

## CONTEMPORARY JESUITS AS FRIENDS IN THE LORD

*Précis: What is the source of union in today's Society, a sign of hope to our times? The author finds this in current experience: First, friendship among Jesuits comes as a gift from above, given with the Jesuit vocation. Friendship grounds both human growth and divine "devotion," and lays the authentic basis for Jesuit obedience. Second, conversation is the typical Jesuit instrument for friendship and for the apostolate. A tertianship experience illustrates this. Third and finally, the Jesuit apostolate consists precisely in extending this friendship to others.*

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Jesuits continue to attract the attention, if not always the affection, of a variety of contemporary writers. Sometimes this interest has provoked great creativity; on other occasions the result has been a more scholarly analysis. One of the more sensitive accounts of contemporary Jesuit life and work is that offered by Drs. Douglas Letson and Michael Higgins, two Canadian academics. I want to focus on two passages from their work, one from their introduction and the other from their conclusion. In the introduction the authors ask, "Why another book about Jesuits?". Their response is interesting, both in itself and in the context of this present reflection:

The Society of Jesus is important because, for all its human failings, for all of the eccentricities and inconsistencies of the Companions who constitute its ranks . . . the Jesuit Order courageously signs the possibility of a better society, of an earthly reign decidedly rooted in evangelical values, and of an ultimate victory of charity and compassion over cupidity and concupiscence (Letson & Higgins, 1995, xi).

For these authors, then, the Society of Jesus is worth studying because it is a sign of hope for others. In their conclusion these authors again underscore the hope that the Society embodies and communicates.

It is a time of crisis for the Society of Jesus . . . a microcosm of the turbulence afflicting the universal church. . . . But the future is not bleak; it is inviting. The

Jesuits after all have known darker times. They survive because they do not conform to that homogeneous block of rigid soldierly virtue that history and polemics have made them. If anything, what we have discovered through our research, interviews, and archival forays is the rather simple fact that the Jesuits are utterly diverse in their talents, various in their undertakings, increasingly eclectic in their training, but nourished all at the same source: the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. The spirituality of the *Exercises* and the persistent appeal of the Order's founder define the Jesuit essence. All else is moot and malleable (Letson & Higgins, 1995, 244).

It is significant that Letson and Higgins locate the contemporary power of Jesuit life and work in terms of the hope which these inspire, and that they use that virtue both as a frame to guide their study and as a conclusion summing up what they have discovered. In this they echo the opening paragraph of Part X of the *Constitutions*, a contemplation on hope within the Society.

The fact that friends outside the Society discern in us reasons for hope, and connect those reasons with the power of the Society's spiritual tradition, confirms the importance of what we are doing in these days: revisiting the sources of union within the Society; seeking to understand these sources better; trying to find ways of promoting union within the life and labor of the Society. The internal life of the Society—its community, and its ability to draw us as friends in the Lord—is also a sign that we can offer to the world around us, a witness to God's action within us. In other words, we are friends in the Lord for mission. And our relationship can give others hope.

My reflections originate out of experience, as experience is understood within the spirituality of the Society: "an experience that is spiritual, personal, vital, rooted in faith, nourished by daily prayer and the Eucharist; an experience that makes us capable of cooperating with God for the spiritual growth of believers and of communicating the gift of faith to nonbelievers" (*Complementary Norms* #65). The presentation of this experience has three major divisions: (1) Friendship as a Gift from Above; (2) Conversation as the Instrumental Cause of Friendship; and (3) Extending Jesuit Friendship to Others.

### Friendship as A Gift from Above

Friendship within the Society is an experience and a gift. By this I mean that the friendship we discover, cherish, extend and value, comes from encounters that are not human but divine. At the crucial time of the election Ignatius reminds the one making the retreat:

That love which moves me and brings me to choose the matter in question should descend from above, from the love of God, in such a way that the person making the election should perceive beforehand that the love, whether greater

or less, which he or she has for the matter being chosen is solely for the sake of our Creator and Lord (*Sp.Ex.*, 184.2).

The choice for the Society is a pre-eminent case of Ignatian election. It responds to an invitation *from God* to become a member of this specific Company—a Company which is a “pathway to God” (*Formula*, 1). In the formation of the young Jesuit, that pathway leads to privileged places and times—privileged in part because it is *companionship within the Society* which draws men to the God who has authored their union:

In all things they should try and desire to give the advantage to others, esteeming them all in their hearts as if they were their superiors [Phil. 2:3] and showing outwardly, in an unassuming and simple religious manner, the respect and reverence appropriate to each one's state, so that by consideration of one another they may thus grow in devotion and praise God our Lord, whom each one should strive to recognize in the other as in his image (*Const.* 250.4-5).

