

# APOSTOLIC COOPERATION

## JESUITS AND LAITY IN ITALY

**Lorenzo Manaresi**

*Vice-Director of the Retreat House*

*Villa San Giuseppe, Bologna*

*National Executive Member CLC - Italy*

Last October, in Italy, about forty Jesuits and more than two hundred laity, representing some sixty works or activities, brought about the first national meeting on apostolic cooperation – in the whole complex of situations and ways in which it takes place. They wanted to make everyone interact, beyond the various particularities of sector, on the single theme of being *‘together for service’* (this was the title of the meeting).

I set off from there, from that significant moment, to illustrate the situation of apostolic cooperation in Italy, because that meeting came at the end of a process of analysis and reflection. The aim was to give a more solid basis, and greater awareness, to this finding ourselves together in service, which has already been the experience of so many, and for such a long time.

For the laity, the challenge is to move beyond a dynamic of personal relationship with one specific Jesuit, which indeed is the beginning of all the experiences of collaboration, so as to open themselves to a wider relationship with the whole apostolic body of the Society, and at the same time to work out their own particular way of living Ignatian spirituality as lay people.

For the Jesuits the challenge is to move beyond a dynamic excessively centred on their own works, to open themselves to a way of planning which is more articulated and varied in initiatives, sometimes upsetting to an

organisation that is well-established but difficult to keep going, and to relocate themselves in a new way of carrying out apostolate. This often starts from initiatives thought out together by Jesuits and laypeople, even before they are carried out together, or actually thought out and carried out by laypeople with the indispensable support of Jesuits.

In the meeting that was held, and in this article, we have deliberately not taken into consideration partnership with religious women, other male religious and diocesan priests, interesting and very fruitful as it is in so many situations, because of the particular characteristics that distinguish it, and the inevitable differences with regard to partnership with laypeople. Nor have we taken into consideration the forms of particular association with the Society (lay 'associates'), which have not especially taken root in Italy, and which do not, perhaps, constitute a model or an ordinary manner of collaboration with laypeople, but a particular choice of some person, not always easy to put into a framework, even in vocational terms.

So in Italy there are ordinary experiences of collaboration with laypeople, and there have been many historically; perhaps the most structured are in the social field, but there are well-rooted experiences also in that of spirituality and of the Exercises. In the colleges the story is more complex, because collaboration comes about either with very motivated and participative persons, often involved in leadership, or with persons who live the collaboration as simple, though capable, employees. Then there is the world of youth, culture, the university world, the world of communications, and so on, in which collaboration is extensive, but less structured and less thought out.

Coming to some considerations: speaking of collaboration may mean so many things, and specifically starting from the reflections and analyses made recently we have become aware of the need for a kind of 'segmentation' of the vast and multiform world of the Society's partners in dialogue, who differ from one another above all as regards the degree to which they share in planning processes and responsibility. And it is precisely in relation to a deeper and more binding collaboration that at this moment, for the Society here in Italy, there is need for a more precise commitment, for a detailed analysis of what works and what works less well, of what are the necessary premises and the indispensable conditions for achieving collaboration. There is need also to acquire the instruments for governing this new thing, which in some cases is disruptive, and to be prepared adequately to work in this new way.

– **APOSTOLIC COOPERATION JESUITS AND LAITY - ITALY** –

So, then, for both Jesuits and laity there is an urgent need above all for specific formation in collaboration and in the assumption of roles of responsibility, which could perhaps in some ways and forms be done together, as an opportunity to get to know one another and develop a common way of working. For the Jesuits, then, particular attention to the theme of collaboration, in the various phases of their formation and at the time of orientation to a future apostolic work. For the laity, the importance of a solid basic personal formation which will permit the Society to have reliable partners in dialogue, persons who have grown up in the school of the Word and of the Exercises, the primary and unifying source of a common spiritual patrimony.

The lay people present at Sassone showed that they were the mature fruit of intense formative activity, from which the majority have been able to benefit since their youth, thanks to the care of a generation of Jesuits now aging and disappearing. An equally effective apostolic capacity for communicating and guiding has not emerged from among the laity. This is a great challenge above all for the lay Association of Ignatian Spirituality, beginning with CLC, whose members are certainly present and active in collaboration in the most varied works, but whose number is in progressive decline, maybe precisely because of the lack of formators for the new generation of laity. Over and above the reflection taking place on the role of Jesuits and laity inside this Association, this example highlights the decisive nature of the challenge to create a solid basis for the growth of a laity called more and more to work in roles and functions which were once entrusted exclusively to Jesuits, and at the same time to maintain to the utmost all the characteristics of their own lay vocation.

It has emerged, then, how important it is for us, at this moment, to reflect on the identity and role of the laypeople who take on tasks of particular responsibility in the works of the Society, their relationship with the Jesuits working in these institutions, and the characteristics of the mission of these Jesuits. It will be important to look at the criteria for the choice of collaborators, at the objectivity of a collaborative relationship – functional in a work - and how that stands alongside subjective ties with a specific Jesuit, even in awareness that creating significant relationships is an essential prerequisite for sharing a project. It will also be important to evaluate the different contribution of paid laity and of volunteers, given that this distinction does not go with any value-judgement, but only with economic possibility or opportuneness, to be evaluated according to each situation.

The demands of continuity and of competence may in some cases impose limits on the employment of volunteers, who remain, however, a fundamental resource, often integrated in a vital way with paid work.

