

“THE SAME PATH AS IGNATIUS”,¹

THE INTERIOR PATH WHICH LEADS TO THE NEW FRONTIERS OF OUR TIME.

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François-Xavier Dumortier, S.J.
Provincial
France

Each one of the members of the 35th General Congregation has lived intensively through an event in which we experienced in the deepest part of ourselves what unites us as Jesuits – Christ and the desire to follow him – and felt to what extent the ‘magis’ was asking of us a renewed openness to go where the Lord calls us to go. This experience, however much it may have been a shared one, was nonetheless radically individual and personal: each one was able to live the same event with his own particular sensitivity, according to his own human and spiritual history, and the way in which the Lord led him to understand and receive these days and weeks which were in many respects unique. I must therefore recognise from the start the personal nature of what I lived as a ‘spiritual experience’, with all that this implies of moments lived through and movements felt. According to this personal experience, it seems to me that the 35th General Congregation led us – “men whose experience of the Spiritual Exercises has bound us to one another and to a particular ‘pathway to God’”² – to desire to root ourselves more and more in the experience of Ignatius and the first companions, so as to live, with largeness of heart, our vocation of being today “men of the frontiers”. True, each one discovers Ignatius’ path as his own only in proportion to his own experience of God and along the ways by which the Lord leads him to understand how to be ‘pilgrim’ in his turn. If our personal journeys may well, then, deepen and diversify almost indefinitely, the texts of a General Congregation – through the diversity of readings and interpretations which

are given them – send us back, personally and collectively, to the foundations of our apostolic religious life, that is, to an experience of grace, where everything depends on God and leads to Him.

A fundamental issue: interiority.

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In the midst of the changes and transformations of his time, Ignatius understood the crucial importance of interiority: “St. Ignatius, recuperating on his bed at Loyola, entered into a profound interior journey.”³ Indeed, interiority is not only that dimension of a human life which allows each one to recognise and welcome the One who has mysteriously made His dwelling-place in him: interiority is a journey never completed. It is not simply a matter of being inward but of becoming still more inward in proportion to the very challenges which are those of apostolic life today. There has to be an inner free space, free, that is, of everything which can clutter it up uselessly, for ‘intimate understanding and relish of the truth’⁴, and it is important to allow this inward work, without which we cannot be men familiar with the things

of God, to take place in ourselves. We can speak accurately only of what we try to live in truth; we can ‘help souls’ to live interiorly only if we ourselves dwell in this space of silence, of gratuitousness and prayer, where we come back to ourselves and look into ourselves. In a world where faith in Christ cannot be taken for granted, it is more important than ever to have this interior life which is at one and the same time the ground in which we are rooted and the spring where, at certain times, we can quench our thirst.

The call to be ‘interior men’ has never ceased to resound all through our history, but it has a particular force in our contemporary societies where each one could be permanently prevented from being recollected, or blocked in his ‘interior voyage’, by the vividness of what is immediate and by the thousand and one solicitations of a globalised world in which speed, reaction and efficiency are presented as imperative duties. Without a deep interior life, we cannot go far in the experience of God who draws us and

leads us to Himself; as companions of Jesus, “our desire is to grow now and in the future in the ‘interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely’⁵ especially in prayer and in community life and in apostolic work.”⁶ Without a demanding and vigorous interior life, we allow ourselves to let go of the ‘contemplative’ pole of our lives as contemplatives in action; but, “In what we do in the world there must always be transparency to God.”⁷ Without seeking and finding these paths of interiority which the Spirit of God opens up to the one who is docile to him, we run the risk that our apostolic generosity will wither, the meaning of our strongest commitments will become confused, and the radicality of a commitment that drives us back ceaselessly to the source of our being, where we meet the One with whom we have bonded ourselves, will fade. Without this other way of looking which is given by inner eyes, we cannot recognise how God is working intensively in the apparent effacement of his presence or of his visibility.

