

SHARING THE IGNATIAN HERITAGE WITH OUR LAY COLLEAGUES

INSIGHTS FROM THE CONSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The laity make up more than 95% of the Church. Their special and irreplaceable mission is to take the gospel and gospel values into the temporal sphere, to homes, businesses, halls of government, and educational institutions.¹ Pope John Paul II uses the image of laborers in the Lord's vineyard to describe their mission. The entire world is the Lord's vineyard.² Especially since the Second Vatican Council, lay men and women who have been involved in apostolates organized by Jesuits, are looking for deeper understandings of the Jesuit ways of proceeding and of the apostolic Ignatian spirituality that will guide their lives and works.

A new era of Jesuit lay association and collegueship is beginning to emerge. Inspired by the Jesuit tradition, informed by Ignatian spirituality, lay men and women work hand in hand with Jesuits in serving the Church and the people of God. How have the laity come to know about the Jesuit charism and way of proceeding? What are the sources and resources to which they can turn to deepen this understanding. We will respond to these questions by a series of summary statements.

SHARING THE IGNATIAN HERITAGE

***Lay Colleagues have been most influenced and formed
by the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius***

Most references to what is understood by Ignatian spirituality rightfully point to the Spiritual Exercises. This is a foundational document for Jesuits and for their lay colleagues. Through the experience of making a retreat, and through lectures and discussions on themes from the Exercises, our lay colleagues have begun to let the Ignatian vision shape their lives. The Exercises have been the spark that fires zeal and desire for deeper involvement in the mission of the Church – whether that be in a Jesuit institution or not. Going through the Exercises has been for many a conversion experience, leading to major decisions in their lives.

In accord with the dynamic of the Exercises, lay men and women turn from sin, follow the way of Jesus Christ the eternal King, take up his Standard, that of the Cross, and remain united with him in his death and resurrection. They then go forth to seek, serve and find God in all things, in accord with the Contemplation to Attain Love.

***For the full meaning of Ignatian spirituality we must progress
from the more ascetical spirituality of the Exercises
to the strongly apostolic spirituality of the Constitutions***

The Spiritual Exercises are from the hand of the early Ignatius, based upon his own conversion experience. Their basic and original goal is to help the Christian to find the will of God in his or her life, and choose accordingly. They do teach the exercitant methods of prayer, the importance of the examination of conscience. But they do not spell out the fuller meaning of an apostolic spirituality. In fact, if read carefully, they remain heavily ascetical, with an emphasis on my own personal salvation, and making choices in accord with my own salvation. Zeal for the neighbor is present, but is not emphasized in the making of choices.

While the Exercises remain a solid beginning, I am arguing that for a deeper and more developed understanding of Ignatian spirituality, we must turn to the later Ignatius who wrote the Constitutions.³ These were written to assure that the Society of Jesus, an apostolic body in the Church would continue and grow in service to the Church. They set forth an

apostolic way of life for the Jesuit who is most basically described as a “laborer in the Lord’s vineyard.” They indicate how the Jesuit is chosen, trained, formed, united with the brethren, and then sent on mission. They describe the means to help the neighbor, the elements needed to maintain a strong apostolic spirituality.

Long and complex, simply to read through the Constitutions might not be that helpful for the laity. Yet I believe they are filled with insights that apply not only to Jesuits, but to all apostolic men and women, and thus to our lay colleagues. In the next summary statements, I will try to set forth some of the more important insights.⁴

1. FORMATION. In the Constitutions, we find insights on how an apostolic person should be formed and trained

Formation for a Jesuit priest is notoriously long, involving two years of novitiate, and many years of study in the humanities, philosophy and theology. It involves apostolic experiences. One cannot expect a lay colleague to have that same lengthy formation. Yet three emphases of that formation for an apostolic life can be highlighted; spiritual, intellectual, and apostolic formation.

Spiritual formation

Presuming one has made the Spiritual Exercises, one should have an experienced mentor, director or guide one who can assist and support one in the life of ministry (263).⁵ There must be an attitude of openness and trust between the director and the one directed so that the best possible apostolic assignment may be made. This is found in the *Constitutions* under the account of conscience (91-92) insights of which can be adapted to lay apostolic spirituality. See also 551 on the relation between superior and the members.

