

LIVING WITH TENSION

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COMPARED WITH the affective serenity suggested by the Benedictine *pax*, and the intellectual serenity suggested by the Dominican *veritas*, a whole complex of yearning, desire, striving, struggle, even dissatisfaction and frustration, is evoked by the Ignatian *magis*. This concept appears in the First Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, challenging the exercitant before the Weeks even begin in the blunt statement, 'Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created'.¹ The whole process of the Exercises keeps that challenge alive, drawing out its implications, personalizing it through intimate contact with Christ, rooting it in the reality of the exercitant's own life by the election, confirming it through union with Christ in his suffering and his glory. The *magis* becomes the spirit of 'the person of the Exercises' and it is precisely such a person whom the *Constitutions* presuppose. The *Constitutions* might well be subtitled *A spirit in search of a body*,² and this indicates that the spirit of the *magis*, already enfleshed in the body (the total personality) of the individual through the Exercises, now seeks a further enfleshment in the body (the total corporate entity or personality) of the Society of Jesus. A new dynamic gets under way, but one in direct continuity with that of the Exercises. The body of the Society (the primary Jesuit community),³ and each member in so far as he is an organic part of that body, are initiated into an ongoing process of living the *magis* in the context of mission, and thus inevitably of living with tension.

Mission and the magis

In an early document preparatory to the *Constitutions* Ignatius discusses his reasons for insisting on the importance of 'experiences' or 'experiments'⁴ in the formation of candidates. He here reveals his expectations for the lifestyle of the professed.

If someone enters a well-ordered and well-organized monastery, he will be more separated from occasions of sin because of the cloister, tranquillity and good order there than he will be in our

Society. For this Society does not have that cloister, quiet and repose, but travels from one place to another . . . For as he travels about later on, he must associate with men and women both good and bad. Such associations require greater strength and greater experiences, as well as greater graces and gifts from our Creator and Lord.⁵

This sketch of Jesuit life becomes even more precise and theologically grounded in the Seventh Part of the *Constitutions* when Ignatius speaks of the fourth vow (of special obedience to the pope in regard to missions).⁶

The intention of the fourth vow pertaining to the pope was not to designate a particular place but to have the members distributed throughout the various parts of the world. For those who first united to form the Society . . . made that promise or vow in order that His Holiness might distribute them for greater glory to God. They did this in conformity with their intention to travel throughout the world and, when they could not find the desired spiritual fruit in one region, to pass on to another and another, ever intent on seeking the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls.⁷

One senses the tension in the intention, the frustration of desires which are disappointingly unfulfilled in one place but which yet appear in hope as capable of fulfillment in another, the constant straining forward of enthusiasts who are never satisfied, the unending fascination with 'the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls'. No wonder the candidate for such a life requires *mayores fuerzas y mayores experiencias, y mayores gracias y dones*.⁸ The spirit of Ignatius is like a suppressed coil of steel, and its verbal expression demands the use of the comparative again and again. Complacency is a feeling unknown to him. There is always that higher mountain to be climbed, that faster race to be run, that more loving service to be offered. Otherwise 'how justly he would deserve to be condemned by the whole world, and looked upon as an ignoble knight'!⁹ There was to be no place for pusillanimous or comfort-seeking persons in the Society.

The presence of the *magis* at the heart of Ignatian spirituality, and especially when that *magis* is lived out by those whose corporate identity rests on their being on mission, guarantees a pervasive tension. The difficulty with this article does not lie in a search for

areas in the *Constitutions* where tension exists, but in the realization that there is no area in the *Constitutions* where tension does not exist. The *magis* is always and everywhere operative. Much could be said about the dangers that lurk in a misunderstanding or misapplication of such a spirituality: pelagianism, perfectionism, voluntarism, activism. There are some for whom the tension of the *magis* is too much to bear, persons to whom it can do physical, psychological or spiritual damage. The probations seek to discover any such weakness in a candidate who will then be asked to leave.

Nevertheless, for those whose true vocation is to live according to the *Constitutions*, the demands of the *magis* are always balanced by the gentleness with which they are presented, and with which they are meant to be heard and responded to. This gentleness has its source in the unction of the Holy Spirit whose presence and activity are always presupposed ('Although all this can be taught only by the unction of the Holy Spirit . . .').¹⁰ Even in the strong exhortation, 'let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God', the gentle rider is added, 'each one, however, according to the grace which the Holy Spirit has given to him . . .'.¹¹ In a similar vein, one of the purposes of the members' opening up of their consciousness to the superior is 'that thus he may direct them better, without placing them beyond the measure of their capacity in dangers or labours greater than they could in our Lord endure with a spirit of love (*amorosamente*)'.¹² The *magis*, if it is truly an invitation and a gift of God from above (*de arriba*)¹³ will be experienced, not as an imposed burden, but as the living out of a greater love and freedom with the unction of the Holy Spirit.

