

IGNATIAN IDENTITY IN TRANSITION

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‘A READING OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES since the Second Vatican Council shows unmistakably that the Church of the next millennium will be called the “Church of the Laity”.’ (GC 34, d.13, n.1) This statement from the last General Congregation of the Society of Jesus highlights an emerging phenomenon that is beginning to transform the life of the entire Church. It is not just a matter of redefining the relationship between the ‘clergy’ and the ‘laity’, and of the associated question of how responsibilities are to be shared between them. What is really at issue is the very shape of the Church and its way of defining its mission.

In its own way, Ignatian spirituality is sharing in this renewal of ecclesial life. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Ignatian identity is itself in the midst of a complete transformation. And the process of reinvention is nowhere more intense than in the relationship between Jesuits and non-Jesuits in mission together.

Having worked in an Ignatian institution for more than fifteen years, I consider myself a privileged witness and at the same time, in some small measure, a live participant in this ongoing shift in identity. Moreover, when I attended an international conference on ‘Ignatian partnership’ in 2002, I realised how wide-ranging, indeed universal, this challenge of reconstructing Ignatian identity was.¹

This article is a kind of spiritual exploration. I shall try to name some issues arising from the attempt to construct authentic Ignatian partnership in mission. I will take care to draw my ideas from the context of my particular apostolate, the *Centre de Spiritualité Manrèse*

¹ The conference, designed as a consultation, was held in Rome from 17 to 23 February 2002, under the aegis of the Secretariat for Ignatian Spirituality. It brought together around fifty Ignatian women and men from five continents. For material from this consultation, see *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 99, 33/1 (2002), pp. 21-76.

(CSM) in Quebec City,² in the hope that this will help them get some sense of what is stirring throughout the church.

New Frontiers

It is quite remarkable to see how the understanding of Ignatian spirituality has evolved over recent decades. We have moved on from a time when Ignatian spirituality tended to be confused with the life and mission of the Society of Jesus. We now recognise an important distinction between the Jesuit way of enfleshing Ignatian spirituality and other ways of living it out, whether in religious or lay contexts.³ We can see a parallel here with the refounding of the Marian Sodality as the Christian Life Community (CLC) in the 1970s; we have come to recognise a certain autonomy among lay people when it comes to taking the Ignatian charism into the world.

The common source of all currents of Ignatian spirituality lies, of course, in the Spiritual Exercises. However, the Exercises themselves—particularly through the growing involvement of lay people in the ministry of spiritual accompaniment—have become a place where many different interpretations and practices can be developed and tested. And these interpretations and practices reflect a pluralism inherent within Ignatian spirituality as such. Some schools of interpretation, such as that promoted by the CSM in Quebec, see the Exercises first and foremost as a style of pedagogy valid for everyone, for all spiritual experience. The Exercises have as much to say to people at large who are simply looking for a meaning in life as to people who are committed Christians. The pedagogy of the Exercises transcends any particular spirituality. This approach raises all the more acutely the issue of Ignatian identity: if the Exercises do not necessarily generate a distinctively Ignatian spirituality, how does one become Ignatian? How and under what conditions *can* the Exercises lead to an Ignatian

**A pluralism
within
Ignatian
spirituality**

² The *Centre de Spiritualité Manrèse* was founded in 1976 by the late Gilles Cusson SJ and a group of other Jesuits. Its mission is seen today in three major sectors of activity: a school of spirituality, based on the practice of the Exercises in daily life; an international school for the formation of spiritual guides; and a journal—*Cahiers de spiritualité ignatienne*—which promotes dialogue between spirituality and contemporary culture. The composition of the Centre's team is presently around 45% lay, 45% women religious and 10% Jesuit.

³ This concern to differentiate Jesuit spirituality and Ignatian spirituality was officially expressed after the 32nd General Congregation (1974-1975).

identity? And does the grace of the Exercises need to be filled out with something else? If so, with what? There are many such cutting-edge questions that are drawing Ignatian spirituality down untravelled paths.