Intellectual formation

Knowledge must be joined to piety. Study of the humanities and of theology becomes imperative for apostolic effectiveness in the world of

Ignatius and even more so today. Thus “human or acquired means ought to be sought with diligence, especially well-grounded and solid learning, and a method of proposing it to people by means of sermons, lectures and the art of dealing and conversing with others”(814). See also 307.

Pastoral formation

The Constitutions set forth “six principal testing experiences” (64) each of which is supervised, and a report is given to the person’s superior. These include serving in a hospital for a month (66), making a pilgrimage for a month, begging from door to door (67), and teaching Christian doctrine (69). With adaptations, experiments like these would certainly be applicable to lay associates who have made the Spiritual Exercises. The retreat experience might well be followed with some form of apostolic insertion experience to test and deepen the fruits of the retreat.

Grace Builds on Nature

An overall principle of Ignatius throughout the Constitutions, is that “grace builds on nature.” Formation looks to the power and input from the Holy Spirit, but that same Spirit pushes us to do all we humanly can to make ourselves effective ministers. We rely first upon God. “..In God alone must be placed the hope that he will preserve and carry forward what he deigned to begin for his service and praise and for the aid of souls.”(812). Such union with God is the most effective means.

“The means which unite the human instrument with God and so dispose it that it may be wielded well by his divine hand are more effective than those which equip it in relation to human beings” (813).

At the same time, Ignatius insists upon using all possible natural means. “The natural means... will all help toward the preservation and growth of this whole body, provided they are acquired and exercised for the divine service alone... so that we may cooperate with the divine grace...”(814).

2. APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY: A number of components come together in the Constitutions to shape and sustain an apostolic spirituality.

Zeal in Working for the Salvation of Souls

The central part of the Constitutions, Part VII, is on mission. The apostolic Jesuit is involved in a great undertaking or project, serving the Church and working for the salvation of souls. An apostolic spirituality does not simply enable us to avoid evil and keep from sin so that we are worthy of heaven. Rather, we are to labor in the Lord's vineyard, to produce fruit, to make a difference.

The end of the Society is to devote itself with God's grace not only to the salvation and perfection of the members' own souls, but also with that same grace to labor strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbors (671.3).

So zealous and apostolic minded should the Jesuit be, that his primary concern shifts from personal salvation (what must I do or choose to be saved – as is frequently found in the Exercises) to how I can best serve and help others to achieve salvation.

Seeking, Finding, Serving God in all Things

Throughout the Constitutions, the Jesuit – and now the lay colleague is pictured as a laborer in the Lord's vineyard. We are to be an agents of transformation, bringing good news to those in need.. Withdrawal and fear are rejected as options, and immersion and solidarity are fostered. In all situations we seek, serve and find God and thus carry out the vision set forth at the end of the Exercises in the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God.

They should often be exhorted to seek God our Lord in all things, removing from themselves as far as possible love of all creatures in order to place it in the Creator of them, loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him, in conformity with his holy and divine will (288).

Daily Examination of Conscience

One instrument to keep an apostolic spirituality vital is the daily examination of conscience (342, 344). In addition to reflection on our strengths and weaknesses, we examine our apostolic activities – how and where have we been effective, where have we gathered fruit.

The Interior Law of Charity

Traditional religious practices, rules and regulations are helpful and necessary. Yet in the mind of Ignatius, deeper than all must be the immediate presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. Thus he writes that “the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and imprints upon hearts” (134) is the chief means to preserve and carry forward our works.

3. VIRTUES OR QUALITIES NEEDED IN AN APOSTOLIC PERSON

The Virtuous Apostle

The description of the General Superior of the Jesuits as outlined in Part IX of the Constitutions highlights the virtues needed in the General, and to some extent, in every Jesuit.

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The first virtue is union with God, familiarity with God in prayer (723). Then, a person who sets good example of all the virtues, beginning with charity and humility (725). He should combine severity with kindness and gentleness (727). Magnanimity and fortitude are needed so that he can initiate great undertakings with constancy and conviction (728). Intelligence and good

judgment are needed, and something very important in the mind of Ignatius, an ability to engage in serious conversation (729).

