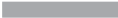


# LOOKING AHEAD: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY'S MISSION <sup>1</sup>

  
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**H**ow can we ascertain the way the mission of the Christian Life Community (CLC) will look in the future? We can choose some apostolic experiences, mindful of the risk involved, so as to envisage future developments. Revisit the history of the world-wide Community, focusing on the “apostolic” dimension that emerges from successive world assemblies. Or recall the apostolic nature and objectives of the CLC as delineated in the General Principles of the foundation text <sup>2</sup> and note the direction that the community is achieving today towards these objectives.

Whatever approach is adopted, it is important to keep our eyes fixed on what is at the heart of the mission of the Christian Life Community: adherence to the risen Christ. The adherence takes birth in our hearts and is renewed daily, thanks to the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. The CLC recognizes them, in effect, as *the specific source and the characteristic instrument of (their) spirituality* <sup>3</sup>. Were the CLC to ignore this fundamental reality of its mission it could neither be adequately understood nor be lived in an authentic way.

That is why we need to rediscover some significant characteristics of the CLC mission (I) before looking at certain

challenges and difficulties (II). It will, then, be easier to see which opportunities are seeds for the future CLC missionary (III).

## I. HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND THE CLC MISSION?

General Principles 1: *The Three Divine Persons, contemplating the whole of humanity in so many sinful divisions, decide to give themselves completely to all men and women and liberate them from all their chains. Out of love, the Word was incarnated and born from Mary, the poor Virgin of Nazareth.*

The CLC mission constitutes a response to the love of God, who becomes involved in the life of the human person, God's creature. The CLC members discover the price they have in the eyes of God, "whose ineffable will to save all peoples, gives them the possibility to participate integrally in the realization of their salvation in history" <sup>4</sup>. Our mission is born from a desire that of our being intimately united to the life of Christ who joins us in our human condition and gives it meaning.

To discern better the essential traits of the CLC mission, it would seem preferable to begin by saying what it is not. Thus, the CLC mission is not an activity, nor is it optional, nor totally personal.

### ***The mission of CLC is not an option***

The CLC is an apostolic body for mission. It is not a place which brings happy people together to share their faith and their friendship in a peaceful and agreeable closed circle. The special characteristic of the CLC is for its members to go out and witness to the Risen Christ.

No one can say that he or she is an authentic member of the CLC unless that person is engaged in an apostolic life. Because, whoever recognizes the CLC as a vocation in the Church, wants *to follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with him for the building of the Kingdom* <sup>5</sup>. That person has met Christ and made the decisive choice to follow him, with his grace.

Very often, when a person does not recognize in himself or herself the desire or the will to be on mission, it is a sign that one is not yet familiar

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with the vocation of the CLC. A formation for a deeper understanding and further vocational discernment is needed. By the same token, a community that does not help its members to make the election and to live out its demands and implications is not a very life-giving CLC.

***The CLC mission is not an activity***

Unless this desire is upheld by the Ignatian spiritual values, our apostolic commitment, even though it may be useful and praiseworthy, would be stripped of what makes it a CLC.

What is important to realize is that the mission is not so much a service to be accomplished as an attitude, which both justifies and carries it.

***The CLC Mission is communal***

*the dynamic interaction of  
discernment, support,  
sending and evaluation*

To speak of a communal mission makes us think straightway of all involved in the same activity – or in a series of similar activities. It is not quite like that, that the CLC understands its common mission. The mission “is common, by reason not only of its origin, but also because of its orientation”<sup>6</sup>. It is Christ who gives his mission to the CLC, which, in turn, lives it according to its special vocation within the Church.

During the World Assembly in Nairobi, we understood that the apostolic body that the Lord invites us to build is one in which apostolic *discernment, sending, support and evaluation* are vital and integral. It is the interaction of these four dimensions of the mission that makes the CLC communal.

Given the characteristics of the CLC, - a community of laity already involved in different family, professional and social commitments - it would be rare for any group to discern and undertake as a mission a common activity for all its members. More likely, the community becomes the privileged place for the discernment of the “personal” mission of its members.

What is true for the discernment is also true for the apostolic sending, support and evaluation.

After the discernment, the CLC must send its members on mission. A little sending celebration would be in order – such as we often do – if the community and person so wish. This aspect of sending on mission, like other Ignatian commitments, differs from other religious orders where lay persons receive their mission from the superiors of the orders with which they are associated.

