



Jesuit Mission
“in all things to love and to serve”

PRESS RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN JESUIT REFLECTS ON HIS LIFE AMONG THE DALITS

For immediate release

What is the most important contribution a person can make to those living on the margins of society? This is one of the central questions in Jesuit priest Fr Tony Herbert SJ's new book, *Disturbing the Dust*, which has been published by Jesuit Mission.

The Australian Jesuit, who was born and raised in Sydney, moved to India in 1965 to work at the Australian mission that had been established there in 1951. In his most important – and challenging – ministry, he began working with the Dalits ('Untouchables') 37 years ago. He has spent the intervening years as a social activist, advocating for the Dalits in criminal, educational, health and land rights disputes, and speaking out against their exploitation by coal mining and logging companies.

In *Disturbing the Dust* Fr Herbert recounts some of his many experiences during his years as a missionary, and reflects on their role in shaping both the Dalits' world and his. Disabused of the romanticism of poverty, he relates his experiences – both quotidian and extraordinary – as a Jesuit immersed in the lives of India's poorest, most marginalised caste. He acknowledges both the inroads that he has made over many long decades of work, and the failures he's weathered. Perhaps most poignantly, he tackles the many ways in which his ministry has shaped him and his idea of church and faith.

The sense of pathos evoked in Fr Herbert's writing is most movingly articulated in his assessment of his own impact on the villagers to whom he has devoted his life's work.

“The Dalits will not be high achievers: there will be no grand exam results, no vocations to the priesthood,” he writes.

“Mine will not be a widely acknowledged and successful ministry. The fact is that the problems are all so vast and the experience is that they are beyond our capacity as a human being to solve.”

But he balances this appraisal with the good news: the implementation of life-changing health and educational programs; the creation of women's savings groups directed by the religious sisters with whom the Jesuits work closely; the reclamation of disputed land; and the gradual change among the people from the enslaved mentality of caste ideology to one which claims self-respect.

Ultimately, *Disturbing the Dust* is a book that gives witness to the Dalit's struggle, and strips away the reader's status to reveal in all of us a “common human poverty”.

Disturbing the Dust is published by Jesuit Mission. Fr Tony Herbert will be in Australia for the book's launch in August, and is available for interview. Please direct interview requests to Helen Forde, Chief Executive Officer of Jesuit Mission, at 02 8918 4122 or helen.forde@jesuitmission.org.au

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NOTE FOR EDITORS

Jesuit Mission Australia is the international development arm of the Society of Jesus in Australia and New Zealand. It was established in 1951 to lend support to the society's missionary work in Hazaribag, India. Today its outreach extends to Southeast Asia and Africa. The organisation is committed to education, environmental sustainability, social development and social justice in countries like Cambodia, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and Thailand. For more information see jesuitmission.org.au