

INTRODUCTION

TO ASSUME AND DISCERN JESUIT PARISH APOSTOLATE

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Some facts and the intent to interpret them

The reality of Parish Ministry as a whole in the apostolic commitments and works that the Society of Jesus has today causes an impact and raises questions. We will give some information without pretending to cover totally this apostolic service:

- in the United States (77 Parishes with approximately 170 Jesuits working in them; besides more than 112 Jesuits work in Parishes which have not been entrusted to the Society; 23 Jesuits work in the missions of native Americans);

- in Latin America (197 Parishes with more than 382 Jesuits working in them; and this without counting others who work part time, etc.; of these Parishes 79 are in peripheral poor zones of the cities; 78 are rural Parishes);

- in the Provinces of Spain (there are 30 Parishes entrusted to the Society with 54 Jesuits working in them and with over 50 collaborators; about 30 priests work in Parishes not entrusted to the Society);

- in the Provinces of South Asia (457 Jesuits work in 257 Parishes, the majority in India, 11 in Sri Lanka and 2 in Nepal. Many of these Parishes live intensely the evangelizing experience among the poor);

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- in the African and Madagascar context (the African Parish apostolate is closely linked to missionary work building up the Church, like in Chad, with many Parishes in Madagascar, in the Democratic Republic of Congo where more than 50 Jesuits are committed to pastoral work in thirteen parishes, in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique);

- in Eastern Asia (there are many Parishes in Indonesia and in Japan. But the Jesuits also take care of some Parishes in the Philippines, in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, in Australia. These Parishes are of diverse types: ethnic, rural, urban, missionary founding the Church).

The total number of Parishes entrusted to the universal Society is approximately two thousand, with a number of Jesuits working in them, practically equal to that of those who work in the educational sector. This corresponds to more than 15% of the members of the apostolic Body of the whole Society. Besides, there are many Jesuits who dedicate Sunday morning or some hours a week to take care of a chapel or a Christian community which depend on a Parish.

Why does this happen? How to explain this massive presence in Parish ministry in the Society today when many Jesuits still say, without doubting much, that this apostolic field is not typical of the society? I do not want to believe that inertia or negligence can determine in our apostolic Body the mission of so many of our brothers. Would it be because in fact,

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the ministries exercised in the Parish context today, have always been, in some way, present throughout the history of the Society? In fact the Fathers themselves who were members of the General Congregation XXXI (1965-6) found that there were over 1200 Parishes entrusted to the

Society of Jesus at that time. This reality was certainly a decisive element to assume and discern on this apostolate as Decree 27 of that same GC did. Father Jerry Rosario, S.J., (MDU), in his article suggests that in Jesuit history there have existed three historical contexts which have conditioned our service in the Parishes: the first period of time was more charismatic, then there was a time more bound canonically to the stability of the pastor and the rent and, then the more missionary time after Vatican II.

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Parish Ministries and the Formula of the Institute

It would suffice to read the ministries presented in an explicit way in the Formula of the Institute “Exposcit debitum” of Pope Julius III of July 21, 1550, in order to become aware that much of this help to neighbour forms a living part of Parish apostolate today. And even more, perhaps we do not have any apostolic work which lives all of these ministries so intensely.

“...He is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense of and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. Moreover this Society should show itself no less useful in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons or hospitals and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good. Furthermore, all these works should be carried out altogether free of charge and without accepting any salary for the labor expended in the aforementioned activities”.

Diversity in the Jesuit Parish Apostolate

The diversity of models involved in the parish work which the Society has today, is very wide. This demands adaptation and insertion according to the socio-cultural and religious environment. In some countries, during some time, which at times meant decades long, this was the only ministry which we could have; in others the Parishes are mission territories, opening fields of evangelisation founding the local Church. There are ethnic Parishes, rural Parishes, Parishes in the centre of large cities, Parishes in the geographical periphery of huge cities, Parishes which form part of a whole compound formed by the school, clinic, etc., Parishes linked to one of our Residences. We can affirm, though, that the great majority of Parishes

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entrusted to the Society today, the faithful we serve are the simple poor people, the needy persons in society. This results in a double gift to the Society of Jesus: the direct contact with and service to the poorest and a more organic insertion in the local Church. Our Parishes come to serve as a bridge and sensitize the whole apostolic body in these two dimensions. “El don de las parroquias a la Compañía” - (“The gift of Parishes to the Society”), the title of the article of Father Luis Pinilla, S.J., (CAS), treats these two aspects more deeply.