The tension of desire

The Exercises reveal Ignatius's dynamic understanding of the human person. What he asks for first is a certain level of desire. If this required level is not present the person may not be given the full Exercises but a less exigent adaptation of them.¹⁴ Desire, constantly sifted and clarified through the *id quod volo*, becomes in some way the raw material of the Exercises. Sin and the consequences of sin create those unfreedoms which either limit desire itself or frustrate its fulfillment. The exercitant petitions for freedom; this is as much psychological as spiritual in many cases. The freedom granted allows the exercitant to make a significant decision (election) which is geared to the (greater) service and glory of God.

While one may speak in terms of the fulfillment of desire, more often than not that fulfillment issues in and takes the form of a yet deeper and more intense level of desire. Desire, therefore, increases rather than decreases. The 'Take, Lord, and receive . . .'¹⁵ is as much, indeed more a prayer of desire than the first *id quod volo* of which the exercitant was aware.

This dynamic concept of the person continues in the *Constitutions* and underlies their structure. The General Examen tests the candidate's level of desire, and even the history of that desire.

Is he determined to abandon the world and to follow the counsels of Christ our Lord? How much time has elapsed since he made this general decision to abandon the world? After making this decision, has he wavered in it, and to what extent? About how much time has elapsed since his desires to leave the world and follow the counsels of Christ our Lord began to come? What were the signs and motives through which they came?¹⁶

As in the Exercises, desire again becomes the raw material for the probations and that whole process of the incorporation of the individual into the body of the Society. Indeed part of the incorporation process is in the desires of the individual becoming more and more conformed to the desires of the body, concretized eventually into 'our way of proceeding'—that ongoing, corporate discernment of apostolic choices and their implementation.

While 'our way of proceeding' is the result and expression of deeply felt and purified desires, the fact that the necessary discernment is never final or definitive, that it involves a constant evaluation of all the Society's ministries, taking nothing for granted and never being satisfied with a lesser good when a greater good is possible, brings a tension into the life of individual and body alike. Even the conditions indicated by the 33rd General Congregation for the success of communal apostolic discernment show that the Society is deliberately choosing to live with tension.

Deeper involvement in the lives of people around us in order to hear 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted';¹⁷ a regular exposure to new situations of life and thought which oblige us to question our way of seeing and judging; a gradual assimilation of that apostolic pedagogy of St Ignatius; a well-informed use of social and cultural analysis; and an inculturation which opens us to the newness of Jesus the Saviour in the

evolution of every people, and thereby prevents us from absolutizing our perceptions and actions.¹⁸

This is very far from a classical, static model of the person, or of ministry, of the Church or of the world. The tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' which is present in the reality of the Kingdom of God and of our Christian experience as a whole, is not only maintained in the vision of the *Constitutions* and its contemporary application, but emphasized and highlighted as a major constituent of Ignatian apostolic spirituality. The 'already' is acknowledged with gratitude, the 'not yet' is anticipated with desire. It is as if there is a confident expectation of hearing Yahweh's words in Isaiah,

Now I am revealing new things to you, things hidden and unknown to you, created just now, this very moment; of these things you have heard nothing until now, so that you cannot say, 'Oh yes, I knew all this'.¹⁹

Dispersal and companionship

The *Formula* describes the Institute as 'a pathway to God'.²⁰ This image is common to many religions, yet here it resonates in a particular way with all that is known of Ignatius' life and character, and his self-description in the Autobiography as 'the pilgrim'. But for Ignatius to call himself a pilgrim is not just a metaphorical description of his inner journey to God; it is firstly a concrete description of his lifestyle from the time of his conversion at Loyola. Here pilgrimage is defined not in terms of its end-point (as with the metaphorical journey to God), but rather in terms of the actual journeying itself over the roads and seas of the known world.

The early companions had an important key for interpreting the charism of the Society. It consisted in taking God's dealing with Ignatius as normative (hence the crucial importance of the Autobiography)²¹ and was expressed in statements such as: 'The Society develops in the same way as the life of our Father unfolded'²² and 'Father Ignatius used to say that when God chooses someone to be the founder of a religious order, he leads him in such a way as he wishes those who follow him to walk also'.²³ Hence the *Constitutions* say that '... the first characteristic of our Institute ... is to travel'.²⁴ The companions, according to Nadal,

... consider that they are in their most peaceful and pleasant house when they are constantly on the move, when they travel throughout the earth, when they have no place to call their own, when they are always in need, always in want—only let them strive in some small way to imitate Christ Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head and who spent all his years of preaching in journey.²⁵

This particular vocation, therefore, modelled on the experience of Ignatius and the public life of Jesus, is to become and remain a pilgrim, to be on the move (or in an attitude of attentive readiness to move) at all times. Here again is an inevitable source of tension.

