

TO BE SENT: MISSION, FRONTIERS, AND CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION

Paul L. Locatelli, S.J.
*Secretary for Higher Education
of the Society of Jesus
President of Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, CA, USA*

When the Jesuits of the 35th General Congregation gathered in Rome to elect a new Superior General, we also reflected on our ministries in the new context of globalization and the universality of the Society of Jesus. With a perspective formed by 46 years as a Jesuit and 34 years in higher education, I will offer my own observations on the interconnection of the spiritual and the intellectual in the choices and writings of the 35th General Congregation.

Father Adolfo Nicolás was an inspired choice to be the 29th Superior General of the Society of Jesus, as was Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach 25 years earlier. Father Kolvenbach brought extraordinary gifts to his tenure as General; so also will Father Nicolás for this particular time in the history of the world and the Church. He is the ideal person to provide fresh “servant” leadership in the globalizing world. We felt guided by the Holy Spirit in our election of him, and our prayer and ultimate decision set a tone and context for subsequent discussions, lively debates, and final writings.

Prior to the Congregation, Father Nicolás outlined six hopes for the congregation. One was to *be creative* for the world of the 21st century. As he put it, “Isn’t there also an important factor in the perception of people (*Vox Populi*) that should drive us to some deeper reflection on religious

life today? How come we elicit so much admiration and so little following? Thus, one of my hopes is that in GC35 we begin a process of dynamic and open reflection on our religious life that might begin a process of re-creation of the Society for our times, not only in the quality of our services, but also and most important in the quality of our personal and community witness to the Church and the World.”

His *hope for creativity* coincided with our desire to inspire an *aggiornamento* in the Society: to bring a justice of faith to the frontiers of diverse peoples and cultures and again to discover that God is already there

*the twin factors of
globalization and universality
will require of us spiritual depth
and intellectual rigor*

at work. Reading the signs of the times, we became even more acutely aware that, since the time of the 34th General Congregation in 1995, globalization has created a new context and new frontiers for Jesuit ministries. Developing technologies, eco-sustainability issues, and various reasons for,

and ways of, people migrating around the world further accelerate and complicate globalization.

As our awareness of the changes brought about by globalization emerged, so did our appreciation for the universality of the Society. Global problems will require global solutions, and, as a universal Society, a universal response is possible:

Serving Christ's mission today means paying special attention to its global context. This context requires us to act as a universal body with a universal mission, realizing, at the same time, the radical diversity of our situations. It is as a worldwide community – and, simultaneously, as a network of local communities – that we seek to serve others across the world.¹

The twin factors of globalization and universality will require of us spiritual depth and intellectual rigor, and only when both factors are addressed will Jesuit ministries be effective in restoring justice.

From Identity to Mission

Jesuits at the 32nd General Congregation in 1975 defined our vocation as that of “sinners, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was.”² This companionship speaks directly to the identity and mission of the Society that were passed on by Ignatius to generations of Jesuits and collaborators. The interplay of identity and mission is best understood in Ignatius’s vision at La Storta when he felt placed by God the Father with Christ, His Son, and sent out to heal and help the world just as Jesus was. The three persons of the Holy Trinity seemed to command Ignatius, “I wish you to serve us.” Since then, placing the Society of Jesus at the service of the Trinity actually has meant placing the Society at the service of the Church and world: “Fundamental for the life and mission of every Jesuit’s mission is an experience that places him, quite simply, with Christ at the heart of the world” to labor for good.³

Ignatius, the courtier and soldier turned contemplative, the activist preacher turned student, saw a personal need for both vigilant prayer and learning for effective ministry. During his recovery from wounds received at the battle of Pamplona, he became a man of deep spirituality by contemplating the life of Jesus and the lives of saints. From that and his revolutionary experiences as a hermit came the *Spiritual Exercises*. His desire to proclaim the word of God to the world eventually invited him into the classroom, for he realized the importance of mental preparation for understanding both the Word of God and the realities of the world. Intimacy with Jesus taught him that to be a useful companion he needed to go not only into the library of learning but also into the “poverties of all people” – for Jesus “is the water of life.... The world’s many ‘poverties’ represent thirsts that, ultimately only he who is living water can assuage.”⁴