Within this vision of formation for friendship, the director of novices has the function of modelling the love that is divine:

It will be beneficial to have a faithful and competent person to instruct and teach the novices how to conduct themselves inwardly and outwardly, to encourage them to this, to remind them of it, and to give them loving admonition; a person whom all those in probation may love and to whom they may have recourse in their temptation and open themselves with confidence, hoping to receive from him in our Lord counsel and aid in everything (*Const.* 263.1-2).

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If these directives from the *Constitutions* mean anything, then they signify that the first experience of bonding within the Society should be one that creates a psycho-religious environment, a culture, in which the mutuality of loving and being loved are seen as intimations of God's presence and of God's direction. This culture has its roots in the experience of the Fourth Week. As one distinguished commentator has put it, the risen Christ offers a grace of permanent friendship:

He is complete in his own evolution through time, now the perfect manifestation of the divine, and therefore able, as an abiding friend, to cause that consolation by which a man's entire affectivity is caught up in God (Buckley, 1975, 103).

Others at this colloquium have the task of explicating the tradition of the Society. My point here is simply to show that from a man's entrance into the body of the Society onwards, he is expected to be capable of finding union with God and his brothers in a way of proceeding that is a kind of friendship, a mutuality of respect, reverence, and love. This expectation is not an imposition but rather an extrapolation of a grace

received: the ability to be a friend in the Lord because of the power of the Lord working within the Society's membership. To be called to the Society should presume a capacity for friendship within the Society. Jesuit friendship is inherent in the grace of Jesuit vocation.

The grace of vocation within the Society, then, calls a man to be a friend in the Lord to his brothers; in turn this bonding contributes significantly to the Society's union. How does the Society, as it actually exists, live out this reality? Let me discuss three aspects of what is always a cyclical process: the routines of everyday life together, relationships with superiors, and the enhancement that shared honesty about experience brings to the apostolate. Let me say a word about each of these aspects, inviting you to reflect on how you yourselves have experienced them in your own Jesuit life.

### The Routines of Everyday Life Together

The rhythm of grace is generally one that adapts to the human realities of psychological and social growth, and the last four general congregations have, with outstanding sanity, insisted on this principle in their directives on formation (*Norms* #125.2). In the Society there are obvious cultural differences that must be respected. I nonetheless believe that we can speak about the common, human need for a gradual ripening of relationship, and about the need for times and opportunities when people can come to know one another. Friendship is a process, not a product. It takes time and leisure; it demands freedom; it has its own humane rhythms. It is through such opportunities and potentials that the grace of Jesuit friendship can be realised.

Jesuits spend a great deal of time together, doing the elementary kinds of things people have to do in any community. The ordinariness of our life is important. These simple realities can give us a framework for developing our friendship in the Lord if we know how to use them. Through eating together, recreating together, reflecting on the budget together, we rub against one another. Learning to live as good people may not seem heroic, but it is humble and real, and a way of imitating Christ.

Paragraph 250 of the *Constitutions* speaks of how everyday interactions should lead each Jesuit to "grow in devotion" through recognising his companions as "in the image of God our Lord." In the reality and humility of daily existence, in the natural rhythms of human exchange, there are plenty of opportunities for this growth to occur. Yet my recent experience as a tertian director of men from a variety of countries has been that this text comes to them not as a renewal of principles lost, nor as a confirmation of a habitual way of proceeding, but rather as a discovery. Yet Ignatius is here speaking of

something essential to how we find God in one another and in the people we serve. He is calling us to trust that God is working within the men he has called to be our companions.

Strategies for bringing us together for prayer and discussion, for communal retreats and days of

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instructions, for easing our life together through more informal meals and recreation, are good. But these are like furniture rearrangements; they do not, of themselves, make a home. Nor do they make a group of individuals a community. It seems to me that two realities lie at the base of Jesuit interpersonal and private relationships: a trust and an intimacy “in the Lord.” By trust I mean what paragraph 250 lays out as a process; and by intimacy I mean what paragraph 263 describes: a mutual willingness both to be known and to accept the self-revelation of a brother Jesuit. These capacities of trust and intimacy are the necessary environment for friendship in the Lord. Without them, such friendship cannot occur.

