

NO FUTURE WITHOUT COLLABORATION

Anthony da Silva SJ - Collaboration Secretariat – Rome.

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by saying how happy and grateful I am to be with all of you, at this 16th World Assembly of CLC. I am aware that this is a historic event, as you celebrate your 450th anniversary as a Catholic Lay organization inspired by the teachings and spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits.

This event is also historic because the venue is historic: Lebanon, the land made sacred by God's presence, mentioned at least 71 times in the Old Testament. The cedars of Lebanon were used to build the house of God by the Israelites. The cities of Tyre and Sidon, now in Lebanon, were referred to by Jesus; The Syrophenician woman, whose daughter Jesus cured lived in these parts.

It is truly marvelous to be submerged in so much history and divinity!

I A Jesuit Narrative of Collaboration

I have been invited this afternoon to speak to this Assembly on a topic that is of great importance to all of us namely, ***Collaboration between the CLC and the Society of Jesus***. I believe that it is so important that I dared to title my talk "**There is No Future Without Collaboration**".

I would like to place this topic of Collaboration within the broader theme of this Assembly, namely, ***From our Roots to the Frontiers***.

For us Jesuits, the roots of collaboration go back to the Ignatian contemplation on the Incarnation, in the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius invites the retreatant to contemplate "how the Three Divine Persons gazed on the whole surface of the world, full of people, so diverse in dress and behavior: some white and others black, some in peace and others at war, some weeping and others laughing, some healthy and others sick, some being born and others dying, and so forth... the Three Divine Persons see the peoples in such great blindness, and how they are going down to hell".

Ignatius then imagines the Three Divine persons saying to one another, "let us work the redemption of the human race...they decided in their eternity that the Second Person would become a human being, in order to save the human race. ...And thus when the fullness of time had come, they sent the angel Gabriel to Our Lady, in the city of Nazareth". (Sp. Exercises: # 101-109)

For us Jesuits, the frontiers for collaboration, are the entire world wherein humans of varied cultures, languages and religions yearn to see the face of the Creator and experience the love of God and fellow humans.

We see immediately in this Ignatian contemplation a model for collaboration; here not only the three Divine Persons collaborate with one another, but God also partners with humans to work out human redemption.

And this narrative of collaboration is carried forward in the story of Jesus of Nazareth, who invited apostles and disciples as collaborators in his mission. These in turn passed on this shared mission to countless other collaborators, in the course of human history.

In the 16th century there came a man from Loyola, named Ignatius. He was on fire to give of his best for the greater glory of God. From the caves of Manresa to the great halls of the Sorbonne University in Paris, he realized soon that the mission of God was far larger than his individual strengths and talents. He needed the help of others, of collaborators, of *compañeros*, as he called them in his native Spanish. And so was sown the seed for the birth of the Society of Jesus, a society of companions and collaborators in mission.

The most recent General Congregations 34 (1995) and 35 (2008) have harkened the Jesuits back to this foundational Ignatian inspiration of collaboration with others, in mission. As Father Kolvenbach has succinctly stated, “the Jesuit of today is not only a man *for* others but a man *with* others”.

It is in this same spirit of sharing in God’s mission, that I present to you this afternoon a few reflections on how the CLC and the Society of Jesus may want to promote further the collaboration vision of St. Ignatius.

II CLC-Jesuit Collaboration

The Nairobi World Assembly – 2003, paid special attention to this issue of CLC-Jesuit collaboration. Obviously there has been and there presently is quite a lot of collaboration going on, considering there are about 700 Jesuits working with the CLC in various capacities (*Progressio* # 65, p. 32). But it seems to be felt that may be the quality and mode of collaboration could be reviewed and fresh proposals made in this regard.

Ibañez’s paper, which you have discussed this morning, and several of the recent issues of *Progressio* magazine raise some insightful questions about the CLC-Jesuit collaboration. While there is a strong desire on the part of the CLC as well as the Jesuits to expand areas of collaboration, there seem also to be some ambiguities as to how to proceed. While the clear and strong affirmation that the CLC vocation is a lay vocation, is to be deeply appreciated, perhaps the implications of such a lay vocation for collaboration in the modern world need to be more fully spelt out. Hence the following question for our reflection:

In what way can the unique Lay vocation of the CLC members, inspired by Ignatian spirituality, act as a force for collaboration with Jesuits and others?

