

COLLABORATION & IGNATIAN FREEDOM

Precis: The author gave this report to the Rome Consultation 2002, "Exercises and Partnership." As national promoter of CLC from 1971, he and a committed group discerned that formation of guides was the crucial matter. They set up a program instigating Jesuit-lay collaboration. Through time, the collaboration changed the clerical and lay roles, enriching both. CLC gradually left politics behind and turned to prayer and discernment. These developments challenge Jesuits in their apostolate and in their community life. Jesuits too easily identify with a movement. Ignatian freedom means Christian love.

1. Spiritual Formation

When I started in 1971 as a National Promoter of CLC in Germany, I found a group of committed women who were willing to give their lives for the promotion of CLC. Hildegard Ehtmann, one of these women, had come in contact with two renewal initiatives of the sodalities in the United States and in Canada and brought the experience back to Germany. My first action as a promoter was to have a kind of communitarian deliberation with these women to find out what should be the priority in our work. The priority we came up with was: formation of guides (for Spiritual Exercises, for individual direction, and for guiding CLC groups).

These women were at least as committed to live the ignatian charism as I was. We complemented one another: They brought their competence in different fields (psychology, administration, organization), I brought mine

(theology, ignatian spirituality). The priority we found materialized in a training program for guides (ongoing formation) which was implemented many times. Lay people, secular priests and some Jesuits participated in these formation courses. During the courses they shared their personal experiences. After the courses they formed guiding teams for different forms of retreats and other courses. A team consisted normally of a Jesuit or diocesan priest and a woman, some times a couple. The experience they had shared in the course was the basis for their teamwork. On the international level of CLC, the same pattern was followed from 1973 on.

Very soon the importance of the lay element in retreat work and spiritual direction became obvious. The laity's background of family life, profession, and other social or parish involvements complemented what we Jesuits and priests professionally dealing with spirituality and living a celibate life could give. In addition to this it was important that the female element was present. Not a few priests, Jesuits, and seminarians opted for a woman as their spiritual director.

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Through this development, roles began to change. The priest was no longer the all-competent leader who engaged lay people for a limited, more or less organisational task. Nor was he the only specialist who taught authoritatively how ignatian spirituality should be lived. There were others who shared the responsibility for the authenticity of what is ignatian. On the other hand, his role as priest was emphasized. In a Eucharist celebrated around a table, it is no longer the celebrant who runs the liturgy, but it is a shared celebration. The priest participates personally as the other participants do. He may moderate the sharing, though this is not essential. But when he opens the liturgy, greets the participants in the Lord's name, says the consecration in Jesus' words, his unique role as the ordained representative of Christ is experienced even more distinctly.

This is also the case with regard to another sacrament: The sacrament of reconciliation (earlier known as confession). Very often retreatants open up to a lay guide as they would to a priest. Thus the lay guide and the priest both become servants in the process of reconciliation. The focus in the direction

is to struggle to discover one's sinfulness and to overcome the shame to admit it. You can see this already as a part of the sacrament. The celebration of the sacrament with a priest adds to this the confirmation of reconciliation. In this celebration with the priest, the focus is shifted from the confession of sins to the celebration of forgiveness.

2. Leadership

Another field of partnership was leadership in CLC. Since the new *General Principles* were adopted in 1967, the priest has no longer been the president but the assistant. The president of a CLC group has been an elected lay person. On regional, national, and international levels, the lay president and the assistant priest have formed a team together with the elected consultors.

In spite of this change of constitutions, there was little difference at the beginning. It was the priest, mostly a Jesuit, who de facto was the leader. But over the years the formation programs in many countries bore fruit. Lay persons who had made the Spiritual Exercises and had undergone further formation were elected. They were capable of matching the Jesuit in many ways. They took their responsibility seriously.

There was still another development. In the early years the boards in CLC functioned in a way similar to a management group or a parliamentary commission: an agenda was set up, issues were discussed, arguments exchanged, and finally came a decision by voting. Later on, these boards became leadership communities. Common decision-finding processes were discovered and adopted. Prayer was not only a formal decoration at the beginning and end of a session, but became an essential element. Communal deliberation was practised. Each member of such a leadership community shared the responsibility both in the finding of a decision and in its implementation.

3. Problems, Tensions, and Obstacles

The big question is: Who defines what ignatian spirituality is? After formation, each Jesuit develops his own profile in practice and in conception of what is

Ignatian. Among Jesuits, spirituality and its practice tend to remain privatized. This is a way we Jesuits use to prevent rivalry from entering our most holy experience. This situation is at the root of many problems:

1. Jesuit are often identified with the lay movement they serve. Other Jesuits tend to project on them the image they have of the movement. And vice-versa: other Jesuits project onto the the movement the image they have of the involved Jesuit. Mostly in informal talk, this kind of wisdom is shared with friends and colleagues. It is the lay movements and their members who suffer from this irresponsible behaviour. They are felt as an appendage to a certain Jesuit and not as something valuable in itself.

2. In case there is more than one Jesuit involved in a lay movement, their differences in understanding ignatian spirituality have often affected the movement. A split among members can develop. Together with relationship problems, factions easily arise and do much harm to the movement. It has become the battlefield for a conflict which is in fact a conflict between Jesuits and not between the members of the movement.

3. When human persons, men and women, work together and share time and concerns, relationships develop. I do not speak here of the rare cases in which a relationship turned out to be a love relationship and ended up in marriage. I speak of a normal spectrum of sympathy and apathy, accord and dissimilarity which facilitates or makes difficult communication and partnership.

All of this happens not only among individuals, but within a group context. Elements of personal relationships interfere in issues of spiritual communitarian or ecclesial significance. People get hurt and react accordingly. By this, factions easily develop among the members. Supervision has become an indispensable help to deal with such situations.

4. A group of lay persons can be very attractive for a Jesuit. The openness and honesty in sharing personal issues is sometimes overwhelming in such a group. This is often in sharp contrast to the everyday atmosphere in the Jesuit community at home.

This experience may alienate a Jesuit from his community and the Society. But it may also enhance his commitment to the Society and challenge him to risk more in his own Jesuit community. I have experienced both happening.

Ignatian freedom is often confounded with liberalness. According to the Exercises, freedom is the fruit of love, first fruit of the love we receive from the Lord, then in response our love to Him. This love frees us from all “inordinate affection.” It enables one to commit oneself to the adventure of human relationship which is both the source of joy and pain. You cannot have the former without the latter.