M. Amaladoss, SJ, in his contribution concerning "Inculturation, Ecumenism and inter-religious Dialogue". These two university professors were like captains navigating the high seas of their material and recognized universally for their knowledge of missionary theology. The text of the conferences, the diary and the final message can be read on the missionary site of the Order's web page: [www.ocd.pcn.net/mission/index.htm](http://www.ocd.pcn.net/mission/index.htm).

In my introductory discourse at the Congress I dared to state: "Carmel was born missionary in Asia, as the fruit of mission. For this reason Carmel ought to remain and develop itself as missionary in Asia". From all we listened to and received at Mangalore the following conclusion can be arrived at: The most mission part of the Order resides today in Asia, with growing dynamism and increasing numbers. For this reason there is faith in the new foundations that are being prepared.

The happy memory Carmel in India leave us still remains. This impression of mine refers to the Karnataka-Goa province. Set up in 1981 with three monasteries, before twenty-five years were out already has 22 monasteries, subdivided into various parishes, missionary stations in their own country and in Tanzania and South Africa, formations houses and extraordinary Spirituality Institutes. In the provincial statistics of 2006, I read the list of 209 professed friars. Who can show a similar dynamism?

Hospitality is very excellent, also in details, and is expressed in forms of most delicate courtesy and a wondrous variety of attention. Everywhere you meet young personnel, numerous and promising, well-trained academically. Attention is drawn to the organization of the monasteries, which reveals an earnest and calm life. At present India is the most Carmelite country in the world. Its youth is its great promise and great challenge: a sign that the time is ripe for their service to the Order in the world. The fruits of the mission of other ages in India has finally arrived from far-off. Carmel in India has embarked (or is engaged?) on continuing the missionary tradition.