

WHAT I HAVE RECEIVED, AND WHAT CLC HAS BROUGHT TO ME, AS A JESUIT

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At the *Review of Ignatian Spirituality's* request I have written this article as suggested to me – ‘something rather as a personal testimony, – on what I have received, and what CLC has brought to me, as a Jesuit.

Taking this particular nature into account, I thought it would be good to begin by introducing myself. Within the Society of Jesus I have been given the responsibility of being *Secretary of CLC*, and consequently worldwide, or international, *Vice-Assistant*. The *Assistant* is Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach. I have spent the last 30 years working in CLC, especially in my own country, Portugal: 20 of them in Coimbra (communities of university students), 4 in Braga (with young adults) and 4 in Lisbon (with young adults and adults). As well as this service I have been novice master for 12 years. Since May 2004 I have been living for half of each year in Rome, with an office in the *World Secretariat of CLC*, working with Guy Maginzi (*Executive Secretary of CLC*) and Van Nguyen (*Secretary*). During the remaining six months I visit the national communities already affiliated to the ‘World CLC Community (57 countries) and the communities whose experience is more recent, in process of affiliation (23 countries). In these visits my intention is to be a presence of the World Executive Council of CLC (Exco), to encourage bonds between the communities and to raise awareness of collaboration in mission in Jesuits and CLC.

What has CLC brought to me as a Jesuit?

1. We only become aware that we are 'bearers' when we share

This statement is obvious, and a general principle of human living together. In a personal way, I have discovered that if the treasure of Ignatian spirituality is communicated solely through me (or by a group called Society of Jesus) what has really been given to me to be shared might end up impoverished and diminished in my hands. And that would be a source of sadness, and perhaps a cause of infidelity and dissatisfaction.

Undoubtedly it is a grace to see and hear so many people (persons and groups) talking about 'our Ignatian spirituality', without the Society of Jesus holding the 'copyright' on this material. Those of us who are Jesuits have the source of the Spiritual Exercises, and we define ourselves by the spirit and the letter of the Constitutions. Thanks be to God, there are hundreds of groups (new communities, associations, movements, religious institutes, diocesan priests, permanent deacons....) who are inspired by it and follow Jesus on the Ignatian road. We all intend to travel it in an autonomous way and with a sense of Church, knowing that no vocation exhausts the richness of following the Lord. In communicating this heritage and seeing that it can be lived according to different forms of life, we understand much better that we are bearers, and that we are called.

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We learn this to the extent that we make ourselves 'present' to one another. It is not something that can be understood simply through writings or through conversations, though we certainly need these. 'Understanding' comes, above all, through 'presence'. Overcoming the temptation to work on parallel lines, we ought to ask ourselves how we can work better together, and to discover new ways of doing it.

In visits to communities my intention is to raise awareness in Jesuits and CLC communities of this sense of body, each according to their particular vocation and mission in the Church. We need each other. We need to discern and to open up new ways of collaboration at apostolic level.

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2. Accompaniment of communities

A second thing which has benefited me and which I intend to go on learning in working for CLC is the accompaniment of communities. The Society of Jesus has an extensive tradition of personal accompaniment. There have been more than 450 years of practising 'personal spiritual orientation', the art of helping persons to turn towards *the Orient*, from which comes salvation.

The experience of the Spiritual Exercises is something which must of necessity be lived by each person. Since the first Companions groups of lay people of Ignatian inspiration have been started. But it has to be recognised that the accent has been placed much more on the orientation of each person individually.

In the four centuries of 'Marian Congregations' the Jesuit was the Director, the one who decided, the one who thought out everything, decided and had it done. And this at local level as at planetary level. The Marian

Congregations were an authentic body in the hands of the Superior General of the Society of Jesus. These are past times, certainly. But it is not rare today to hear nostalgic

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commentaries, in various modalities, even if mostly from older people (Jesuits and laity) on those days... On the other hand, it is also not rare to hear commentaries from someone who rejects without further argument whatever smells of 'Marian Congregations'... But it has to be acknowledged that this has been a road to sanctity for many generations!

