

A FIRE THAT KINDLES OTHER FIRES

Rediscovering our Charism

Many Sparks, One Fire: Many Stories, One History

1.- The Society of Jesus has carried a flame for nearly five hundred years through innumerable social and cultural circumstances that have challenged it intensely to keep that flame alive and burning. Things are no different today. In a world that overwhelms people with a multiplicity of sensations, ideas, and images, the Society seeks to keep the fire of its original inspiration alive in a way that offers warmth and light to our contemporaries. It does this by telling a story that has stood the test of time, despite the imperfections of its members and even of the whole body, because of the continued goodness of God, who has never allowed the fire to die. Our attempt here is to present it anew as a living narrative that, when brought into contact with the life-stories of people today, can give them meaning and provide focus in a fragmented world.

2.- The continued narrative of the Society has provided, over the centuries, the ground for numerous experiences of unity-in-multiplicity. We Jesuits are frequently surprised that, despite our differences in culture and context, we find ourselves remarkably united. Through prayerful discernment, open discussion, and spiritual conversations, we have again and again been privileged to know ourselves as *one* in the Lord:¹ one united, apostolic body seeking what is best for the service of God in the Church and for the world. This graced experience reminds us of the experience recounted in the Deliberation of the First Fathers. Our earliest companions, even though they considered themselves weak and fragile and originating from many different places, found the will of God together amid great diversity of opinion.² What enabled them to find God's will was their "decided care and alertness to initiate a completely open way" and to offer themselves fully to it for the greater glory of God.³ Thus they began a narrative; they lit a fire, which was handed on in subsequent generations whenever people encountered the Society, enabling the personal histories of generations to become embedded in the Society's history as a whole. This collective history formed the basis of their unity; and at its heart was Jesus Christ. Despite the differences, what unites us as Jesuits is Christ and the desire to serve him: not to be deaf to the call of the Lord, but prompt and ready to do his most holy will.⁴ He is the unique image of the unseen God,⁵ capable of revealing himself everywhere; and in a tantalizing culture of images, he is the single image that unites us. Jesuits know who they are by looking at him.

3.- 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. Its root is to be found in Saint Ignatius's experience at La Storta. There, "placed" with God's Son and called to serve him as he carries his cross, Ignatius and the first companions respond by

¹ Cf. *Constitutions*, 671.

² *Deliberation of the First Fathers (1539)*, § 1 (MHSI 63, 2).

³ *Deliberation of the First Fathers (1539)*, § 1 (MHSI 63, 2).

⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, 91.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3.

offering themselves for the service of faith to the Pope, Christ's Vicar on earth. The Son, the one image of God, Christ Jesus, unites them and sends them out to the whole world. He is the image at the very heart of Jesuit existence today; and it is his image that we wish to communicate to others as best we can.

Seeing and Loving the World as Jesus Did

4.- 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.⁶ This experience is not merely a foundation laid in the past and ignored as time moves on; it is alive, ongoing, nourished, and deepened by dynamic Jesuit life in community and on mission. The experience involves both conversion *from* and conversion *for*. Saint Ignatius, recuperating on his bed at Loyola, entered into a profound interior journey. He gradually came to realise that those things in which he took delight had no lasting value but that responding to Christ beckoning instilled peace in his soul and a desire to know his Lord better. But – as he came to see later – this knowledge could only be won through confronting the falseness of the desires that had driven him. It was at Manresa that this confrontation took place. There the Lord, who taught him like a schoolboy, gently prepared him to receive an understanding that the world could be seen in another way: a way freed from disordered attachments⁷ and opened up for an ordered loving of God and of all things in God. This experience is part of every Jesuit's journey.

5.- While at Manresa, Ignatius had an experience at the river Cardoner that opened his eyes so that “all things seemed new to him”⁸ because he began to see them with new eyes.⁹ Reality became transparent to him, enabling him to see God working in the depths of everything and inviting him to “help souls”. This new view of reality led Ignatius to seek and find God in all things.

6.- The understanding that Ignatius received taught him a contemplative way of standing in the world, of contemplating God at work in the depths of things, of tasting “the infinite sweetness and charm of the divinity, of the soul, of its virtues and of everything there”.¹⁰ Starting from the contemplation of the incarnation¹¹ it is clear that Ignatius does not sweeten or falsify painful realities. Rather he begins with them, exactly as they are – poverty, forced displacement, violence between people, abandonment, structural injustice, sin – but then he points to how God's Son was born into these realities; and it is here that sweetness is found. Tasting and seeing God in reality is a process. Ignatius had to learn this himself through many painful experiences. At La Storta he received the grace to be placed with the Son bearing the Cross; and so he and his companions were drawn into the Son's pattern of life, with its joys and with its sufferings.