Three key moments

Beginning with Vatican Council II, three key moments have helped the Society of Jesus to have a new vision and integrate better the Parish Ministry carried out by Jesuits:

-1965/66 Decree 27 of General Congregation XXXI, “Pastoral Institutions, Residences and Parishes”: A historical change in the attitude of the Society toward the Parish Ministry took place in this Congregation, which later was ratified by G.C. XXXIV. General Congregation XXXI started from a double fact (Const. IV, 2, 4 and B [324]; VI, 3, 5 [588]), which referred to the rents and mobility in the service of the Universal Church. It was not necessary to change our Constitutions concerning these two apostolic criteria, because the regime of Parishes no longer implied: either to live from the rent which is against our criterion of poverty, or to appoint definitively the subjects to a determinate place, according to the new form of contracts with the Bishops. *“No longer should it be said that, in general, the care of souls in the Parish is contrary to the principles of the Constitutions, since recently, the discipline of the Church regarding Parishes entrusted to religious has changed” (GC 31, 10, 2º).*

- 1990 Relatio P. Generalis “De Status Societatis”, the part on “Parish and pastoral ministry”, Congregation of Provincials, Loyola, Spain. In commenting on Parish and pastoral ministry, as one of the seven principal ministries of the Society, Father Kolvenbach says, *“... that in the majority of apostolic plans of the Provinces this Parish work has its own place and is no longer considered as contrary to the mobility and availability, essential elements to the vocation of the Society at the service of the Universal Church”*

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(Nº: 54). Father General commented that the category of the Parishes which have a preference in the plans of the Provinces were those so called “functional”, that is to say, *“clearly oriented toward the apostolate among the poor, among minorities, the intellectuals, the refugees or prisoners, the sick and the immigrants”* (Nº: 60). A Jesuit Parish is authentic when it participates fully in the apostolic priorities of the Society, moving on three axis: spirituality (Exercises/Retreats, spiritual accompaniment), the social dimension and the missionary perspective. With future perspective, the document mentions the necessary formation for this ministry and the collaboration of the laity – men and women - in mission (Nº: 62). The Society of Jesus on the other hand, should maintain or found a Parish only in the measure that there is apostolic urgency and the possibility to work “according to our way of proceeding” (Nº: 63).

- 1995 Decree 19 of the GC XXXIV, “The Ministry of Parishes”:

This is the first time in the history of the Society that a whole Decree is dedicated to “Parish Ministry”. The Decree says that *“in certain circumstances, (the Parish) it constitutes an apostolate which is very apt to carry out our mission of service of faith and the promotion of justice”* (Nº 1).

“Even more, the Parish offers a favourable context to the life and solidarity with the poor” (Nº 2); *“an evangelized and evangelizing community should be formed, committed with justice and reconciliation”* (Nº 3). *“The Jesuit Parish receives energy from the Ignatian Spirituality, especially through the Spiritual Exercises and individual and community discernment”* (Nº 4).

The Jesuit who is sent to a Parish, whether it is entrusted to the Society or not is invited to make a relevant contribution to its life. From here arises the need for formation in areas such as *“homiletics, liturgy, catechesis, socio-cultural analysis, social communications and management of conflictive situations”* (Nº 9). The article of Father Roberto Oliveros, S.J. (MEX), comments at length on the origin and the development of Courses of Formation for those who work in the Parish context in Latin America. Formation for Parish ministry continues to be a big challenge in the Society

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of Jesus today. Perhaps there is no other ministry which requires so many skills and so much preparation. It embraces the whole person in his daily entire life.

Future Challenges

More than 50 delegates to the GC XXXV (2008) had been working during several years – including Father General, Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., who worked in ministries in a Parish context between 2000 and 2004 – or who at present carry out ministry in Parishes. The group held an informal meeting to share on this apostolate. Four postulates sent to the Ccongregation asked to strengthen and deepen the Parish ministry and to foster the pastoral perspective in the formation of Jesuits. The same group celebrated the Eucharist presided over by Father General in thanksgiving to the Lord for the experience they had had in working in the Parish and for all that this had meant in their Jesuit vocation. In this sense we include in this issue of the review two narratives of Jesuits who at present are working in Parishes: Father Orlando Contreras, S.J. (CHL), and Michael Kennedy, S.J., (CFN). We also publish a report of the Pastoral Council of the Parish of the Most Holy Trinity, Washington, USA, on our mission in a Parish entrusted to the Society.

On August 27, 2005, Father Kolvenbach in his visit to Japan addressed a letter to the Jesuits of that Province who work in Parish ministry. The paragraph which we quote is also a challenge for us concerning ‘our way of proceeding’ and ‘the quality’ of the Parish apostolic service in the Society of Jesus today:

This new apostolic awareness that we have acquired regarding parishes today poses new challenges to “our way of proceeding” and “identity” in this field.

What are the characteristics of a Jesuit parish? Can we talk of an Ignatian ingredient in parish ministry as practiced today? How does Jesuit Parish Ministry fit within the Province Apostolic Plan?

What kind of Jesuit is apt to work in parishes in [in the province] today? What kind of preparation is needed? What kind of studies

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and experiences are needed to introduce younger Jesuits to their work as future pastors?

Do Jesuits of this province working in parishes have the adequate renewal formation?

It is imperative to reflect seriously on these questions as a Province and to plan apostolic strategies together for the coming years concerning parish apostolate.

“Learned ministry” that is typical of Jesuit works is not just theological renewal. It means deep reflection and evaluation of our pastoral commitments in parishes, going from renewing structures and relationships, creating new methods of formation, to liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments.