

# LITURGICAL FORMATION IN THE SOCIETY OF JESUS\*

## A REFLECTION FROM IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

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### *Lights and shadows in my experience*

**T**he first thing I want to say is that liturgical formation in the Society of Jesus is much better today than it was 30 years ago. When I look back on my experience I have to admit that my own liturgical formation was most inadequate. Our liturgy professor in theology limited himself to explaining the history of the liturgy, but we never saw him participating at a liturgical celebration in the community. Then just before ordination to the diaconate, the Rector of the Theologate instructed us in the use of the Liturgy of the Hours, something we had never done or prayed before. I also remember, with a certain embarrassment, while attending, with my own novices in Puerto Rico, a formation program for novices of different religious congregations, (the first activity in the program was the recitation of vespers) and one of my novices came up to me and asked: "what are Vespers?" On a more positive note, I must say that I received a significant part of my liturgical formation in ministry, while serving the people of God in a poor Barrio in San Juan. Developing a sensitivity for people taught me how to celebrate, how to preach, how to pray together with them. Moreover, the people taught me that the liturgy was connected to their

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everyday life, to the main events of their family, to the way they lived and worked.

As a contribution to the theme of this meeting, liturgical formation in the Society, I would like to offer some reflections on the relationship between liturgical practice and the spiritual tradition of the Society, beginning with the witness of Ignatius, passing through some recent documents of the Society and ending with some proposals, suggestions, challenges for your consideration.

### *The witness of Ignatius*

We are all aware of the importance of the liturgy for Ignatius, the many tears he shed while celebrating the Eucharist, the **spiritual consolation** he experienced in participating in liturgical celebrations. In the *Autobiography* Ignatius recounts of “a forceful thought (that) came to him by pointing out the hardships of his life, like a voice within his soul, ‘how will you be able to endure this life for the seventy years you have to live?’” “It happened when he was entering a church where he heard High Mass each day and Vespers and Compline, all sung, finding in this great consolation” (20). In the *Spiritual Diary* he writes: “During Mass I experienced diverse sentiments in confirmation of what has been stated. At the moment when I held the Blessed Sacrament in my hands, a voice and an intense emotion surged within me never to leave him for all heaven or all the world or the like. I felt new motions, devotion and spiritual joy.”

Now Ignatius was not just taken up by personal consolation in liturgical celebrations, but was equally concerned with some norms for worship for the edification of people. In the Instruction given to Fr. Juan Núñez, Patriarch of Ethiopia, he recommends: “In saying the divine offices, Mass and vespers, you should be careful to do it in a way that the **people may be edified**, slowly and distinctly...The vestments of the priest, deacon and sub-deacon and of the altar, the chalices and instruments to make the hosts should be well chosen.”

Ignatius shows also concern that the liturgy be connected with the **practice of virtue**, in other words, our worship should be related to the quality of life we lead. In a letter to Francis Borgia, he gives three rules for receiving communion: “The first is the pure and right intention in the person receiving the most holy Sacrament. The second, the advice of the spiritual

director or confessor. The third, the profit that the soul experiences in growing in virtue, especially in charity, humility, mercy and devotion.” Likewise in a letter to Teresa Rejadell, where he recommends daily communion, he says: “This is our daily bread; therefore live in such a way that you can receive it every day.”

Finally in the *Deliberation on Poverty*, one of the reasons Ignatius gives for not having fixed income, besides that of resembling and contemplating the Son of the Virgin, our Creator and Lord, so poor and in so many adversities, is that “it seems that we are united to the Church with greater affection, by being uniform in not having anything for ourselves while we are **contemplating Christ poor in the sacrament**”.

All of these texts of Ignatius show the high regard he had for the liturgy and how he related it to other aspects of our religious and apostolic life.

#### *Some recent documents of the Society of Jesus*

In preparation for this meeting, I have read Fr. General’s address to you four years ago (2002) where he examines what the Generals of the Society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have said regarding the liturgy and, most especially, Fr. Janssens *Instruction and Ordinance Concerning the Training of Ours in the Sacred Liturgy*. I will center my attention on the decrees of the most recent General Congregations, the supreme legislative body of the Society.

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When looking at the index of the *Complementary Norms* (in the Spanish edition) one is surprised to see only four references to the term *liturgy, liturgy of the hours*. They are:

- CN 68: “There should be a graded introduction to the systematic reading of Sacred Scripture, to arrive at a deeper insight into the Mystery of Christ. Similarly, training must be given throughout for an active participation in the liturgy and a progressive grasp of its meaning.” (GC 31, n.20)

- CN 77, 2: “...There should be ampler opportunities for a variety of spiritual exercises, especially an active and diversified participation in

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the Eucharist and a brief daily common prayer.” The 32<sup>nd</sup> GC, in decree 11, *Union of Minds and Hearts*, says that “all of our members should consider daily celebration of the Eucharist as the center of their religious and apostolic life” (35).

