

THE APOSTOLIC PRIESTLY BODY OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS DURING MY YEARS IN FORMATION

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General Premise

In the most recent General Congregation the Society of Jesus updated its mission in these terms: the defense and proclamation of the faith, which leads us to discover new horizons and to reach new social, cultural and religious frontiers. As Fr. Adolfo Nicolás noted in his words to the Holy Father, these frontiers can be places of conflict and tension that threaten our reputation, our peace, and our security (...)¹ It is important to emphasize that the integrating principle of our mission is the service of the faith, and it is this principle which will permit us to be on these new frontiers and to take on the various tensions that they generate from the distinct dimensions—apostolic, missionary, priestly and communitarian—of our Society.

Along these lines, *we scholastics in formation, brothers as well as priests, participate and share with formed Jesuits the call to following Jesus as a fundamental option, and by this call we become part of the universal body and of the mission of the Society from the moment of entering the novitiate.* It must be remembered that our formation is mission and is not just a goal to be reached in the future. This

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means that we participate in each and every one of the dimensions which the service of the faith entails, through the diverse ministries that the Society has prioritized throughout its history, and of those which are permitted within the framework established by the Church. In summary, our incorporation as scholastics is not of an active apostolic character, as it is for the professed Jesuits, but rather one of identification with the Society, that is to say, of incorporating the mission and preparing us in view of a particular calling within it.

our formation is mission

The process of formation in the Society of Jesus by means of each of the stages aims towards our identification with the dimensions of our mission: the novitiate has as its aim the identification with the following of Jesus poor and humble in the way of the Society, so that the novice at the conclusion of this stage may seal the confirmation with a radical following by way of the evangelical vows. The stage of philosophy aims at refining the gaze in a critical way to assume and interpret the challenges that we face in the world, given that this is the privileged place where the Jesuit collaborates in the construction of the Reign of God. Regency is the stage of synthesis in which apostolic service confronts the scholastic in the spiritual and intellectual dimension. Finally, theology is a stage of integration between experience and reflection from the point of view of faith that concludes with the confirmation of serving the universal Church as a ministerial priest in the Society of Jesus.

In spite of all I have said above, in my experience, the priestly dimension was probably the most neglected of all these dimensions. The emphasis was placed on the theme of affectivity *for a* good reception of faith, philosophical reflection *for* effective service, the mission *for* the poor and community life *for* living with your “friends in the Lord”. I emphasize the preposition *for*; which is a preposition of finality, precisely because the goal of my formation was for action, sometimes understood as intense dedication to our works or the accomplishment of social activities; and rarely action included intellectual reflection, formation, prayer, spirituality and ministerial priesthood. I can affirm that I was formed for social action.

Within this emphasis of formation in Mexico the priesthood is a service that qualifies the actions of our works and for this reason plays a secondary role in respect to the different services or activities. The result is that formation emphasises the dimension of the apostle as sent by God to

the mission, but very rarely is the relationship between the apostle and the priestly dimension clarified, leaving it to the scholastic to make the synthesis and to uncover its significance. The void that results not only makes you doubt your ability to assume the ministry that was described by GC 34, but also causes you to question the meaning of priesthood in the Society of Jesus, especially if you are participating in apostolates that do not include this dimension. In my experience with the defense and promotion of human rights it was not easy to find the relationship of the apostle with the priest.

As I see it, the fact that the priestly dimension is not so explicit in our formation has to do with the social and cultural context of Mexico, where it is taken for granted that the majority of the Mexicans are Catholics and therefore are familiar with the role and function of the priest. Granted this, the formation of the Jesuit in Mexico concentrates on other more contested dimensions, such as perhaps the religious vows or the affective aspect of the person. Still, I think that this presupposition of our formation needs to be rethought, taking into account that Mexico is also immersed in a global process of secularization, in which clear identities such as that of the priest are disappearing because of the plurality of religious manifestations in the country, of the active participation of the laity in activities which fifty years ago were reserved to the priest, and due to the influences we receive from other countries through the communications media, and without losing sight of all the highly publicized sexual scandals which place in doubt the sense of the priesthood today and above all the vows.