The support that a member of the CLC will have from the community in the mission will depend to a large measure on the nature of the mission and the particular circumstances of the community. Whatever the situation, the community should ensure a spiritual relationship with this the member, particularly in one's missionary life. To be concerned for one another and to carry each one in our prayer is a manifestation of this closeness in our missionary communion. As well and according to circumstances, the community must be ready to put at the disposition of its members various – including material – resources, to help them accomplish the mission.

Evaluation is a dimension that is often neglected; it allows us, however, to recall, to reflect on what we have lived in the sight of God and to recognize therein God's finger in our history. When done in community, this exercise so eminently Ignatian, makes our mission much more communal and nourishes our apostolic discernment and support.

Clearly, what we mean is that these four dimensions in the life of the CLC are not chronological stages to be followed one upon the other, but a dynamic interacting to ensure a reliable base for apostolic communion of the CLC. It is not the achievement of a certain apostolic activity by the members of a community or even of the institution with its apostolic network that makes the mission communal, but rather the dynamic interaction of discernment – support – sending – evaluation.

***The CLC mission, based on Ignatian spirituality,  
is that of a world-wide association of faithful lay people.***

The CLC shares the mission with the faithful laity in the Church, that is: “to witness to God in the world in which they live.

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*But by reason of their own vocation, it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life, which as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God, that being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others*<sup>7</sup>.

Taking part in the mission of the faithful laity, the CLC endeavours to follow the Ignatian spirituality. To this effect, the words of Father Arrupe lead us to the essential: *The Ignatian spirituality is above all christocentric. To live an intense love for the person of Christ leads us to "a sense of Christ" which makes us be, appear and act like Him; that is the first and fundamental characteristic of "our way of acting"*<sup>8</sup>. We, CLC, see in these words a task of continual renewal, a challenge to accept despite the inherent difficulties in this ecclesial vocation.

## II. CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES OF THE CLC MISSION

General Principles 4:

*Our Community is made up of Christians: men and women, adults and youth, of all social conditions who want to follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with him for the building of the Kingdom, who have recognized Christian Life Community as their particular vocation within the Church.*

Many difficulties are strewn along the path of the CLC in its striving towards the apostolic body that it wants to become. Some belong to the CLC itself while others pertain to relations with other bodies within the Church or particular churches. We will leave aside particular cases so as to draw forth some universal lessons applicable to the CLC and which touch on its relationship with the Society of Jesus, its closest neighbour .

*Challenges that are internal to the CLC*

While such challenges are numerous, we shall limit ourselves to signaling out the three most urgent: identity, leadership, readiness and availability.

**-A further look at the identity of CLC**

The path that the community is invited to traverse is, from several viewpoints, a new way. They are a community of lay people who recognize in the Ignatian spirituality their vocation. But to live as an apostolic body in the world, requires further opening out. The process would certainly be easier if some, rather similar, church organizations existed within the church. But such is not the case, and perhaps so much the better, I dare say.

The Church does have several bodies of lay people linked with religious orders, who retain more or less their institutional bonds. While the Society of Jesus does not promote having a Jesuit Third Order, so neither does the CLC propose to be such. The choice for the CLC to share and be inspired by the Ignatian spirituality has implications for its identity. And these implications extend impinge upon the nature of the apostolic and institutional collaboration between the CLC and the Society of Jesus.

The CLC does not amount to a simple network of apostolic action composed of lay people more or less adult in the spirituality of Saint Ignatius. The vision of the CLC is much deeper. The community brings together lay people of diverse origins and conditions to become committed together in their life of following Christ, according to the method and spirituality of Ignatius. While not imposing upon the members to become “lay Jesuits”, the call to CLC is one of deep friendship in the Lord, as profound as possible. In this way, can a member as such be one one? One might as well say that as an apostolic body, the CLC is not, according to a rather humorous expression of a Jesuit, the infantry of the Jesuit cavalry.

