

ONGOING FORMATION MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE


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I am grateful for this invitation to share with all of you my personal experience of ongoing formation, an issue of vital importance in greater regeneration and growth both at a personal level and as a companion of Jesus in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to me by the Society.

Introduction

My personal story

I come from a deeply Christian family, directly linked to the Society of Jesus, due to close relationships between some Jesuits and my parents even before they married. As you will see, this Ignatian formation comes to me both from my own family and my years as a student in the College of the Immaculate, in Lima, Peru. You will understand the fundamental importance of deep relations between family and college in the education of children. My parents' decision – which I will always appreciate – to have us educated with the Jesuits was very important and valuable. In this context and during an experience of the Spiritual Exercises, two years before completing my studies in the college, it happened that I asked myself – what does it mean to be a Jesuit and have a

vocation? What does it mean to have a vocation to be a priest in the Society of Jesus?... In short I was trying to reply to the basic question - what does God want of me? I know now that my desire to correspond to the love of Jesus, poor and humble, and the preferential option for the poor, is the basis of my vocation; I long to serve and desire to do this in a more radical way.

Just after turning 17, at the end of my college studies, I entered the Novitiate in March 1966, in the context of General Congregation XXXI. The greatly loved and ever remembered Padre Arrupe had been recently elected as General at a time of great social and ecclesiastical change at the end of Vatican Council II. Changes were also beginning to take place in formation, experimented progressively together with all the attendant implications, decisions and limitations. I feel my entire formation has taken place in the Society and I believe I can say that ***this formation continues in ordinary life, in the work done every day.***

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Throughout the trajectory of my life in the Society, as I prepare to celebrate 45 years this year, I have experienced mission intensely, collaborating in Jesuit formation and the formation of diocesan clergy, assisting in the government of the Peruvian Province, sharing my life and priestly ministry with people who are poor, living in rural areas, marginalised or in violent situations, forming children, young people and lay workers and integrating an educative community, among other activities. Each and every one of these contexts and human groups with whom I have shared this beautiful course of existence have made me experience all the bonds and directions of belonging to the body of the universal Society and the particular Church, in all its richness, diversity and complexity. Recently I have been based in the Curia Generalizia in Rome as Regional Secretary for the Assistencies of North and South Latin America.

Understanding the reality of today's world

In order to live our mission to the fullest, I consider it especially important to deepen our awareness of the complex reality we encounter in our world today. This issue should be the subject of concern, study, reflection

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and the fruitfulness of sharing. In other words, this requires a process of continuing formation which builds our capacity and constantly updates us in order to be able to transmit the Gospel of Jesus Christ “*newly incarnate in this way*” (SpEx 109). I always remember the Latin proverb written by Terence in 165 BC, inscribed for posterity - ***“I am a man, I consider nothing that is human alien to me”***.

It is fitting to remember the Second Vatican Council - “*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts*” (GS1). Since the incarnation of God, nothing and no one must be foreign or indifferent to us, paraphrasing the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin – ***“Nothing is profane, here in the world, for those who know how to see”***.

To remain in this attitude means to stay formed for the reality we are living and for which we are responsible. The poor evangelise us, they bring us closer to God, just as close contact with the reality of extreme poverty, violence and social injustice, death and disappearances, confronts our way of being, of thinking, of acting and of proceeding. In this sense I am very grateful for having lived and worked so much in the Apostolic Vicariate of Jaén, in the northern mountain range of Peru and having had close relations with the peoples of the rural mountains and native areas of Marañón. Likewise in the Archdiocese of Ayacucho, an area of great poverty

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and terrible social violence. The experience of direct personal contact, sharing life with many of our brothers who live – or rather survive – in very precarious situations, leads us to consider very deep issues, requiring profound human and spiritual consideration to deal with all the aspects these imply. *“If you love the poor, you will know what to do for them”* “because

the poor man or woman is Christ for me.. what would Christ do if he were in my place”, asks Father Alberto Hurtado.

Also very important is the testimony of Fr Ignacio Ellacuría, assassinated in El Salvador - *“It is impossible to be free of reality on our back, since we are infused in it”*. We must take charge of reality, charge it

and entrust ourselves to it so it is as it should be. This requires consistent ongoing formation.