In scarcely thirty years, Ignatian awareness has thus undergone a phenomenal transformation. One transition has been definitively made: we no longer identify Ignatian spirituality with its Jesuit expression, but recognise many different ways in which it can be lived. But now we seem called upon to make a new shift: an Ignatiocentric idea of the Exercises (in the sense just described) is giving way to a more universalist and pluralist interpretation, paradoxically more Ignatian perhaps than ever before. What is beyond question is that Ignatian spirituality will always be the spirituality of unexplored and foreign frontiers, including the frontiers within itself.

A New Role for the Society of Jesus

Experience of collaboration between Jesuits and others throughout the world has shown that Ignatian Spirituality does not become a pluralist reality without there being some conflict. I myself have several times heard Jesuits state as an axiom that Ignatian spirituality can only be preserved safely by Jesuits, in other words, by those who make the Thirty Day retreat at least twice in their lifetime—not to mention the

general experience that comes from annual retreats, apostolic discernments, the study of fundamental Ignatian texts during the novitiate and tertianship, and so on. One of them even explicitly told me, no doubt with noble intentions, that ‘the only way for CSM to apply the pedagogy of the Exercises to and for our times is to pay attention to the Jesuits’. On the other hand, I have also heard lay people complain—in a way rather lacking in due



discriminating charity—about the desire of some Jesuits to claw back the gift of the Exercises. They even accuse Jesuits of a chronic inability to leave behind the old reflexes of a clericalism that persists in treating the laity as infants. Such reactions, even if they are to some extent well-grounded, are clearly not going to bring about change. Above all, they do not convey the whole truth.

Having spent much time with a wide variety of Jesuits in the context of my work at CSM, I have learned from experience that the Society's desire to collaborate with the laity emerges from a truly Spirit-based decision; it clearly arises from that love which 'consists in interchange between the two parties' (Exx 231.1). I have been able to observe the generosity of God's gift operating through the loving and gracious presence of those men who have served, and are still serving, a mission that they immediately and intuitively recognised as larger than the specifically Jesuit charism. Their 'way of proceeding' has also taught me that quality of love marked by 'the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what they have . . . and so conversely the beloved to the lover' (Exx 231.1). Further, I have been called gradually to an authentic partnership, bringing to the life of the Centre that which is lacking in the Jesuits—starting with everything involved in my vocation as a lay person. I know that many other people involved in the work of the Centre, lay or religious, would express gratitude for similar reasons.

I consider myself today to be a lay Ignatian 'without hang-ups' in relation to my Jesuit brothers in Quebec, and capable of maintaining an Ignatian dialogue with them on an equal basis. But the process of arriving at this position needed patience, and involved some wounds along the way. On the one hand, I had to accept my need to grow, to be instructed by those who were more Ignatian than me—which meant allowing myself to be formed by members of the Society of Jesus. That responsibility fell to Jesuits not through any kind of theological necessity, but rather through historical and cultural circumstances.

**Not only
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On the other hand, the conversion that Jesuits themselves have to live requires of them too a certain patience with a growth-process. To become men not only *for* others, but also *with* others (as the 1995 General Congregation challenged them to do) will involve a transformation in attitude—supported by new patterns of formation—which can only come about over several generations. That

is why I feel admiration rather than hurt after my fifteen years or so of spiritual and apostolic fellowship with the Jesuits.

At this stage of our journey together—or, rather, at this stage of the alliance which we must build in order to make a stronger unit for mission—I think that the greatest challenge facing the Society of Jesus will be that of remaining in fellowship with its partners at the heart of the apostolic works it has created. As far as the CSM is concerned, the Jesuits of the French Canadian Province chose in 1995 to institute a broad Ignatian partnership. This initiative brought partner groups together on the Administrative Council, with memberships drawn from different religious congregations, from among diocesan priests and from among lay people. The work is incomplete; in many respects it is still in embryo. But it shows an energizing confidence in the future of Ignatian partnership for the 21st century.

The question that preoccupies me, however, is the following: will the Society be tempted to consider its own mission complete once the work can be fully taken over by its non-Jesuit partners? The temptation will be all the stronger as active Jesuits, in Quebec as throughout the Western world, become fewer and fewer in number over the years to come. But true partnership will not be possible if one of the supposed partners is completely eclipsed, even if this is to make

room for mature and competent lay Ignatian disciples.