It seems to me that, all through the 35th General Congregation, we developed a renewed awareness of the urgent need to be, and to become still more, interior, each in himself and as an apostolic body: it is from inside that the fire springs, and that this flame appears which we must ‘keep alive’⁸ ‘in a world that overwhelms people with a multiplicity of sensations, ideas and images’.⁹ In each one that inward space must be hollowed out where Christ appears and grows, where the eyes develop the habit of recognising him, and where his call resounds to follow and serve him; if it is clear that ‘Jesuits know who they are by looking at him’¹⁰, they must become more and more men of inner life.

A path of humility.

The following of Christ is a path of humility: it leads at the same time to discovering Christ’s love in everything and for everyone, and to seeing the waste and dried-up earth of our lives, which need mercy and forgiveness to be born again. Decree 1: “With Renewed Vigour and Zeal” acknowledges how much the spiritual experience of the General Congregation was marked by the desire to examine as precisely and carefully as possible the situation and the life of the apostolic body which is the Society of Jesus: “Our effort to be completely honest with ourselves and with the Lord included much of the dynamic of the First Week of the Spiritual

Exercises: it helped us to discover and recognise our weaknesses and inconsistencies but also the depth of our desire to serve. This required that we examine our attitudes and our way of living.”¹¹ It is in function of that deep experience that the call resounded many times to examine ourselves: “it is necessary for us to examine ourselves critically in order to remain mindful of the need to live faithfully this polarity of prayer and service”¹², “recalling the Examen,..... we ask each of our companions to examine his own way of living and working at ‘the new frontiers of our time’.”¹³ It is a matter not only of self-examination but also of acknowledging those weaknesses which, in our personal existence and in our apostolic mission, in our life as a body and in our service of the Church, have been mistakes and faults. It is a matter not only of acknowledging what has happened but of asking forgiveness: “in the name of the whole Society, the 35th General Congregation asks the Lord’s pardon for those times when its members have been lacking in love, discretion or faithfulness in their service of the Church.”¹⁴ It is a matter not only of asking forgiveness for reactions and attitudes diverging from what our Institute asks of us, but also of asking “the Lord for the grace of conversion”¹⁵. Conversion is the motivation of all spiritual life.

The characteristic of sin is the unawareness and blindness in which a person stays if he does not receive with a humble heart the grace of God

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which makes him see and understand what he stubbornly resisted confronting and recognising. Humility is not a moral attitude: it expresses the reality of our bond with Christ. We can recall, then, what Ignatius wrote in his *Spiritual*

Diary: “it occurred to me that my humility, reverence and submission should be not of a man who fears but of a man who loves. So strongly did this impress itself upon my soul that with great faith I said ‘Give me a lover’s humility’, and so also concerning my reverence and submission” (30 March 1544). It is in the very depths of relationship with the Lord, in that radical decentring from self, that each one may become aware of his infidelity in the light of God’s gentle mercy. The path of humility turns us away from the paths that lead nowhere: explanations which are justifications, or again resistances to all self-questioning, which turn into accusations of someone

else. The path of humility comes from Christ and leads to Christ: it opens other paths, those paths which trust placed in God and hope received from Christ allow us to embark on with the tranquil confidence of one who does not place his confidence in himself. This is what led St. Albert Hurtado to write “ the greater the task is, the more one feels small in front of it. It is better to have the humility to undertake great things at the risk of failure than to fall into the pride of wanting to succeed by turning back to self”¹⁶

Following Christ carrying his Cross.

The question of ‘Jesuit identity’ is often asked from outside the Society and within it, as if there were doubts and uncertainties about what is specific to the Jesuit vocation and mission in the Church. Some ask themselves: what are we according to our contemporaries, even according to the men and women with whom we work? Some ask themselves how to characterise what is ‘specific’ to the Jesuit, to look for a way of signifying it visibly. Others examine our spiritual and apostolic tradition to discover what distinguishes it and might define it in its own individuality... Decree 2 of the 35th General Congregation calls us to another way of answering: “Jesuits know who they are by looking at him.”¹⁷....”