The road traversed by the world-wide CLC, notably through its world assemblies, put into relief the gradual clarification of the CLC’s identity. This step is not yet completed because certain concrete expressions of our desire to become an apostolic body that is world-wide, Ignatian and lay must still take shape. But there exist some areas where the happy adjustments have been developed both in community and in collaboration

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with others. Thus, for example, there is creativity in the practice of the Spiritual Exercises; adapting them for the laity is precious for the CLC. There is no doubt today that the closed retreat of thirty consecutive days is not the only authentic way to experience the Spiritual Exercises. And the laity, immersed in the world and its day-to-day rhythm do not have the time – nor even the resources – necessary to go on retreat for thirty days.

Nourished by its own history, the CLC must accept the challenge to deepen and clarify for itself its own identity not by finding some practical

*The world-wide character of the CLC  
is a richness*

model but by seeking the Holy Spirit. The Spirit manifests itself in diverse ways in the teachings and calls of the Church, in the experiences of other

Ignatian bodies and in associations of lay people. This deepening is useful for the CLC and facilitates collaboration in the Lord's vineyard. But this ongoing realization of CLC's identity presupposes an effective leadership.

**- Leadership in CLC**

The government of the community is possible thanks to the generosity of the persons. They give their time, and often their material resources to build the community and develop its apostolic dimension.

In the world, there are very few people able to be full time at the service of the community; so possibilities for community action are seriously limited <sup>9</sup>. While exploring ways to increase the number of persons who can work full-time for the community, the CLC should make use of mechanisms for effective communication and organization. It must also be attentive to opportunities for collaborative work that are offered through new information technologies. But these services presuppose easy access to these technologies, which is not always the case in certain parts of the world and for certain members.

We realize that the good will of only members of the CLC who are on our service teams – national executive council, formation teams, apostolic teams, etc. – does not always suffice. The World ExCo has created a working group for the development of the CLC leadership. The first initiative taken by the working group has been to prepare a session on formation <sup>10</sup> for the

CLC who will then be able to animate sessions on governance in their respective regions. Some modules have thus been developed and tested, so as to further the acquisition of certain useful concepts in the management of our communities.

In this area, likewise, the CLC has found a way to proceed, because our spirituality gives us excellent means to promote a leadership of service. Already it provides an important Christian witness in a world marked by an excessive fever of competition. It allows us to proceed precisely in a Christian way as a body of “volunteers” working at the heart of an organization that is at the same time spiritual in nature and strongly motivated, to become an efficient and fruitful ministry.

#### **- Readiness and Availability**

Our lay life-style makes strong demands already upon our time devoted to family and professional commitments. We have little time at our disposition to offer for services. At the same time the Society of Jesus - with its historical formation to Ignatian spirituality – gives, and rightly so, great importance to availability and readiness to serve. Under these conditions, the feeling of not being able to live fully the Ignatian spirituality that members of the CLC often experience becomes quite understandable. At times this feeling leads to discouragement with the prospect of never being sufficiently free to serve.

Ignatian spirituality is not meant to be the only Jesuit experience, so our wish is that it may continue to become more inclusive and bear yet more fruit for the Lord’s vineyard. When Ignatius submitted the Exercises to the Pope, he was confiding them to the whole Church. His desire would continue today to apply to the laity allowing them to make the fundamental choice for Christ in their concrete situation today. This choice, as exacting for the lay person as it has been for the religious committed to Ignatian spirituality, must be brought to maturity for the glory of God and the salvation of the person who makes it.

To the availability of the persons is added that of resources because the needs are being felt in a way that is always more urgent and more pressing. Some arrangements have been taken – including a world-wide reflection on the finances – so as to make material resources for mission



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even more available. In this area, something still remains to be done, as also regarding collaboration with the Society of Jesus.

### *Challenges relative to the collaboration between the CLC and the Society of Jesus.*

First of all, it is from the corner of the Jesuits' role in the CLC as ecclesiastical assistants, dealing with misunderstandings over reciprocal expectations, prior to collaboration that we will take up these challenges.

#### **- Perceptions of the role of the ecclesiastical assistants.**

The CLC inherits a history which comes down from the Marian Congregations. In this historical tradition of Ignatian spirituality being lived out by the laity, the place of the director was reserved for a Jesuit. While giving thanks to the Lord for the service in the church and in the world which the Marian Congregations made possible, the CLC likewise acknowledges its gratitude to the Society of Jesus for its growth. Later on, so as to allow the Marian Congregations to rediscover their Ignatian origins lost over the course of the years, the Society of Jesus resumed its service of the Congregations. In this process, the role of the Jesuits in the Congregations, which became the Christian Life Community (CLC) in 1967, likewise evolved.