The Jesuit mission is intellectually rigorous and spiritually deep because of its origins in the revelation of the Trinity at La Storta: the Father sending the Son into the world for its redemption and salvation. This mission of service begins with one’s identity – being placed with the Son – and leads to an active ministry of restorative justice “to bring good news to the poor.”⁵ Three key factors define this mission: the *Spiritual Exercises*, a humanistic education, and the choice of a variety of ministries.

As for the early Jesuits, so for us and our collaborators today. At the 35th General Congregation, we noted that the *Spiritual Exercises* “help to

initiate and progress in a life of prayer, to search for and to find God in all things, and to discern his will, making faith more personal and more incarnate. Our contemporaries are also helped in the difficult task of bringing about in themselves a deeper sense of integration in their lives.⁶ Integration discovered in the experience of the *Spiritual Exercise* culminates in the contemplation on love, which love is seen more in deeds – in ministries – than in words. In contemplation our actions, rooted in love, lead to great service of God and the more universal good of people.

The second factor is the formation of Jesuits and the education offered in their colleges. For the early Jesuits, education focused on humanistic letters which combined a Renaissance humanism with Scholastic philosophy and theology. This formation resulted in a world view which embraces a humane mission integrating learning with service to society for God's greater glory.

At first Jesuits did not consider college education as a key ministry of the Society, but Ignatius soon realized that the well-being of civilization and Christianity depended on the proper education of the young.⁷ The principles of Jesuit formation were adapted for their colleges. Especially important was the Ignatian concept of the *magis*, or the greater good. That quest for moral and spiritual excellence requires knowledge not only of theology but also the arts and literature in order to develop a moral person who will actively and intelligently bear witness to the good news. Ultimately, the aim of learning contributes, first, to the quest for human perfection of individuals striving to reflect an image of God and, second, for the well-being of a society that gives greater glory to God. As Jesuits, "our aim is to be ever available for the more universal good – indeed desiring always the *magis*, that which is truly better, for the greater glory of God."⁸

While a 21st-century education differs radically from one in the 16th century, the fundamental principle still applies. Today a Jesuit humanistic education combines intellectual depth and critical thinking with "a concern for those in misery and for an educated sensibility toward the world of human suffering, and also toward justice."⁹ As we noted, this intellectual foundation for justice is rooted in an understanding of the theology of faith:

Faith and justice; it is never one without the other. Human beings need food, shelter, love, relationship, meaning, promise, hope. Human beings need a future in which they can take

bold of their full dignity; indeed they need an absolute future, a “great hope” that exceeds every particular hope.¹⁰ People who are hurt need to be restored to the community, to belonging – to restore entire human persons in their integrity, reintegrating them in community and reconciling them with God.¹¹

The third factor that influences “Jesuit life and mission” is the exercise of a variety of ministries. Jesuit historian John O’Malley wrote of *The First Jesuits*: “[Their] ministries and how they went about them were quintessential to the Jesuits’ self-definition.” In their ministries, Jesuits excluded no person or place in the world. They operated at the edges of life: they preached, taught catechism, proposed new liturgical practices, and sought to help orphans, prostitutes, prisoners, and those hospitalized. They were simultaneously writing plays, teaching in universities, and acting as theologians at the Council of Trent. Within seven years of their papal approval, they founded and operated schools.¹²

Today our mission is to go with both spiritual vigor and intellectual rigor to the “new frontiers” where we learn again that our “Jesuit identity [and mission] are relational; they grow in and through our diversities of culture, nationalities, and languages, enriching and challenging us.”¹³

