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THE STATE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: A HISTORICAL VIEW

Within a broader context of Jesuit history, the author, himself a historian, reminds us that these times are neither the worst of times nor the best of times, but rather our times that need to be discerned. This he does commenting the process and final document of the last Procurators' Congregation of the Society of Jesus, held in September 2003 in Loyola, Spain. Reading again the final document of this congregation is stimulating. This historical perspective invites us to reflection and action heeding tha voices of others within the church.

Introduction

On September 17, 2003 the sixty-ninth Congregation of Procurators began at Loyola, Spain. Its primary purpose was to survey the status of the Society of Jesus, and if it perceived grave problems, to summon a General Congregation. Not surprisingly the Congregation did not see the need for the more legislative General Congregation to meet, (only twice before have the Procurators voted to call one). Instead the consensus emerged that "the time was not yet ripe" in terms of many of the issues that might be treated by a General Congregation, and so the emphasis was on helping Father General and his curia plan and prepare studies in the course of the next several years to better bring the eventual Congregation to fruition. While the role of this Procurators' Congregation, then, was rather limited in its scope, it nevertheless offers Jesuits and those who work with them a chance to get a different perspective on the health and activities of the worldwide body.

The view in the Procurators' Congregation comes from below in the

reports prepared by each elected procurator on the state of his Jesuit province. Accountability from above comes from the various sectional secretaries and other counsellors who form the General's curia. Finally, Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach presented his own synthetic report on the State of the Society based on his own experiences and what he has heard from Jesuits around the world. This evaluative snapshot helps not only the General in his governance and future planning, but also the corporate whole of the Society of Jesus to better understand and identify with their far-flung companions around the world.

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The make-up of the Congregation of Procurators also indicates other aspects of the Society at the moment of its meeting. The majority of members at this congregation had some role in the formation of young Jesuits, and many had responsibilities as superiors. Six had already been newly appointed as provincials. While only one was officially designated as a historian (and another as a historical theologian), a few others have worked in Jesuit history in the past. But all sectors of Jesuit activity had some representation. The average age of the congregants was 49 and the median age 53, so it seems that the Society of Jesus wanted to focus towards the future at this time. With this picture in hand, then, some observations on the present state of the Society from a historian/procurator can provide a legitimate context and perspective as we collectively look to future horizons. Demographic history.

Let us first locate ourselves in the demographic spectrum of Jesuit history. The number of Jesuits in the world today, according to the latest statistics, remains above 20,000 (20,408). At two other times in its history the Society of Jesus passed through this level. The first time was in the mid-eighteenth century when the order reached about 23,000 members before beginning a soft decline leading up to the General Suppression in 1773. The second moment occurred in the mid-1930s when the Restored Society, in spite of various revolutions, continued to grow and expand. While neither of these two periods have much to say to the world

situation today, they do underline the fact that the Society of Jesus remains caught up in the larger life and controversies of both the Church and the contemporary world.

The spike in numbers in the eighteenth century, while less dramatic at the time than today's longer and more steady decline, belied a much more serious crisis between the Church and secular society. Beginning with their expulsion from Portugal and her colonies in 1759, most of the other Western European monarchs took political actions against the Jesuits in a systematic way through the period of the General Suppression of the Society of Jesus (1773-1814). Not only historians, but also historical novelists draw out of this period conflicts between secular culture/science and religion. These struggles became so polemical that the Jesuit order, which was clearly engaged in the former and loyal to the latter, would inevitably be caught in the crossfire. The myths and accusations (best exemplified by the Monita Secreta) made during this period still endure in modern form among politicians and parties seeking scapegoats in the Catholic Church.

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The cautious reawakening of the Society of Jesus at the beginning of the nineteenth century (in the course of its first generation) gradually began to respond to the realities of the Liberal Age. Curriculum changes in Jesuit schools, even a greater reliance on tuition fees in U.S. schools, signalled adaptation to the new world. The expansion of the United States opened new vistas for the many Jesuits who followed the European emigrations there. By the 1930s, when the Society of Jesus once again reached 20,000, the greatest institutional growth was to be found in the Jesuit provinces of North America, in a society formed by one of the earliest of the liberal revolutions. While the massive immigration from Europe created a context which favored the Jesuits and their schools in North America, the disaster of the Second World War would leave Europe devastated and divided. But the Jesuits continued to grow in other parts of the world for another

half century.

The present year finds the Society of Jesus beginning to level out of a decline in numbers that began rather steeply in the 1970s. Most of those who attended the Procurators' Congregation, then, would have lived most of their Jesuit lives in the resulting period of institutional consolidation. The corporate vision of the Order has been affected by its demographic changes; but cultural and theological changes have also been strongly felt in the last thirty years. The defensive and apologetic stance of the Restored Society of Jesus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remained centered on the cultural and theological issues of Western Europe. The Society has now been transformed into a global organization that glories in its multicultural identity even while it struggles to understand it in an increasingly global context. A predominantly institutionally-oriented structure (largely devoted to classical education) has given way to a body less closely tied to the institutions which it founded and continues to sponsor. Instead, Jesuits have become more committed to activities characterized by an engagement with social structures under the rubric of "a faith that does justice." The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), founded in 1980 by then Father General Pedro Arrupe, currently administers 156 projects in seventy countries. In addition to direct care to refugees (including some 150,000 students), JRS also engages in advocacy for refugee rights before the United Nations and other governmental organizations.