Institutionally, the Jesuits' role changed from director to ecclesiastical assistant. But it is important to recognize that the process is not yet completed because it still happens that the Jesuits act as directors. To this effect, Father Kolvenbach noted that "certain Jesuits are more like directors, which is not at all our purpose. And others are what we want to be: assistants. Even the word 'guide' would be too much. But that depends very much on the person's character and the group as such. This characteristic of Ignatian spirituality is very delicate, but we try to safeguard it" <sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, we observe some situations in which the Jesuits, for fear of becoming too directive become almost passive. We are caught between two extremes <sup>12</sup> – happily minor – which remind us of the urgency to clarify together the role of the ecclesiastical assistant. Some efforts in this direction have begun <sup>13</sup> so as to avoid such misunderstandings, which are not the only ones to arise between the CLC and the Jesuits.

**- *Misunderstandings over expectations***

One of the pitfalls to avoid in the apostolic collaboration between the CLC and the Jesuits is to set up the one against the other with unrealistic expectations. The spiritual and historic bonds that unite the Society of Jesus and the CLC can at times generate situations wherein the apostolic freedom of one or the other is made to suffer.

Thus, for example, when the CLC finds itself being offered to take on a work or an apostolic commitment of the Society of Jesus, it must discern and be left free to accept

or decline the offer. Certainly it is important to consider the imperatives of efficiency and of the future apostolic fruitfulness of the work. But what is of prime concern is to underline that the collaboration between the Society of Jesus and the CLC finds its roots more in the shared spirituality than in some historical circumstances affecting certain Jesuit provinces.

For the same reasons, the CLC must not expect that all their requests, the fruit of its discernment be favorably accepted on the part of the Society of Jesus. The temptation to conclude that the bonds between the two are becoming weak, when there is a negative response to our expectations on the part of one or the other, can at times make us anxious.

It is through prayerful discernment and open, frank dialogue that we can untie these kinds of misunderstandings and harmful perceptions and move towards a healthy collaboration that these two bodies are called to uphold.

**- *Prior to institutional collaboration***

In certain countries, the CLC finds itself still in the first stages of preliminary development. Overwhelmed by the internal challenges and the fragility of a young organization, the CLC does not always feel welcomed in this collaboration by the Society of Jesus. It has happened that, pressed by its own apostolic priorities or its own difficulties, the Society of Jesus would prefer to wait until the CLC “reaches a certain level of organization” before envisaging an eventual collaboration.<sup>14</sup>

Even though this attitude is understandable, it risks, however, creating a vicious circle. History teaches us in effect that the early growth of

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the CLC is often related to the collaboration that it succeeds in establishing with the Society of Jesus, which often helps it take shape. And one of the fruits of Jesuit accompaniment is precisely maturity which makes the CLC capable of collaborating well with others, including the Society of Jesus itself. To minimize or neglect this collaboration from the beginning – which is shown principally by accompaniment of the CLC on the part of the Society of Jesus – is not profitable in the end neither for the CLC nor the Society of Jesus.

### III. OPPORTUNITIES, FUTURE SEEDS

*GP 8: Our life is essentially apostolic. The field of CLC mission knows no limits: it extends both to the Church and the world, in order to bring the gospel of salvation to all people and to serve individual persons and society by opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures.*

At the heart of apostolic opportunities, is Ignatian spirituality whose flexibility and dynamic provide adaptation to the changing conditions and needs of today's world. These opportunities are seen as much in the actions already underway, as in the potential of the CLC (see above already commented on).

#### *Real Action*

The CLC members try in their everyday, very ordinary and mundane tasks to be in communion with the life of Christ. Their lives as well as those whom the Lord has placed on their path are often quite marked by this communion. One could say that the ordinary path is their sanctification.

Often, they are inserted in both social and Church life, a situation that is not sufficiently known and recognized. An explanation for this ignorance is found in their interior attitude more or less typical of the community, which consists in not wishing to publicize or engage in some "apostolic marketing". The CLC's way, one often hears, is to be like the leaven in the dough or salt in food. Its members do not put themselves in the forefront.