Soon after the end of the Second Vatican Council, when the Assembly of the 'World Federation of Marian Congregations' itself, meeting in Rome in September 1967, decided to change its name to 'Christian Life Communities' (and then to 'Christian Life Community' in the singular) and adopted the 'General Principles of the CLC', two aspects came up afresh which were decisive in this change: to return to the sources (concretely the Spiritual Exercises) and to place the accent on the lay lifestyle of the community.

'Fr. Pedro Arrupe entrusted responsibility for the direction of the renewed association to the laity and asked Jesuits to drop the directive role,

as far as possible, and begin to act more as a source of inspiration and as animators in the community.’ (Document ‘Relations between the Christian Life Community and the Society of Jesus in the Church’, July 2006).

Today, 40 years after this change, enthusiastic in its beginnings, I have the feeling of being in the midst of tensions and opportunities which call for greater clarification and convergence on what we are to do. As Society of Jesus and Christian Life Community, we need to keep in mind this history of grace in the course of centuries. This will enable CLC and the Society to keep on journeying in fidelity and capacity for renewal, in shared, ongoing and progressive discernment, and will enable the Society of Jesus to accompany the communities in an intelligent and generous way.

3. The life and fruitfulness of the apostolic communities

Finally I should like to underline one last but not less important point. It is the reality which has had the most impact on me in the last two and a half years as Vice-Assistant of CLC: the life and fruitfulness of the apostolic communities.

Without mentioning numbers or specific places, because the list is long – thank God – certainly where I have received most has been in meeting some CLC (at local and sometimes at national level)

who discern: communities open to what is outside, people who analyze the situation, who open their hearts to the cries of their

fellow-citizens (like Moses on Sinai); who know that they cannot and should not attend to every ‘fire’, and therefore select in what and where they are called to intervene. This they do reflecting and praying on what kind of motivation (using the very Ignatian criteria of the most urgent, necessary and universal), finding the best way of doing it, taking decisions and working out an articulated and consistent programme of action and evaluation.

I have had the grace of living in a Jesuit community which has done this work every week for twenty years! I have also had the opportunity of knowing some others whose custom is to do this, for example small teams

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of Jesuits in some work or pastoral activity. I believe that this is the way, and something that we as Jesuits need, like the air we breathe.

But seeing in a concrete way lay communities, specifically CLC apostolic communities, with really notable fruits and works, in various fields, is certainly what I consider to be the greatest discovery. I refer concretely to initiatives in the area of work with the homeless, with immigrants and refugees, with AIDS' orphans, in education, with peasants, in the field of family life (couples, Christian education of children..) and so on. Some of these are activities known today at national or international level. But they had very modest beginnings. The reason that set them in motion has taken them a long way. Great works have small beginnings!

I allow myself to draw a conclusion. A community (CLC is one form, SJ is another, with different ways of living obedience, which is no small matter!), which mobilises itself, organises itself and modifies as may be necessary, to carry forward what passion for the greater service of the Kingdom demands.. it is that which brings it to conversion. If it does not do so, it falls into perversion. That is to say: **conversion or perversion** depends on **getting mission right**.

I have also witnessed that communities that live in this way are the most fruitful, the ones which have new blood, the ones which become more credible in society and in the Church. Young people, in a special way, 'sniff out' immediately that here there is something valid, consistent and credible. Christians and non-Christians alike recognise easily that they are dealing with consistent people, and note that *meet together-pray-act-serve* speak of the same thing. Political authority recognises it as well, even if at times there are conflicts for that reason.

On the contrary, those who call themselves 'communities' because they sit on the same sofa, and whose experience is exhausted at 'their' meeting, live alone and die alone!

We need to challenge one another not to stop coming out of ourselves in order to follow the road of more and better service of the Kingdom. This will be a fitting response on CLC's part to celebrate the 40 years of its new name and General Principles in 2007; and on the part of the Society of Jesus, facing the coming General Congregation.