

Disturbing the Dust

There is a special section of our Christopher Brennan Library where books written by Old Ignatians are displayed. Graduates of Riverview and members of staff leave their mark here in different ways. Since our earliest days, there have been those who have left their stamp in the written word.

Last week I attended the launch of a book by an Old Boy, Fr Tony Herbert. Tony graduated from here in 1959 and then joined the Jesuits. Five years later he volunteered for the Indian mission in Hazaribag. In his book, Fr Tony describes himself at that time as a very young North Shore boy, limited by his culture, full of theory and enthusiasm, “ready to liberate the Third World”. He soon realised there was so much for him to learn. The title of his book is *Disturbing the Dust*. Dust he explains, is a metaphor for poverty, for the caste system, for the exploitation of women, for environmental degradation in India. For over fifty years there, living with and learning from the people, Tony worked at disturbing the dust. Did he liberate India as he first hoped? No. But what the world calls simply ‘a drop in the ocean’, the Christian calls ‘the leaven in the bread’. In his own way, Fr Tony left his mark. Each chapter of his book begins with a story, a personal experience, then is followed by a reflection upon it. That is, what the experience taught him. Then follows the way it showed him how to respond. It is the same model we always put before the boys here: experience, reflection, action. It is the Ignatian paradigm.

That Australian Jesuit Mission to Hazaribag began in 1951. Hazaribag was chosen because it was one of the poorest regions of India. Jesuits have always been missionaries, always being sent. Ignatius used to say to his Jesuits, “the world is our home.” It was a bold vision for his day. A freedom to serve – anywhere. “The world is our home.

Ignatius also said that his mission was to go where the need is greater, where the greater good can be done. He was speaking, of course, about the *magis*, about how to discern the greater good. Now, thanks to those missionaries and their supporters, Hazaribag is a Province in its own right – bigger than its Australian ‘mother Province, full of schools, parishes, agricultural programmes and clinics. So much good being done.

In his book, Fr Tony writes about his close-friend, Fr A T Thomas, a local who joined the Jesuits in that then mission region. A T was born in the same year that the first Australian Jesuits arrived in India. Since his days as a scholastic, A T was fired with a passion for serving the poor, especially the Dalits (the lowest class of untouchables). With others, he set up evening schools to educate the young, and fought for justice in land reform. Because of his stand with these members of the lowest caste, he incurred powerful opposition. At one time, he stood up for some who had had their land stolen by rich overlords. A T took them to court and won the case. But that stance sealed his fate. In revenge, he was kidnapped, tortured and beheaded. The twenty-year anniversary of his martyrdom will be celebrated this coming September. Our A T Thomas Advocacy Group (ATTAG) at Riverview is named after him. In the tradition of its Patron, it regularly mounts campaigns advocating for human rights.

Since the earliest days of the mission to Hazaribag, the Indian Bazaar (here at Riverview) and the Maytime Fair (at Xavier College in Melbourne) have contributed to the lifeblood of this outreach. We know it well. It is much more than a Riverview event. Yes, it is supported by our sixteen Houses, by boarding families, by Old Ignatians. But also by the St Aloysius’ and Loyola Mount Druitt school communities, by our Sydney Jesuit parishes, and by Old Xaverians in Sydney.

Why do we encourage our young men’s commitment to and support of the Bazaar? Because this is just a beginning step in cultivating their sense of what it is to be called an Ignatian. Giving money is just a start. In the longer term, we would like them to become young men who will give of their time and give of their talent in response to the world’s needs. Their service programmes here, their Immersions, then perhaps their Gap Years to South and East Asia, to Central and South America, with the Cardoner Project, will

shape their minds and hearts. They will form their growing consciences. Then they will come to know more deeply what Ignatius meant when he said, "The world is your home." Because in saying that, he meant us to understand that the world's people are thereby our brothers and sisters. It will mean a deeper appreciation of what Jesus means in the Gospel when he says, "from those who have been given much, much more will be expected." He is saying that to us all. We have been blessed. So we, in turn, are to be a blessing to others.

In time, I hope our graduates will become like their brother Ignatian of nearly sixty years ago, Tony Herbert. That they, like he, will be "disturbers of the dust". Disturbing the dust that settles on complacency. Disturbing the dust that settles on someone who exists for him- or herself alone. Disturbing the dust that settles on injustices which have never been challenged.

That's what Ignatians are being called to here. To be men of the *magis*. To be making a difference in the world – a world which is always their home.