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In the course of the Congregation of Procurators several themes arose which were perceived as being of greater significance for the Society at this time. While these issues were not of a gravity to warrant the calling of a General Congregation, they did provoke several days of reflection and discussion. Father General was left with the fruits of this process for his own action as well as in view of his remote planning for future congregations. In examining three of these themes (identity, globalization, and "sentire cum ecclesia") some probable directions for

the future of the Society of Jesus begin to emerge.

Identity

Not surprisingly one of the first questions raised at Loyola concerned the self-identity of the Order. How do Jesuits see themselves, and articulate their corporate identity in terms of their mission? Father General's report, echoing the last General Congregation, closely linked identity to mission. While noting that Jesuits shared many of the problems and temptations facing secular societies around the world today (materialism, individualism, ambiguity regarding sexuality), Father General perceived more vitality than stagnation in the state of the Society. The increasing stability of vocations to the Order belie a healthy status among those in formation. The report on formation, in fact, was very positive and well received at the Congregation. Father José Morales Orazco reported that each stage of formation now had a clear set of guidelines for local implementation, yet which also seek to respond to the broader challenges of the Society in the modern world.

An integral part of the identity of the Society of Jesus remains the Spiritual Exercises. Yet both from the observations made by Father Joseph Tetlow from the Secretariat for Ignatian spirituality as well as a trend noted in the reports of the procurators, young Jesuits are not receiving enough opportunities to learn to give the Exercises. However there is a growing interest in this kind of spiritual ministry, and the Society is moving towards a better implementation of the legislation calling for this kind of preparation. As more non-Jesuits take an increasing role in the mission of giving the Exercises, Father Tetlow recommends the practice of "mentoring" those interested in directing others. Thus, the art of giving the Spiritual Exercises will be passed on personally, from one director to another, at times Jesuit, at times not, as a way of guaranteeing a certain "authenticity" based on the wisdom and experience of colleagues and predecessors.

Another aspect of Jesuit self-identity concerns the practice of the manifestation of conscience to the major superior. This tool for government within the Order remains one of the most important means

for uniting the individual Jesuit with the corporate mission. Restrictions caused by external pressures (especially due to an erosion of confidentiality privileges in some civil jurisdictions), as well as a general weakening of the practice because of a confusion arising out of new layers of Jesuit oversight at the national or Assistancy level, threaten an important means by which Jesuits are missioned. Several Province Congregations from various parts of the world expressed concern over this issue. To address it, the Congregation recommended that Father General deal with the specific questions concerning the manifestation of conscience in a letter to the whole Society.

One full session was also spent exploring the Society of Jesus' relationship with its lay partners. While much still needs to be done in improving the means by which Jesuits and non-Jesuits share many of their common missions, the overwhelming attitude was that collaboration in ministry now constitutes a basic dimension of Jesuit self-identity. In almost every one of the sectional reports, space was given to the implementation of Document 13 of the last General Congregation concerning collaboration with others. The question is no longer "should we be doing this?" but "how can we do this better?" The modalities of this collaboration, however, remain very different from one ministry to another, and from one region to another. The procurators asked concrete questions about how we motivate others to share in a vocation to mission that is overtly Jesuit, especially those who might not have specifically chosen to work with Jesuits.

In discussing the question of Jesuit identity many lament that there no longer exists a common ideology, cultural framework, or even classical formation to unite the members of the Order. The multicultural, post-Christian world presents challenges to self-understanding and communication among ourselves. But certainly this is not so grave a problem as the divisions in the Society of Jesus which occurred in the late sixteenth century under Father General Claudio Acquaviva. The Fifth General Congregation (1593-94) which was called at the insistence of a pope, met to consider fundamental changes to the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. The so-called "Memorialists," Jesuits from Spain who sought to curb the extensive powers of the General and his lifetime

tenure, operated from a very different ideology and point of view from many others in the Society. While the movement was rejected by the General Congregation, it indicates a much greater division in the literal sense of viewing the identity and nature of the Society in very different ways. The Memorialists sought to give more autonomous control to the provinces (particularly those of Spain). This would have implicitly brought the control of the Order into the hands of the local monarch. By resisting this, the Jesuits sought to maintain a system of government that would remain supranational, even if the national interests of individual Jesuits might remain.

Globalization

Perhaps the issue which most captured the attention of the Procurators' Congregation at Loyola was that of globalization. The shrinking of the world economically and socially through technological advances in transportation and communication brings a whole new set of questions to Jesuit engagement with contemporary culture and society. Once again the challenges of our world today confront not only the Order but also the Church and the many communities within it. Lights and shadows can be discerned in the direction in which globalization is overtaking the modern world, and Jesuits join many others in the world today in feeling powerless in the face of such an overwhelming process.