- CN 228: “In the recitation of the divine office, to which they are bound by ordination, our priests and deacons should make an effort to achieve a devout and timely participation in the chorus of praise which is truly the prayer of the whole Christ, with all his members, to the Father.” (GC 31, n. 10).

- CN 241: “All of us, even formed members, must strive to sustain and renew our spiritual life with the resources made available by the Church and the Society, such as Bible study, theological reflection, the liturgy, retreats, recollections and reading. In this way, as we advance in age and gradually approach journey’s end, our spiritual life will be ever in bloom and our apostolic thrust will be more effective in meeting the needs of the ecclesial community and of humanity at large.” (GC 31, n. 46).

It is interesting to note that most of these texts, few as they are, come from the Formation decrees of GC 31. On the other hand, the word *Mass* or Eucharistic celebration appears many times with three headings: 1) Its importance and significance for the personal and community life of the Society, for the help of souls, and to govern, preserve and increase the Society; 2) Participation in and celebration of the Eucharist; 3) Other observations regarding the celebration of the Eucharist. It would appear that the Society’s reflection on liturgy is very much centered on the Eucharist. Fr. Kolvenbach himself, at the end of the Synod on the Eucharist, has written a letter on this topic (15.02.06) as a reminder to the Society of what Ignatius and his first companions left us both as a message and a mission, in living out this ‘greatest sign of his love (SpEx. 289).

Some proposals, suggestions, challenges for liturgical formation

- The first thing I would like to say is quote Fr. Janssens’ letter where he says: “There should vanish any fear that, by cultivating the Sacred Liturgy according to the mind of the Church, we are departing from the spirit of our holy founder or are adopting the monastic forms that he rejected for apostolic purposes.” I think it is important to have a good knowledge of Ignatius’ appreciation of the liturgy and the place it has in Ignatian spirituality.

- To remember that at the end of the Spiritual Exercises, which are a personal experience for the following of Jesus Christ, Ignatius places the Rules for the right sense we ought to have in the Church. There is no

doubt that Ignatius intended that the following of Christ take place in the Church. In 3<sup>rd</sup> Rule (355) we read: "To praise the hearing of Mass often, likewise hymns, psalms, and long prayers, in the church and out of it; likewise the hours set at the time fixed for each Divine Office and for all prayer and all Canonical Hours."

- Fr. Kolvenbach has said that from the Novitiate on it is necessary to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. This is to pray with the whole Church. If we do not teach this from early on, how can we expect our men, just before ordination, to pray the Office? In the Novitiate in France, they do a study of the Psalms and learn to chant the Psalms in liturgical common prayer. This may be a way to help our men in formation to "feel and relish things interiorly" (SpEx 2). This is given continuity in the following stages of formation. I have seen similar practices in the Novitiates of the USA, Italy and Slovakia.

- In the Spiritual Exercises Ignatius seems to be very much aware of the liturgy of the Church and the times for prayer were determined according to it. In a note (72) for the exercises of the 1<sup>st</sup> week he says: "The first exercise will be made at midnight; the second immediately on rising in the morning; the third, before or after Mass; in any case before dinner; the fourth at the hour of Vespers; the fifth, an hour before supper." One Novitiate schedules the 30-day retreat in such a way that the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the Exercises falls during Holy Week and the 4<sup>th</sup> week during Easter. We need to explore different ways to use the liturgy in giving the Exercises.

- One of the challenges for liturgical formation and practice is the cultural and religious emphasis on the individual versus the communal, the private versus the public. Many spiritualities today stress the individual's relationship to the divine, and this, done in a private way. We need to bring out the eminently personal and at the same time communitarian dimension of Christian faith.

- In a short book on the liturgy entitled *Das Fest des Glaubens*, the then Cardinal Ratzinger asks the questions: How do we teach to pray, how do we learn to pray? Most of us learned to pray **with** others. Prayer always includes a **with**. To lose the fundamental **with** of Christian prayer is perhaps the root of lack of prayer. The liturgy is composed of words and silence; of songs, praise and image; of symbols and actions that correspond to the word. Liturgical formation will require the interiorization of the "Word," the word of the crucified and risen Lord; attention to the symbolic actions which unite the exterior and the interior (to stand or sit down, to

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kneel, to make an inclination or stand upright, to touch the heart, to make the sign of the cross). All this re-presents the spirit in the body.

- An awareness of God's people. Those who are to be ministers in the Church should learn to listen to, walk with and feel with the people of God. Before preaching in the liturgy, they should contemplate the Word of God and contemplate the reality of God's people. They should know the questions, life-situations, challenges, preoccupations of the people to whom they are to preach. And should be filled with mercy and understanding.

- Inculturation of the liturgy. How to be sensitive to cultural diversity?

- Formators should be imbued with the spirit of the liturgy in order to be "teachers" of it.