**IGNATIAN CHARISM FOR DIALOGUE**

John Borelli

Georgetown University

October 26, 2016

**Points for Reflection for Jesuits and their Lay and Ordained Associates**

**Serving in Jesuit Works and in Religiously Diverse Ministries**

1. *See God in all things; recognize the voice of God where you did not expect to hear it*: In a letter dated 1 June 1551 to Antonio Brandao, transcribed by Juan Polanco, Ignatius answered several questions of a scholastic. To the question on what forms of meditation foster a Jesuit vocation, Ignatius advises:

“Over and above the spiritual exercises assigned for their perfection—namely daily Mass, an hour for vocal prayer and examen of consciousness, and weekly confession and Communion—they should practice the seeking of God’s presence in all things, in their conversations, their walks, in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, and in all their actions since His Divine Majesty is truly in all things by His presence, power, and essence.” [*Counsels for Jesuits, Selected Letters and Instructions of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, edited by Joseph N. Tyenda, S.J., Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985*, 39-46, 43 specifically.]

Howard Gray explains: “You cannot find God in all things if you do not find all things in all things.” This bedrock practice in Ignatian spirituality means to be attentive especially to what you see, hear, and otherwise experience. [“Mercy: Another Name for God,” *Human Development* (Fall 2015)] In the concluding sentences of his encyclical on mission (*Redemptoris Missio*), John Paul II wrote: “The missionary must be a ‘*contemplative in action*’ . . . My contact with the representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless a missionary is contemplative, he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way.” (91)

2. The letter of instruction on *appropriate behavior* in early 1546 from Ignatius to those Jesuits attending the first session of the Council of Trent provides further advice for developing the virtues of openness and compassion in conversation:

learn the surpassing worth of conversation; be slow of speech;

be considerate and kind especially when deciding on matters under discussion;

pay attention to the whole person;

understand the meaning, learnings and wishes of those who speak;

be free of prejudice; argue from authority cautiously;

quote important persons only if arranged beforehand;

consider the reasons on both sides without showing attachment to your own opinion; avoid bringing dissatisfaction to anyone;

be modest when you are certain;

choose to speak at the other’s convenience even when certain;

give conversation the time that it needs. [*Counsels for Jesuits*, 9-12, specifically, 10-11.]

3. True dialogue requires a *long term* commitment, like marriage and religious vows. Dialogue succeeds through partnership and mutual commitment. It is *a life-long way of living*.

4. Almost all reflections on the Ignatian charism for dialogue mention the *Presupposition*. Ignatius lays out this principle at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* (22), advising both the director and the retreatant to be willing to do what every good Christian should do: accept what a neighbor believes as true rather than to reject it. If this proves difficult, then after much effort, one should offer a correction of the other with love. This extended effort to understand one another, particularly for one who enters a new community and culture, allows four stages of growth for the encounter to become a truly mutual communication:

1) An extended commitment to being present among others,

2) Adaptation to mutual living,

3) Allowing others to offer a sign of inclusion,

4) Mutual confirmation

[Carl Starkloff, “As Different As Night and Day,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 28/4 (September 1996), [http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/jesuit/article/view/3963/3527](http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/jesuit/article/view/3963/3527" \t "_blank)]

5. While other religious orders and congregations worthily encourage imitating Jesus, Jesuits have sought to gain an *intimate knowledge of the mind of Jesus* through their forms of imaginative meditation and colloquy, and thus to experience Jesus’ way of “seeing others.” Thus the “Ignatian” character is not something to be grasped arrogantly; rather, it is *an ongoing accommodation to humility*, acknowledging one’s own sinfulness and giving way to *liberty* to think and feel with the mind of another, namely that of the master, Jesus.

6. At the beginning of the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, one contemplates the vast diversity of peoples, places and cultures of the world, what people are saying, thinking, hoping, feeling, fearing, asking and regretting, and how God in the three persons ponders all this comprehensively and wills the Incarnation from the beginning that, in the fullness of time, becomes concrete in the Annunciation to Mary. Michael Ivens comments on this scene: “Thus the exercitant contemplates the Trinity as transcendent, majestic, ‘above’ the world but also as the God *of* the world, the God who in Christ enters the world. The thrust of the *Exercises* will be to involve the exercitant personally in God’s own activity in Christ within the world.” [*Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, Gracewing, 1998, 93.]

