

BRITISH JESUIT PROVINCE PROMOTER OF IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

Some years ago a member of the British Province, now dead, on hearing that religious sisters and laypeople were giving directed retreats at Craighead Spirituality Centre in Scotland inquired, “Who tells them what to say?”

The presuppositions embodied in this question, innocent though its intention may have been, do not sit well with some contemporary Jesuit attitudes set out by the (subsequent) 34th General Congregation of the Society. The mission I was given by the British Provincial in 2000 is rooted, in large part, in a regard for the laity expressed by our most recent General Congregation, particularly in Decrees 13 and 26.

In the summer of 1999 I began a sabbatical year. The start of my sabbatical coincided with the moving of Craighead Spirituality Centre (now the Ignatian Spirituality centre, Glasgow), a decision with which I fully agreed. Prior to this decision, an alternative had been to reconstruct Craighead at considerable expense. One of the powerful influences shaping the eventual decision was an awareness of how the apostolate of the Craighead team had changed. Some of the work in which the team was by then engaged was undertaken in Edinburgh and even further afield. Investing a large amount of money in reconstructing Craighead could have entailed focussing solely on work at the centre to the detriment of other developments.

Through the work of Craighead many (not all of them are Catholics) had been drawn to Ignatian spirituality; and among these there were some who felt called to be active in Ignatian spiritual ministries, such as

spiritual direction and the giving of the Spiritual Exercises, in the places where they lived.

In this regard, Craighead was not unique. In the last 25 years or more many people in Britain have been drawn into ministries originating from the Spiritual Exercises. In some cases, this has been a benefit of contact with one of our institutions, for example Loyola Hall. Someone benefiting from the programme at Loyola Hall might then have gone on to undertake the internship in Ignatian Spirituality and Spiritual Accompaniment offered there, before beginning a ministry in spiritual direction somewhere else. St Beuno's team has fostered a ministry in Ignatian spirituality, principally by lay people, in the Wrexham diocese. Outstanding work in drawing people into these ministries has also been done effectively by individual members of the province: one has only to think of the work of people such as Bill Broderick, Tony Horan, Gerry W. Hughes, and Patrick Purnell.

These developments should neither surprise nor alarm us.

"During the past thirty years", the last General Congregation observed, "increasing numbers of lay people have responded to the call to ministry flowing from the grace received in baptism. The actualisation of their vocation in so many and varied situations", it added, "has become the predominant way by which the People of God minister to the world in promotion of the Kingdom." (GC 34, D 13, n. 1)

Moreover, as Father General has, reportedly, recently pointed out, the Society does not "own" the Exercises in the way it "owns" the Constitutions -- which Jesuits alone interpret, apply and adapt. The Church has "owned" the Exercises since their approval in 1548, and not only Jesuits are able to understand and apply them. Nor, indeed, has the Society been able to claim exclusive title to the designation "Ignatian" since the canonisation of St Ignatius in 1622.

The decrees of the 34th General Congregation embody a clear and positive attitude to the involvement of others in ministries that, in the past, have been sustained, more or less exclusively, by the efforts of Jesuits. Basing itself in the Constitutions [622] the 34th General Congregation stated:

"Partnership in cooperation with others in ministry is not a

pragmatic strategy resulting from diminished manpower; it is an essential dimension of the contemporary Jesuit way of proceeding, rooted in the realisation that to prepare a complex and divided world for the coming of the Kingdom requires a plurality of gifts, perspectives, and experiences, both international and multicultural.” (GC 34, D 26, n. 16)

My experience in Scotland between 1992 and 1999 convinced me of the gifts many people outside the Society can bring to ministries flowing from the Spiritual Exercises. It also became clear to me that proper formation in those ministries deeply affected other ministries in which a person, such as a parish priest, might be more fully engaged. My experience was practical confirmation of the view expressed (in reference to the Jesuits) around 1587 by Fr Gil Gonzalez Davila in his directory to the Spiritual Exercises:

“If our ministries were accompanied by the teaching and instruction we have in this book, we would see much more progress in the people who deal with us.” (n. 156)

Formation, however, could not end on completion of a course in Craighead or Edinburgh, Perth or Aberdeen. It was likely, nonetheless, that some of the people in Scotland who wished to be involved in Ignatian spirituality as a ministry would not turn for support to Craighead or to the House of Prayer in Edinburgh run by the Sacred Heart Sisters. Geographical reasons alone (given Scottish winters) would make this difficult.