As confirmed recently by General Congregation 35 – *“This mission of attempting ‘to feel and to taste’ the presence and activity of God in all the persons and circumstances of the world places us Jesuits at the centre of a tension, pulling us both to God and to the world at the same time. Thus arises, for Jesuits on mission, a 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”. [GC 35, 2.8]. “Jesuits must manifest – especially in the contemporary world of ceaseless noise and stimulation – a strong sense of the sacred, inseparably joined to active involvement in the world. Our deep love of God and our passion for his world should set us on fire – a fire that starts other fires” [GC35, 2.10].*

We are called to live according to the example of Jesus, among our people who are poor and believers, and therefore we need to know our people and understand their culture, their languages and customs, their traditions, their problems and difficulties and their hopes of building a different nation. We must vibrate with what makes them vibrate, share their sufferings and their joys. *“Our commitment to help establish right relationships invites us to see the world from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised, learning from them, acting with and for them. In this context, the Holy Father reminds us that ‘the preferential option for the poor’ is implicit in the Christological faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). He invites us with a prophetic call to renew our mission ‘among the poor and with the poor’. (GC 35,3.27)*

Therefore it should be a daily fact for us to be constantly informed regarding local, national and global realities, reading local and more specialised publications, reflecting on social and political events at both a personal and community level, participating in meetings and gatherings of pastoral agents and being aware of everything that regards our world today. Nothing that is human should be alien to us, nothing that regards others can be left out of our way of being. A vision of this kind helps us greatly in announcing the Gospel, from an incarnated and truly committed spirituality. This is picked up in the text of GC 35 – *“to follow Christ carrying his Cross means to announce the Gospel of hope to the countless poor people living in our world today”.*

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With regard to our Church present in Latin America and the Caribbean, our Bishops meeting in the Sanctuary of Our Lady Aparecida have clearly stated, *“Our faith proclaims that “Jesus Christ is the human face of God and the divine face of man”... All that has to do with Christ has to do with the poor and all that relates to the poor relates to Jesus. “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me” (Mt 25.40).. Only the proximity which makes us friends allows us to deeply appreciate the values of the poor today, their legitimate yearnings and their own way of living their faith. The option for the poor must lead us to friendship with the poor”*. (Cf. Document from Aparecida nn.393-398, May 2007

What do I mean by ongoing formation?

The first answer which comes to mind and heart, making memory and thus “reflecting on these matters, to draw some profit from each of them” [SpEx 108], is to consider the following words interwoven and articulated together; to renew first love, prepare yourself for tomorrow and rise at dawn, spiritual renewal, human growth, Ignatian spirituality and Ignatianism, theological and pastoral fulfilment, improve the quality of apostolic service, be an adequate and suitable instrument in the service of “helping souls”, respond more fully to challenges and tests from our realities, adapt to changes, experience the universal Society and mission, go to the frontiers. Each one of these reveals what I would like to convey to you.

Based on personal experience, it seems to me we should understand this as a process during which we undergo ***formative experiences in daily life, mixed with experiences of a more extraordinary nature***, distributed in fairly regular and constant stages or phases of a more variable nature. We are not always totally conscious of what we consider a priority or essential, so daily life or immediatism can lead us to lose our perspective and postpone the essential in some cases, for a certain time. Knowing how to discern in time and with clarity can help us avoid falling into this kind of trap, so that

the first is first and therefore we cannot get around this by seeking apparent justifications which are not completely true and distract us from the essential.

It seems to me that we must struggle against the tide and oppose current tendencies so as not to fall into the trap of superficiality and mere appearance, without penetrating into the essence of human things and situations. We should try to go deeper and discover what emerges as the recurring theme in events and what directs the deeper significance of all that occurs. Of course this brings us to desire to live at a greater depth and profundity, ***seeking the significance behind information, the reality behind appearances***, going right to the bottom of things, in an exercise which allows us to correctly judge other people, ideas and events and achieve in this way a realist vision, free of superficial prejudices and criticisms.

It is time for inner regeneration, going back to basics, the essence, in a particular moment and with special regard for mission, which “*implies living in a continuous process of spiritual conversion and regeneration to be worthy of our vocation*”. For those we consider to be in the “phase of maturity”, between 45 and 65 years of age, “*ongoing formation must focus on a deeper spiritual experience which allows us recover our personal history in the light of God and see the present as a moment of grace and hope so that in later years everything will be possible with the strength which comes from God*” (Cf. Jesuit Formation, page 165, Documents of Fr Peter Hans Kolvenbach, Rome, 2003)).

I remember now, how Ignatius “*directed his heart to where the Spirit and the divine calling led.. although, with singular humility, he followed the Spirit, not overtaking it. And thus he was conducted gently to somewhere he did not know... however, gradually the path opened and he followed it, knowingly ignorant, his heart placed trustingly in Christ*” (Cr. MHSI, FN II, “Dialogi pro Societate, cap. II, n.17).

Different experiences and methods of formation

Spiritual Exercises and personal and group accompaniment

Personally I have always been interested in deepening the spiritual experience, especially with the help of the Spiritual Exercises, allowing myself to be guided by other aspects of study and reflection concerning Ignatian spirituality, the Institute, the life of Ignatius, his companions and

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present documents on the life of the Society, among others. I have considered this interest a challenge from the viewpoint of mission, in the light of experience gained as instructor for novices and students and the years spent working for provincial government, as Socius to the Provincial, at different times within the Society.