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A worrisome sign that preoccupied the procurators was Father General's report that "the social sector, strictly speaking, risks extinction." Nevertheless many Jesuits are engaging the questions emerging from contemporary society from a wide variety of disciplines. Jesuit scientists of all types (who come from a long tradition in Jesuit history) pursue moral questions relating to new technologies in agriculture, medicine,

and other practical sciences. Other Jesuits ponder the social impacts and challenges facing the Church as a result of globalization, especially in the way the world identifies and orders itself.

Father Thomas Rochford's report on Social Communication points out that Jesuits increasingly see the communication of their reflections as an essential dimension of their specific work. They know that it is no longer sufficient to pen a few lines for publication or prepare good homilies touching on social issues, "the people whom Jesuits address, at least in developed countries, have higher expectations of those who would communicate with them." Yet the nature of our audience remains restricted to students, experts, politicians. This is in part because of the nature of our reflections, but also because of our own targeting of these specialized groups.

Not surprisingly Jesuits do not always share the same views on many pressing social questions, or even globalization in general; and opposing theories often appeal to the moral authority of one or another Jesuit theologian or scientist. While some see this as a scandal of disunity in an Order once known for its famous (if mythical) and highly disciplined obedience, one need not look far into the early history of the Jesuits to find elements of nationalism, opposing political, economic, and moral theories. But through history and its subsequent resolution of these issues, we are often left with the perspective of a Society of Jesus that had been much more unified than the original primary sources suggest.

One need only reflect on the controversies surrounding the Society of Jesus in France in 1611 when the assassination of Henri IV led the Parlement of Paris to call for French Jesuits to manifest their Gallican loyalties; this in the face of the international tendency of the Order expressed in the ultramontanism of its superiors. As in Spain, French intellectual life had grown suspicious of attempts to control the national Church from Rome. It seems less surprising that among Jesuits in France many expressed Gallican sentiments, than that the Society of Jesus there ultimately sided with many of their Jesuit brothers in holding the ultramontanist position.

Sentire cum ecclesia

One of the final questions taken up at the Congregation concerned Jesuit fidelity in "sentire cum ecclesia," the famous set of rules set out by St. Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises. While the heterodoxy of some highly visible theologians remain in the spotlight, many other Jesuits are called upon by those entrusted with leadership in the Church to articulate new understandings of doctrine and, perhaps more importantly, to help form a new generation of theologians for the Church. The Church itself has changed significantly in the centuries between Ignatius' writing and the Second Vatican Council. For this reason Jesuits must reinterpret Ignatius' rules in the context of an ecclesiology which recognizes the importance of the local episcopacy in their function as "Vicars of Christ."

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Jesuits, of course, have not been strangers to conflicts over theology. The question of the Chinese rites focused issues of missiology and liturgy and cultural dominance at a time when the Church remained overwhelmingly Eurocentric. Debates over the primacy of grace or free-will with the Dominicans in the seventeenth century produced less in the way of clarity and more in the way of inter-Order animosity. But perhaps the most controversial of theological issues in Jesuit history concerns neither missiology nor soteriology, but rather moral theology. The probabilism of Jesuit theologians in the seventeenth century was perceived by many in the Church, including Pope Innocent XI, as too lax to be acceptable moral theology. When the Thirteenth General Congregation met in June of 1687, they acceded to the wishes of the Holy Father and elected Tirso González, a moral theologian of the more rigorist "probabiliorist" position as General. By indicating the Society's disposition towards the more rigorous and minority position, the Congregation opened almost two decades of debate and dissension within the Order. While gradually the Church articulated a middle position between rigorism and laxism, Jesuit theologians faced the difficult task of reconciling their learned opinions

with those of their Superior General.

The last General Congregation spoke clearly in its eleventh decree that Ignatius' "Rules for thinking with the Church" retain a validity even if the historical context in which he wrote them has changed. While "creative fidelity" remains a model for a Jesuit's relationship with the magisterial Church, both the General Congregation's decree and Father General's closing allocution underline a fidelity to the Church that is of the heart as well as the mind. The procurators themselves expressed "sentire cum ecclesia" as a loving relationship ("feeling with the Church") that must constantly be attended to. It is unlikely that misunderstandings, disagreements, or even dissent between some Jesuits and the hierarchy of the Church will simply disappear, nor will the pain that it causes. But the Society of Jesus will seek to grow in the fidelity that it has articulated, and in this way serve the Church that it loves.

This brief survey of some of the main points treated by the Sixty-Ninth Congregation of Procurators within the broader context of Jesuit history reminds us that these are neither the worst of times nor the best of times, but rather our times. Issues facing the Church and the whole of world civilization are as pressing to those men who have decided to follow Jesus in His Companionship as to all other People of God. Past history reminds us to neither slide into self-contented complacency, nor to push too insistently for our own insights without heeding the voices of others within the Church. The Society of Jesus has already begun to adapt to the realities of a post-Vatican II Church and a post-modern world culture. Yet we remain committed to further reflection and action in order to help both the Church and the society in which it lives to confront in a positive and constructive way the challenges which face them.

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