From Mission to the Frontiers

Going to frontiers has always been a part of the Society’s self-definition. The consequence of his vision at La Storta was Ignatius’s development of a universal mission that would deploy Jesuits into a wide variety of apostolic ministries around the world. Jesuits were to go where the need was greatest, other religious were not already there, the good to be achieved was wide and deep, and their service would better society while giving glory to God.¹⁴ For example, he sent Francis Xavier to India, the edges of the known world. He sent a talented, international group of ten Jesuits to Messina, Sicily, to found the first Jesuit college for the improvement of students and of the city itself. His first companions would be recruited to teach theology at the University of Rome and later serve as advisors at the Council of Trent.¹⁵

In 1975 Pope Paul VI spoke of “crossroads” and “the front line” – images of frontiers – when he addressed the 32nd General Congregation: “Wherever in the Church, even in the most difficult and extreme fields, in the crossroads of ideologies, in the front line of social conflict, there has been and there is confrontation between the deepest desires of the human person and the perennial message of the Gospel, there also have been and there are Jesuits.”¹⁶

We at the 35th General Congregation realized that globalization is the new context that creates new frontiers. We also reaffirmed that the universal mission of a faith directed toward doing a justice of solidarity was integral to all ministries and to our lives.¹⁷

*Our mission of faith and justice, dialogue of religions and cultures has assumed dimensions that no longer leave the world a realm of separate areas but make it rather one, with each of us depending on the other. Globalization, technology and environmental concerns have placed in question our traditional boundaries and have enhanced our awareness that we bear a common responsibility for the welfare of the entire world and for its development in a sustainable and life-giving way.*¹⁸

At no time in human history has the impact of globalization on the poor and the affluent, the young and the old, the rural and the urban, been so great. What frontiers most make a claim on us in Jesuit ministries today?

*globalization
is the new context
that creates new frontiers*

And how do we respond today? These questions occupied our days and are likely to occupy us in the years ahead. Tentative possibilities follow.

Globalization benefits many through increased educational opportunities, cultural exchange, improved human rights, the spread of democracy and political freedom, advanced economic development and equality, and the transfer of medical services. It allows wider migration, confers greater religious liberty, disseminates the latest scientific advances, and fosters the sharing of knowledge and technology.

Globalization has negative effects as well, for example, undermining indigenous cultures, excluding the poor from global markets, increasing inequality by neoliberal economic policies, depleting natural resources, and expanding child labor markets. In 2001 Father Kolvenbach, speaking to leaders of higher education, named some negative effects that have become more acute since:

... The frightful results..., all [related to] ethics, are obvious: dehumanization, individualism, lack of solidarity, social fragmentation, a widening of the already existing gap between rich and poor, exclusion, lack of respect for human rights, economic and cultural neo colonialism... deterioration of the environment... Not to speak of the "perverse connection" with the globalization of crime: traffic in human beings and arms, drugs, exploitation of women and sex, child labor...terrorism, war, and the debasement of the value of human life.¹⁹

Globalization can be analyzed from various perspectives. A **geo-political** perspective might consider globalization from the perspective of a region such as China, South Asia, Latin America, or Africa. About Africa, we noted: "Aware of the cultural, social and economic differences among the various countries of Africa and Madagascar, but also conscious of the great opportunities and challenges and the variety of Jesuit ministries, we acknowledge the Society's responsibility to present a more integral and human vision of this continent...."²⁰

Another is a **theological or cultural perspective**. Globalization "has also given birth to a world culture affecting all cultures; often this has resulted in a process of homogenisation and in policies of assimilation that deny the right of individuals and groups to live and develop their own cultures." In the midst of this upheaval, post-modernism, mentioned also by GC34²¹, has continued to shape the way the contemporary world and we Jesuits think and behave."²²

Respect for indigenous cultures is heightened by the concern for the more than 370 million indigenous people in some 70 countries around the globe, who "... due to various socio-economic and politico-historical processes, ... have been amongst the most marginalized and exploited segments of the world's population – politically, socially and economically."