To the social context I would add that the process of incorporation into the Society in Mexico is more open and that candidates enter from other spaces than those from which vocations were traditionally drawn, such as the high schools and our works, in which an understanding and identification with the Jesuit priest and the ways of the Society could be presupposed, but now this is not the case. For example, in my generation of the twelve who entered the novitiate with me none of us came from the Jesuit high schools or works, and only one studied in a Marist high school.

*the process of incorporation
into the Society in Mexico is
more open*

The fact that the Society has opened itself to the admission of candidates from a variety of cultural spaces supposes a plurality of visions

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with respect to the meaning of being a religious, priest, and Jesuit. For this reason it cannot be taken for granted that the novice who enters the Society has a clear idea of what it means to be a Jesuit. In Mexico we have incorporated the experience of the prenovitiate which helps you get acquainted a bit more with the Society, but I still think that more explicit formation in the priestly dimension of formation is necessary to help clarify the link of our mission with that of the Jesuit priest. By this I do not mean that we ought to clericalize the Society, even less that we ought to make stricter the criteria for admission, but that we ought to create an integral formation wherein the emphasis is on both the person in his distinct dimensions as well as on the dimensions of our mission, which often remains in a second place.

In order to conclude this first point of the general framework, I believe that in Mexico we have adopted the mission with the poor in a committed and serious way since GC 32, but we only later recognized that this mission would require an affective maturity and decided to incorporate personal self-understanding into the formation program. This emphasis on affective maturation led in itself (no longer thinking about the commitment to the poor) to two extremes: activism and psychologism. The two, in their distinct historical moments, became absolutized and led the scholastics to identify so much with the poor as to end up opting to become committed lay people, or else focusing on their own deep psychological process which led to the discovery that happiness lay outside the Society. The result of this fusion of formative emphasis is that in Mexico we are forming married lay Ignatians who can do all that Jesuits can do without needing to live in community, without the vow of chastity and with a certain distance from the Church, that is to say, with a clear message like "I am freer to live my vocation outside of the Society and doing the same things."

What do I mean by this: that formation has been reduced to a series of activities in which we are losing our identity; we are forgetting that the principle of the service of the faith is that which unifies our distinct apostolates and dimensions. We spread ourselves too thin in the cities doing things lay people are already accomplishing with better preparation and efficacy, while the priestly dimension of the scholastics in formation is weakened, and often the Jesuit priests do not realize it. None of today's scholastics are interested in being a good preacher or an excellent confessor or a brilliant spiritual director, all dimensions that were fundamental in

Ignatius Loyola and the companions, and which did not eliminate the social dimension of their lives nor do we judge them to be clerical. I believe that the missions that we have in Mexico with the indigenous peoples are the current best example of the integration of our mission and for this reason are attractive to scholastics, because here the Jesuit is priest, missionary, apostle, and apostolic in many ways and lives in community. In contrast, in the city the mission becomes overwrought because we conserve all these dimensions formally but they are not integrated.

Why am I saying all this? Probably because of my own process in the Society in which I have found formation and identification with mission which has required of me a process which has often been rather uneven. Precisely with this context I would like to open the second moment sharing some features of my formation, placing an emphasis on the priestly character. This will be a more narrative sharing, taking as a structure the distinct steps of formation, from the novitiate to theology, passing through a brief explanation of my image of the priest before entering the Society, since, as I have already said, I do not come from a Jesuit background which has forced me to reelaborate the meaning of the priest, the religious and, in the end, bring together the meaning of being a Jesuit.

*my own process in the
Society in which I have
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identification with mission*

Images of the priest

As many know Mexico is a country with a strong Catholic tradition, but socially and politically we are governed under liberal principles, among which the overriding principle is laicity, which has generated great tensions between the Church and the State in the past century up until our days. Nevertheless, some cities, such as Guadalajara, retain a deep Catholic tradition and the presence of the Church, with its priests (religious or diocesan) and religious enjoy great appreciation and respect, and it was in this context in which I was born some 35 years ago.

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In my first years I saw the priest as a man dedicated to worship, to the sacraments and the Sunday homilies. The priest of my parish was a thin man with white complexion and with a solemn countenance like the pillars of the Church, living an austere life and not unlike a beautiful image like his devotion to Mary. He was a respectable gentlemen, but I am not sure if this was for his deep spiritual life or more for the terror he instilled in us when he scolded us. This, then, was my first image of the priest.