This is so because the value of being a pilgrim, of mobility, of dispersal on mission, seems to be in conflict with the value of companionship in the Lord. Is there a need to choose between the two? This was one of the questions faced by the early companions in the Deliberation of the First Fathers where it was formulated as follows:

After we had offered and dedicated ourselves and our lives to Christ our Lord and to his true and legitimate vicar on earth, so that he might dispose of us and send us where he might judge we could be most effective—whether to the Indies, the heretics, or among any of the faithful or among non-Christians would it be better for us to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical dispersal, however great, could separate us? Or perhaps would this be inexpedient?²⁶

Their answer was quick in coming and clear in intent:

We decided affirmatively, namely, that since the most kind and loving Lord had deigned to unite us to one another and to bring us together—weak men and from such different places and cultures—we should not sever God's union and bringing together, but rather everyday we should strengthen and more solidly ground it, forming ourselves into one body. Everyone should have concern for and comprehension of the other for greater apostolic efficacy, since united strength would have more power and courage in confronting whatever challenging goals were to be sought than if this strength were divided into many parts.²⁷

So there was to be no choosing between the two values. Dispersal was 'necessary in order to reach the goal we had already fixed

upon and thought about with intense desire'.²⁸ On the other hand their friendships were given them as gifts by God and therefore not to be abandoned. Indeed these close relationships were so many ways through which God mediated his providential love and concern to them all.

Harmonizing these values became possible firstly through their realizing that God had given them their friendships for an apostolic purpose, so that 'forming ourselves into one body' would lead to 'greater apostolic efficacy'. But secondly (and this is where Ignatian indifference and freedom were required) they were willing to sacrifice one particular mode of expressing their 'union and bringing together', namely that of constant physical presence to one another, and to seek other means to 'strengthen and more solidly ground it'. The Deliberation of the First Fathers, therefore, already set up the tension between dispersal and companionship, between mission and union, which is presented so unambiguously in the opening paragraph of the Eighth Part of the Constitutions.

The more difficult it is for the members of this congregation to be united with their head and among themselves, since they are so scattered among the faithful and among the unbelievers in diverse regions of the world, the more ought means to be sought for that union. For the Society cannot be preserved, or governed, or, consequently, attain the end it seeks for the greater glory of God unless its members are united among themselves and with their head. Therefore the present treatise will deal first with what can aid the union of hearts and later with helps toward the union of persons in congregations or chapters. With respect to the union of hearts, some of the helpful means lie on the side of the subjects, others on the side of the superiors, and others on both sides.²⁹

One notices that union is again presented in terms of the end, of a mission which is effective 'for the greater glory of God'. This does not downgrade union (or companionship or friendship) as a mere means (as if it were not also a value in itself), but places it in the wider context of God's plan for 'the body of the Society taken as a whole',³⁰ and for each member who is to 'strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God'.³¹

Internal dispersal

One of the dangers inherent in dispersal is that of psychological isolation, which in turn can easily become alienation. But at least

it is a fairly obvious danger. More subtle, and so more likely to be overlooked, is that arising from a kind of 'internal dispersal' which can be experienced even within a local community and can similarly lead through psychological isolation to alienation. People may live under the same roof, yet never see one another at work, still less form part of a collaborative team. Specializations can divide. At an even deeper level to-day's world is producing a variety of theologies and spiritualities, a pluriformity of thought, imagination, outlook. Much of this can be represented in the same local community. Gone is the presupposition of common background, the sharing of long years of the same formation process, a philosophy and theology that were regarded as perennial, religious symbols that were unquestioned and unambiguous, an assured place and clearly-defined role in Church and wider society.

