

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRIES

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Introduction

I understand my task in this essay is to reflect from a theological perspective on the testimonies or histories that CIS has gathered from Jesuits and lay-partners in various social ministries around the world concerning the ways in which Ignatian spirituality has informed those ministries. I understand theological reflection to be critical scrutiny of a situation or event (in this case, the testimonies gathered by CIS) in the light of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, and the various sources that his Church has used through time to understand, celebrate, be guided by his person, and live out his message.

The purpose of theological reflection as I practise it is to fathom more fully how God is at work in the world through the Spirit of Jesus. This is an exercise that involves both uncovering and basking in surprising eruptions of grace, as well as personal and structural resistances and barriers to God's efforts to enlist us under the banner of his Son, the Cross, symbol and sign of God's victory over sin and death.

To this end, and following the suggestion of the editors of this volume, I have divided my comments into different parts. I begin with a general theological vision of the histories I have read, then move on to speak about how different aspects of Jesuit spirituality are present in these same accounts, and take account of certain *lacunae* that I have noticed. Finally, my conclusion highlights what I see as contributions by the histories to the life of the Spirit and other ministries of the Society.

The General Theological Vision of the Testimonies

The ten testimonies or histories that I read are disparate narratives of ministerial and religious experiences that do not intend to present the reader with anything approximating a theological treatise on God or any kind of dogmatic or systematic theology. Be that as it may, there is a certain common theological vision of which these narratives partake. They reveal a belief and personal commitment to, in the words of Paul Caspersz S.J. “the God of Goodness and Justice [who] comes to us in Jesus.”

This God revealed by Jesus is intimately connected with creation, and through the Spirit of Jesus continues to sustain and guide it toward God’s plan for creation. In particular, the example and Spirit of Jesus inspires men and women of good faith, Christian and non-Christian, to continue the mission of Jesus, namely, the announcement and establishing of a more just and humane reign among human beings. Far from being a predetermined endeavour, the enterprise of working together in God’s project for creation is one that is personally addressed to each person in the form of an invitation to follow Jesus as his disciple, and requiring each person who hears the summons of Jesus to carefully discern the time, place, and circumstances that such a call entails.

In most of the narratives a low Christology predominates, emphasizing Jesus’ struggle for peace and justice in his time. Nonetheless, the divinity of the Lord also makes an appearance, for example, in the citation by Michael Bingham S.J. of St. Paul’s kenosis hymn from Philippians. Bingham reflects on the self-emptying of the Word to describe his own experience of working among the poor and acquiring the vision to discern all choices from the perspective of the poor. While I found explicitly affective language to describe the relationship that most of the authors of the histories enjoy with the Lord to be missing, their frequent expressions of how the poor have often been revelatory of the best of humanity, suggest to me the profound Matthean grace of identifying and encountering the Christ in the *anawim* or God’s humble and deserving poor. It is in keeping with the spirituality of Matthew 25:25ff, that the narratives see the poor and marginalized as sacraments of the Christ.

The final dimension of the general theological vision of the testimonies I would like to underscore is their eschatology. A sober awareness of the limitations of all earthly political and institutional projects

to achieve the fullness of life of the reign of God characterizes these narratives, especially the narratives of Alvaro Alemany S.J. and Godfrey D'Lima S.J. This is an awareness born of the long and very difficult struggles to which these men and women have dedicated their lives. But it also springs from a spiritual vision of the reign of God as holding out a promise of mercy and compassion that is humanly impossible without the totally transforming power of grace. Indeed, this eschatological dimension was for me one of the great surprises of these narratives, for unlike early liberationist reflections, these accounts are free of reductionist jeremiads against the rich and romanticizing rhetoric about the poor.

Aspects of Jesuit Spirituality in the Testimonies

As one would expect, Jesuit spirituality appears frequently in these testimonies. First and foremost recounted is the legacy of the Spiritual Exercises, predominantly its pedagogy of reading the movements of spirits, its language of spiritual combat and spiritual freedom. The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits are invoked not only to understand the interior life, but the turbulence of a ministry committed to battling injustice, with the goal of applying these rules to become a contemplative in action. Crucial aids in the ministry of social transformation seem to be the spiritual freedom or indifference characteristic of the First Principle and Foundation, and the solidarity with the poor expressed by Christ in the Contemplation of the Call of the King. I found Alvaro Alemany S.J. and Fernando Lopez S.J. particularly eloquent in this regard.

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In addition, Christ's way of proceeding expressed in the Meditation of the Two Standards (poverty, offering no resistance to insults, and humility, in sharp contrast with the logic of the enemy of our human nature—riches, honour, pride) finds resonance in the lives of many of the contributors. Their ministry among the poor echoes the school of thought that sees the Exercises as a conversion process culminating in the election or reformation

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of life. The election here is the process of choosing and being chosen by the poor, with all the dying to self and rising to a new life of commitment and companionship with the poor that this entails, a ministry similar to that of Jesus. I recommend the account of Godfrey d'Lima S.J. in particular as illustrative of these aspects of the Exercises.