To this initial image was added that of a Franciscan friar, when I had the possibility of participating in a group of children and teenagers founded by Brother Bernardino Mora and other laypeople to collaborate with the missions which the Franciscans had in the mountains with the Huichol indigenous people. Fr. Mora—as we all called him—was an elderly person but I can testify that he led a deeply spiritual life, and that it was thanks to him that the horizon of the meaning of the priestly ministry widened for me. Fr. Mora was like a grandfather: white hair, with a countenance exuding peace and was always welcoming and enjoyed being with poor people, his way of being with them, his greetings, his smiles and his few words.

I was able to go with the group of missionaries to the mountains when I was about ten years old. The adventure of going to the mountains and eating a delicious chicken soup while the chill burned my skin and made my bones ache, was all a spiritual experience: we learned to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, to catechize and to celebrate the Eucharist, sometimes in the chapel of the monks. This was a completely different vision from what I had experienced in my parish. In spite of my age, **going out on “mission” gave a powerful meaning to my life** as I returned home with my heart renewed. This seeing Fr. Mora instilled in me the desire to live out in this way my relationship with God, with the poor, in the mission and trying to get close to all.

To these two images of the priest, there was added one more during my school formation. All my studies took place in public schools. The first was the famously known Manuel M. Diéguez, while my high school was the equally well known Secundaria Mixta 5 in Zapopan, well known for the violence which would break out within its walls as well as in the neighborhood. My university years and law school were at the University of Guadalajara. All my public formation carried the seal of the liberal ideas crystallized by the socialist vision which the university had at that time. The image of the Church and the priest was different from what I had

experienced. In the school we studied about ecclesiastic personages who had influenced the politics of the country, some considered true heroes and others a pack of liars whose ideas were despised, but the characteristic common to them all was that all were politically active.

As you can realize my brief history of the image of the priest involves three models: the cultic priest, the religious missionary priest, and finally the “political priest.” My history is saturated with experiences of different colours and tonalities, for after my experience with the group of missionaries I never returned to participate in any parish activity or group but, I did enjoy participating in political life of my school and city. There is no doubt that God calls those that he wants, through the events of one’s life and through concrete persons. In the midst of these comings and goings of my 22 years returned the strong desire to be like Fr. Mora. And the necessary question is, then: why the Jesuits and not the Franciscans? For the simple reason that in my first contact with the Society I could find the two dimensions of the priest that I was passionate about, the first being the missionary character (as Fr. Mora), going where there was no one else to bring the Word of God, and the second being the mission that incorporates justice for the poor. In the end, I identified with several dimensions of the Society and at the same time with the gifts that God had given me. With these images and after a process of accompaniment for more than one year, I entered the novitiate.

Novitiate

Our novitiate in Mexico is located in a small city dedicated to agricultural and commercial activity, which conserves deep religious roots along with stupendous popular traditions. Juan José Arreola, a Mexican writer in his book *Confabulario* describes Ciudad Guzmán as “a valley filled with corn fields, a circle of mountains without much ornament besides its good temperament, a blue sky and a lagoon which comes and goes like a slender dream.”² The same author comments on its religious traditions in another novel entitled *La Feria* where he speaks of the great feast of the city in honor of its holy patron St. Joseph in the month of October. *La Feria* is the event which brings together the whole people, all social classes and all generations. This feast joins together religious devotion and the enthusiasm

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which lead to the most varied manifestations and excesses, and it is in this quite particular context that I made my novitiate.

The then master of novices defined this period as “the stage of the desert,” more specifically “for praying and discerning the vocation to the Society of Jesus.”

the stage of the desert This desert turned out to be years of great experiences and of powerful internal emotions.

The Spiritual Exercises, the hospital experience in the southern state of Chiapas, in a hospital staffed marvelously by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, with the indigenous *tzotzil* people, the pilgrimage experience—which in Mexico we call working in the sugarcane fields, alongside hundreds of indigenous men and women who pass long workdays cutting sugar cane in exchange for a salary of hunger and a life of death, and the jail ministry which was my weekly service. In the end, faces, names, emotions, and experiences, all these brought me to experience a great confirmation in the vocation to serve Christ poor and humble. Although there were moments of great internal struggles where my ideas tried to resist, justify, and make the call of God go away. In the end, the only one tired after fighting against God was me, because the Father had been patient and merciful with me and had been through all these years in spite of my stubbornness.

In this period so full of internal movements I discerned about the priestly character in an implicit way through the studies of the novitiate. The priestly dimension can be found at the heart of the lives of the individual Jesuits who have made our Society a reality; it can be discovered in the history of the Society, its documents, its constitutions. No less important is the weekly apostolic service we performed regularly, which consists in teaching catechesis or through liturgies of the word, activities which in some way approach this dimension. In my case I collaborated with the Jail Ministry along with a group of lay people and with Fr. Arteaga, who was the director of the Social Ministry of the diocese. This apostolic experience was of great help because it allowed me some contact with the diocesan clergy and with lay men and women, giving me the possibility of identifying the priestly charism of the Society, recognizing the diversity and plurality of charisms which exist in the Church and at the same time sharing with them the same universal mission in the apostolate.

However the implicit experience became manifest when the moment arrived of the month-long Spiritual Exercises. This is the moment

in which one verbalizes choosing to collaborate in the mission of the Society, assuming its dimensions through a series of experiences and personal experiments, where the vocation stops being idealized and then becomes conformed to the personal call of God. But one is not only choosing to collaborate with the mission, rather with fear and trembling one also chooses and expresses the call to be a priest. The Spiritual Exercises were fundamental for the vocation and a foundation that supported the successive stages.

In summary the priestly dimension in the novitiate is lived in an implicit way in the programme of formation, where the apostolic service has relevance; and explicitly in the Spiritual Exercises.

Philosophate

The period of philosophical studies has an object that the scholastic acquire knowledge that will permit him to respond to the challenges of the world and of our mission. It is the stage in which one returns to a social dynamism that is more active, precisely as one was engaged before entering the Society, but now with a perspective placed in God and an option of life that helps you discern the daily life. In my case I returned to my native city where I found my family and my friends, the settings in which I had worked, and for this reason a good possibility to escape from community life and the apostolate. Returning to the university aula was a challenge, but studying philosophy was even more difficult because the material was not always spiritually comfortable.

*with a perspective
placed in God that helps
you discern the daily life*

But the true challenge was to retain a certain spiritual disposition in the face of the accelerated rhythm of the city, which forces you to stick to the daily rhythms to get to the university, to community meals, to Eucharists, to meetings of the apostolate, and the beginning of shorting the time dedicated to the spiritual life.

I have to admit that this was a stage in which the studies challenged me deeply, and beat me like a dirty carpet that is thrown against a wall to get out all the dust that has accumulated. For when these millions of fragile pieces of dust begin to fall out from among the fibers of the carpet, one does not know if one's faith will not fall out at the same time. This jostling

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was an intellectual earthquake, and added to this was the model of formation centering attention on affectivity, which turned into psychologism. What remained of my faith was shadowed by doubt and the insecurities of not knowing if the wounds of childhood had made me incapable of living and taking on the mission. The Jesuit philosophers could well define ourselves as men wounded by their childhood and under suspicion of not being fit for the Society. In order to complete the picture I began to work in a very active apostolate, going every week to give legal assistance at an organization of people living with HIV/AIDS. This service was my refuge to leave all that left me bewildered while the encounter with this suffering reality made me live and find the motives that had brought me to choose to be under the banner of Christ.

I ought to say that the period of philosophy was for me an intense psychologism, which ended by eliminating our spiritual lives, and reduced us to contemplating and healing our past conflicts. Saying this I do not mean to deny the importance of psychology but it is important to emphasize the need to balance it and to integrate it with other dimensions because in my opinion there was an overemphasis on the use of psychology. The spiritual life was less and less dynamic and more formal: a retreat, spiritual exercises and the daily mass. The apostolate was my refuge, while the relations with the other scholastics were excellent which permitted an air of spontaneity and pleasure; but the priestly dimension at this stage went up in smoke.