The Jesuit way of serving today undeniably involves the death of an old form of presence. But it is probably also true that straightforward withdrawal from an apostolic work represents a powerful temptation under the appearance of good. Partnership implies the risks of dialogue and companionship on a daily rather than an occasional basis. Hence the importance of a meaningful



Jesuit presence that is still fully invested in the work—not in order to affix the official Ignatian seal of approval (such recognition has already ceased to be the Society's role)—but in order to live out complete Ignatian partnership, and to contribute to the formation of a new

Ignatian identity at the heart of the Church and of the world. It seems to me that, for the Jesuits, this remaining is also part of what is entailed in the call to become men *with* others, after having been so generously and for so long men *for* others.

Towards Mature Partnership

The challenges involved in Jesuit-lay partnership must be understood in relation to the new place of the laity in the Church. Within the overall history of Christianity, the emergence of the laity as real partners (rather than simply as people who did what they were told), has as yet occurred only on the surface. Like all those involved in the Church, I have heard—especially in my role as spiritual director—numerous sad stories of both laity and clergy in situations of shared responsibility. They may be suffering from incomprehension and humiliation, or from guilt and feelings of inferiority, or even at times from the secret fear of losing ‘their’ place at the heart of the Christian community. All these cries and whispers express the inevitable discomfort of a dialogue between people who are trying to find a common language and culture. This shared understanding will need decades and more to come to birth.

There are of course examples of successful partnerships in the Church, but they rarely make the headlines. I like to see in the multiplicity of diocesan synods a constructive affirmation, even if hesitant and incomplete, of the will of the whole Church to expose itself to the wind of change. We know full well where this wind of change is coming from, but no one has any idea where it is going, apart from the fact that there will be a complete institutional remodelling. However, it does not take a skilled exegete to decipher, between the lines of all the decrees promulgated after these conferences, permanent conflicts and uncertainties around key concepts like synodality and co-responsibility. These words do not always mean the same thing for lay people as for clerics.

The experiences of collaboration in the Ignatian world are also marked by these hopes and ambiguities. As an example, the 1995 General Congregation decree on the laity was received by lay people and by Jesuits in quite different ways. Jesuits themselves differ in their perception of its importance for the life of the Society, and I have noticed that it has generally aroused greater enthusiasm from lay

people than from Jesuits. After the international conference on Ignatian partnership in Rome, I was able to see what were at least paradoxes—if not downright contradictions—in the expectations of both sides. For example, I heard the Jesuit General call forcefully on the Christian Life Community to grow in autonomy, so as to become a true partner in mission. At the same time, I also heard lay people protest that too many members of the Society understood the CLC and its way of mission in very Jesuit-centred terms.

On this last point, one question, raised at several points during the conference, is remarkably revealing of the issues at stake in building Ignatian partnership. ‘Who is it that sends out on mission?’ This question was usually put by Jesuits who were concerned at not finding representatives of the laity (now going beyond the CLC) authorised to build an institutional partnership, as opposed to a partnership between Jesuits and particular individuals. In the Society of Jesus, the situation is clear: it is the Father Provincial (or General) who ‘missions’ and who is the mandated spokesperson for the Jesuit community. With the laity, it cannot be like this. This question seems to express an unease also shared by lay people, since some of them have chosen to become Ignatian Associates in order to be formally attached to the Jesuits’ mission and to be ‘sent’ by the Provincial.

The thinking on this subject contributed by the laity, especially by members of CLC, opens up quite a new way of understanding what it means to be sent on mission: it is not a person in authority who sends, as in the Society of Jesus, but the community itself, ‘without intermediary’, one might say. So each local community can be seen as a ‘discerning body’, entrusting its mission to each member, following—if appropriate—the orientations of the wider association to which it belongs, and respecting the lay realities that shape the involvement of each person—family, work and so on. Seen in this light, lay status entails a new way of thinking about ‘missioning’ and the mobility that it necessarily entails. To put the matter bluntly: lay status is not a limitation to be accommodated, but part of a mode of genuinely Ignatian mission that is different—Ignatian, but not Jesuit.

