

General Congregation 34, Decree 26

Conclusion: Characteristics of Our Way of Proceeding

1. Certain attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior join together to become what has been called the Jesuit way of proceeding. The characteristics of our way of proceeding were born in the life of St. Ignatius and shared by his first companions. Jerome Nadal writes that “The form of the Society is in the life of Ignatius.”¹ “God set him up as a living example of our way of proceeding.”²

2. General Congregation 34 considered which of these characteristics we need especially to draw upon today and the form they must take in the new situations and changing ministries in which we labor. We suggest that the following be included among them.

I. Deep Personal Love for Jesus Christ

3. *Here it will be to ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become human for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely.*³

4. In remorse, gratitude, and astonishment – but above all with passionate love – first Ignatius, and then every Jesuit after him, has turned prayerfully to “Christ our Lord hanging on the Cross before me” and has asked of himself, “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What must I do for Christ?”⁴ The questions well up from a heart moved with profound gratitude and love. This is the foundational grace that binds Jesuits to Jesus and to one another. “What is it to be a Jesuit today? It is to know that one is a sinner yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was.”⁵ The mission of the reconciled sinner is the mission of reconciliation: the work of faith doing justice. A Jesuit feely gives what he has feely received: the gift of Christ’s redeeming love.

5. Today we bring this countercultural gift of Christ to a world beguiled by self-centered human fulfillment, extravagance, and soft living, a world that prizes prestige, power, and self-sufficiency. In such a world, to preach Christ poor and humble with fidelity and courage is to expect humiliation, persecution, and even death. We have seen this happen to our brothers in recent years. Yet we move forward resolutely out of our “desire to resemble and imitate in some manner our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ...since he is the way which leads men to life.”⁶ Today, as always, it is deep, personal devotion to Jesus, himself the Way, that principally characterizes the Jesuit way or proceeding.

2. Contemplative in Action

¹ Nadal, MHSI, vol. 90, *Commentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu*, bk. 5. [§II] (p. 268) and [52*a] (p. 287).

² Nadal, MHSI, *ibid.*, [33] (p. 262).

³ *SpEx* [104].

⁴ *SpEx* [53].

⁵ GC 32, D 2, n. 1.

⁶ *Examen* [101].

6. *I shall not fail to recall that grace which he had in all circumstances, while at work or in conversation, of feeling the presence of God and of tasting spiritual things, of being contemplative even in the midst of action; he used to interpret this as seeking God in all things.*⁷

7. The God of Ignatius is the God who is at work in all things: laboring for the salvation of all as in the Contemplation to Attain Love; working immediately and directly with the exercitant as in Annotations 15 and 16; laboring as Christ the King for the liberation of the world; beginning, preserving, directing, and advancing the Society of Jesus as at the beginning and end of Constitutions.

8. For a Jesuit, therefore, not just any response to the needs of the men and women of today will do. The initiative must come from the Lord laboring in events and people here and now. God invites us to join with him in his labors, on his terms, and in his way. To discover and join the Lord, laboring to bring everything to its fullness, is central to the Jesuit way of proceeding. It is the Ignatian method of prayerful discernment, which can be described as “a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision, and action, in line with the Jesuit ideal of being ‘contemplative in action.’”⁸ Through individual and communal apostolic discernment, lived in obedience, Jesuits take responsibility for their apostolic choices in today’s world. Such discernment reaches out, at the same time, to embrace the larger community of all those with whom we labor in mission.

3. An Apostolic Body in the Church

9. *Finally we decided in the affirmative; namely, that...we should not break this divinely constituted oneness and fellowship, but rather strengthen and consolidate it ever more, forming ourselves into one body.*⁹

10. Following the example of Jesus, the first Jesuits would be sent, as far as possible, in groups of at least two.¹⁰ Even when dispersed, a bond of unity – with superiors and among themselves – remained strong through the constant communication and writing of letters that Ignatius insisted on, and especially through the account of conscience. Xavier, laboring far from Rome in the Indies, put it simply: “[T]he Society is love.”¹¹