In my experience – as I believe it is for all those working in Ignatian formation - it is this desire to experiment and be directly aware of the immense love God has for us together with the aspiration to follow Jesus Christ poor and humble in a more radical way, which impels us to live according to the grace of our own vocation, clearly identifying and reflecting our way of proceeding. And of course from the experience of the Spiritual Exercises, as Father Ignatius the Master wrote– *“Once again, and again, and as often as I can, I beg of you by the service of God our Lord, take my advice for fear that some day the Divine Majesty reprove me for not having exerted myself to the utmost, knowing as I do that the Spiritual Exercises are the best means I can think of in this life both to help a man to benefit himself and to bring help, profit and advantage to many others”* (Letter to Fr Manuel Miona, Venice, 16 November 1536).

*giving and accompanying
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In the course of my years in the priesthood, having been ordained on 18 June 1977, I was captivated by giving and accompanying the Exercises to and with different groups, personally and at community level. Seeking and obtaining material and notes, preparing topics, writing suggestions on prayer points, proposing Bible or Ignatian texts, adapting all this in the most pertinent way for a group or individuals is an important methodology which greatly assists in ongoing formation.

Participating in Jesuit formation

After ordination I was destined to work in forming novices and juniors. This involved studying topics related to the life and history of the Society, the Constitutions, founding documents and documents produced by Father Generals and General Congregations, the life of Ignatius and the first companions, current affairs and other matters. On the occasion of my

Third Probation, I dedicated several months to studying these topics in Rome, where I took the opportunity to be personally accompanied by specialists and attended courses and workshops held in the Institute of Spirituality in the Gregorian University and the Centre of Ignatian Spirituality.

During my experience of Third Probation and thanks to Fr Gilles Cusson as my Instructor, I was able to go even more deeply into the discovery of issues related to the Exercises and Ignatian spirituality, participating in a group made up of Jesuits from different countries and provinces (including West Africa, Canada, Colombia, Mexico, Holland and Peru) and encountering an enriching experience of universality. In the middle of this experience, with the illness of Father Arrupe and the naming of Fr Paolo Dezza as Pontifical Delegate, special situations arose within the Universal Society. This meant that those of us present at the time lived through a very exhilarating period, with special emphasis on matters concerning the life of the Society and the Church.

For many years I facilitated courses and workshops on the Constitutions for novices. In this regard I always begin with a valuable and significant text by Fr Jerónimo Nadal (1507-1580), a close companion of Ignatius in the early years of the Society, who took on the mission of disseminating the text of the Constitutions. In my view, it expresses very well how we must understand and consider matters relating to the Society. This document is outstanding in its timeless validity for ongoing formation.

“But for what we must consider, presupposes that the things of the Society to be considered for our benefit should be these

three principles - spiritu, corde, practice.

spiritu, corde, practice

Spiritu: as a thing whose principle is God, who rules and governs the Society, not necessarily with immediate revelations. We also know He moved Father Master Ignatius, as the Church tells us in the bulls of confirmation for the Society and other legitimate acts and testimonies. We call spirit and motion of God what is revealed to his Church and which moves us by its infused gifts and virtues. And so it is that the Church orders what the natural spark and the experience of things teaches us and moves our moral virtues. And by these means God communicates to us, and is the principle of everything, and in this way we must consider we are moved and governed by Him.

Corde: not in a speculative way. It is not enough to understand that this is of God and is ordered by his Providence – it is necessary to apply will

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and affection. A man who has only understanding, what is he without will? A monster. It is therefore necessary to add will to what we understand; and hear with taste, devotion and tenderness, loving with affection, consoling ourselves, that what we hear comes from God.

And further, **practice:** that you may act for what you understand and love, that we are governed by this. What talks to you is not only what seems right and what you may like, but so that jointly you may put it into action". First talk in Alcalá on 26 October 1561. *Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu*, pp. 226-230.

Formation of diocesan clergy

From my experience as Rector of the Saint Louis Gonzaga Major Seminary of the Apostolic Vicariate in Jaén, Peru, set up for the formation of diocesan seminarians from various Ecclesiastic Jurisdictions in the Northern Peruvian Sierra and Selva, I have learnt to understand and to value diocesan spirituality. It is especially from this viewpoint of diocesan spirituality, which I value as much as the special Ignatian nature of our own vocation, that I obviously had to study and fully understand the value of the vocation of diocesan priests and what it means in the current context of our Church, particularly in the local churches of the seminarians themselves. The basic question still is - What kind of priest is formed in our Seminary? What kind of priest does the Church need today in the world, in Peru and in our Jurisdictions?