To go on with this string of themes emerging in the Italian situation, the difficulty the Society has in maintaining all the existing realities appears evident. The majority of laypeople have sufficient insight to understand and recognise the necessity and the urgency, for the Society, of taking decisions even when they are unpopular, especially when there is talk of closing a work or a community. But if there really is the desire to bring new resources and projects to birth, even and especially in these crisis-situations, it is important that there be an involvement of laypeople from the initial stages of analysis and reflection on the enterprise, thus giving greater attention to the persons who come to be involved in these decisions.

In Italy now various situations can be noted in which, precisely from a crisis of presence of the Society, new initiatives and project-making have emerged, and a greater involvement of laypeople is to be observed. But this concept cannot be simplified and applied as a prefabricated formula in all situations, some of

which are suffering more intensely from the end of a presence. This happens above all when a process is interrupted that is already under way, which has perhaps involved, even with lifestyle choices, single

persons or family units. (There are cases like this, some already in the past, and some more recent.) Hence, then, the importance of analysing precisely what has happened, in order to learn for the future: where has the problem been? In having had as points of reference and partners in dialogue in this project individual Jesuits rather than major superiors? Difference of opinion at a change of major superiors? The excessive personalisation of a project around the figure of some particular Jesuit? Not having weighed sufficiently the implications of the project for families? Not having evaluated at the beginning whether the project had its own autonomy, apart from the presence of the Society? Here various interesting questions open up, to which it may be useful to give a name, precisely to understand how to

*partners differ from one another as regards the degree to which they share in planning processes and responsibility*

– **APOSTOLIC COOPERATION JESUITS AND LAITY - ITALY** –

define correctly this new way of thinking not only about the running of the works, but about the presence of the Society in Italy as such.

Apart from the difficult situations, however, there are also so many in which this new way of working together, which produces a radical change of mentality, where the key words are networking, linking of sectors, common analysis of reality, study of shared action strategies, presence and unified voice in the social fabric, etc. , is experienced with satisfaction and success. All these are things which certainly do not touch only the sphere of cooperation between Jesuits and laity, but more in general that of the collaboration, not to be undervalued, between Jesuits and Jesuits and between works and works. One concrete example of this is the newborn network linking entities of Ignatian inspiration active in the social sphere, the Jesuit Social Network, a true and distinctive Federation of agencies, either of the Society or of laity, with its own statutes and organs of government.

This networking is also beginning to take steps among the different agencies working in the field of spirituality (retreat houses, centres of spirituality, experiences of Exercises in Daily life, various initiatives for forming spiritual directors and directors of the Exercises, etc.) and among the various Colleges operating in Italy. One concrete objective, on the other hand, is that of encouraging similar 'networking' in other sectors (in which it does not yet exist, or where there is only a little), beginning with social communication, but also in the cultural apostolate, youth apostolate, etc.

If every apostolic sector had its reference-network it would be easier for the government of the Society to think of occasions for 'consultations' of laypeople, which might take place, sector by sector, within the compass of a well-established structure for confrontation, and so be representative of the reflections and feelings shared in that sector. It would be difficult to be able to single out in any other way laypeople who might express and represent others, in consultative organs eventually set up by the Society, precisely because of the great diversity of ways and situations in which cooperation is brought about.

There always remains the possibility, for the Society, of choosing persons in their confidence or persons who fulfil particular tasks in Associations of Ignatian inspiration, to involve them in consultative organs. The shared opinion, however, is that at this moment it would not be useful to multiply formal structures, commitments to be maintained, but rather to favour the networking already spoken of. Further, it was decided to confirm, with opportune and necessary modifications, the work of a small commission

composed of Jesuits and laypeople, largely chosen by the Society itself, which has already worked together in the last two years to bring about a cognitive investigation on the state of apostolic cooperation in Italy and to organise the Convention which has just ended. To this 'secretariat' it would now be possible to entrust a role of service to the Provincial Council, keeping attention to this theme alive, suggesting ways of working, encouraging the realisation of the objectives identified at the last Convention and the distribution of all the material produced, as an occasion of enlarging and deepening the debate.

*differences of vocation,  
formation, mobility, time*

At the end of these more articulated reflections, a string of other concerns emerged in the Convention, as questions worth noting and considering more deeply, but all still to be considered more deeply:

- being laypeople and being Jesuits: differences of vocation, formation, mobility, time; taking into account the limitations and potential of each person; avoiding ambiguity about one another's vocation; respect for diversity, which is both a limitation and a resource;
- collaboration with laypeople/delegation to laypeople: when the Jesuits disappear and there are only laypeople.....Potentiality and limitations in the actions of the laity, in the different types of work;
  - definition of 'work' of the Society; apostolic purpose of a work;
  - mobility of Jesuits and stability of the works;
  - the challenge of the young: knowing how to involve them, to succeed in giving continuity to the significant experience gained in the past by those now adult, to make credible proposals, to have the courage to renew and innovate, role of the Colleges, role of the Associations, the vocational dynamic;
- knowledge of, and adequate ability to use, economic and legal instruments for a common and shared management: associations, cooperatives, foundations etc.;
- need for a comprehensive project which will design a strategy for action in the field of social communications; an office for social communications? Entrusted to laypeople?
- Jesuit website as great showcase and opportunity, to enrich and make use of; creation of general and sector mailing-lists for quick and

– **APOSTOLIC COOPERATION JESUITS AND LAITY - ITALY** –

efficient internal communication; creation of a data-bank in which to look up experiments and resources; a newsletter turned over to the lay collaborators;

- Experiments made in other provinces, to know, deepen, confront...
- And this number of the CIS journal comes at just the right moment; thanks to whoever thought of it!