I suggest reflections in two areas which may clarify the lay vocation and distinct spirituality of the CLC:

- a) a reflection on the key differences between a ***CLC- lay vocation*** and a ***Christian-lay vocation***;
- b) a reflection on the key differences between a ***CLC-Ignatian spirituality*** and a ***Jesuit-Ignatian spirituality***.

a) CLC–lay vocation versus a Christian-lay vocation

May be a helpful starting point would be to articulate more clearly the differences and the similarities between a Christian lay vocation and a CLC lay vocation. Obviously, the CLC lay vocation subsists in the broader Christian lay vocation; therefore, there would be many common characteristics between the two emanating from our baptismal and other sacramental commitments. But there would also be some striking differences and demands that the CLC vocation makes of its members which are not expected of a non-CLC baptized person, albeit both are lay persons. Such a reflection and analysis may lead to greater clarity and appreciation in the self-understanding of a CLC lay vocation.

The paper of Ibañez seems to point out that at times some CLC members struggle to recognize as a “valid mission” the challenges of living radically the “ordinary life” i.e. family, work, relationships... (See discussion pp. 12/13 of paper). May be a greater clarity in this regard would not only expand the concept of “mission” in a lay vocation but also contribute to a more fruitful collaboration between CLC members and others.

b) CLC-Ignatian spirituality versus a Jesuit-Ignatian spirituality

In a related issue, since the CLC spirituality is strongly embedded in the Ignatian charism, the CLC has used concepts and insights from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises in order to shape and develop its vision and mission. Naturally, the Jesuits have played a significant role over the past four and half centuries in conveying to the CLC the spirit and essence of the Spiritual Exercises. It would not be too far-fetched to surmise that in the process of this transmission of Ignatian spirituality, there may have also been a handing down of a strongly flavored Jesuit- Ignatian spirituality rather than a Lay-Ignatian spirituality.

At this juncture in the history and growth of the CLC as a lay association would it be helpful for the CLC to clarify to itself how *it* sees Lay-Ignatian spirituality through the lenses of a lay vocation? One cannot forget that Ignatius wrote the Spiritual Exercises as a lay man, without much knowledge of theology. Later, after the Jesuit Order was founded in 1540, these Spiritual Exercises became the bedrock of Jesuit spirituality. Effectively, from then on the interpretation and the communication of the Spiritual Exercises have been influenced by the Jesuit perspective. This perspective has to take into account, naturally, that Jesuits see themselves primarily as members of an apostolic Religious Order, with accompanying canonical structures, governing structures, obligations to the Vows, community life, mission, etc. Therefore, many interpretations of Jesuit-Ignatian spirituality may need to be challenged by a lay-Ignatian spirituality in order to make it applicable to the CLC.

In my opinion, it would be a meaningful challenge for a modern day lay association like the CLC to explore how much its spirituality has been influenced by a Jesuit-Ignatian perspective rather than a lay-Ignatian perspective. Furthermore, the CLC could also find immense benefit in clarifying to itself how key Ignatian concepts like, discernment, magis, mission, finding God in all things, indifference, the call of the eternal king etc. could be interpreted and adapted creatively by its members, who are rooted in a lay vocation as distinct from a religious vocation.

It is hoped that that Ibañez’s concern, expressed in his paper, about “understanding what is the mission of the laity in collaboration” (p.12) can start to be addressed by the CLC, by continuing to seek a better self-understanding of its lay vocation and spirituality. This would also facilitate a meaningful response to the call for collaboration in mission with the Jesuits and other lay partners.

III CLC as an Apostolic Body

Another important aspect of collaboration in mission that has been the concern of the CLC is its strong determination to see itself as an apostolic community, with a prophetic character in its service to God's people. Since the Nairobi (2003) and Fatima (2008) World Assemblies, the CLC has been particularly focused on the need to develop the apostolic dimension of the community. Such a focus is best expressed by the CLC, when it says "we wish to go from being a community of apostles to being an apostolic community" (*Progressio #65, p. 41*).

In this context it further elaborates that "CLC does not wish to be the total sum of groups of persons who come together to pray, in some cases for years, without changing their individual lives, without generating significant actions and without developing a prophetic dimension on their individual and communitarian lifestyles" (*ibidem p. 41*). Now, in these dreams and endeavours, the CLC looks to the Society of Jesus for cooperation and guidance, given the Ignatian heritage shared mutually by both apostolic bodies and its centuries-old relationship with the Society. As the document goes on to say, "In this way a really important possibility for cooperating with the Society of Jesus opens up, including the possibility of joint discernment, shared tasks, apostolic agreements, the presence of CLC members in the apostolic works of the Society and vice-versa, etc." (*ibidem p. 42*).