The Virtuous Candidate

Those desiring to lead an apostolic life as Jesuits “should be desirous of all virtue and spiritual perfection, peaceful, constant, and resolute in whatever enterprise of the divine service they undertake, and zealous for the salvation of souls” (156). Candidates must have a desire to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. They must be ready to “...accept and desire with all possible energy, whatever Christ our Lord has loved and embraced...”(101). And “... desire to clothe themselves with the same garb and uniform of their Lord because of the love and reverence owed him...” (101). Jesus Christ becomes the center and model: “He gave us an example that in all things possible to us we might seek, with the aid of his grace, to imitate and follow him, since he is the way that leads men to life” (101).

The Good Superior and Administrator

Those in positions of authority should be loved more than feared (667). They must find that delicate balance between firmness and kindness. They should have an officially appointed admonitor who will regularly give friendly advice (770), and a system of assistants or advisors (810-11 and 431).

A Community of Love and Challenge, Learning from One Another

“The chief bond to cement of the union of the members among themselves and with their head is the love of God our Lord. For when the superior and the subjects are closely united to his Divine and Supreme Goodness, they will very easily be united among themselves...”(671).

With the help of one another, we grow in life in the Spirit and in apostolic effectiveness. The members look to their superiors and to one

another for assistance and correction. Candidates must be open to this correction. “He should be asked whether he will be willing to have all his errors and defects...manifested... and further, whether he along with all the others will be willing to aid in correcting and being corrected” (63). See also 269-70.

Communication and Eloquence

The early Jesuits gained success and fame through the ministry of the Word. Equally important in today’s fast moving world is the field of communications – mass media and interpersonal communication. As teachers, preachers, and administrators, the ability to write and speak is essential. Thus “it is good that all practice preaching inside the house, so that they may take courage and get practice in using the voice, method and the like (280). As with the spiritual life, the input of others will help one to improve: Thus it is useful “to have a good corrector who points out defects either in the matter preached or in the voice, inflection, gestures and movements’ (405)

Sharing of knowledge and information, done out of love, strengthens the individual and the corporate body. “This bond of wills... the mutual charity and love they have for one another... this bond is strengthened by their getting information and news from one another, and having much intercommunication” (821).

Moderate Asceticism

Good health and stamina are needed. The apostolic person cares for his physical health and appearance. In terms of fasting and ascetical practices, “...do not lean toward an extreme of rigor or toward excessive laxity...” (822). Again, “just as an excessive preoccupation with the needs of the body is blameworthy, so too a proper concern for the preservation of one’s health and bodily strength for the divine service is praiseworthy” (292). The length of prayer is limited, for prayer is apostolic prayer deeply related to action, and not an end in itself.

The Rule of Discreet Charity

We might call it prudence, wisdom, or the ability to discern and make proper judgments. In a bold statement, Ignatius calls for this “discreet charity” as the ultimate norm for decision and action.

“In what pertains to prayer, meditation, and study, and also in regard to the bodily practices of fasts, vigils, and other austerities or penances, it does not seem proper to give them any other rule than that which discreet charity dictates to them...”(582).

Availability and Freedom

One’s freedom is always limited, and especially so for lay colleagues due to family and other commitments. Yet an attitude of openness and availability marks the generous apostolic person. As far as possible, one is available and ready to travel, to respond to where the greatest needs are. “We must be always ready to travel about in various parts of the world...”(92). One views his or her life not as one’s own, but as an instrument in the hands of God for the good of others. “Our profession requires that we be prepared and very much ready for whatever is enjoined upon us in our Lord and at whatsoever time...” (82)

*prayer relates to our
apostolic works*

4. MAKING DECISIONS REGARDING APOSTOLIC WORKS. The Constitutions offer insight and methods into making the most effective apostolic choices concerning one’s life and mission

Clear Vision and Mission

One needs a clear vision of goals and objectives. This is found for Jesuits in the Formula of the Institute, the decrees of the Popes who approved the Society of Jesus. A mission statement like this can be adapted for lay

colleagues. In the Constitutions themselves we read in sharp and clear words that “The aim and end of the Society is, by traveling through the various parts of the world... to preach, hear confessions, and use all other means it can with the grace of God to help souls” (308). Not my own salvation, but the aid of souls, service to others becomes the final criterion of our decisions.