Regency

When philosophy ended I asked to proceed to regency. In my initial discernment I believed that the experience would help me take up a deep spiritual life again, and for this reason I asked for a type of pastoral or educational service, since I had never served in one of these situations. My final assignment was the Center for Human Rights Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez (Centro Prodh) in Mexico City. The Centro Prodh is one of the most significant social centers that the Society in Mexico has, and whose focus is on the victims of violations of human rights.

From Guadalajara I moved to Mexico City. I was enthusiastic about the Centro Prodh although I knew that it would be a center where I would have many challenges both as a professional and as a religious, because the

center has a secular atmosphere. Along with the work I was sent to an inserted community in a working class *colonia* which aimed to live a preferential option for the poor, with an austere life/study and expressing solidarity with the world of workers. The assignment in general, the work and community, seemed to me to be a gift which the Lord was giving me to help me grow and learn how to be a Jesuit.

There are no paradises or perfect works in mission, and in most cases we have to learn to walk our way through the adversities which present themselves to us, and this was true at the Centro Prodh. The work itself was not passing through one of its better moments. The collaborators had little confidence in the Jesuits and the economic situation was not the most desirable. With the passage of the months, the Spirit gave me the gift of a strong consolation which gave me the faith and the hope that in the midst of an apparently conflicted situation there could be a horizon of hope to go forward and improve the work. Every day I would pray to God for the Centro Prodh, recognizing that God was the one who was guiding us in making our major decisions, knowing that our collaborators and Jesuits had to do our part but that the final word comes from God.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar says that the spiritual life does not lead to a comfortable life or one far away from the world, but rather the contrary, it places you in such a way that you feel situations more deeply, and I believe that the Spirit has guided me and accompanied me in this process. An aspect that gave me consolation was seeing that, with my lay

companions, although we were not using the word "God", I felt that we were living it in moments when we shared our hopes in the search for alternatives for a better defense of human rights, since in the end we were sent together to defend the life of persons who were victims of brutal situations, and I was sure that God was helping and strengthening us.

I remember very well one day I was with Santiago, one of the lawyers of the Centro Prodh, at the funeral of a young man named Alexis, who was killed, a victim of the brutal repression of the Mexican police. We were seated in a café in front of the funeral parlor, and we began spontaneously to chat about the situation of the Center, as if the death of Alexis had moved us inside to wonder if we were also facing the possible

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death of the Centro Prodh. I believe that we both felt that the work still had something to offer in the face of situations of injustice as what had happened to Alexis. In this context, God gave us insights to look for alternatives to reform the work, and on a napkin we wrote some aspects to change and we began to dream. It only took us a paper napkin to sketch out our dreams and hopes. We finished our coffee and went to speak to Alexis' sister. I kept the little piece of our dreams in my pants' pocket, not knowing that day, that days later, this little scrap of paper would be the beginning of a series of changes to rebuild the mission which, thanks to God continues its service today.

The reform that began required of me long days of work and I don't think I knew how to adequately handle the activism that was required of me. The temptation, I believe, is inevitable for those of us who participate in the social apostolate. The problem is that as time passes and things don't come out as one thought, hope begins to die and also one closes one's heart to God, just as Job reproached God for his silence, his passivity, his weakness and his lack of understanding. And as God replied to Job, God said to me "Do you mean to tell me that I am unjust? Are you going to condemn me to excuse yourself? Are you as powerful as God?" and before such questions I answered, "No, I am not that strong. Forgive me; I am not looking to substitute you with my fragile ideas scattered in pieces before evil. What happens is that I do not understand anything well, I try to force your decisions, I speak without understanding, I do not know what to make of deceptions and negative situations in a struggle that seems all good and that you realize is not so, that so many others also want to see you fall.