They do not ask for sympathy or pity; they ask to be empowered and equipped to cope with a fast-changing world.²³

A **socio-economic** perspective, especially attending to those who have been marginalized, might consider, rather than the predominate neoliberal philosophy of markets, the impact on indigenous people, women and children, the poor of Africa, the dalits of India, the Blacks in the U.S. Can the Gospel preference for the poor have a place in this frontier of globalization?

Frontiers beyond geographical definitions await us; these include those who are poor and displaced, those who are isolated and deeply lonely, those who do not ask for God and those who are instrumentalizing God for political purposes. There are new “nations” of poor and we are sent to them.²⁴

*can the Gospel preference for
the poor have a place in this
frontier of globalization?*

Technology expands and accelerates globalization in a variety of ways; it creates its own reality – rapidly changing the way we live, work, recreate, interact, learn, and communicate. It has given birth to a global internet culture, creating “instant communication and digital technology and worldwide markets.”²⁵ We noted that using new technologies and the Internet in new ways is essential to Jesuit identity and mission and ministries. As a new pedagogy of learning, internet technology necessitates that our ministries take “into account the advantages and the risks of the Web and of the new media for the personal growth....”²⁶

Technology also demands “that we adjust our procedures and liberate our imaginations to deliver God’s word in the most effective ... and the most convincing way to today’s generations.”²⁷ The early Jesuits “communicated their knowledge of God and their ways”... at crossroads and in the center of town, because that is where the people gathered [but] today the center of town is in millions of keyboards and on millions of screens.”²⁸

Another pressing global concern is **ecology**. “Care of the environment affects the quality of our relationships with God, other human beings and creation itself. It touches the core of our faith in and love for God from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.”²⁹ Our care of the environment can find inspiration in Ignatius’s teaching on the

good use of all created things³⁰ and in his sense of the active presence of God within them.³¹

The Congregation's concern for the environment led to suggestions ranging from being good stewards of our natural resources – the land, the sea, the sky – to using solar power or hybrid cars rather than draining our earth of its deposits and polluting our air. The frontier of ecology makes a claim on us concerning climate change and depletion of resources and more. It also encompasses environmental refugees, a category of persons defined as those “who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat...because of a marked environmental disruption...that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life” – *United Nations Environment Program*.

Pope Benedict XVI confirmed our mission by inviting the Society to address “urgent and present needs of the Church” and cultures and “to indicate the intellectual commitment in the fields of theology and philosophy as well as in the dialogue with modern culture.” He further noted ours was a mission in “a period of great social, economic and political changes, sharp ethical, cultural and environmental problems, [and] conflicts of all kinds, but also of a more intense communication among peoples, of new possibilities of acquaintance and dialogue, of deep announcing to our contemporaries the Word of hope and salvation.”³²

We go as did Jesus, and we go inspired by Jesus, who announced “good news to the poor, the release of captives, the recovery of sight by the blind and freedom for the oppressed”³³ for his time and culture. We must do the same for our time and civilization.

Contemplatives in Action on the Frontier

Jesus crossed physical and socio-religious frontiers with his message of God's love and compassion.³⁴ He was “perpetually in motion: from God, for others. This is the Jesuit pattern too: with Christ on mission, ever contemplative, ever active. It is the grace – also the creative challenge – of our apostolic religious life that it must live this tension between prayer and action, between mysticism and service.”³⁵

By being placed with Jesus, we remain firmly rooted in God at all times, while simultaneously being plunged into the heart of the world. Our

task of awakening the life of God in the life of the world requires being contemplatives in action, a characteristic that distinguishes both Jesuits and our collaborators in ministry. Ideally, contemplation is simultaneous with action, and action is simultaneous with contemplation. And just as any Jesuit “ministry [must be] nourished by knowledge,”³⁶ so also must both action and contemplation, both service and spirituality, be nourished by knowledge and understanding.