11. Jesuits today join together because each of us has heard the call the Christ the King. From this union with Christ flows, of necessity, a love for one another. We are not merely fellow workers; we are friends in the Lord. The community to which we belong is the entire body of the Society itself, however dispersed over the face of the earth. Though we come from many nations and cultures and speak many languages, our union is enriched, not threatened, by diversity. In shared prayer, in conversation, and in the celebration of the Eucharist, each of us finds the spiritual resources needed for an apostolic community. And in our service of the Lord and his spouse, the Church, the People of God, we are especially united to the Roman Pontiff in order to be sent on the missions he may entrust to us.¹² As

⁷ Nadal, MHSI, vol. 47, *Epistolae P. Hieronimi Nadal, 1546-1577*, bk. 4, p. 651.

⁸ GC 32, D 4, n. 73.

⁹ First conclusion of the Deliberations of the First Fathers in 1539, MHSI, Vol. 63, p. 3.

¹⁰ Cf. *Const.* [624].

¹¹ To Father Ignatius of Loyola, Cochin, 1 December 1549, p. 5.

¹² Cf. *Formula* [1].

men of the Church, we cannot but think with the Church, guided by the Spirit of the Risen Lord.¹³

4. In Solidarity with Those Most in Need

12. *And what they should especially seek to accomplish for God's greater glory is to preach, hear confessions, lecture, instruct children, give good example, visit the poor in the hospitals, exhort the neighbor according to the amount of talent which each is conscious of possessing, so as to move as many as possible to prayer and devotion.*¹⁴

13. Ignatius and his followers began their preaching in poverty. They worked with the powerful and the powerless, with princes, kings, and bishops, but also with the women of the street and with the victims of the plague. They linked their ministry to the powerful with the needs of the powerless.

14. Today, whatever our ministry, we Jesuits enter into solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the voiceless, in order to enable their participation in the processes that shape the society in which we all live and work. They, in their turn, teach us about our own poverty as no document can. They help us to understand the meaning of the gratuity of our ministries, giving feely what we have freely received, giving our very lives. They show us the way to inculcate gospel values in situations where God is forgotten. Through such solidarity we become "agents of inculturation."¹⁵

5. Partnership with Others

15. *For that same reason too, preference ought to be shown to the aid which is given to the great nations, such as the Indies, or to important cities, or to universities, which are generally attended by numerous persons who by being aided themselves can become laborers for the help of others.*¹⁶

16. Partnership and cooperation with others in ministry is not a pragmatic strategy resulting from diminished manpower; it is an essential dimension of the contemporary Jesuit way of proceeding, rooted in the realization that to prepare our complex and divided world for the coming of the Kingdom requires the plurality of gifts, perspectives, and experiences, both international and multicultural.

17. Jesuits, therefore, cooperate with lay women and men in the Church, with religious, priests, and bishops of the local church in which they serve, with members of other religions, and with all men and women of goodwill. To the extent that we develop a wide-ranging web of respectful and productive relationships, we fulfill Christ's priestly prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21).

6. Called to Learned Ministry

¹³ *SpEx* [365].

¹⁴ Instruction of Ignatius to the Fathers at the Council of Trent, 1546.

¹⁵ Pedro Arrupe, Letter and Document on Inculturation, *AR* 17 (1978): p. 236.

¹⁶ *Const.* [622].

18. *After the pilgrim realized that it was not God's will that he remain in Jerusalem, he continually pondered within himself what he ought to do. At last he inclined more to study for some time so he would be able to help souls, and he decided to go to Barcelona.*¹⁷

19. Ignatius very quickly saw the need for learning in the service of the faith and the ministry of the Word. In the Formula of the Institute we read, "[T]his Institute requires men who are thoroughly humble and prudent in Christ as well as conspicuous in the integrity of Christian life and learning."¹⁸ Therefore it is characteristic of a Jesuit that he embodies in creative tension this Ignatian requirement to use all human means, science, art, learning, natural virtue, with a total reliance on divine grace.

20. In our ministry today we respect and appreciate the good in contemporary culture and critically propose alternatives to the negative aspects of that same culture. In the context of the complex challenges and opportunities of our contemporary world, this ministry requires all the learning and intelligence, imagination and ingenuity, solid studies and rigorous analysis that we can muster. To overcome ignorance and prejudice through learning and teaching, to make the Gospel truly "Good News" in a confused and troubled world through theological reflection, is a characteristic of our Jesuit way of proceeding.

7. Man Sent, Always Available for New Missions

21. *If they were not given permission to remain in Jerusalem, they would return to Rome and present themselves to the Vicar of Christ, so that he could make use of them wherever he thought it would be to the greater glory of God and the service of souls.*¹⁹

22. Nadal, in promulgating the *Constitutions*, asked: Why are there Jesuits? There are diocesan priests and bishops. He answers simply that our charism, indeed our reason for existence, is that we might go where needs are not being met. Our way of proceeding encourages this mobility.²⁰

23. A Jesuit is essentially a man on a mission, a mission he receives from the Holy Father and from his own religious superior, but ultimately from Jesus Christ himself, the one sent by the Father. Jesuits remain "ready at any hour to go to some or other parts of the world where they may be sent by the Sovereign Pontiff or their own superiors."²¹

24. Therefore, it is characteristic of our way of proceeding that we live with an operative freedom: open, adaptable, even eager for any mission that may be given us. Indeed, the ideal is an unconditional consecration to mission, free of any worldly interest, and free to serve all men and women. Our mission extends to the creation of this same spirit of mission in others.

8. Ever Searching for the *Magis*

25. *Those who wish to give greater proof of their love, and to distinguish themselves in whatever concerns the service of the Eternal King and the Lord of all, will not only offer*

¹⁷ *Autobiography* [50].

¹⁸ *Formula* [5].

¹⁹ *Autobiography* [85].

²⁰ Nadal, MHSI, Vol. 90a, *Orationes Observationes*, [281] (p. 113).

²¹ *Const.* [588].

*themselves entirely for the work...but make offerings of greater value and of more importance.*²²

26. The *magis* is not simply one among others in a list of Jesuit characteristics, it permeates them all. The entire life of Ignatius was a pilgrim search for the *magis*, the ever greater glory of God. The ever fuller service of our neighbor, the more universal good, the more effective apostolic means. “[M]ediocrity has no place in Ignatius’s worldview.”²³

27. Jesuits are never content with the status quo, the known, the tried, the already existing. We are constantly driven to discover, redefine, and reach out for the *magis*. For us, frontiers and boundaries are not obstacles or ends, but new challenges to be faced, new opportunities to be welcomed. Indeed, ours is a holy boldness, “a certain apostolic aggressivity,” typical of our way of proceeding.²⁴

Conclusion

28. Our way of proceeding is a way of challenge. But “this way of proceeding is the reason why every son of the Society will always act and react in a consistently Jesuit and Ignatian way, even in the most unforeseen circumstances.”²⁵

29. May we ever live more faithfully this way of Christ modeled for us by St. Ignatius. For this we pray in prayer of Father Pedro Arrupe:

Lord, meditating on “our way of proceeding,” I have discovered that the ideal of *our* way of acting is *your* way of acting.

Give me that *sensus Christi* that I may feel with your feelings, with the sentiments of your heart, which basically are love for your Father and love for all men and women.

Teach me how to be compassionate to the suffering, to the poor, the blind, the lame, and the lepers.

Teach us your way so that it becomes our way today, so that we may come closer to the great ideal of St. Ignatius: to be companions of Jesus, collaborators in the work of redemption.²⁶

²² *SpEx* [97].

²³ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, To the Friends and Colleagues of the Society of Jesus, *AR 20* (1991): p. 606.

²⁴ Pedro Arrupe, *Our Way of Proceeding*, n. 12, *AR 17* (1979): p. 697.

²⁵ Arrupe, *Our Way of Proceeding* n. 55, *AR 17* (1979): p. 719.

²⁶ Arrupe, *Our Way of Proceeding* n. 56, *AR 17* (1979): p. 719-22.