The present situation of 'internal dispersal' is rife with centrifugal forces, capable of tearing apart a cherished unity. Nevertheless, the tension which is created in communities (as in the body itself) by such differences of work, ideas, sensibility or vision, need not necessarily be an obstacle either to union or to growth. As the 32nd General Congregation stated:

More so to-day than in the past, our membership is drawn from very different social and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the modern world places a much heavier stress on individual freedom than on the subordination of the individual to the group. Our response to these realities will be to transform them from obstacles to aids in community building. Our basic attitude toward cultural differences will be that they can enrich our union rather than threaten it. Our basic attitude toward personal freedom will be that freedom is fulfilled in the active service of love.³²

While the tension, therefore, can be accepted and even welcomed as a positive contribution to growth and union, what is unacceptable is contumacious obstinacy. This is the inveterate attitude of a person who reacts negatively to any suggestion of change or experimentation or pluralism, and who seeks to block any move, however modest, in those directions. Ultimately such an attitude, even in one person, can destroy the harmony and undermine the well-being of a community, causing discord and unhappiness. The *Constitutions* are firm, even stern:

One who is seen to be a cause of division among those who live together, estranging them either among themselves or from their

head, ought with great diligence to be separated from that community, as a pestilence which can infect it seriously if a remedy is not quickly applied. To separate can mean either to expel the person from the Society completely or to transfer him to another place, if this seems sufficient and more expedient for the divine service and the common good, in the judgment of him who has charge of the matter.³³

A further possibility might be to allow him, or encourage him, to live outside community on his own, both for his sake and that of his brethren—and so ultimately for the sake of the mission.

The individual and the body

The rigour of this approach to the contumacious dissident pinpoints the wider tension that exists, and must exist, between the individual and the body, between the personal and the corporate. The word 'individualism' tends to have a pejorative connotation nowadays, and rightly so if it means an attitude of mind which closes off a Jesuit from the *communio*, which leads him to 'do his own thing' without reference to the body and the values of a corporate understanding of mission. Yet 'individualism' can also be given a more positive meaning, indicating that a person, while having a strong and joyful sense of belonging to the body, and of being engaged in a corporate mission, nevertheless is able to 'stand on his own feet' both psychologically and spiritually. It is this quality (whatever one may wish to call it) which, I believe, suggested to Michael J. Buckley the comparison between the Jesuit and the Carthusian.

For Ignatius, there had to be something profoundly eremitical about the Jesuit, something self-contained and independent so that he can move from place to place, from work to work, from house to house. This absolute detachment from *stabilitas*, from the definition of his life within a particular place or church or group, radically distinguished the Jesuit from either the monk or the hermit, but it was a detachment which was possible only if there was something strongly solitary about his spirituality. Paradoxically, this 'eremitical' element made apostolic availability possible.³⁴

There is a strange continuity between the solitude of the Exercises and that of Jesuit apostolate.

One might well argue that the tension between the individual and the body is not something specific to the *Constitutions*, that it exists in any religious institute, or indeed in any human grouping whatever. This is certainly true, but there are elements in Ignatian spirituality which aggravate it, which can give it an intensity not always experienced elsewhere. The greatest of these is the centrality given to discernment, both personal and communal, and the parallel stress laid on the exercise of authority and the practice of obedience. It is necessary to grasp that Ignatian obedience is always and intrinsically, not just sometimes and extrinsically, linked to discernment, and indeed is a virtue only in that context. A full investigation of this truth is beyond the scope of this article, but attention can be drawn to a crucial principle enunciated by Ignatius in the Rules for Thinking with the Church, and which is equally relevant, *mutatis mutandis*, to the relationship between a member and the body of the Society.

For I must be convinced that in Christ our Lord, the bridegroom, and in his spouse the Church, only one Spirit holds sway, which governs and rules for the salvation of souls. For it is by the same Spirit and Lord who gave the Ten Commandments that our holy Mother Church is ruled and governed.³⁵

The Jesuit must be convinced that in the body of the Society, and in his own person as a member of that body, 'only one Spirit holds sway'. So the individual needs to be open to that Spirit's speaking and attracting in the depths of his own being, and open also to that same Spirit's speaking and attracting in a superior's mind and heart, and in the corporate mind and heart of the Society.

The divine and the human

Another tension emerging from the *Constitutions* is the interplay of the divine and the human. Among the major traditions of Christian spirituality none has allowed more importance and given greater attention to 'nature', to human abilities and talents, than the Ignatian. It is not just a question of an appreciation of the natural, but of the use of the natural in the building of the Kingdom. The Jesuit tradition is deeply humanist in its orientation as can be clearly seen in its educational theory and practice. Similarly, with regard to the Society's own well-being, while the *Constitutions* insist that,

... the means which unite the human instrument with God and so dispose it that it may be wielded dexterously by his divine hand are more effective than those which equip it in relation to men

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they nevertheless go on to add:

When based upon this (spiritual) foundation, the natural means which equip the human instrument of God our Lord to deal with his fellowmen will all be helps toward the preservation and development of this whole body, provided they are acquired and exercised for the divine service alone; employed, indeed, not that we may put our confidence in them, but that we may cooperate with the divine grace according to the arrangement of the sovereign providence of God our Lord. For he desires to be glorified both through the natural means, which he gives as Creator, and through the supernatural means, which he gives as the Author of grace. Therefore the human or acquired means ought to be sought with diligence . . .³⁷

It is extremely difficult to take seriously the human means, to use them with creativity and skill, and at the same time maintain an awareness of the reality and necessity of God's providential care. The tendency is to lean too heavily to one side or the other, either being dismissive of human means and careless in their application on the grounds that it is all God's work, or so reliant on human means and their effectiveness that one never turns to God in the poverty of supplication.