Animating a justice of solidarity is the understanding that people of all languages, cultures, religions, and ways of life are fashioned in the image of God. In “a fire that kindles other fires,” the Congregation stressed that to heal and care for each other and the world, contemplation was absolutely necessary, for in contemplation we begin to understand that the source of, and creative power of, life comes from the life of the Trinity. We also understand the world and the need for dignity and hope, faith and justice of all human persons.

Following Jesus, we feel ourselves called not only to bring direct help to people in distress, but also to restore entire human persons in their integrity, reintegrating them in community and reconciling them with God.... It is a matter of getting down to the depths of human experience today, touching the frontiers of human experience, and there discovering God and the possibilities that God offers.³⁷

The Ignatian way of proceeding is reconciliation as knowledgeable contemplatives in action who build bridges through the service of faith and promotion of justice adapted to a rapidly globalizing, and therefore changing, world:

... We become able to bridge the divisions of a fragmented world only if we remember and live from three Ignatian principles: the love of God our Lord, the union of minds and hearts reflected in the personal bond of Francis Xavier and Ignatius across the seas, and the obedience that sends each one of us in mission to any part of this world.³⁸

Building bridges according to the principle of love of God leads to the realization that we bear a responsibility for each other. For Ignatius and, therefore, Jesuits and our collaborators, love consists in sharing what one has and what one is with those one loves – and that is all of God’s people. Love ought to show itself in deeds – in action – more than in words. For the contemplative, love guides actions.

Jesuits and collaborators in mission, then, become contemplative bridge builders – the reconciliation of each person with God, with each

other, and with creation itself. The core nature of the action becomes reconciliation in which polarities converge and integrate. We are brought into contact with the polarities of opportunities and contradictions: grinding poverty and hunger with economic abundance, human rights violations in nations of law, depletion of natural resources and economic development, climate change with human progress, to cite only a few examples.

Reconciliation unifies “being and doing; contemplation and action; prayer and prophetic living; being completely united with Christ and completely inserted into the world with him as an apostolic body.... [These] mark deeply the life of a Jesuit and express both its essence and its possibilities.”³⁹

The complexity of the problems we face and the richness of the opportunities offered demand that we engage in building bridges between rich and poor and establishing advocacy links of mutual support between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their interests. Our intellectual apostolate provides an inestimable help in setting up these bridges, offering us new ways of understanding in depth the mechanisms and links among our present problems.⁴⁰

*our intellectual apostolate provides
an inestimable help in setting up
these bridges, offering us new ways
of understanding in depth the
mechanisms and links
among our present problems*

The preservation and restoration of the dignity of each person, restoration of our fractured communities and cultures, and preservation and restoration of the creative world, then, become measures for our relationship with God.

At the frontier, then, we encounter the tragedies of poverties, hunger, thirst, pain, and death – a world in need of healing. But this discovery need not discourage us, for we also discover that God is already there at work, and God will accompany us. Because God is already there, Jesuits and their collaborators will receive new energy and new life, even when mingled with anguish where “the Divinity is hidden.”⁴¹ Even in the darkest corners of life, the transforming light of God shines, and from our experience of

God laboring intensely in the heart of life, our identity and mission as “servants of Christ’s mission”⁴² are ever renewed.⁴³

God has created a world with diverse inhabitants; all this is good. It expresses the rich beauty of this lovable world – people working, laughing, thriving together;⁴⁴ signs that God is alive among us. However, diversity becomes problematic when the differences between people are lived in a way that promotes some by excluding others – people fighting, killing each other, bent on destruction.⁴⁵ Then God suffers in and with the world and wants to renew it; our mission is here in particular. This is where we have to discern it, according to the criteria of the *magis*⁴⁶ and the more universal good.⁴⁷ God is present in the darkness of life trying always to make things new....⁴⁸ “Nation” beyond geographical definitions await us, the ‘nations’ who today include those who are poor and displaced, those who are isolated and deeply lonely, those who do not ask for God and those who are instrumentalizing God for political purposes. There are new “nation” of poor and we are sent to them.⁴⁹