The other major heuristic framework that interprets the Exercises as a school of prayer or growing union with God is also present in these testimonies, as evidenced by William Ryan, S.J.'s classic formulation of the connection between Ignatian spirituality and his social justice work: "My regular bridge between justice and union with God is built on a persevering search for spiritual freedom based on a stable attitude of gratitude, supported by prayer to the Trinity to receive the grace to be placed beside Jesus carrying his cross for the recreation of the world and all its peoples—especially the poor; and also frequent prayer to see and find God present and active in myself and every other person, and in every circumstance—and that my *Suscipe* be accepted."

While the references to the Spiritual Exercises are the clearest link in the narratives to Ignatian spirituality and the ministries of social justice mentioned, they are by no means the only ones. A number of other aspects associated with the spirituality of the Society surface in the testimonies. Most of these are associated with the renewal undertaken by GC 31 and 32 and brought to fruition when Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. was general (1965-1983). Among these, I would note the references to community life as companionship and friendship in the Lord (Suzanne Geaney), communal discernment (Fernando Lopez, S.J.), inter-religious dialogue (Tony Herbert S.J.), and inculturation (Ricardo Falla, S.J. and Tony Herbert, S.J.)

While these are not properly Ignatian themes, the contributors refer to them in an Ignatian manner. That is, they mention them in their spiritual dimension as understood in the documents of the Society, and their role in this work of battling for social justice. These terms highlight the contributors' awareness of the complexities of their ministries, of what is described by Rigobert Minani, S.J. as "the multi-polar crisis" that is the object of the social apostolate, and the varied strategies and resources that have to be employed to address it.

Lacunae in the Testimonies

Two important and thoroughly Ignatian elements of the spirituality of the poor that I have often encountered in my ministries among Latin American immigrants in the United States, are conspicuous by their absence in the testimonies provided, namely the roles of Mary and the Eucharist. In addition, there is little explicit mention of sharing Ignatian spirituality with others as a constitutive element of the majority of the ministries highlighted in the testimonies.

The place of Mary in the life of St. Ignatius and in key contemplations and many colloquies in the Exercises make devotion to this saint an integral component of the Society's spirituality throughout the centuries. In my experience, it is no less central to the piety of the poor. It is curious then, that no mention of her appears in these testimonies, not even her proclamation of the *Magnificat* in the Gospel of Luke, perceived by liberation theologians as herald of a more just social order in her. Related to this, in so far as it speaks to women's experience of God and Ignatian spirituality, is the lack of mention of the sexist language of certain well-known parts of the Exercises, i.e., the Rules for Discernment of Spirits of the Second Week, and the challenge these have posed for women interested in living out of the Ignatian charism, especially in light of GC 34's Decree on Women.

The relative absence of the Eucharist in the histories is also puzzling. The sacrament in neither its horizontal nor its vertical interpretations, that is, as eschatological banquet and sacrifice of love receive much mention. In this Year of the Eucharist, the importance of this sacrament for the Church's social justice mission has been highlighted in June, 2005 by the Pontifical Council on Peace and Justice conference in Rome. The forthcoming canonization in October, 2005 of Blessed Alberto Hurtado, S.J. of Chile, apostle of social justice, and exemplar of the Eucharistic dimension of Ignatian spirituality, also stresses the centrality of the Eucharist.

Finally, the histories include a number of testimonies about the integral part that sharing Ignatian spirituality with colleagues plays in the ministry of social justice of many, for example, the accounts of Alvaro Alemany S.J. and Lorena Cornejo and Benito Baranda. Yet it is far from an integral and programmatic dimension in the ministry of the majority of Jesuits whose testimonies are presented in this volume. Could this be because explicit mention of Ignatian spirituality is missing in a number of the histories presented? One wonders how integral these very laudable efforts at

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promoting justice are when they fail to make explicit the religious dimension of this effort.

Conclusion

Some forty years after GC 31 began the Society's *aggiornamento* in the wake of the end of the Second Vatican Council, the testimonies of those working to promote social justice within the Society bears evidence of a multi-polar approach to a complex series of challenges where Ignatian spirituality has an important role. True to the spirit of the Spiritual Exercises and distinguishing the efforts of the Society and its partners in this regard is a never-ending search for the *magis* born of an experience of God, *semper maior*. In the case of many engaged in the social apostolate, this 'more' and this 'God' who exceeds our dreams for a more just existence for the poor involves the question raised by Fernando Lopez: "How to live and construct dignified life conditions with the little ones, where the wounds of history are more open and life is more threatened?"

It is a struggle so vast and complex that it can paralyze us in many ways by leading us to fatalism, spiritualism, or secularism. But in its vastness and complexity there are tremendous gifts that the Society is being granted. We are learning in our life, with and on behalf of the struggle against injustice, what it means to be "the least Society," to be partners and friends in the crucial struggle of our time, shunning isolation, as well as the need to be the protagonists of change. We are learning from the Lord and the little ones to whom the Father chose to disclose a way of proceeding characterized by gratitude and the patience of the sower, who trusts that from the mustard seed will sprout a bush where all sorts of birds will find a home.