⁶ Cf. NC 246, 4°; 223 §§ 3-4.

⁷ *Spiritual Exercises*, 21.

⁸ *Autobiography* 30.

⁹ Diego LAYNEZ, *Letter about Fr. Ignatius (1547)*, § 10 (MHSI 66, 80).

¹⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, 124.

¹¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, 101-109.

7.- Similarly today the Society, in carrying out its mission, experiences the companionship of the Lord and the challenge of the Cross.¹² Commitment to “the service of faith and the promotion of justice”,¹³ to dialogue with cultures and religions,¹⁴ takes Jesuits to limit-situations where they encounter energy and new life, but also anguish and death – where “the Divinity is hidden”.¹⁵ The experience of a hidden God cannot always be avoided, but even in the depths of darkness when God seems concealed, the transforming light of God is able to shine. God labours intensely in this hiddenness. Rising from the tombs of personal life and history, the Lord appears when we least expect, with his personal consolation as a friend¹⁶ and as the centre of a fraternal and servant community.¹⁷ From this experience of God labouring in the heart of life, our identity as “servants of Christ’s mission”¹⁸ rises up ever anew.

Our ‘Way of Proceeding’

8.- To find divine life at the depths of reality is a mission of hope given to us Jesuits. We travel again the path taken by Ignatius. As in his experience so too in ours, because a space of interiority is opened where God works in us, we are able to see the world as a place in which God is at work and which is full of his appeals and of his presence. Thus we enter, with Christ who offers living water,¹⁹ into the dry and lifeless areas of the world. Our mode of proceeding is to trace the footprints of God *everywhere*, knowing that the Spirit of Christ is at work in all places and situations and in all activities and mediations that seek to make him more present in the world.²⁰ This mission of attempting “to feel and to taste” (*sentir y gustar*) 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.

9.- 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.²¹ The Gospels show Jesus in deep, loving relationship with his Father and, at the same time, completely given over to his mission among men and women. He is 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.

¹² *Spiritual Exercises*, 53.

¹³ GC 32, D. 2.

¹⁴ GC 34, D. 2, nn. 19-21.

¹⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, 196.

¹⁶ *Spiritual Exercises*, 224.

¹⁷ Matthew 18:20.

¹⁸ GC 34, D. 2.

¹⁹ Cf. John 4:10-15.

²⁰ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; also GC 34, D. 6.

²¹ Cf. Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH, *Sobre la vida religiosa*, Havana (Cuba), 1 June 2007, p. 1.

10.- 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.²² However we cannot abandon this creative polarity, since it marks the essence of our lives as contemplatives in action, companions of Christ sent into the world.²³ In what we do in the world there must always be a transparency to God. Our lives must provoke the questions, “who are you, that you do these things...and that you do them in this way?” Jesuits must manifest – especially in the contemporary world of ceaseless noise and stimulation – a strong sense of the sacred inseparably joined to 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! For ultimately, there is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look.²⁴ We must communicate this way of looking and provide a pedagogy, inspired by the *Spiritual Exercises*, that carries people – especially the young – into it. Thus will they be able to see the world as Saint Ignatius did, as his life developed from what he understood at the Cardoner to the eventual founding of the Society with its mission to bring the message of Christ to the ends of the earth. This mission, with its roots in his experience, continues today.

A Life Shaped By the Vision of La Storta

11.- Saint Ignatius had the most significant experience for the founding of the Society in the little chapel of La Storta on his way to Rome. In this mystical grace he saw clearly “that the Father placed him with Christ, his Son”,²⁵ as the same Ignatius had asked insistently of Mary. At La Storta, the Father placed him with His Son carrying His Cross, and Jesus accepted him saying: “I wish you to serve us”. Ignatius felt himself confirmed personally, and felt the group confirmed, in the plan moving their hearts to place themselves at the service of the Vicar of Christ on earth. “Ignatius told me that God the Father imprinted these words on his heart: ‘Ego ero vobis Romae propitius’”.²⁶ But this affirmation did not make Ignatius dream of easy paths, since he told his companions that they would encounter “many contradictions”²⁷ in Rome, and perhaps even be crucified. It is from Ignatius’s encounter with the Lord at La Storta that the future life of service and mission of the companions emerges in its characteristic contours: following Christ bearing his Cross; fidelity to the Church and to the Vicar of Christ on earth; and living as friends of – and thus in – the Lord in one single apostolic body.