7. The *Spiritual Exercises* foster a spirit of *magnanimity*—served by constancy, courage in the face of contradiction, and zeal as promoted in the contemplation of Christ and his kingdom. The king inthe *Kingdom Exercise* (second week) is called “so liberal and kind.” Annotation five advises: “It is highly profitable for the exercitant to begin the *Exercises* in a magnanimous spirit and with great liberality toward Their Creator and Lord, and to offer him all their powers of desire and all their liberty, so that the Divine Majesty may avail himself of their person and of all they possess, according to his most holy will.” Liberality and Liberty allow one to be open to breadth of God’s graciousness to us. Liberty provides both the freedom to do God’s will and the generosity to follow God’s will freely without prejudice or limit. See the notes for *Contemplation to Attain Love* (fourth week).

8. From the time of the deliberation of the first fathers in 1539, Jesuits have had a way of proceeding based on communal, spiritual deliberation. It is a form of dialogue for making decisions in general congregations and an occasion summoned a group to decision. Ignatian practice fosters mutuality among the practitioners. The *Constitutions* state with regard to “How the whole body of the Society is to be preserved and increased in its well-being,” Part 10: “This [promotion of unity] is especially the case with the bond of wills, which is the mutual charity and love they have for one another.” (821) This bond of unity within the Society and the Church is strengthened by following the same doctrine; however, two paragraphs later, the *Constitutions* urge that for the same purpose of well-being “it is helpful in general to strive to retain the goodwill and charity of all, even of those outside the Society, and especially of those whose favorable or unfavorable attitude toward it is of great importance for opening or closing the gate leading to the service of God and the good of souls.” (823) [*The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.]

9. In service to the mission of the church, Jesuits naturally oriented themselves toward *unity and communion*. First, they saw their mission as a part of something greater—the church’s mission. Then, at General Congregation 31 (1965-1966), they incorporated the ecumenical commitments of the Vatican II *Decree on Ecumenism* and *Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches*. At GC 34 (1995), they noted that ecumenism is not the work of an elite class of scholars and church leaders but is “a new way of being a Christian.” They also embraced interreligious dialogue as essential to their mission in service to the church: “To be religious today is to be interreligious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism.” [Decree 5]

10. Jesuits were aware that from their origins in the 16th century, the century of the Reformation, that their “presupposition,” which they learned in formation through the *Exercises*,prepared them for encounters with Protestants. They reiterated this at GC 34, on ecumenism: “… to put the best interpretation on what the other says and does . . . Ecumenism seeks what unites rather than what divides; seeks understanding rather than confrontation; seeks to know, understand and love others as they wish to be known and understood, with full respect for their distinctiveness, through the dialogue of truth, justice and love.” [Decree 12]

11. In communicating the Ignatian charism for dialogue, we keep five components in mind:

1) a pastoral orientation to the “care of souls”;

2) willingness to accompany others spiritually, following Pope Francis on interreligious friendship, listening to others and excluding no one;

3) spiritual formation as a preparation for dialogue: tending the inner dialogue in examination and prayer and extending dialogue to decision-making and a way of proceeding;

4) a search for new ways in communicating the message of the gospel;

5) an ongoing commitment to education.

12. This developed sense of freedom and way of proceeding fostered a *predisposition toward education* among the first Jesuits so that their students would be trained to

a) expand their minds beyond their experience,

b) understand that the past is relevant and gives perspective,

c) realize that they are not born for themselves alone,

d) develop effective communication,

e) engage creatively with the mystery of being human.

They believed reason to be universal. They recognized how people can improve through education, how they can reason and have a high standard of moral continuity. Education opens minds to a broader world of experience. See John O’Malley, “Jesuit Schools and the Humanities: Yesterday and Today, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 47/1 (Spring 2015), <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/jesuit/article/view/5924/5238>

13. Jesuit higher education provides a sanctuary from the inhumanity casting a shadow over contemporary culture: the sanctuary of education, of dialogue, and of vocation—three Ignatian motifs of sound learning, effective communication, and good example. Dialogue, mutuality that puts winning on hold and confronts manipulation, is *a sacred space in the spirituality of Ignatius*, a place where God can be heard and adapts to the blessed idiosyncrasies of the individual. (Howard Gray, “Sanctuary of the Heart,” *Conversations*, Fall 2017.