We Jesuits, then, find our identity not alone but in companionship: in companionship with the Lord, who calls, and in companionship with others who share this call.”¹⁸ What is first and last is the experience of Christ found because sought, looked upon because met, listened to because followed, served

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because loved. It is from our own experience of Christ and of the gospel that we receive our identity, in the very place where the Lord leads us through today’s Galilees and Samarias. On Ignatius’ own path, one event has taken on decisive importance: the vision of La Storta. In seeing with astonishing clarity “that God the Father placed him with Christ his Son”¹⁹, it is with the Son carrying his Cross that he and the group of his first companions found

themselves placed: "It is from Ignatius' encounter with the Lord at La Storta that the companions' future life of service and mission emerges in its characteristic contours."²⁰

Following Christ is following Christ carrying his Cross: it is important for each one to allow to be imprinted on him, in day-to-day patience and in the course of a lifetime, the form that his particular path should take, understanding what Christ is making of him in associating him with his own path. It is in contemplating Christ carrying his Cross that, in the one who wishes to become more and more his companion, the desire is engraven to follow him even in the place where he meets men's hatred and God's silence. To follow Christ carrying his Cross calls for this presence to the mystery being carried out, which is conversion of mind and heart: like Paul, to decide to "know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ crucified".²¹ To follow Christ carrying his Cross is a path of consent to what we understand and learn of Christ who goes before us and who calls us to the grandeur and beauty of an evangelical life. So "The grace we receive as Jesuits is to be and to go with him, looking on the world with his eyes, loving it with his heart, and entering into its depths with his unlimited compassion."²² We receive what we cannot give ourselves because following Christ carrying his Cross shapes the Jesuit's being and life : on this union with Christ expressed as "the mystical experience of passionate love for Christ"²³ will depend our capacity to live our vow of obedience in its radicality.

*Placed with Christ at the heart of the world.*²⁴

Following Christ carrying his Cross takes us nowhere else than to the heart of the world "to see God working in the depths of everything."²⁵ It is not in any way an accommodation with 'worldly' realities or commitment as a 'social worker' but a contemplative way of being in the world which gives access to a new perception of reality. The disciple of Ignatius allows himself to be taught how to 'seek and find God in all things', even in the 'nights' of our world, in places of suffering and death, in the 'deserts' of societies which are losing their sense of humanity.... where 'the divinity hides itself.'²⁶ It is a matter of going down to meet God, in the very place where he is present to the least and the most excluded, to the most forgotten and the most marginalised, to the poorest and most despised. Thus, "There are powerful negative forces in the world, but we are also aware of God's

presence permeating this world, inspiring persons of all cultures and religions to promote reconciliation and peace.”²⁷

Constantly deepening encounter with Christ himself, as the *Spiritual Exercises* allow it to be lived, does not separate from the world but enlarges heart and spirit, for – as Fr. Jerome Nadal said – “the world is our house.”²⁸ The issue is, then, to come back to the realities of our societies and our world with a ‘different’ vision: it means “to see the world from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised, learning from them, acting with and for them.”²⁹, to note and to analyse with realism

the tensions and paradoxes, the changes and conflicts, the possibilities and potentialities that characterise our time, in the diversity of situations that exist throughout the world. The grace of God given to us is also the force which makes us refuse a world disfigured and dehumanised by jealousy, rivalry, competition and violence. How can we not work, with all the resources of mind and heart, for the coming

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of a society where respect for each one, concern for the weakest, and solidarity among all, are not just wishes but become the values lived by our human communities? It will be important to be able to say to ourselves in 10 years’ time: “we did not shut our eyes to what, 10 years ago, demanded our resistance, what called for our refusal or asked for our involvement... we did not hide from the cries of those who were howling their distress or the silence of those who no longer had a voice to call for help... we did not remove ourselves from what that time demanded of us, and what the Lord called us to be and to do to witness to Him and to the coming Kingdom.”