Just like an addict, I spent long hours at work, and in order to tranquilize my guilt, I worked even more. One night around midnight, I was alone in the office with the light lit. Through a gap in the curtains of my window I could look at the windows of the building across from us. A common building, of four floors, and gazing at it I asked myself what it would be like to go back home and find myself with my wife, with my relatives, with my brothers. It seems that I had forgotten what it would feel like to be loved by another. I asked myself what were the emotions and sentiments that could bring anyone to leave their office chair, their computer and the reports for the morning and to run out because someone else was waiting and you were yearning to meet them. The question was not an idle one; in reality it was to recover a little of the humanity that I had drunk in one of so many cups of coffee. For a moment I had forgotten myself and my

need for others: for God, the community, the colleagues at work, friends and family; and I recognized that I had created a god of my measure, who required sacrifices of me that I could not accomplish. In reality it was an unknown god, foreign and inhuman. And like an echo in my interior resounded the words of Fr. Arrupe: "Without prayer conversion is not possible, nor evaluation, nor discernment, nor apostolic persistence"³ Nothing is surer than these words.

But interior desolation confronted what my brother Jesuits were saying. They applauded my involvement with the social work, recognized my work and encouraged me to continue along this road. Yes, but I could never tell them about the absolute loneliness I was really, that remained silent, worked and only worked. I recognized that the apostolate lived in such an inhuman form can never be just, nor good, nor social, because it isn't at all identified with the mission and even less with God. In reality I was engaged anew in the work of the evil spirit.

*without prayer conversion is
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nor discernment, nor
apostolic persistence*

My escaping from the enveloping dynamic of activity, silence and isolation was thanks to the Spirit and my memory. In a moment of strong interior movements I searched for the God of life, and recalled all that had been given me in earlier years, I remembered the motivations that had brought me to accept living the gospel and the following of Christ poor and humble. Suddenly, with humility and faith in prayer, and as the blind man seated on the road I asked God: "Lord, have mercy on me, Son of David!" The Eternal Father who is good and merciful took me again by the hand, restored my sight to me and accompanied me to get back on the road of hope and consolation for the option of life. Finally I accepted that I am a sinful person but for the love of Christ called to follow him.

The priestly dimension in the social apostolate has a particular way of living, especially in secularized environments. If the work is not a parish, if it is a community united by one spirit that needs to be accompanied, the Jesuit realizes this dimension with each of his collaborators, accompanying them in sickness, the attentive listening in joys, sharing the successes and encouraging them in times of failure, that in this service often are more common. The team of Centro Prodh spent more time in the office than in

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our houses, for this reason, it was in reality a community in mission, united in the defense of the lives of those persecuted because of justice. Besides this I enjoyed receiving the people who came to knock on our door, as a Jesuit, knowing how to greet with sensitivity those who were being maltreated, humiliated on so many occasions with questions about their juridical situation. It is recognizing that whoever is in front of you is part of the plan of God and that if I was at the Centro Prodh it was because God had confidence in me. Accompanying, listening and collaborating in the construction of the Reign of God with hope in the juridical defense of the life of the poor is part of the social dimension of our priestly ministry.

In reality regency was a stage of learning to trust more in God than in my own theories, of recovering the importance of prayer and of living my religious life within a secular environment with enthusiasm for my vocation, and from this seeing the priesthood as a service where you are the instrument of God although this is not mentioned. I concluded the stage of regency grateful to God for so many experiences and for having been so well received. Finally and by my surprise the Provincial sent me to do theological studies in Rome, at the Gregorian University and here I begin another experience.

Theology

In this stage, beyond the newness of finding myself in a country I had never thought I would be, and in particular in Rome, the International College of the Gesù, gives you the possibility of gathering the fruits of the earlier stages and then orient all your experience in the perspective of the ordained priestly ministry. The lessons we had at the Gregorian University touch upon the priestly dimension from several angles. I did not find the experience as confronting as philosophy although in a more gentle and perhaps subtle way it helped me clarify the mission of the priest.

Of all of my three years in Rome, in my opinion, the priestly month is the time when you most explicitly confront your story and the decision to follow this road of formation but now in view of the priesthood. The College spends this period in Spain and we take advantage of this opportunity to pass through several Ignatian places which are significant for a Jesuit.

For those who are not Europeans, the Ignatian itinerary is a spiritual journey. Seeing places, churches, contexts where St. Ignatius lived was a moment which permitted me to enter again into my Jesuit roots and my own experience. And of all the places I became familiar with, there is one in which I found most consolation: the small hospital named “de la Magdalena” in Azpeitia. This is a small site in contrast to the majestic Basilica of Loyola. It is found on a hillside on the outskirts of Azpeitia, hidden, in a corner, it is easy to pass by it without giving it any great attention because of its simplicity.