Following Christ...

12.- To follow Christ bearing his Cross means opening ourselves with him to every thirst that afflicts humanity today. Christ is nourishment itself, the answer to every hunger and thirst. He is the bread of life, who, in feeding the hungry, draws them together and unites them.²⁸ He is the water of life,²⁹ the living water of which he spoke to the Samaritan woman

²² Cf. Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH, *Sobre la vida religiosa*, Havana (Cuba), 1 June 2007, p. 3.

²³ GC 33, GC 34.

²⁴ Cf. Pierre TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, *Le Milieu Divin*, London, Collins, 1960 (original 1957), p. 66.

²⁵ *Autobiography*, 96.

²⁶ Diego LAYNEZ, *Adhortationes in librum Examinis (1559)*, §7 (MHSI 73, 133).

²⁷ *Autobiography*, 97.

²⁸ Cf. Mark 6:31-44 par.

²⁹ Cf. John 4:7-15.

in a dialogue that surprised his disciples because it took him, like free-flowing water, beyond the river-banks of what was culturally and religiously familiar and into an exchange with someone with whom custom forbade him to speak at all. Jesus, in his outreach, embraced difference and new horizons. His ministry transcended boundaries. He invited his disciples to be aware of God's action in places and people they were inclined to avoid: Zacchaeus,³⁰ a Syro-Phoenician woman,³¹ Roman centurions,³² a repentant thief.³³ As water bringing life³⁴ to all who thirst, he showed himself interested in every parched area of the world; and in every parched area of the world he can thus be welcomed, for all who are thirsty can understand what living water means. This image of living water can give life to all Jesuits as servants of Christ in his mission because, having tasted this water themselves, they will be eager to offer it to anyone who thirsts and to reach out to people beyond frontiers – where water may not yet have welled up – to bring a new culture of dialogue to a rich, diverse, and multi-faceted world.

13.- To follow Christ bearing his Cross means announcing his Gospel of hope to the many poor who inhabit our world today. The world's many 'poverties' represent thirsts that, ultimately, only he who is living water can assuage. Working for his Reign will often mean meeting material needs, but it will always mean much more, because human beings thirst at many levels; and Christ's mission is directed to human beings. Faith *and* justice; it is never one without the other. Human beings need food, shelter, love, relationship, truth, meaning, promise, hope. Human beings need a future in which they can take hold of their full dignity; indeed they need an absolute future, a 'great hope' that exceeds every particular hope.³⁵ All of these things are already present in the heart of Christ's mission, which, as was particularly evident in his healing ministry, was always more than physical. In healing the leper, Jesus restored him to the community, gave him a sense of belonging. Our mission finds its inspiration in this ministry of Jesus. 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. This frequently calls for an engagement that is long-term, be it in the education of youth, in the spiritual accompaniment of the *Exercises*, in intellectual research, or in the service of refugees. But it is here, aided by grace and drawing on whatever professional capacities we may have that we try to offer ourselves to God fully, for his service.

14.- The Son's way of acting provides the pattern for how we must act in the service of his mission.³⁶ Jesus preached the Reign of God; indeed it was given with his very presence.³⁷ And he showed himself as having come into the world not to do his own will but the will of his Father in heaven. Jesus' entire life was a kenosis, and he approached situations by self-forgetfulness, seeking not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.³⁸ Thus incarnation and paschal mystery unfold in his life-pattern; his life-pattern will be ours also when we join with him. As companions with him on mission, his way is our way.

³⁰ Luke 19:1-10.

³¹ Mark 7:24-30.

³² Luke 7:2-10; Mark 15:39.

³³ Luke 23:39-43.

³⁴ Cf. John 7:38.

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007), see paragraphs 4 and 35, for example.

³⁶ *Spiritual Exercises*, 91-98.

³⁷ Cf. Matthew 12:28, Luke:11:20; 17:21.

³⁸ Mark 10:45.

15.- In following this way Jesuits today affirm all that has been specified regarding the Society's mission in the last three General Congregations. The service of faith and the promotion of justice, indissolubly united, remain at the heart of our mission. This option changed the face of the Society. We embrace it again and we remember with gratitude our martyrs and the poor who have nourished us evangelically in our own identity as followers of Jesus: "our service, especially among the poor, has deepened our life of faith, both individually and as a body".³⁹ As followers of Jesus today, we reach out also to persons who differ from us in culture and religion, aware that dialogue with them is integral also to our service of Christ's mission⁴⁰. In every mission that we carry out, we seek only to be where he sends us. 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.