As Rector, I took part every year in the Annual Meeting of Seminary Rectors and Vocational Promoters from different Ecclesiastic Jurisdictions, called by the Commission of Bishops for Seminaries and Vocations, in which we shared experiences and discussed matters regarding the formation of seminarians. From this case in point of ongoing formation I was elected as a member of the Commission to revise and draw up a new document on diocesan priest formation in Peru. This task took three years and brought me into contact with many diocesan instructors. We were required to put into practice the guidelines issued by Pope John Paul II in the Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*" [25 March 1992], in line with the identity of priestly vocation and the human, spiritual, academic, pastoral and community dimensions of formation. This was a privileged opportunity for me which brought me into close contact with

local churches and many diocesan seminarians and priests, and helped me understand and value this particular vocation of the Church.

I consider it a grace of God that as a Jesuit I can also appreciate the importance of diocesan formation, since I believe that sharing between religious and diocesan life enriches the Church greatly and leads us to value and esteem our vocations reciprocally, working together in the Church's mission at local level. Something I have always insisted upon with seminarians as Rector of the Saint Louis Gonzaga Major Seminary in Jaén, and as Spiritual Director in the San Cristóbal of Huamanga Conciliar Seminary in Ayacucho, is the *importance of*

personal growth in order to serve as pastors according to the heart of God and the heart of our poor and faithful people, in the attempt to draw closer

to the personal configuration of Jesus the Shepherd. The process directed from the Seminary seeks not only to form priests but also to form the priesthood, and commits to a life constantly moved by pastoral love,

intended as that principle which determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of behaving with people, for generous and selfless service, with the preferential option for the poor, the forgotten and the excluded.

The formation of a mature, truly integrated personality is an ideal worth making an effort for. It is only by living in accordance with the truth of our being, with coherence and honesty, that we can discover the path to true and lasting happiness. We are called to be happy and for this we seek the happiness God invites us to partake of. I believe the fundamental principles within the basic and ongoing formative process worth emphasising are directly related to *integration, responsible liberty, self-formation, transparent dialogue and pastoral love*.

*Participation in the Ongoing Formation Course
and the Workshop Course for new Superiors*

Another valuable experience I would like to highlight is participation in the Ongoing Formation Course and the Workshop Course for new Community Superiors which the Conference of Latin American Provincials

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(CPAL) has been organising for some years now. I personally consider them of great consequence. Anyone I know who has taken part has experienced something very significant with regard to inner renewal, generating a vital process of personal and community reflection, in the company of other Jesuits from the Latin American and Spanish provinces.

Each one of these experiences has its own intrinsic paradigm and methodology and entails time. It is good to let ourselves be directed by the Spirit and learn how to listen with openness and docility. This means living a time of grace offered to us by the Society to put our lives in order and correspond to the vocation we are called to. I consider it important ***to preserve this disposition for personal growth and maintain a spirit of openness to change, thereby avoiding any kind of distraction or apparent justification and facilitating with all this a life directed according to the attitude of Ignatian magis - "in all to love and serve"***.

Socius and Regional Secretary – memory and hands

As I share my life in the Society with other members of the Curia Generalizia community in Rome, where I now live and work, from each one of my Jesuit brothers, the way in which they deal with people and

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issues and their manifest love, discretion and brotherly affection as true friends in the Lord and companions in mission, I constantly learn more about the life of the Society. With this way of proceeding we are all seeking the greater glory of God, the overall universal good and the good of each one, thus contributing to

constructing a greater awareness of being within the Society.

Before coming to Rome I served as Socius to the Provincial in Peru at different times, and thanks to this position I was able to become more familiar with our Institute and our way of proceeding. I was inspired by reading valuable documents – both old and new – all this in an attempt to fulfil the mission entrusted to me in the best possible way.

Reading the text of the Society's Constitutions, we see Part Nine refers to "*he who should help the General fulfil his office well*", in a concrete

sense the Secretary of the Society, yet in a wider sense the office of Regional Secretary or Socius to the Provincial - *"In regard to the first point, his solicitude to attend to all affairs, the general obviously ought to have one person who ordinarily accompanies him and should be his memory and hands for everything which he must write and handle, and finally for all the affairs of his office. This person should take on the general's own person and imagine that he carries on his own shoulders the general's whole burden (except for his authority)". [800-8]*

"This person ought to be a man of great solicitude and judgement and, if possible, learning; one too who has a pleasant personality and a good manner of dealing with all kinds of persons by word of mouth and by letters. Above all he should be one in whom confidence can be placed and one who loves the Society in our Lord, that the general may be better aided and served by him for the glory of God". [802-9]

Consideration for ongoing formation is fundamental in the fulfilment of mission in the service of all; in my personal case, in the service of the body of the Society and particularly the Assistencies of Latin America.

I end with this recommendation from the Apostle Paul to his disciple Titus - *"That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess through the laying on of my hands. God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control... share in my hardships for the sake of the gospel, relying on the power of God" (2 Tim 1,6-8).*