One of my goals, then, before I began my sabbatical in 1999, was to encourage a small number of people whom I knew to have made the Spiritual Exercises to come together as a group focussed on the apostolate of Ignatian spirituality. By running a seminar on giving the Spiritual Exercises for that group, and by running a year's course on supervision, I attempted to provide some resources that would enable the group to carry on a fruitful ministry. I also encouraged the group to provide its own corporate formation through in-service days, a continuing seminar on the Spiritual Exercises and an annual conference, all of which are now in place. Because the meeting that initiated the process leading to the formation of the group was held on 6 January 1999, the group is

known as the Epiphany Group.

The Epiphany Group is not unique. In different parts of Britain groups that claim to be focussed on ministries of Ignatian spirituality have formed in various ways, usually under the influence of a particular (often Jesuit) person. Among these groups some are happy not to have any particular link to the Society. On the other hand, there are groups that would echo the wish of a group in the north of England to know “what the Society might expect of members and groups with an Ignatian charism”. That group (and, I am sure, others) recognise that, in the words of Father General, the Exercises are the Society’s special patrimony; and that though the Society may not “own” the Exercises we do carry the responsibility to guarantee and promote the authentic Exercises.

In January 2000 I was living in Copleston House in London prior to going to Madrid for several months. David Smolira came on visitation to the community shortly before I left for Spain. A number of options were raised about the apostolate to which I might be committed on my return. One option arose from a question about the responsibility the province might have for those, mostly laity, working in Ignatian spirituality outside institutional settings such as our own spirituality centres. That is to say, how the Province could be of service to such people given that many of them would have received encouragement and training from Jesuits or Jesuit institutions. It was from further discussions around this question that the role of Province Promoter of Ignatian Spirituality emerged. It is rooted in the judgment of the last General Congregation that:

“...we must increasingly shift the focus of our attention from the exercise of our own direct ministry to the strengthening of laity in their mission.” (GC 34, D 13, n. 19)

The role of Promoter became part of my mission when I returned from Spain and began to live in Edinburgh in September 2000. Initially, it had been hoped that I could also give some attention to Ignatian spirituality in the archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

At first, no one was clear what support would be appreciated by those working primarily in non-institutional settings in the field of Ignatian spirituality; nor, for their part, were they very clear about what the Province was up to in initiating the role of Promoter. My sense of my role

as Promoter in the last two years is largely of being a diplomat: working to establish trust that can be the basis of discussion about the way forward. This work has not been without profit, and I now have well-established contact with groups in Scotland, the North-East of England, York, Manchester, London, and South-West England.

That having been said, I have reached some provisional conclusions. In the first place, about the principal goal of my work, which is to establish a clearer, more stable pattern of relationship between the Province as such, and groups wanting a relationship with us that will survive their relationship with individual Jesuits and a Provincial's period in office.

As previously stated, some groups may not want such a relationship, but some certainly do. They recognise, as much as does Father General, the Society's authority in the ministries arising from the Spiritual Exercises. They want a connection with the living tradition of the Spiritual Exercises that the Society is, partly in order to be confirmed in the integrity of their ministry, partly so that those who approach them for help will be able to trust their intentions, their attitudes and their ability.

For its part, the Province should be happy to have a clearer attitude about what it expects of groups to which it offers support, which would then have a claim on the attention and service of the Promoter. In this area of ministry the Province needs to be clearer about which uses of the description 'Ignatian' it is willing to be associated with and which it is not.