In the Church and For the World...

16.- Knowing ourselves to be sent with Jesus as companions consecrated to him in poverty, chastity, and obedience, although we are sinners, we listen attentively to the needs of people whom we seek to serve. We have been chosen to live as his companions in a single body governed by means of the account of conscience and held together by obedience: men of and for the Church under obedience to the Supreme Pontiff and our Father General and duly appointed superiors.⁴¹ In all of this, 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.⁴² It is this availability for the Church's universal mission that marks our Society in a particular way, makes sense of our special vow of obedience to the Pope, and makes us a single apostolic body dedicated to serving, in the Church, men and women everywhere.

17.- It is in its obedience, above all, that the Society of Jesus should be distinct from other religious families. One need only recall the letter of Saint Ignatius, where he writes: "We can tolerate other religious institutes outdoing us in fasting and in other austerities that they practise according to their Rule, but it is my desire, dear brothers, that those who serve the Lord our God in this Society be outstanding in the purity and perfection of their obedience, the renunciation of their will, and the abnegation of their judgment".⁴³ It is to the obedience of the *Suscipe* that Saint Ignatius looked in order to highlight what it was that gave the Society its distinctive difference.

As An Apostolic Religious Community...

18.- Together with obedience, our Jesuit vows of poverty and chastity enable us to be shaped in the Church into the image of Jesus himself,⁴⁴ they also make clear and visible our availability for God's call. This availability is expressed in a variety of ways, according to

³⁹ GC 34, D. 2, 1.

⁴⁰ GC 34, D. 2.

⁴¹ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 352-370.

⁴² Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 23, *Constitutions*, 622.

⁴³ *Letter to the Jesuits of Portugal (26 March 1553)*, § 2 (MHSI 29, 671).

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:18.

the particular vocation of each. Thus the Society of Jesus is enriched and blessed by the presence of brothers, spiritual coadjutors and professed fathers who together, as companions in one family – enlivened in particular by the presence of those in formation – serve the mission of Christ according to the graces given to each.⁴⁵ Thus we Jesuits live our consecrated lives in response to different graces. We minister sacramentally at the heart of the Church, celebrating the Eucharist and the other sacraments and preaching the word of God faithfully. We take this word to the very ends of the earth, seeking to share its riches with people everywhere.

19.- The differentiation of roles and ministries of Jesuits finds its necessary complement in a life of companionship lived in community. Our life together testifies to our friendship in the Lord, a sharing of faith and life together, above all in the celebration of the Eucharist. Following Jesus together acts as a pointer to the disciples *en mouvement* with their Lord. Jesuit identity and Jesuit mission are linked by community; indeed, identity, community, and mission are a kind of triptych shedding light on how our companionship is best understood. This companionship shows how people different in background and diverse in talent can live together as true “friends in the Lord”. Jesuit identity is relational; it grows in and through our diversities of culture, nationalities, and languages, enriching and challenging us. This is a process that we enter upon as we join the Society, and we grow in it every day. As we do so, our community life can become attractive to people, inviting them – above all the young – to ‘come and see’,⁴⁶ to join us in our vocation and to serve with us in Christ’s mission. Nothing could be more desirable and more urgent today, since the heart of Christ burns with love for this world, with all its troubles, and seeks companions who can serve it with him.

A New Context – To New Frontiers

20.- 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, realising 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. Our mission of faith and justice, dialogue of religions and cultures has acquired dimensions that no longer allow us to conceive of the world as composed of separate entities; we must see it as a unified whole in which we depend upon one another. Globalization, technology, and environmental concerns have challenged our traditional boundaries and have enhanced our awareness that we bear a common responsibility for the welfare of the entire world and its development in a sustainable and living-giving way.⁴⁷

21.- Today’s consumerist cultures do not foster passion and zeal but rather addiction and compulsion. They demand resistance. A compassionate response to these cultural malaises will be necessary and unavoidable if we are to share in the lives of our contemporaries. In such changing circumstances, our responsibility as Jesuits to collaborate at multiple levels has become an imperative. Thus our provinces must work ever more together. So also must we work with others: religious men and women of other communities; lay persons; members of ecclesial movements; people who share our values but not our beliefs; in short, all persons of good will.