Just as it is not good that the CLC hand body and soul over to marketing its charism, so it is a shame to deprive others of knowing how we live with the grace of the CLC. This humble word is a witness, which nourishes our faith in the Lord. To see it at work in our brothers and sisters helps us to find it better in our own existence. This sharing helps us make community; it helps us as well to explore, grasp and strengthen the possibilities for apostolic collaboration, not only among ourselves but also with others.

### *Potential of the CLC*

More than once I have heard it said that the CLC is a small organization, and in this respect its frame of action is limited relative to the complexity of the present-day problems in the world. The affirmation is not false, but carries the danger of not being able to recognize all our potential.

*The Spiritual Exercises:  
the specific source and the  
characteristic instrument of  
CLC spirituality*

The world-wide character of the CLC is richness worth taking advantage of. Furthermore, its variety calls for nuanced, albeit profound responses to certain general questions. This world perspective gives its members the possibility of really thinking - and one might add of praying and discerning - globally and acting locally. It is the reason why the General Principles encourage us to create and keep up our apostolic networks.

Thanks notably to the prophetic action of our elders along the way; the CLC is a non- governmental organization, endowed with a consultative statute within the United Nations. This statute confers on it some possibilities for lobbying which need to be further exploited. These actions for pleading a cause require close collaboration with persons and networks engaged at the base. They constitute a service to other forms of social involvement and to lobbying carried out in other instances. In this domain, likewise, there are opportunities for collaboration with Jesuit structures for social action.

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### *Conclusion*

Because of Ignatian spirituality, mission is at the heart of the CLC. It is lived in a variety of ways, which can and certainly must become better so that the CLC may be truly an apostolic Ignatian lay body. Such is the great challenge for the CLC, which opens up to it at the same time numerous opportunities for growth for itself and its members, all the while becoming of useful service to the Church and the world. The difficulties are not insurmountable, and our vision will no longer be beyond reach, if we take advantage of all the resources that our spirituality offers us. When we look at the world and ourselves with the eyes of our Incarnate Lord, our motivation to take up this challenge with Him is renewed. With a heart constantly being freed of all "affection which might be disordered" we will walk resolutely along the path which we have recognized to be the one which approximates ever more intimately our deepest desire: to be witnesses of the Risen Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal reflections of the author, who does not necessarily represent the views of the world-wide CLC or of its Executive Council.

<sup>2</sup> This approach would be particularly appropriate during the year 2007 when the CLC is celebrating 40 years since drawing up the foundation text: the General Principles (GP).

<sup>3</sup> General Principle no. 5 of the CLC.

<sup>4</sup> Synod of the Bishops on the vocation and mission of the laity in the church and in the world 20 years after the Vatican Council II, *Instrumentum laboris*, no.11.

<sup>5</sup> General Principle (GP) no.4 of the CLC

<sup>6</sup> Our Charism no.103, published in *Progressio*

<sup>7</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n.31.

<sup>8</sup> Pedro Arrupe, Notre manière d'agir (Our way of acting), Conference, 18 January 1979, available on the site: [www.jesuites.com/histoire/arrupe/agir.html](http://www.jesuites.com/histoire/arrupe/agir.html).

<sup>9</sup> By way of exemple, the world-wide Secretariat functions with a CLC member, a Jesuit and a full-time employee, and benefits by the collaboration of two other part-time members of the CLC.

<sup>10</sup> This session took place in Rome between November 25 and December 2, 2006. It brought together 28 persons from all the continents.

<sup>11</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, *Faubourg du Saint Esprit*, ed. Bayard 2004, p.133.

<sup>12</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, *Rapport Nairobi*.

<sup>13</sup> The recommendations of the World Assembly in Nairobi includes an annex dealing with the collaboration between the CLC and the Society of Jesus (available on the

site <http://www.cvx-clc.net/docfr.html>). As well World ExCo has set forth a working document on the subject, which has been submitted for the reflection of the national communities and the Jesuits before being officially published.

<sup>14</sup> Evoking this situation should not leave us to believe that the Society of Jesus is not present along side the beginnings of the CLC. Quite the contrary, the communities have often started on the initiative of the Jesuits; the CLC is grateful to the Society of Jesus. See a propos: the declaration of Nairobi on the collaboration between the Jesuits and the CLC. But it is helpful to evoke this objection so as to underline the counter-productive effect in the long term.