Conclusion

God is more than merely present in the globalizing world; God brings love and hope to a world in all its beauty and tragedies, possibilities and contradictions. The knowledge born of contemplation helps one realize that God is always working among us. The knowledge born of action teaches us love. To achieve the *magis* and the more universal good, we know that we have received grace under the banner of his Son and are sent to serve the Church and world as Jesus did. But we must go with a depth of both spirituality and knowledge that will make a difference in what we believe, say and do.

¹ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 20. Cf. *Globalization and Marginalization*, Rome, Social Justice Secretariat, February 2006, pp. 16-17

² G.C. 32, D.2, n.1

³ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 4.; G.C. 35, D. 2, n. n. 3, 4, 6, 11.; G.C. 35, D.3, n.n.5.16

⁴ G.C. 35, D.2, n.12, 13

⁵ Luke 4.16 / Is 61

⁶ G.C. 35, D.3, n.21

- ⁷ John O'Malley, S.J. *The First Jesuits*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993) p. 209
- ⁸ G.C. 35, D. 2, n.16. Cf. *Spiritual Exercises* 23, *Constitutions*, 622
- ⁹ Cf. Michael J. Buckley, S.J., "The Search for a New Humanism: The University and the Concern for Justice," in *The Catholic University as Promise and Project* (Washington: Georgetown, 1998), pp. 103-128
- ¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (November 30, 2007), see paragraphs 4 and 35
- ¹¹ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 14
- ¹² O'Malley, pp. 3 and 18
- ¹³ G.C. 35, D.2, n. 19
- ¹⁴ *Constitutions* 622
- ¹⁵ O'Malley, p. 24
- ¹⁶ Allocution to the 32nd General Congregation
- ¹⁷ G.C. 35, D.3, n.3-4
- ¹⁸ G.C. 35, D.2, n. 20
- ¹⁹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Rome 2001, n.30
- ²⁰ G.C. 35, D. 3, n. 39i
- ²¹ G.C. 34, D 4, n. 19-24
- ²² G.C. 35, D.3, n. 10
- ²³ Presentation at G.C. 35
- ²⁴ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 22. Cf. Adolfo Nicolás, Rome, Homily on the day after his election as Superior General of the Society of Jesus (20 January 2008)
- ²⁵ G.C. 35, D.2, n. 10-11
- ²⁶ Presentation at G.C. 35
- ²⁷ Presentation at G.C. 35
- ²⁸ Presentation at G.C. 35
- ²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Message for the day of Peace*, 1 January 2008, no. 7
- ³⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, Principle and Foundation, 23
- ³¹ G.C. 35, D. 3, n. 32; *Ibid.*, *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, n. 230-237
- ³² Benedict XVI, *Allocution to the 35th General Congregation*, (21 February 2008), n.2
- ³³ G.C. 35, D.3. n. 13
- ³⁴ G.C. 35, D. 3, n. 13-14
- ³⁵ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 9
- ³⁶ G.C. 34, D. 26, n. 6
- ³⁷ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 101-110; G.C. 35, D.2, n.13
- ³⁸ G.C. D. 3, n. 17; *Constitutions*, pp. 655-59
- ³⁹ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 8-9. Cf. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, *Sobre la vida religiosa*, Habana (Cuba), 1 June 2007, p. 1
- ⁴⁰ G.C. 35, D. 3, n. 28

—— MISSION, FRONTIERS AND CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION ——

⁴¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 196

⁴² G.C. 34, D. 2

⁴³ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 7

⁴⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 103

⁴⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 104

⁴⁶ *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 97.

⁴⁷ *Constitutions*, p. 622

⁴⁸ *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 147

⁴⁹ G.C. 35, D. 2, n. 22