Given the intellectual and cultural formation required by the *Constitutions*, the Jesuit is more likely to fall into the trap of self-sufficiency than into that of a naive reliance on God. Whether it be in the early Society when Jesuits were the confidants of kings and others in high places, or in to-day's involvement in the struggle for justice, the temptation to rely overmuch on the human, the natural, is inescapable. Commenting on the Society's response to Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation ('Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice'), the 33rd General Congregation said *inter alia*:

In all honesty, we must also acknowledge that this new understanding of our mission can lead to tensions both in the Society and outside it. Some have at times emphasized in a unilateral fashion

one aspect of this mission to the detriment of the other. Yet neither a disincarnate spiritualism nor a merely secular activism truly serves the integral Gospel message.³⁸

This balanced assessment of one particular historical situation can serve as a model for dealing with the many polarities in the *Constitutions*. One does not eliminate one of the polarities in order to avoid the tension. Instead there must be a willingness to appreciate and grasp the creative possibilities that a healthy interplay of polarities can offer, an eagerness to continue in faith to live with tension.

NOTES

¹ Exx 23.

² See Dominique Bertrand, *Un corps pour l'Esprit*, (Collection Christus 38; Paris, 1974).

³ 'Moreover, it is in companionship that the Jesuit fulfills his mission. He belongs to a community of friends in the Lord who, like him, have asked to be received under the standard of Christ the King. This community is the entire body of the Society itself, no matter how widely dispersed over the face of the earth. The particular local community to which he may belong at any given moment is, for him, simply a concrete—if, here and now, a privileged—expression of this worldwide brotherhood'. 32nd General Congregation, Decree 2, ('Jesuits Today'), par. 15-16.

⁴ See George E. Ganss, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, (St Louis, 1970), p 82, footnote 23; p 96, footnote 7.

⁵ *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, Constitutiones*, I, p 60.

⁶ See vow formula, *Const* 527.

⁷ *Const* 605.

⁸ 'Greater strength and greater experiences, as well as greater graces and gifts', see footnote 5.

⁹ Exx 94.

¹⁰ *Const* 414.

¹¹ *Formula of the Institute*, par. 3; in Ganss, p 67.

¹² *Const* 92.

¹³ See Exx 237.

¹⁴ See Exx 5, 18, 19, 20.

¹⁵ Exx 234.

¹⁶ *Const* 50. See also 51.

¹⁷ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, par. 1.

¹⁸ 33rd General Congregation, Decree 1, ('Companions of Jesus sent into to-day's world'), par. 41.

¹⁹ Isaiah 48, 6-7.

²⁰ *Formula of the Institute*, par. 3; in Ganss, p 67.

²¹ See the Prologues of Jerome Nadal and Luis Gonçalves da Camara; English translation in *Inigo: Original Testament* (London, 1985), p xviii-xxi.

²² Nadal in MHSI, *Fontes Narrativi*, II, p 9.

²³ Laynez in MHSI, *Fontes Narrativi*, II, p 428.

²⁴ *Const* 626.

²⁵ MHSI, *Monumenta Nadal*, V, p 773.

²⁶ English translation of the *Deliberatio* in John Carroll Futrell, *Making an apostolic community of love*, (St Louis, 1970), p 188-194. This quotation, p 189.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 189-190.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 188.

²⁹ *Const* 655.

³⁰ *Const* 135.

³¹ *Formula of the Institute*, par. 3; in Ganss, p 67.

³² 32nd General Congregation, Decree 11, ('The Union of Minds and Hearts'), par. 16.

³³ *Const* 664-665.

³⁴ Michael J. Buckley, 'Mission in companionship: of Jesuit community and communion', in *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits*, vol XI, no 4, (Sept 1979), p 15.

³⁵ *Exx* 365.

³⁶ *Const* 813.

³⁷ *Const* 814.

³⁸ 33rd General Congregation, Decree 1, ('Companions of Jesus sent into to-day's world'), par. 33.