If it is important to discern carefully what is not just the concern of the social sciences, because it is a question of understanding “the spiritual situation of our time”, it remains essential to desire and wish to become involved. As Fr. Yves de Montcheuil wrote: “the one who, so as to be able to lend himself to everything, refuses to give himself, only ever knows what is most superficial in things, and especially in human beings... To be committed in truth is, so to speak, to sign a blank cheque to God without knowing what he will write on it later, or rather, knowing only that he will go on writing more and more.”³⁰ This unreserved commitment proper to the spiritual person who discovers how much the God of the Incarnation calls him to ‘act’ his faith is ‘worked upon’ by some demands:

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- In resistance to the forces of death and destruction which disfigure the face of creation, it is important to discern, evoke and accompany the forces of life, often buried, which – like the grain of wheat fallen into the ground – carry the promise of a new earth and a new humanity;

- availability “for the more universal good”³¹ specifies the mission of the Society of Jesus, which can be understood only in universal terms. The search for the more universal never leaves us in peace, so much does it turn out that this experience flows from the very radicality of following Christ carrying his Cross.

- Peaceful, timid mediocrity³² must be refused completely, everywhere and always: if the mediocre being is happy to accept half-measures in everything and compromises which become secretly dishonest, getting to the bottom of things, and to the very end of what it is important to be, to say and to do, mark with a particular radicality the existence of the person who understands his commitment in the light of the One who “loved to the end;”³³

- It is a matter of agreeing to live this “set of polarities, Ignatian in character, that accompanies our being firmly rooted in God at all times, while simultaneously being plunged into the heart of the world. 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: all of these polarities mark deeply the life of a Jesuit and express both its essence and its possibilities.”³⁴ The tensions are necessarily and, as it were, constitutively, part of Jesuit life.

At the new frontiers of our time.

From the beginning, Jesuits have understood themselves as “men of the frontiers” and pioneers in the proclamation of the faith. Thus, in his discourse to the members of the 35th General Congregation on 21 February 2008, Pope Benedict XVI recalled: “In its history, the Society of Jesus has lived extraordinary experiences of proclamation and encounter between the gospel and world cultures – it suffices to think of Matteo Ricci in China, Roberto De Nobili in India or of the ‘Reductions’ in Latin America. And you

are very rightly proud of them. I feel it is my duty today to urge you to set out once again in the tracks of your predecessors with the same courage and intelligence, but also with an equally profound motivation of faith and enthusiasm to serve the Lord and his Church.” Indeed, Ignatian spirituality is fundamentally apostolic. Whatever may be the ministries entrusted and the tasks carried out, the spheres and the places where the service of faith calls for the presence and action of Jesuits, it is always necessary to discover these “new horizons” and to reach these “new social, cultural and religious frontiers” of our time and our world where the Lord is to be proclaimed and the gospel brought to those who know little or nothing of it. The concern “to help souls” leads to crossing the visible and invisible frontiers which separate people, and to being present in the arid, dark and difficult “places” of our humanity and of our societies: “God is present in the darkness of life intent on making all things new. God needs collaborators in this endeavour: people whose grace consists in being received under the banner of his Son.”³⁵

To feel interiorly and to hear this call to go to the “new frontiers” of our time – “frontiers” often within our cultures, our societies and our countries – is at the same time to understand our historic situation and our personal and communal availability, as members of an international and multicultural body, to risk ourselves where others in the Church are not, or do not go. It is a matter of going towards what is unknown, of losing securities tied to one’s own culture and knowledge, of venturing on this journey without a fixed time-limit and without an itinerary determined in advance: it is enough to understand that it is to humanity waiting for the Lord that we are sent. This requires of us a way of living the present in attention to what will not wait, and with discernment of what takes intelligence and courage to go on living. Many tasks may call on us urgently, but we know that it is not only urgent tasks that define the Society’s missions: it is Christ’s mission, of which we desire to be the servants, that is our urgency. That is why, in the intellectual apostolate as in other missions, to live “at the new frontiers of our times always requires that we also be rooted at the very heart of the Church. This tension, specific to the Ignatian charism, opens the way to true creative fidelity.”³⁶

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At the heart of the Church.