⁴⁵ *Constitutions*, 511.

⁴⁶ John 1:39.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Globalization and Marginalization*, Rome, Social Justice Secretariat, February 2006, pp. 16-17.

22.- God has created a world with diverse inhabitants, and this is good. Creation expresses the rich beauty of this lovable world: people working, laughing, and thriving together⁴⁸ are signs that God is alive among us. However, diversity becomes problematic when the differences between people are lived in such a way that some prosper at the expense of others who are excluded in such a way that people fight, killing each other, and are intent on destruction.⁴⁹ Then God in Christ suffers in and with the world, which he wants to renew. Precisely here is our mission situated. It is here that we must discern our mission according to the criteria of the *magis*⁵⁰ and the more universal good.⁵¹ 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.⁵² ‘Nations’ beyond geographical definitions await us, ‘nations’ that today include those who are poor and displaced, those who are profoundly lonely, those who ignore God’s existence and those who use God as an instrument for political purposes. There are new ‘nations,’ and we have been sent to them.⁵³

23.- Recalling Father Jerónimo Nadal, we can say with him: the world is our house.⁵⁴ As Father Kolvenbach said recently: “a stable monastery does not serve us, because we have received the entire world to tell about the good news...we do not close ourselves up in the cloister, but we remain in the world amid the multitude of men and women that the Lord loves, since they are in the world”.⁵⁵ All men and women are our concern for *dialogue* and for *proclamation* because our mission is that of the Church: to discover Jesus Christ where we have not noticed him before and to reveal him where he has not been seen before. In other words, we look to “find God in all things”, following what Saint Ignatius proposes to us in the ‘Contemplation for Achieving Love’.⁵⁶ The entire world becomes the object of our interest and concern.

24.- Thus as this world changes, so does the *context* of our mission; and new frontiers beckon that we must be willing to embrace. So we plunge ourselves more deeply into that dialogue with religions that may show us that the Holy Spirit is at work all over the world that God loves. We turn also to the ‘frontier’ of the earth, increasingly degraded and plundered. Here, with passion for environmental justice, we shall meet once again the Spirit of God seeking to liberate a suffering creation, which demands of us space to live and breathe.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 106.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 108.

⁵⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, 97.

⁵¹ *Constitutions*, 622.

⁵² *Spiritual Exercises*, 147.

⁵³ Adolfo NICOLÁS, *Homily on the Day After his Election as Superior General of the Society of Jesus* (20 January 2008).

⁵⁴ Jerónimo NADAL, *13ª Exhortatio Complutensis* (Alcalá, 1561), § 256 (MHSI 90, 469-470).

⁵⁵ Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH, *Homily Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae*, celebrating the anniversary of the approval of the Society of Jesus (27 September 2007).

⁵⁶ Cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, 230-237.

Ite Inflammate Omnia

25.- Legend has it that Saint Ignatius, when he sent Saint Francis Xavier to the East, told him: “go, set the world alight”. With the birth of the Society of Jesus, a new fire was lit in a changing world. A novel form of religious life came about, not through human enterprise but as a divine initiative. The fire that was set alight then continues to burn in our Jesuit life today, as was said about Saint Alberto Hurtado, “a fire that kindles other fires”. With it, we are called to set all things alight with the love of God.⁵⁷

26.- There are new challenges to this vocation today. We live our identity as companions of Jesus in a context where multiple images, the innumerable faces of a fragmented culture, compete for our attention. They seep into us, take root in the fertile soil of our natural desires, and fill us with sensations that flow through and take control of our feelings and decisions without our awareness. But we know and proclaim one image, Jesus Christ, true image of God and true image of humanity, who, when we contemplate him, becomes flesh in us, healing our inner brokenness, and making us whole as persons, as communities, and as an apostolic body dedicated to Christ’s mission.

27.- To live this mission in our broken world, we need fraternal and joyful communities in which we nourish and express with great intensity the sole passion that can unify our differences and bring to life our creativity. This passion grows out of our ever new experience of the Lord, whose imagination and love for our world are inexhaustible. This love invites us to “participation in the mission of the One sent by the Father, in the Spirit, in an ever greater service, in love, with all the variants of the cross, in an imitation and following of that Jesus who wants to lead all people and all of creation to the glory of the Father”.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Luke 12:49.

⁵⁸ Pedro ARRUIPE, “*Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism*”, § 79, *AR* 18 (1980-1983) 150.