

APOSTOLIC CONGREGATIONS OF WOMEN AND THE IGNATIAN CHARISM

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IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA's warning that 'the devil acts like a woman . . .'¹ hardly augured well for his support of woman's role in the ministry. Yet our discussions today will build upon the paradox that his influence through his Company of Jesus in the last four centuries has been one of the major spiritual forces, impelling religious women of apostolic congregations towards the fulness of their proper role within the Church's ministry, a role consonant with the fulness of mission shared by all who are 'in Christ Jesus'.² 'Ministry' here will be used to denote that broad range of services which one dedicated to the mission of Christ extends to his fellow-man in order to foster each person's reception of the Father's gift of salvation and to foster participation in the redemptive action of the Son through the guidance of his Spirit.³

It will not be possible to discuss here other equally influential persons besides Ignatius in the post-reformation Church; for example, Angela Merici or Vincent de Paul, through whose teaching and works religious women have moved into ever fuller participation in the active ministry. Nor shall we be able to survey the large body of information now accumulating on the psycho-sociological, economic and cultural forces which have led to the present woman's movement – a movement holding rich promise for the extension of the kingdom, but also liabilities if we do not help to base it on authentic notions of personhood and freedom. In this symposium, we concentrate on the

¹ Exx 325: 'Rules for the Discernment of Spirits'.

² Gal 3, 28.

³ Much current periodical literature is devoted to 'ministry', including 'women in the ministry'. *Supplement to the Way*, 17, especially its section 'Consecration and Ministry of Women', provides excellent material relevant to this paper, but it was not issued until after this paper was written. See also vol 44, 3 (Nov. 1972) of *Sisters Today*; and *Women in Ministry: A Sister's View*, NAWR Publications, Chicago, 1972.

influence of Ignatius and his followers, conscious that much that they accomplished positively for women religious was in spite of the limitations of their cultural outlook, and in consequence of their spiritual vision. The clarity and convictions we gain may help us better to direct future developments for the greater glory of God. We also foresee that research and writing on ignatian influence on our congregations can reveal to the jesuits unsuspected depth and richness of expression in their own charism. This aspect can be merely touched on at the end of this paper, but we hope that this symposium will result in continued sharing along these lines.

From the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle of our own century, increasing numbers of women tried to organize their religious lives on the principle explicated in Vatican II: that the 'very nature of [their] religious life requires apostolic action and service'.⁴ No really complete survey of the number of these congregations formally organized in Europe and America in the last four hundred years has been made, to my knowledge. Heimbucher, to whom we all acknowledge a debt, lists about one hundred fifty in his 1965 edition, but the incompleteness of even his excellent manual is testified to by the presence of congregations here whom he does not name.⁵ We might estimate, when one includes groups from the monastic orders who have taken on full-time apostolates, that the number of congregations or orders of women dedicated to apostolic work is closer to two hundred. We might also estimate that individual or small groups of jesuits have been influential in the founding and/or fostering of about one-third of these congregations, and have, through preaching and spiritual direction, influenced over half of these congregations. Very often, of course, their influence was combined with that of bishops and diocesan clergy. Although the circumstances of foundation of each of these congregations of women illustrate that rich variety which always characterizes God's action in history, two general tendencies are discernible with regard to the

⁴ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8.

⁵ Heimbucher, M., *Die Orden und Kongregationen der Katolischen Kirche*, vol 2 (Paderborn, 1965), pp 341-551; pp 611-637 *passim*. Partial surveys of the congregations under ignatian influence have been attempted; the following are helpful: Beyer, J.: 'Der Einfluss der Konstitutionen der Gesellschaft Jesu auf das moderne Ordensleben', in *Geist und Leben*, 29 (1956), pp 440-54; and 30 (1957), pp 47-59; Codins, A.; 'Prolegomena to *Sancti Ignatii de Loyola, Constitutiones Societatis Jesu*', tom 3, *Textus Latinus*, in *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu*, III (Rome, 1934-38), pp xcix-cxiii; Grisar, J.; 'Jesuitinnen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des weiblichen Ordenswesens von 1550-1650', in *Reformata Reformanda: Festgabe für Hubert Jedin*, part II (Münster, 1965), pp 70-113.

operation of jesuit influence. In many instances, jesuits came upon groups of devout women effectively pursuing a work of spreading the kingdom, and helped them to discern a call to total dedication and an enduring mission; or jesuits entered upon the direction of women deeply receptive to growth in the Spirit and helped them to discern a call to total dedication in a field of apostolic endeavour where they could serve the people of God with the ardour to which their union with Christ impelled them. Whichever the sequence of events or combination of events led to religious foundations, they serve to illustrate one of the major fruits of ignatian influence: Ignatius developed men of the Spirit, with a great faith in the action of the Spirit in others, a great concern to foster the discernment of and response to the action of the Spirit as the fulness of life for each christian. Von Balthasar has underlined this notion:

... his [Ignatius's] ironical observations on the occasion of his encounter with the dominicans and the Inquisition, when he was virtually equated with the illuminists and the erasmians, . . . as well as the type of holiness envisaged by the Exercises, make it perfectly clear that there was one point on which he would not give an inch: the inner teaching of the holy Spirit. Though he had not the slightest intention of inaugurating a 'new theology' – for which he was conscious neither of the vocation nor the ability – he fastened on the johannine idea of the identity of knowledge and life. The Exercises lead up to a 'choice' arising from the fulness of contemplation of the life of the Lord, a life springing up from the fulness of the christian idea. This is what made them the basis for the chief school of sanctity for succeeding centuries. They simply restored the simple christian conception of truth which is the unity of knowledge and action. Just as Thomas became the patron of all christian schools of theology, of whatever religious order, so the ignatian Exercises became the practical school of holiness for all the orders.⁶

It was important for religious women that during the centuries, and especially the nineteenth, when the holy Spirit was impelling them to a mission *outwards* for redemptive ministry among their fellow-men, there were abroad spiritual directors whose faith in the 'inner teaching of the holy Spirit' was stronger even than their male scepticism. Jesuit directors, with greater or lesser depth and insight, utilized the teaching of Ignatius on discernment and gave confirmation and support to many efforts to live consecrated lives centred on the active apostolate.

⁶ Von Balthasar, H. U., *Word and Redemption* (New York, 1965), p 59.

Above all, what was even more important for religious women was that ignatian spirituality, with its emphasis on the individual's ever-deepening capacity to discern and to respond to the inner action of the Spirit, was a spirituality which looked towards and affirmed spiritual maturity. That Ignatius had this aim is indicated both in his instructions regarding formation⁷ and above all in his *Constitutions*, where he places the strength of his order in 'the interior law of charity and love which the holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts . . . more than any exterior constitution'.⁸ Although even jesuits were slow to accept the full implications of the spiritual maturity attained to by the religious women whom they instructed and directed, especially through the Spiritual Exercises; although jesuits were yet slower in supporting the utilization by religious women of the principles and the framework for the fulness of the apostolic life which Ignatius outlined in his *Constitutions*, still decade by decade, century by century, their influence helped religious women attain spiritual maturity, and quietly but firmly to edge out of the cloister. Ignatius had recognized that, for the effectiveness of a truly apostolic consecrated life even for men, he must explicitly address himself to the traditional challenge of 'the world' to holiness, and must provide an alternative to the medieval panacea – the cloister. His spiritual teachings and methods provide for a new approach to religious spirituality from the earliest stages of candidacy.

If someone enters a well-ordered and organized monastery, he will be more separated from occasions of sin because of the cloister, tranquillity, and good order there than in our Society. It does not have that cloister, quiet, and repose, but travels from one place to another. Moreover, if one has bad habits and lacks some perfection, it suffices for him to perfect himself in a monastery so ordered and organized. But in our Society it is necessary that one be well-experienced and extensively tested before being admitted. For as he travels about later on, he must associate with men and women both good and bad. Such associations require greater strength and experiences as well as greater graces and gifts from our Creator and Lord.⁹

The whole thrust of the ignatian approach, not only for early formation, but through all the stages to the attainment of a discerning

⁷ From a declaration, *De Collegiis et domibus fundandis*, 18, of St Ignatius in 1541, cited by Ganss, G., S. J., in *The Constitution of the Society of Jesus*, translated with an introduction and commentary (St. Louis, 1970), p 96.

⁸ Preamble to *The Constitution of the Society of Jesus*, Ganss, pp 259–60.

⁹ The declaration of St Ignatius, *De Collegiis* . . . cited in note 7.

love, to the attaining of that maturity Ignatius envisioned for his men ('— it does not seem expedient to give them any other rule than that which discreet charity dictates to them . . .'¹⁰) was needed much more for women than for men; for it was the assumed weaknesses of the former to which the cloister was especially designed to minister. In the long patristic and medieval tradition women had been Eve, susceptible to the devil's wiles, and, in turn, the temptress; and what has been said about woman's status at the beginning of the middle ages had hardly changed when Ignatius formulated his theology of the apostolic religious life.¹¹ It is extremely important here to note that I have been using the term 'cloister' and not 'contemplative' and 'contemplative life'. The Church has always, we hope, ultimately recognized that the true contemplative is spiritually a very mature person. But cloister and cloister regulations were gradually, through the centuries, often built on assumptions of immaturity, while through the same centuries, the contemplative became more and more identified as the 'cloistered person'. Thus official ecclesiastical thought and popular thought was tainted with assumptions of immaturity, which were unfortunately often correct. In his declaration cited above Ignatius seems to reflect the thought prevailing in his time.

He is, of course, famous for his disclaimer of responsibility of himself and his order for congregations of religious women. Fortunately, he and his company took responsibility for fostering the action of the Spirit of Jesus, and the Spirit of Jesus works toward the maturing of all 'jew and greek, slave and free, male and female, . . . all one in Christ Jesus'.¹²

Ignatius's men not only provided a means of growing in the Spirit to a full christian maturity, but very importantly they also shared and fostered a deep sense of mission, a mission *outwards* to serve people in whatever ways would lead to their redemption. This sense of mission was especially present in the post-reformation and in particular the post-french revolution Church. Jesuits, by providing religious women with the Spiritual Exercises, helped them to deepen their union with Christ in his paschal mystery, and therefore to share in his redemptive zeal to bring all people to the Kingdom and

¹⁰ *The Constitution of the Society of Jesus*, VI, 3, 1 582: Ganss, pp 259-60.

¹¹ Cain, J. R.: 'Cloister and the Apostolate of Religious Women', in *Review for Religious*, 27 (1968), pp 243-80, 427-48, 652-71, 916-37, and 28 (1969), 101-21, provides a basic survey of attitudes toward women and development of cloister regulations.

¹² Gal 3, 28.

to participate in the work of the Kingdom. Ignatius's own trinitarian sense of mission conveys the urgency of the Son of God, impelled by his communion in love with the Father and the Spirit, to reach out to men and draw them into that communion of love.

The jesuits, too, shared with and confirmed in religious women a profound sense of mission in and through the Church united under the pope as Christ's vicar. In endeavouring to work in and for the institutional Church, religious women suffered persistently and heavily from the clerical inability to understand the apostolic means necessary to accomplish the apostolic ends the clergy themselves desired. Cardinal Wiseman, who brought the apostolic founder, Cornelia Connelly, to England to *lift* the level of catholic education in the mid-eighteenth century, nevertheless sent an official warning to Rome, on the occasion of her congregation's inheriting a priest's library, that 'the fragile daughters of Eve are now in the possession of the tree of knowledge'.¹³ But the apostolic religious founders from the valiant Mary Ward to the twentieth century founders, were capable of understanding and acting upon the kind of counsel Cornelia Connelly's jesuit spiritual director gave her; '... there will be difficulties, obstacles, sufferings, even. These are the signs of its [her congregation] being a work of God'.¹⁴ The spirit of the apostolic founders vis-à-vis the institutional Church seems to have been well-expressed recently in a different context by one deeply imbued with the ignatian spirit. Teilhard de Chardin wrote concerning his own cause:

Would it be logical for me, by breaking with my Church, impatiently to force the growth of that christian stem in which I am persuaded that the sap of the religion of tomorrow is forming? I am held fast to the Church by the very views which help me see her insufficiencies.¹⁵

Ignatian discernment not only helped apostolic religious women develop a patient, mature and efficacious love of the institutional Church, in the face of the obstacles and sufferings it gave them, but also an efficacious love in better choice of ministries in the face of real needs. This ignatian principle, so relevant to today's needs, merits deeper study and renewed application in our congregations today.

¹³ Letter of Cardinal Wiseman to Cardinal Frasoni, Mar. 24, 1854, in *Atte della Commissione per la revisione delle regole*, 1887, Archives of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Rome.

¹⁴ Letter of J. Grassi, S. J., Jan. 20, 1848, Archives of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Rome. (The term 'founders' is used throughout for both men and women).

¹⁵ Cited by d'Ouince, R., S. J., in 'Prologue' to *Letters to Two Friends*, 1926-1952, by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (New York, 1968).

Thus far we have looked at a rather ideal picture of ignatian influences slowly but steadily impelling religious women towards their now expanding role in the Church's ministry. But the unfortunate reality which present studies are revealing more clearly is that the ignatian heritage was transmitted only partially to women's congregations. Since details concerning obstacles to its transmission have been given in recent articles, these will not be dwelt upon here.¹⁶ Many obstacles centred around the unwillingness of diocesan and roman authorities and/or jesuits to allow women religious to utilize Ignatius's *Constitutions*, which bring the complex elements of what some would call his 'theology of the apostolic life' into a dynamic unity. These difficulties were compounded by the frequent use, as the base of the constitutions of sisters, of what is called the jesuit *Summary of the Constitutions*; this is, in fact, not a 'summary'; but rather a 'set of excerpts' (this is Ignatius's own term), containing admittedly, some important excerpts, but not a comprehensive outline of all the ignatian emphases, and of the inter-relationships of the varied elements of his teachings.¹⁷

Whatever may have been the obstacles to a free and creative use by religious women of Ignatius's theology of the apostolic life as contained in his *Constitutions*, it is not possible to detail them here.

What *should* we do here? Obviously, *much* for the greater glory of God. I should like, then, to suggest a few concrete questions to focus efforts not only in this session but throughout the symposium. We need to improve, to pinpoint, these questions within the discussions themselves.

I suggest:

1. That we pool the fruits of our prayerful study on what are the basic and perennially relevant elements of Ignatius's synthesis of the apostolic religious life in his *Constitutions*;
2. That the jesuits clarify for us their differences of interpretations as well as their shared affirmations regarding the teachings of the *Constitutions*;
3. That we sisters share our findings regarding the aspects of ignatian teachings whose development has been aborted or stunted within our congregations, but which appear to have been within the vision of our founders;

¹⁶ See McCarthy, C.: 'Constitutions for Apostolic Religious', and Courel, F.: 'Apostolic Religious: One End', in *Supplement to the Way* 14 (Autumn, 1971), pp 33-45, 46-61; Wetter, I.: 'Mary Ward's Apostolic Vocation', in *Supplement to the Way* 17 (Autumn, 1972), pp 69-91.

¹⁷ McCarthy, *op. cit.* pp 35-7.

4. That we share views on the areas where ignatian thought can or should be developed by new insights and changed conditions since his time;

5. Finally, above all, that we share positive suggestions, plans, experiences for the implementation of that dedicated apostolic ministry for which Ignatius has provided profound inspiration and effective guidance for all of us.