### Relationships with Superiors

Part VIII of the *Constitutions* illustrates the close relationship between the Society’s union and the Society’s good governance. Modern communications and travel have only accentuated this relationship. Good Jesuit government is interpersonal government: government that establishes relationship with the men of the Society. What does this mean?

First, the government of the Society is at the disposal of a God from whose goodness a total love descends both to the strong and to the weak. Ignatius speaks of how superiors and subjects should be united in a divine love descending “to all other persons, and particularly to the body of the Society” (*Const.* 671). Each one of us comes to know this aspect of God personally and repeatedly through the rhythm of the Exercises. What we experience we also represent. We are a people called to image the abiding love of God that authentically challenges but also profoundly forgives.

Second, and more significantly, we have appropriated the name of Jesus, the one who delighted in being a friend to sinners, to outcasts, to the marginal, and even to the irreligious. There is an obvious need for prudence and for realism in assessing one’s own strengths. Nonetheless, Jesuits should be able to continue and mediate, in the way Ignatius envisages here, Jesus’ mercy and forgiveness to all men and women.

Finally, the Spirit Jesus sent is a Spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. To abide in that Spirit is to abide in the vulnerability of never withdrawing that desire for reconciliation and for the power to forgive.

The Trinitarian mysticism of the Society—the way we participate in the reality of Father, Son, and Spirit—must operate *within* us as well as being what our apostolate expresses. We Jesuits must ourselves experience the reconciling love of Father, Son, and Spirit if we are to express that reconciling love. One major channel of this reconciling divine love in the Society is the presence and work of superiors. I do not want to downplay the responsibility superiors have to challenge their brothers, to correct their defects, and to make hard choices about the dismissal of those who undermine the Society’s apostolic life and community vitality. But the vigor of government must be balanced by the compassion

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of government. This compassion is not a pragmatic ploy or a mere management skill of religious life, but rather an expression of the God who calls and sustains the membership of the Society. In short, when we talk about the union of the Society, we must also pay attention to how Ignatian government represents God. For to represent the authority of God is also to represent the authority of a forgiving and reconciling God.

I would like to return to my experience as a tertian director. Some men came to tertianship out of experiences of being loved even when they had failed, both in their own spiritual and apostolic ambitions and in the ambitions which the Society had placed in them. These men felt a profound trust and gratitude towards the Society. Of course, there are men who have taken advantage of the goodness of the Society, who interpret forgiveness as weakness, and who continue to abuse the trust of their superiors. But this is not true of most Jesuits. Ordinarily, a Jesuit has the right to expect forgiveness and reconciliation from the Society.

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If a Jesuit has found superiors who dealt with him as friends in the Lord, he blesses that relationship with an openness of heart. In its turn, this openness has tremendous ramifications for the houses, the provinces, and the entire Society. We create the climate of our obedience in a house, a province, or the worldwide Society. If superiors are themselves in union with the love that descends from above, then the body of the Society will reflect that grace. Interpersonal governance is not so much a question of time but of environment and communication, of a trusting mutuality between superiors and brother Jesuits. The bond of obedience is the mutual trust that God is working in both, bringing each to insight and to acceptance of the another. The heart of Jesuit obedience is not a matter of asceticism but of mysticism: a finding of God that leads to submission and love.

### Shared Experience and the Apostolate

The goal of the Society is the apostolate, not the cultivation of community life for itself. Nonetheless, as we ourselves live in union and give witness to adult friendships on all levels of Jesuit life, the reality of grace shared cannot help influence those who share our work and those for whom we work. One important aspect of Jesuit friendship in the Lord, Jesuit union with one another, is how it can enhance the apostolate. If we live together in mutuality, we also learn that our life is a mixture of success and failure, of pain and joy, of suffering and happiness. This rhythm of life is the matter of our communion. Just as Jesus's own humanity served as a portrait of God, so we are constantly drawing a picture of what people who follow Christ are like today. The

ability to recognize, to communicate, and to respond to the movements of our lives shapes the humanity of our apostolic work. We often use the phrase “our way of proceeding” to mean much that is sublime in Jesuit life. It must also mean the much that is ordinary and that places us within the human community: the experience that leaves marks on our souls of wisdom, courage, forgiveness and tolerance, or that leaves scars on our souls of foolishness, fear, enmity, bias and prejudice. We Jesuits need to appreciate the profound gift that we have when we speak simply and truthfully to one another of what has been part of our ordinary living, in an adult ability to communicate who we are to the men we live with. This leads to the theme of the next section, the important role of conversation in our lives. But first I want to name some questions that emerge from this discussion.