These earnest desires and wishes on the part of the CLC invite us to ask the following question:

What avenues for greater collaboration with the Society of Jesus and vice-versa could we explore?

Here is an enumeration of possible ventures for collaboration:

- a) Collaboration in Lay-Ignatian Spirituality:** It may be well worthwhile for the CLC and the Jesuits to create a team of persons, who would collaborate on working out more clearly what a Lay-Ignatian spirituality should look like. How does the CLC gain inspiration and sustenance for its lay vocation from Ignatian spirituality? The CLC could also explore ways of collaborating with the work of the Secretariat for Faith in the Jesuit Curia.
- b) Collaboration in Formation of CLC:** Jesuits have always been involved in CLC formation work. May be now more joint teams of formators, that is, CLC and Jesuits together, could take up formation activities of the CLC, including directing the Spiritual Exercises of CLC
- c) Collaboration in Formation of Jesuits:** CLC could contribute to the formation of young Jesuits by sharing with them the Lay-Ignatian spirituality in theory as well as a lived experience. In such experiences, the apostolic dimension of our respective vocations can be explored, clarified and strengthened. This learning would form an important basis for future collaboration in mission.
- d) Collaboration in Jesuit Works at non-Institutional levels:** Such collaboration would seem more viable, as it would be easier for Jesuit Works to adapt to the living circumstances of CLC members, such as time limitations, family/work commitments etc. Hence the Jesuits and the CLC will have to mutually form each other, such that, they understand and accept joyfully each other's different vocations and their respective limitations.

e) Collaboration in Jesuit Works at Institutional levels: From the report of Ibañez, it seems this level of collaboration seems to be minimal presently, possibly only 10% of CLC members. Now this is an area where the local/National CLC bodies with the help of the Provincials and Directors of Jesuit Works, could explore pathways for long term collaboration. Since institutional work would most likely involve civil legislation with regard to employment, qualifications etc. collaboration may at times become difficult. Also, quite frequently conditions of employment, like salaries, work hours etc may not serve as incentives for institutional collaboration. But in spite of such constraints, the long term presence of CLC members in Jesuit Institutions could definitely add witness value and apostolic efficacy to the Works.

f) Collaboration in Creating new CLC Apostolic Works: The paper of Ibañez, as well as, the CLC Video on its apostolic Works, testifies to the positive outcome of making the CLC see itself as an apostolic body. It would seem that the identity of the CLC as an apostolic body would be strengthened even more, if some more local/National communities create and sustain small new apostolic Works in their areas. Services such as these, to the poor, the needy, the marginalized etc. would necessarily create a strong apostolic bond among the CLC members of the area. Also, such Works become an occasion for the CLC to invite new collaborators to get involved and even become eventual members of the community. Furthermore, Jesuits could be invited to become involved in such Works of the CLC. The Society is committed to such collaboration with others, as has been expressed quite clearly by Fathers General Kolvenbach and Nicolás.

g) Collaboration with the three new Secretariats created by Fr. General Nicolás: The three Secretariats are: i) for the promotion of Faith; ii) for Social Justice and Ecology; iii) For collaboration with Others. These Secretariats are located in the Jesuit Curia in Rome and would be extremely useful channels for collaboration with the Society of Jesus and vice-versa. Given that each Secretariat has extensive contacts with the Works of the Jesuits world-wide, they may serve as a useful entry point for CLC's apostolic planning and growth. Possibly, the Ecclesiastical Vice-Assistant to the CLC (Luke Rodrigues SJ) could play an important role in initiating and facilitating a constructive dialogue between the CLC and the Secretariats.

Conclusion

The Lebanon World Assembly theme "From our Roots to the Frontiers" opens wide the CLC doors for Collaboration with Others. The CLC's strong urge to grow more as an apostolic body seems indicative of a deep desire for greater immersion and involvement in the lives of others, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. At the same time, the enormity of God's mission becomes self-evident and our limitedness in mission confronts us. This could well be the sign of the Spirit beckoning us to look to others to collaborate with us and we with them, in serving the people of God. In a way, this reality brings us face to face with the truth that: ***there is no future without collaboration.***

Thank You