Searching for the Magis

Part VII of the Constitutions on mission outlines norms to be used in making decisions. Where is the “greater service of God... more universal good... greater need... greater fruit... where indebtedness is greater...” (622).

Decision making must be preceded by examination of possibilities and places where the needs of the people are evaluated. Where can I achieve the greater good?

In deciding if I should stay or move on, my decision stems from “seeking greater service of God and the good of souls” (603).

Multiplier Effect

One examines not only how an individual can produce fruit, but employs the multiplier effect, seeking the aid and cooperation of others so that greater fruit can be reaped. How and where can I touch more persons? “The more universal the good is, the more it is divine. Hence preference ought to be given to persons and places which...are a cause of extending the good to many others...” (622).

In the same vein, “preference ought to be shown to the aid which is given to large nations... to important cities, or to universities, which are generally attended by numerous persons, who, if aided themselves, can become laborers for the help of others” (622). We are drawn to “...occupations which are of more universal good and extend to the aid of greater numbers of our neighbors...” (623). We choose “...works that continue longer and are permanently profitable” (623).

Feed Back on the Fruits Reaped

Insights from the way to choose as found in the Spiritual Exercises are surely found in the Constitutions. One trusts in the presence, power, and guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, one employs human wisdom, reason, the help of experts, learning, and reports from the workers in the vineyard to gather and evaluate data to make the best decisions possible regarding mission and ministry.

In the mind of Ignatius there should be constant communication and feedback regarding the fruits (or lack of fruits) one is producing. Thus his insistence on regular detailed written reports. “It is important that those who are sent keep the superior informed by frequent reports about the fruit which is gained” (626). See also 629, 673-74.

Personal Care for the Members

A hallmark of Jesuit education is personal care (*cura personalis*) for the students. This should also be found in the community of apostolic workers. One example of personal care and love found in the Constitutions is the difficult decision to dismiss a member (220-230). The one making the decision must pray, consult quietly, weigh reasons, seek the common good and the good of that individual. And then “send him away with as much love and charity for the house and as much consoled in the Lord as possible” (225). Furthermore, one should “guide him in taking up some other good means of serving God” (226). Members of the Society should have a positive attitude to the one who left (compassion, love and prayers for him (229), and indeed learn from that experience.

Priority for the Poor

In examining where one might be an apostle, one looks especially to the needs of the poor and the weak, to those who are marginalized and have no one to help them. We seek to work in “that part of the Lord’s vineyard which has greater need both because of the lack of other workers and because of the wretchedness and infirmity of the people there and their

danger of eternal condemnation” (622). This becomes one important criteria in the discernment of ministries. In Ignatian strategy one seeks the help and support of the powerful so that the needs of the poor and weak will be met.

5. MEANS BY WHICH ONE HELPS THE NEIGHBOR. Various means by which the person on mission helps the neighbor.

Good Example

While words may be important and necessary, in the mind of Ignatius unless words are joined to living witness, they are hollow. Thus the first means for effectively helping the neighbor is “is by giving the good example of a thoroughly upright life and of Christian virtue...” (637).

Apostolic Prayers, Petitions and Desires

The second means is prayer. “Likewise, the neighbor is aided by desires in the presence of God our Lord and by prayers for all the Church...” (638). Note that the prayer expected of Jesuits in the Constitutions most frequently is prayer of petition, apostolic prayer. Prayer relates to our apostolic work. We pray for our students, our brothers, for kings and princes, for bishops and benefactors. We ask God to bless them, reward them, and that we be effective in assisting them. Indeed, the first obligation of the rector of a college is prayer. “The function of the rector will be first of all to sustain the whole college by his prayer and holy desires...” (424). The final Part X of the Constitutions reminds us that by prayer the entire Society of Jesus will be sustained. (812).