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All that I have outlined as the experience of Jesuit union—the experience of what God calls us to because we are Jesuits—frequently has no place in the lives of some Jesuits and of some communities. We have the Ignatian strategies, but we do not always understand them, or we are afraid to use them, or we use them only with others outside the Society merely as an “apostolic tool.” How do we read and implement paragraph 250 and paragraph 263 from the *Constitutions*? How do we appropriate the kind of orientation that these paragraphs give for community life within the Society? In emphasizing the need for personal and communal mutuality, trust, forgiveness, and communication, do we, as some assert, risk making the Society too self-consciously therapeutic? How can we overcome the individualism about which so many of the reports submitted from around the world to GC 34 were so concerned?

### Conversation as the Instrumental Cause of Friendship.

This section draws on my personal experience of being tertian director in a program that included Jesuits from throughout the world. Father Walter Farrell, the associate director, and I found that the “glue” for the tertianship program was *conversation*—the ability of the tertians to talk openly and sincerely with one another about the totality of their lives as Jesuits. This facility in talking with one another depended on the kinds of realities that I described in the first part of my presentation: the styles of communication arising from the Society’s acceptance of God’s grace descending into the

reality of our personalities and Jesuit relationships. In other words, the program would work only if we trusted the charism for union that is part of the Jesuit vocation.

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However, if conversation was to be the characteristic method of the program, we also had to establish structures inviting the tertians to appropriate

forms of conversation. We began with a simple, non-threatening process of the fourteen men sharing their autobiography: their family histories and social development prior to their entrance into the Society. Each tertian spoke for about thirty minutes and we allowed time for reactions and any questions. These exchanges took place during a set of morning sessions, while the afternoon sessions were reserved for the remote preparation for the long retreat. In other words, we juxtaposed the intensity of personal recollection with the more ordinary work of tertianship. Once we completed the sessions on autobiography, we then moved to the faith-narratives of each tertian. These sessions were more intimate, more revelatory of a man's dialogue with God. Usually we did this in connection with afternoon sessions focused on the *Autobiography* of Saint Ignatius. As you probably have recognized, the process was an adaptation of the *General Examen*. The sessions recounting life stories paralleled the second and third chapters, while the classes recapitulated the Society's self-presentation, an expression of the first and fourth chapters.

During this same period of time both tertianship directors had a set of conversations with each tertian about the long retreat and about the options for the future five-month apostolic experiment. We felt that this gave each man an opportunity to get to know us and *vice versa*. Following this introductory period, we sent the men to our province villa for three full days of relaxation prior to the long retreat: an opportunity for them to be together within the context of the conversational union that they had begun.

The long retreat period was one of intense silence, of course. But it was also a time of profound conversation: the tertians with the Lord and their directors, but also the community of tertians with one another through the liturgy and in the internal communion that God invites when men seek together to know God's will. The tertians renewed their understanding that silence was not the absence of words, but the communion of soul both with God and with those who joined them in seeking God. At the conclusion of the long retreat, we again had a set of sessions in which each tertian communicated his experience in the way he wished. These exchanges were intense and powerful. Each man brought his conversation with the Lord into the conversation with his brothers.

In the study of the *Constitutions*, which followed the long retreat, we used particular situations or cases, real or imaginary, as a starting point. The aim was to apply Ignatius's principles to the contemporary realities in which these ideals have to be lived. The cases were another form of conversation: men talking about their charism and their implementation of that charism in common life, apostolic service, and the needs of our times. Moreover, since these tertians represented a variety of races, cultures and histories, there was also the constant need to adapt and clarify, and to confront and correct false assumptions, even biases and prejudices. Consequently, reconciliation became an important aspect of the conversational culture.

I do not want to romanticize this process. Not every tertian was easy to handle; the degree of participation

*the process of union  
through conversation*



varied; not everyone liked everyone. But the men genuinely tried to make the process of union through conversation work. In that process they formed a community that could share struggles and successes. What was being taught, I feel, was the way Jesuits can become friends in the Lord through the ordinary means the Society has established in its way of proceeding: direct communication about our lives; corporate reflection about apostolic opportunities and problems, liturgical worship, and a prayer binding Jesuits to the Lord who called each of them.

Because we had deliberately situated the tertianship program within an active university community, the tertians also had to relate to the range of Jesuits involved in the apostolate at the University of Detroit Mercy. The community was hospitable and supportive, but it had its own apostolic agenda. Our liturgies were open to the community; the community socials included the tertians; outside of the long retreat the tertians ate with the community. This conversational outreach was highly important both for the tertians and for the formed community—a mutual reality check.

By the time the tertians began their five-month apostolic experiences, they had begun to integrate conversation as an instrument of union, of learning by doing, of becoming friends in the Lord. Some tertians became close friends, and continue to communicate years after the tertianship experience. Others knew that they would never be intimate companions with all their brothers but, nonetheless, came to appreciate the good that each man represented. What was important was the climate that evolved, a climate of communication and respect, based on a vocation shared through conversation.

During the five-month experiments we visited the tertians who were in the United States. We also set up a regular newsletter to keep the men informed about one another's work. In other words, we used the means of communication recommended in Part VIII of the *Constitutions* [673], as a form of conversation and an exercise in the union of minds and hearts.

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Following the five-month experiments, the men returned for their final period of tertianship. This period began and ended with conversation. At the beginning, each reviewed the consolations and desolations, the sense of confirmation of their long retreat, that they had found in the apostolic experiences. At the close of the tertianship, there were conversations assessing the year and the orientation each had as he left tertianship. We resumed the study of the *Constitutions* and the work of the last four general congregations, employing again the case method as a way of addressing the personal appropriation of the ideals and principles of our life.

Life in our regular communities is not the life of a tertian. But the life of a tertian should prepare a man to be part of the formed Society. The culture of the Society is one of dialogue in our personal relations, in our governance, and in our apostolic labor. How we talk to and

*... in our personal  
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apostolic labor*

not *at* one another is crucial. As tertian directors, what we hoped the men learned were ways to draw a community—or parts of a community—into serious personal revelation about their lives, about their service of God, about their hopes and struggles with their apostolates. In the overwhelming majority of instances, the tertians who went through the Detroit Province program found the culture of dialogue an essential element in their appropriation of the graces of tertianship. Those few who found the approach threatening or unattractive generally had other issues that they need to continue working out, especially the ability to trust others.

A final comment on the process of conversation that we used. We insisted that the disclosures within a session were confidential. What was said in that room remained in that room—no gossip, no joking or teasing, no critiques outside the covenant space we tried to establish. It worked. The cycle of shared, personal reflections were sacred. But what men did fear was that they would never again have a group willing to enter into such dialogue and committed to reverencing such disclosures. Perhaps in that concern we have an important area for our own discussion here in this conference. Do we trust one another enough to use the ordinary, but graced, opportunities we have to talk to one another about our life as Jesuit apostles? How can the rhythms and spiritual realities of an intensely focused tertianship program be reproduced in an active Jesuit community?

### Extending Jesuit Friendship to Our Apostolic Partners

There are two points that I want to make here. First, in every one of our apostolic works there are structures already in place for our extending friendship to our colleagues who are not Jesuits. Second, the chief means we possess for effecting a union of minds and hearts with our apostolic colleagues is again that of conversation. Through our boards, councils, staffs and faculties, we possess a network in which we can communicate both the ignatian tradition and the Jesuit efforts to incorporate that tradition into our contemporary works. In every one of our works there are colleagues who want to know how they can use the ignatian tradition to integrate their professional and private lives, and to give focus to their talents, professional competencies, and opportunities. In every one of our works, there are men and women who can take responsibility for the future of the parishes, schools, retreat and social centers that we operate. This threefold program of communication, integration, and formation for leadership depends on the willingness of Jesuits to extend the experience of apostolic union with their friends—friends who may not be Jesuits, but who are bonded to Jesuit ideals and mission. However, we cannot extend our apostolic communion if we do not exercise our apostolic communion among ourselves. Do we, then, know how to transfer our internal, fraternal union into communion with our apostolic colleagues?

### Conclusion

I introduced this topic with some reflections on the hope that others place in the Society. I want to end on that same note. Hope is the virtue that leads us into the power of God and the fidelity of God. The God who called the Society into being, guided its institutionalization, directed its works, and clarified its mission continues to be present to our Society today. God continues to be God—faithful and powerful, laboring within each generation of Jesuits to bring them into the communion of his grace and their fellowship. This is the conclusion of Part X of our *Constitutions*, and it should be the introduction to our work here.

God's conversations with Ignatius transformed him into an apostle and into a man with an amazing capacity for friendship. Ignatius' conversations with his companions transformed them into an apostolic body within the Church. This process is not our possession, but it is our gift, and as such all the more precious to us. We are friends in the Lord by the design of God. The focus for these days is on how we exercise our stewardship.

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