An Ignatian concept of this kind of mission has scarcely reached the awareness of the laity, and it will probably take several decades for it to grow fully. Thus we are faced with two questions. First, how can the Society of Jesus let go of its Jesuit models for understanding

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Ignatian lay identity? And secondly, how can the lay people involved come to see themselves (and I am thinking here very concretely of the CLC and other similar communities) as a body that has not yet reached maturity, a body that still needs the resources of the Society to continue creating itself, and still looks to the Jesuits for its foundational Ignatian identity to be recognised?

The Variety of Lay Ignatian Vocations

This body of Ignatian laity will always be, by its very nature, pluriform. Lay Ignatians are not always grouped into communities, far from it. Many lay people work alongside Jesuits, or in the apostolic network of the Society of Jesus, without having any firm link to an Ignatian community. Others are Ignatian Associates or members of a Christian Life Community.

All this points to how complex lay Ignatian identity is, and how far-reaching the challenge is when it comes to constructing a Jesuit-lay partnership. One point is clear: the partnership will always be pluriform in its structures of association and in its ways of functioning, or else it will not exist at all.

The CSM is an interesting case in point. Founded by the Society of Jesus apostolic network of the French Canadian Province (it is scarcely ever termed 'a Jesuit work'), the CSM is now constitutionally dependent on a formally established Ignatian Association, involving (besides the Society of Jesus as the original founders) a group of religious congregations, a group of secular priests and a group of the Ignatian laity. Each group is represented on the administrative Council, enabling a sensitivity to the needs of the various sectors as the basis for ongoing discernment as to how the Centre's mission evolves.

Although there is room for improvement, one element here must surely be maintained: the imaginative vision that has led to a style of partnership that is both structured and open—a partnership of a kind quite different from that between the institution and those who work for it. For the presence of women religious and secular priests breaks down the sense of polarisation that arises when one thinks simply of Jesuits and lay people. It brings to Ignatian partnership other ecclesial dimensions that are essential if the pluriform reality which is true Ignatian partnership is to grow fully.

I am personally part of an Ignatian community that grew from CSM—the Community in Daily Life (CDL)—which could well be called one day to join the ranks of the Ignatian Association. Whether that happens or not, I already feel myself ‘sent’ by my community to work at the Centre. However, though the Centre is quite used to thinking about people from religious congregations in these terms, I am sure that it does not yet see me, a lay person, in this way.

Alongside that, in my capacity as Director of Programmes, I receive my mandate from the Administrative Council (and therefore from the Ignatian partnership), which, through the director, ‘missions’ me in terms of the responsibility that is given me at the Centre. Then again, since the Centre is also an apostolic work of the Society of Jesus, I can see a particular link between myself and the Jesuit Provincial, whom I meet during his annual visitations. I experience that meeting as an ‘account of conscience’, the revealing of all one’s ‘inclinations and motions’ that is very characteristic of Jesuit governance.⁴

In short, I experience Christ sending me on mission by three different Ignatian means: my lay community, the Ignatian Association, and the Provincial. Ignatian partnership in mission is something that works itself out in me through the interplay of these three linked agencies. All three of them are interpersonal and institutional structures that affect me personally. I could not now abandon any of them without giving up something integral to the texture of my lay Ignatian commitment.

I am convinced that my situation is not at all exceptional—it simply highlights the pluriformity and complexity of lay Ignatian identity and Ignatian partnerships, now and in the future. I think we should resist the reductionist temptation to simplify the multiple, often contradictory components of lay Ignatian identity. We should rather be happy to live in the insecurity of an Ignatian partnership that moves forward in trust through the darkness as it tries to define itself. This is perhaps the price we must pay for living in creative fidelity to the spirit of Ignatius Loyola.

⁴ Examen 4.35 [*Constitutions* 92.4].

Diversity in Partnership

One of the most innovative forms of collaboration in mission is the involvement between Ignatian and non-Ignatian individuals or groups. In a growing number of situations, Christians without any experience of the Exercises, or with only a rudimentary knowledge of Ignatius' work, are called upon to fulfil key functions in Ignatian institutions or Jesuit projects (such as schools, spiritual centres or social justice programmes), and even, in certain provinces, within the government of the Society of Jesus itself. There are also situations in which fully Ignatian or Jesuit programmes are partly staffed by individuals from other religious traditions, or by those with no faith at all. All are able to work together on the basis of shared values. And of course there are more and more Ignatian women and men involved in spiritual or humanitarian projects that do not originate in the Society of Jesus or in Christian churches. Each of these models of Ignatian partnership is important; all of them have much to teach us.