Power of the Word

As mentioned, the first Jesuits emphasized the ministry of the Word. “In the church the word of God would be constantly proposed to the people

by means of sermons, lectures, and the teaching of Christian doctrine”(645). Apostolic effectiveness comes from relying upon and preaching God’s Word.

Conversation

Numerous texts of the Constitutions speak of conversation as an essential tool for those laboring in the vineyard. Ignatius calls this the grace and art of conversation. The General Superior should excel in it (729). “They will likewise endeavor to benefit individual persons in spiritual conversations, giving counsel and exhorting to good works, and in giving the Spiritual Exercises” (648).

Corporal Works of Mercy

Not only do we reach out to save souls, we care for the whole person. Thus “They will also occupy themselves in corporal works of mercy....by assistance to the sick, by the reconciliation of quarreling parties, by doing what they can for the poor and for prisoners in the jails, both personally and by getting others to do so” (650).

Team Work, Collaborative Ministry

Following the example of Jesus in the gospels, we are sent out in two or in teams, receiving support and challenge from one another. Thus, “it would be wise when possible not to send one person.. but instead at least two persons, so that they may be of greater aid to one another in spiritual and bodily matters... and be of more benefit to those to whom they are sent” (624).

6. CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR WAY OF PROCEEDING

In sum and in review, most of the Characteristics of the Jesuit Way of Proceeding, which we share with our colleagues, are given sharp focus in the Constitutions.

SHARING THE IGNATIAN HERITAGE

Decree 26 of the 34th General Congregation sets forth eight Characteristics of the Jesuit Way of Proceeding. I am suggesting that these apply, with needed modifications to our lay colleagues with whom we collaborate. While these characteristics stem from and are rooted in the Spiritual Exercises, in many ways they have taken their shape and concrete form from the Constitutions.

According to Decree 26, Jesuits (and I now add, their lay colleagues) should have the following characteristics 1) a deep personal love for Jesus Christ; 2) contemplative in action; 3) an apostolic body in the Church; 4) in solidarity with those most in need; 5) in partnership with others; 6) called to learned ministry; 7) sent, always available for new missions; and 8) ever searching for the *magis*.

Insights from the Constitutions help us develop the apostolic spirituality of a contemplative in action, urging us to work together in and for the Church, always looking out for the persons in need, combining learning and prayer, looking for ways to improve our apostolic effectiveness through constant evaluation, and finally, aggressively and boldly searching for new and better ways, new situations in which we can give more glory to God and better aid to our neighbor.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

My thrust here is to encourage Jesuits and lay colleagues to start with the Exercises in setting forth Ignatian spirituality, but not to stop there. Rather, insights gathered from the treasure of the Constitutions offer a more complete and a deeply apostolic view of Ignatian spirituality – a spirituality needed in our church and world today, and strongly desired by our lay colleagues.

How will lay colleagues gain these insights from the Constitutions? How can Jesuits share the treasure of the Constitutions with lay apostles? Because of the complexity and length of the Constitutions, it will take some adaptation. Certainly days of reflection, lectures, and articles such as these are ways. A handbook of key texts from the Constitutions with questions for reflection, discussion, implementation and action could be put together. Groups or individual lay colleagues could benefit from prayerfully reading key texts of the Constitutions.

Yet there is a third step. In addition to the Constitutions, we now have, inseparable from the Constitutions, the Norms set forth and approved at General Congregation 34. They too offer in a contemporary format much material for our lay colleagues on the Jesuit life, mission, and way of proceeding. But that is matter for another paper. This article has focused exclusively in the text of the Constitutions as it was approved over 450 years ago. It is a classic text, offering original insights of St. Ignatius for the Society of Jesus, and now insights for our lay colleagues.

¹See Vatican II, Church in the Modern World, Nos.43 and 93, and The Apostolate of the Laity, No.2.

² See his Apostolic Exhortation, The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People.

³ See my essay in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, "The Pilgrim Journey of Ignatius," 31/4 (September 1999).

⁴ It is important to note and recognize that in giving the Exercises, Jesuits often give more than the Exercises. They give them as lived by Jesuits – with the Constitutions having formed and guided them, and their spirituality.

⁵ Numbered references throughout this article are to the paragraph numbers of the Constitutions.