*the Ignatian itinerary is
a spiritual journey*

At the Magdalena, the Pilgrim, in the year 1535, taught Christian doctrine to children and would preach on Sundays⁴ and also undertook the mission of promoting justice, as the Autobiography highlights: “He also made an effort to suppress some bad practices, and with the help of God, some things were put in order (...) through talking the administrator of justice round to the idea.”⁵ Without a doubt I could identify here with this place and with this Ignatius.

Again I received great confirmations in the Spiritual Exercises of the priestly month. The first of these was to feel myself confirmed in the service of the poor within the social apostolate, the affirming of the desire to be a priest to serve the Church and the mission of the Society, not because the formation program was asking it of me or because it was the moment to ask for ordination, but rather because in my experience I do not find anything greater than this Love that is worthy of faith, the revealed Christ, who even in the midst of my struggles, discussions and desolations, has accompanied me all the time, and if the good Father did this with me it is because, knowing of my many sins, he keeps on inviting me to travel along with him in the service of faith in Christ which promotes justice for the poor.

I remember that the Spiritual Father of the College commenting on my discernment told me that he could confirm that he could see a presence of my experience centered in Christ, and that from my history whether

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outside or in the Society I had a gift to serve in the social apostolate, but he emphasized a point which I remember still today: "The principal of the social apostolate has a prophetic dimension, since the social is not reduced to obtaining material goods that poor persons ought to have, but rather also and in particular Jesuits need to help foster interior freedom of persons, the place in them where true change is made." This affirmation left me reflecting, and asking in prayer that God would give me this grace to know how to accompany and listen to people.

The priestly dimension in theology at the Gesù College, without any doubt, is the organizing theme of this stage. The studies, the community life and the priestly month all lead you to a deeper appreciation of this dimension. It is a clearer and more open manifestation. On occasion the other dimensions are overshadowed, such as the apostolic. In my case after three years I believe this time helped me to pray and reflect on the priestly dimension, as maybe in Mexico I had deepened other facets of the jesuit vocation.

Conclusion

1. The process of my experience of the priestly dimension in the Society of Jesus begins with a non-explicitation, but which brings you through a series of steps and experiences to an identification with the diverse dimensions of the mission, so that all this will flow into the explicitization of the desire to give your life to God through this ordained ministry. As you can see in my story there have been no grand courses of formation on this dimension, but rather a journey, that is finally grounded in Christ and a full confidence in him.

2. I began this sharing saying that a central point in the novitiate was the Spiritual Exercises, so I can conclude saying that in the same Spiritual Exercises after ten years of walking and learning to be an apostle, missionary, priest and companion in community life, I will find in them the point of integration in my formation for the priestly dimension. In my opinion the annual exercises are a nuclear point in our formation.

3. From the apostolic point of view and in particular from the defense and promotion of human rights, the priestly dimension is not always liturgical. The work is itself a community in which those who collaborate with it and with our mission ought to recognize that the same spirit calls us

from diverse vocations. As a Jesuit, I am called to listen, accompany, and receive the other because God also manifests himself in him or her. This is also a priestly characteristic not to be forgotten as manifested in the Gospel.

4. It seems to me that the theme of priestly formation in my Province needs to be more explicit and solid so that it would integrate better all the dimensions of the mission. We ought to get in touch anew with our Jesuit identity in formation because, even if the challenges that we have before our eyes require of us more intellectual and theological capacity, unless we do not become rooted in faith we will end up forming lay persons or excellent professionals but not religious Jesuit priests.

*Translated by
Robert E. Hurd, S.J.*

¹ General Congregation 35 of the Society of Jesus, Decree 1§6.

² ARREOLA, Juan José, *Confabulario*, Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 1963, p. 5.

³ Selection of the Writings of Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, 1997-2009, Editors: Curia of the Province of Spain of the Society of Jesus, 2007, pg. 113.

⁴ Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Personal Writings. Penguin Classics. Autobiography, p. 56 [88]

⁵ Idem.