14. In their missions in distant lands, Jesuits applied the composition of place technique and paid attention to the *socio-religious economic and political context* and learned important lessons:

--foreign cultures and traditions were never entirely alien or unintelligible for they share a common origin in God’s creative plan and continue to be touched by Divine Providence and share a common destiny; thus, they learned the language and culture of place;

--most of what they encountered was good; the Trinitarian God was apparent in what they found to be true and good and could be recognized by grace;

--there were deficiencies, not due to sin, demonic influence or false religion but due to ignorance; native morals had both commendable features and deficiencies;

--the world seemed a reasonable place; they could educate for truth; they found a purpose for argument but only after trust existed.

Ignatius admonished missionaries to learn local languages for insider knowledge and productive dialogue. Today, we pay attention to the composition of place for understanding the context in which religious diversity is experienced. There may be misunderstandings and disputes. Out of a love for what is greater, to experience God unexpectedly and to present the truth of the Gospel, we seek ways out of impasses without compromising what is essential, stand firm in the faith, grow with others, and clear away misunderstandings in the hope of greater understanding. [*Lessons from the first missionaries* (Francis X. Clooney, S.J. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 34/2 March 2002): <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/jesuit/article/view/3989>]

15. The application of these good practices encourages: ongoing creativity, discernment as a habit of reflection, contemplation in action, availability, attentiveness to the quest for deeper needs, openness of the call of grace from deep down, deploring past divisions caused by conflict and polemics, avoiding simplistic solutions, and taking delight in the gospel message. Here the *magis*, the willingness to make the greater effort and go the extra step, but with the humility of Christ before the ever-surpassing greatness and glory of God, is especially applicable.

16. *Identifying Ignatian sources* for dialogue draws us more deeply into preserving the Ignatian tradition in contemporary life. We can become ever more expert on the thinking behind practices five centuries ago at the time of Ignatius and his companions and the changes that they instituted then, the changes two centuries ago in 1814 with the restoration, and fifty years ago in the wake of Vatican II, and today.

17. *Dialogue has multiple meanings in the contemporary world*: it encompasses all those forms of dialogue to which Jesuits have committed themselves and their institutions and the dialogue that all Christians are called to practice—interior dialogue in prayer, and common deliberation within our communities, ecumenical dialogue with other Christians, interreligious dialogue with the adherents of other religions, and cultural engagement with all peoples, believers and those not making reference to religious faith in their lives.

18. A *fifth foundation* *for co-responsible leadership* may come from widespread reflection together on the Ignatian charism—taking John O’Malley’s suggestion of the four previous foundations (1540, 1550, 1814, and 1965-66, *The Jesuits*, 2014). Are we nearing a fifth foundation, one that incorporates a principle of co-responsibility for lay and ordained associates with formation in Ignatian practice and in response to an absolute need for an integrated collaboration between Jesuits with their associates? Such an idea is implicit in the Adolfo Nicolás’ hopeful words in Mexico City in 2010: “If we Jesuits were alone, we might look to the future with a heavy heart. But with the professionalism, commitment and depth that we have in our lay collaborators, we can continue dreaming, beginning new enterprises and moving forward together.” And, to the Georgetown University Board of Trustees and their guests on June 8, 2016, he reminded them that generosity, the first point of strategy for cooperation, is a two-way street. To the early benefactors of the Society, Ignatius said: “This minimal society is as much ours as yours.”

19. *Ignatian practice is adaptable* for all Christians, and can be adapted in part for Jews, for Muslims, and even others, particularly for those followers of other religions who are comfortably associated with Jesuit institutions and express a desire to explore the spiritual roots of the Ignatian tradition.

20. *Ignatian practice is accompaniment*. Pope Francis in his address to General Congregation 36 (24 October 2016) point this out: “Drawing profit in the final analysis is “that which they sought the most.” This is the *magis*, this more, which moves Ignatius to start accompanying people and helping them reflect on the various experiences of their lives with regard to faith, justice, mercy and charity. The *magis* is the fire, the fervour in action, awakening those who have become dormant. Our saints have always incarnated this fervour.” He concluded his reflections with a prayer beseeching Mary to accompany Jesuits and their associates: “We entrust to Her “our way of proceeding” that it should be ecclesial, inculturated, poor, attentive, free from all worldly ambition. We beg Our Mother to direct and accompany every Jesuit along with that part of the people faithful to God whom he has been sent, along these paths of consolation, of compassion and discernment.

John Borelli, Ph.D.

Special Assistant to the President

Georgetown University

borellij@georgetown.edu

Coordinator for Dialogue

Jesuit Conference of the United States and Canada