Ignatius' spiritual experience and the spiritual experience of those who desire to follow "the same path as Ignatius" lead to the heart of the Church and call us to carry this heart of the Church to the frontiers of the world. This is clearly signified both by "the availability promised in the Fourth Vow" and by "the Ignatian spirituality of 'the proper attitude that we ought to have in the Church' or 'sentire cum Ecclesia'." ³⁷ And the text of the General

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Congregation goes on: "However, both are rooted in the love we have for Christ our Lord, a love that extends itself to love for the Church...This is why we speak of being united with the Pope effectively and affectively. Taken together, the Fourth Vow and our ecclesial spirituality move us to offer

the service asked of us by the Pope."³⁸ Men of and for the Church, we know that it is Christ himself who leads us to the heart of the mystery of the Church. It is there that we can live this apostolic ardour which leads us further, and without fear, in the vast Vineyard of the Lord; it is there that we shall understand how important it is to have "an ecclesial heart" to live obedience where we are sent and planted. The Church is our path to God and that is why "we desire to love it more and help others love it more, for it leads the world to Christ humble and poor and announces to every person that *Deus caritas est*."³⁹ On this rootedness at the heart of the Church depend our availability and our apostolic fruitfulness. By this rootedness at the heart of the Church, we live, and shall be able to live, what is at the heart of our vocation: "to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the Cross... and to serve the Lord alone and the Church his spouse, under the Roman pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth".⁴⁰

The strongest and most rigorous spiritual experience open in us these interior paths which lead to the ancient and new frontiers of a world of which we ceaselessly discover the grandeur and the misery, the beauty and the suffering, the thirst for God and the refusal of his word. It is in walking humbly with Christ who has taken hold of us that we are led to live, at the heart of the harshest realities of our time, the spiritual realism of free hearts and open spirits. Present to the world where Christ is at work,

we know what is the force of God's grace. It is from that grace that trust is born, beyond everything that might shake it or make us doubt it: this trust is not one disposition among others. It transforms them all. So, then, the following of Christ – humble and poor – may be lived out with the tranquil confidence and audacious hope of men sent to the frontiers – frontiers never obvious and always changing – of men rooted in the Church and in the burning heart of the Church which is Christ.

Translated by Patricia Harriss, cj

¹ D2 "A Fire that Kindles Other Fires", §8

² D6 §15

³ D2 §4

⁴ Sp.Exx. 2

⁵ Sp.Exx.104

⁶ D1 § 10

⁷ D2 § 10

⁸ D2 §1

⁹ D2 §1

¹⁰ .D2 § 2

¹¹ D1 §3

¹² D2 § 10

¹³ D1 § 15

¹⁴ D4 §4

¹⁵ D1 § 15

¹⁶ Albert Hurtado, "Comme un feu sur la terre", Editions Facultés jésuites de Paris, Paris, 2005, p. 134-135

¹⁷ D2 § 2

¹⁸ D2 § 3

¹⁹ Autobiog.96

²⁰ D2 § 11; cf. D2 § 3, § 6; D4 § 3

²¹ Rom. 2:2

²² D2 § 15

²³ D4 § 17

²⁴ cf. D2 § 4

²⁵ D2 § 6

²⁶ Sp.Exx. 196

²⁷ D3 § 18

²⁸ Jeronimo Nadal, 13 Exhortatio complutensis (Alcala 1561), § 256 (MHSI 90, 469-70)

²⁹ D3 § 27

³⁰ P.Yves de Montcheuil, s.j., *Problèmes de vie spirituelle*, ed. de l'Epi, 1945, p.105

³¹ D2 § 16

³² cf. D1 § 11

³³ Jn.13:1

³⁴ D2 § 8-9

³⁵ D2 § 22

³⁶ D1 § 26

³⁷ cf. D 4 § 33

³⁸ D 4 § 33

³⁹ D 1 § 16

⁴⁰ Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit debitum* (1550), §3 (MHSI 63, 373)