Ignatian spirituality is essentially about making relationships. Thus those who follow it need to make alliances with people who are different—either just a little different (Roman Catholics who are not Ignatian or Ignatian people from other Churches), or else rather more different (mainstream members of other Churches), or perhaps quite different (followers of other religions), or even very different indeed (non-believers).

Much more is at stake here than a pragmatic *faute de mieux*. Such alliances are inspired by a dynamism at the heart of Ignatian identity:



the irresistible urge towards new frontiers. By the very fact of their otherness, these others participate in a mysterious way in the blossoming of a more authentically Ignatian partnership. True, this type of collaboration is sometimes far removed from an Ignatian partnership rooted in the 'pure' Ignatian tradition, but this is precisely where its true grace lies. To refuse to take the risk of such connections, even at the institutional level, would be a violation of the Ignatian spirit, a spirit which seeks ceaselessly to break down barriers, especially those which divide the Churches from humanity as a whole.

In Quebec, the CSM has long-established alliances with individuals from non-Ignatian traditions. Thus, many collaborators, notably those with expertise in the human sciences, have come from other schools of spirituality, other spiritual families. Though such links have clearly been fruitful, there have been some occasional difficulties in integrating them within the overall Ignatian vision. Indeed, some instances of collaboration have seemed problematic to at least some Centre staff and some French Canadian Jesuits—problematic because they seem threatening to the specifically Ignatian character of the Centre. Obviously we are dealing here with something far short of an established partnership. Inevitably there will be a gap between how the Centre perceives those outside it and how those outside perceive the Centre. There is one set of questions about the Centre's desire to collaborate, and another about how far those concerned want to be incorporated into the definition of Ignatian identity. These gaps are difficult to negotiate: we are dealing with people who are 'other', and that means what it says. But living with this tension is an essential part of Ignatian identity.

Institutionally, too, the CSM has begun to forge institutional partnerships with various external bodies. We have begun here by making agreements with the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at our local university, and also with the interreligious chaplaincy there. The link with the Faculty enables the Centre to offer formation courses for spiritual guides at the Centre, and gives the Centre a chance to exert a broader Ignatian influence on society at large—the university is, after all, a public institution. The Centre is also stimulated to be more open to the educational values at the heart of contemporary Western society. For its part, the agreement with the chaplaincy will, among other benefits, expose the Centre more directly to the practice of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and invite it

to explore what it is to live out such a dialogue in an Ignatian way. Such partnerships will help significantly in broadening Ignatian awareness. These two examples will suffice to suggest future paths beckoning the CSM forward. Its history has brought it to a crossroads, from which it cannot but move on towards bold and original forms of Ignatian partnership.

Conclusion: The Ignatian Hope

As I come to the end of these thoughts on Ignatian partnership, I want to describe the hope I nurture at the outset of a new century that is calling for Ignatian partnerships of new kinds. At the heart of this call are the new relationships being forged between Jesuits and the laity. Yesterday's beacons serve only to remind us of the road we have already travelled. It is time for an ecclesiological breakthrough, and for creativity in our discernment. Ignatian spirituality is one of the resources being summoned by the Spirit to a place of meeting, a radically catholic, universal place, a place from where we can enter into the 'Church of the laity'. This Church will, in its entirety, be oriented towards the service of the world. And the lay state of life will be the focal sacramental reality.

At the risk of being accused of spiritual chauvinism, I believe that Ignatian spirituality, precisely by virtue of its position as the most secular spirituality in the history of Christianity, has a prophetic role to play in this great project. This is the deep conviction that keeps me going, and which has led me to write here about all these years of Ignatian fellowship in mission. I believe that the new creation which the Spirit is bringing about at the CSM in Quebec, in interaction with the whole Ignatian tradition, can contribute to the opening of paths that will be fruitful for the future. Moreover, through the variety of our experiences, Ignatian identity is itself growing. We are constantly experiencing the Ignatian *magis*—the 'ever greater glory'. And the Ignatian tradition is coming to nourish the Church as a whole. It can serve as the 'little yeast' which 'leavens the whole batch of dough' (1 Corinthians 5.6).

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