In conclusion, I shall quickly touch on some of the points relating to the first question: those basic and perennially relevant teachings of Ignatius' Constitutions on the apostolic religious life. At the centre of the ignatian vision is his clear and effective formulation of the end proper to the apostolic religious life: the greater glory of God and the salvation of men – this double term seen as one end. Ignatius puts so much stress throughout his Constitutions on the single end of the apostolic life that it has been called his *leitmotif*.¹⁸ The jesuit scholar, François Courel, holds that Ignatius deliberately set out to resolve the long-standing tensions which centuries of monastic theology held constantly before the religious: the pursuit of individual perfection *versus* working for one's neighbour's perfection; prayer *versus* active service.

The first resolution of tensions Ignatius accomplished by seeing the apostles' own pursuit of perfection as an indispensable means, not an end, to the glory of God and salvation of one's neighbour. The second is based on a full understanding of the 'glory of God', not just that which lies in his objective perfection, but also that which man, moved by God, gives to God through his total gift of himself in the Son serving the Father for the salvation of men. The will of the Father is the salvation of all men: 'Glory and service are identified perfectly'.¹⁹

Ignatius gave to the whole framework of his Constitutions a person-orientation, an emphasis on the forming of apostles for mission. The order of composition deals first with the prospective apostle, considering his vocation to the Society, and his and the Society's acceptance or rejection of him. It follows him through the stages leading to his full incorporation into the life of the Society, then traces his life in terms of the body – its mission, government, unity, preservation. The emphasis is on the apostles in mission, not

¹⁸ Cf Courel, F.: 'Gloire', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, VIII col 490. The points given here and in the following paragraphs are based on McCarthy, *op. cit.* pp 39–42.

¹⁹ Courel, 'Apostolic Religious: One End', *art. cit.* p 61.

on structure, although the latter is strong in terms of the union of the apostles with the unifying head.

We have already indicated how he strove to be deliberately innovative in the mode of formation, so that the religious is formed for apostolic service from the beginning of religious life, finding service a means of growth in contemplative union with God rather than an obstacle.

Therefore, in his Constitutions, Ignatius provides for a challenging flexibility, mobility, disponibility for the formed apostles, rather than for a rigidly structured pattern of life – a feature for which his authority has sometimes erroneously been invoked. Much has already been said regarding his basic intent to form men deeply sensitive to the Spirit, 'finding God in all things', spiritually mature in striving ever more and more to do the will of the Father. It is within this context we can view his teaching on obedience.

The latter should be viewed, too, within the context of mission. Basic to all Ignatius's teaching is his belief in the apostle's incorporation into the mission of the incarnate Son through a truly personal union with Christ in his paschal mystery. Ignatius relies especially on the Spiritual Exercises for the fostering of this redemptive union, and of discerning growth in humility and zeal. Is it in this context we can understand most clearly his teaching on poverty? Recent jesuit studies enlighten us on poverty,²⁰ and we look for further help on a challenging subject from this symposium.

This cursory summary does no more than touch on the ignatian core. It has been suggested that the Constitutions can be studied for their light on the resolution not only of the contemplation – action tension, but also on those of humility-zeal, work-leisure, community-apostolate. We certainly look to the sharing in this symposium for insight regarding 'community' – what Ignatius taught and what insistent contemporary emphases tell us.

My final word looks to a future of increased sharing which this symposium courageously inaugurates. Here we religious women can plan the ways by which we will share with the jesuits and with one another the revelation of the rich potential of Ignatius's charism as it is expressed creatively yet authentically by women founders who identified with its basic thrust. Increased sharing will hopefully renew us in ever deeper dedications to the mission for the service of others to which the Father has consecrated us in union with his Son.

²⁰ See Knight, D.: *St. Ignatius's Ideal of Poverty*, Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits, vol 4, 1, St. Louis, 1972; also *Supplement to the Way* 9 (Spring, 1970), 'Poverty'.