We are not the only province that is considering this issue. On 12 January this year, the Provincial of Oregon addressed a letter to his province on "*Understanding the Structure of a Jesuit Apostolic Work in the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus*". The concluding section of the document accompanying the letter is entitled: "*Questions for Reflection & Issues for Consideration*" and raises the question: "Should there be various levels of association articulated that show a gradation between a Jesuit institution and a lay Ignatian one?" Within the section that follows various possibilities are suggested, for example, *affiliation*, in which there is evaluation and support for a body through a relationship to the Society, without ownership; and *association*, in which the Society assists and provides resources for the body, but has no evaluative or

ownership role. (Note: this document can be viewed on the website: www.nwjesuits.org)

Documents like this and the reflections from which they arise are now widespread in the Society, at least in its English-speaking regions. Last year the Australian Province was considering the shape of its relationship with a group called Companions in the Ministry of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. This group (inaugurated with Jesuit support) is aiming at articulating standards for the formation of givers of the Exercises, a framework for good practice in giving the Exercises, and on-going formation for those giving the Exercises. In January the US Jesuit Conference was considering a draft document on the Jesuit ministry of the Exercises in the United States. Jesuit reflection about our contemporary ministry of the Exercises helps understanding about what can reasonably be expected of anyone engaging in ministry engendered by the Exercises; therefore, what we might expect of groups who want the assurance of affiliation or association with us.

In relation to the situation now existing in the United Kingdom, where an increasing number of people are claiming to be engaged in ministry rooted in the Spiritual Exercises, we could, of course, do nothing. In reflecting on the characteristics of our way of proceeding the last General Congregation seems opposed to *laissez-faire* attitudes:

"Jesuits are never content with the *status quo*, the known, the tried, the already existing. We are constantly driven to discover, redefine, and reach out for the magis. For us, frontiers and boundaries are not obstacles or ends, but new challenges to be faced, new opportunities to be welcomed. Indeed, ours is a holy boldness, 'a certain apostolic aggressivity,' typical of our way of proceeding." (GC 34, D 26, n. 27)

Facing this growing change in the United Kingdom is like facing a frontier. One thing that is quite clear to me is that the territory beyond the frontier is not one in which we shall "tell them what to say". It is also clear to me that it is a situation we should be encouraging. I do believe, like the last General Congregation, that cooperation with others in ministry is not a pragmatic strategy resulting from diminished manpower. Yet it is a suggestion that is often made to me. Frequently, when people

learn about the role of the Promoter, their response is usually along the lines of, "Well, I suppose with the decreasing number of Jesuits..." My response is that even if there were the hundreds of Jesuits in the United Kingdom that there were 40 years ago, we would want to foster the change that is developing. The past 20-30 years have demonstrated the broad membership of the Church has great gifts for ministries arising from the Spiritual Exercises, and it would be a scandal not to develop these gifts for the good of the Church and the world it serves.

I believe the Province needs a clearer, more focussed attitude in the developing situation, especially in terms of its relationship with groups who wish some form of association with the Province. I do not, however, believe that more Jesuits need to be assigned to share the Promoter's role. Our objective is not to establish greater Jesuit control over what is happening, but to encourage solid ministry in the apostolate of the Spiritual Exercises that is supported by the Province, but not dependent on it.

Even at this stage much can be done in a personal way to foster an apostolate characterised by a good scriptural foundation and proper theological understanding, manifesting ecclesial awareness and being carried on in a healthy way. I cannot claim a teaching competence in all these areas. I have therefore been grateful when members of the Province have responded positively to groups or individuals I put in touch with them. Through such assistance groups can be helped to develop appropriate formation and training, intended to foster ministry that is separate from the Province's works, but with the assurance a clear relationship with the Province can bring.

Some of my energy, on the other hand, has been given to much more practical tasks. Some of my time has been used on helping the formation of new groups; some in the guise of an all-comers information officer; some in a rather simple ministry of encouragement; and, occasionally, in arranging financial support from the Province (in which area, as always, we have been generous).

Carrying out the mission given me by the Provincial has not been without personal cost. Whilst I am inspired by the thought that, in the future:

"...we must increasingly shift the focus of our attention from the

exercise of our own direct ministry to the strengthening of laity in their mission.” (GC 34, D 13, n. 19)

I feel the diminishment of my own direct ministry in the field of the Spiritual Exercises, a diminishment that was accepted in my conversations with the Provincial in 2000. Because of the travel I undertake, I cannot commit myself, for example, to much availability for spiritual direction, a ministry requiring a degree of reliability I cannot at present offer. I hope, nonetheless, to return more fully, one day, to the ministries of the Spiritual Exercises because in them I have found great consolation. I hope, also, that through the role of Province Promoter of Ignatian Spirituality I shall help many others to find comparable consolation.

Gero McLoughlin, S.J.

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