



PROGRESSIO

DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES

By an International Reflection Group

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FOREWORD

This *Progressio* supplement is the fruit of many years of experience and reflection. One could almost say that the author is the "Christian Life Community", present in the five continents, with a history going back four centuries, made up of adults and young people, men and women, of different social backgrounds.

Two years ago, the CLC General Assembly approved important modifications to the General Principles, and adopted by a large consensus a new basic text. This was followed by ratification by Church authority. In a certain way this was the reaching of a goal, the end of the road. We also, however, like to think of it as a midway point, in many senses a departure given that the text of the General Principles of 1990 is a text born of experience, which has as its aim to return to that experience in a permanent process of growth and reflection. It is with this in mind that the pages that follow have been written, by a small group of people, and brought together by an editor into a supplement. The source, though, is still the Community, spread throughout the world, and the content is still the life of an Ignatian (that is apostolic) community of faithful in the Church.

CLC is a community gifted with a spirit of discernment. There will be another General Assembly, a time for deliberation and decisions, and a landmark in our history. These pages sit between two landmarks, and invite us to digest all this, to pray and to seek the will of God.

This supplement could be read individually or in groups, but always with the text of the General Principles to hand. The commentary refers to the first nine articles of the GPs, which define "our charism", and on which the other GPs and the General Norms are based."

May God continue to accompany us on our way !

GOD'S GIFT AND THE GIFT OF SELF

The love and well-being with which God endows us is the starting point of the General Principles. GP 1 reminds us that CLC came to birth around the mystery of the Annunciation and Incarnation, the loving initiative of the Trinity which finds a welcome in Mary. From the Incarnation unfold the dynamics of walking in the path of Jesus and identifying with his options, which are at the root of the CLC vocation.

A contemplative and compassionate God

The solemn and three-dimensional framework of the Contemplation of the Incarnation, in St Ignatius's little book of the *Spiritual Exercises* (101, 110), is the opening of what is going to constitute the heart of the retreatant's experience at the central stage in the process of these Exercises. It is also what introduces the text of the General Principles of the Christian Life Community, who consider the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius to be the "specific source and characteristic instrument" of their spirituality (GP 5).

At the heart of both, there is the mystery of the gift of God, of the Three Divine Persons who contemplate "the whole of humanity in so many sinful divisions" (GP 1). The God presented by Ignatius in this contemplation is, therefore, a **contemplative** and **compassionate** God, a Trinity who, on the basis of what they *want*, contemplating humanity lost and sinful, choose and, anew, make up their mind to give themselves totally, in a saving and liberating praxis, to this lost and divided humanity.

The love of God is unconditional and eternal. This compassionate concern and the decision that follows from it are the expression of this love which is "faithful forever"... and has been since the beginning of time.

Humanity divided

What God contemplates is humanity "divided by sin". Today we can express this "division" of humanity in terms of the breaking up of the three basic relationships: Our **parent and child** relationship with God, since we have made ourselves the children of other Gods (children of power, of money, of pleasure); the **sister/brotherhood** relationship amongst ourselves, since we preferred being self-sufficient, and exploiting each other; and our relationship of **stewardship** with nature, since we preferred to take its gifts for ourselves (finding ourselves ensnared by them) instead of being its guardians.

God's healing and reconciling gaze lets us rebuild these three broken relationships. This **decision**, this **choice** by God, means identifying with humanity in every way, even in the most painful and negative situations, in order to assume and redeem the human condition from inside.

Humanity is given the real possibility of beholding God through this gift of Jesus Christ, and so of "taking part through Him, with Him and in Him in this loving initiative which expresses God's promise of faithfulness for ever."

God takes on poverty

Assuming the narrow limits of the human condition, the infinite God is incarnated and placed at the centre of history. Abandoning all the riches of divinity to be placed "among the poor", God takes flesh and is born of Mary, "the poor Virgin of Nazareth." God accepts and takes on the limits of what is human, the basic principle of the dynamics of the Incarnation: in Jesus, nothing that is human is unfamiliar to God.

We can confirm that in the Incarnation, God "takes seriously" the concrete, daily reality of that which is human, with its dramas and its difficulties. In the "God who contemplates" we see a God who yields to being touched by the history of humankind. The universal God, at this

instant in human history, puts divine love into action and surrenders everything – the Almighty humbled at one particular moment lost in history, where the Incarnation of the Word took place in Jesus of Nazareth. “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself... and being human, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death” (cf Phil 2:5-11).

In the infinite expanse of the universe and of all humanity, in the divine infinity of the glorious throne of the Eternal Trinity which St Ignatius puts before the dazzled eyes of the retreatant (*SpEx* 101-104) there follows the house, the dwelling and the body of Mary in the scorned little town of Nazareth in Galilee, as the history of the theme to be contemplated and a Composition of Place. These particular circumstances, humble and so human, are to be the circumstances of the Incarnation, the focal point of the indivisible whole of Christian experience.

Amongst the men and women whom the Incarnate Word calls us to meet, the poor have a privileged position. It is amongst them that the Word is placed in its Incarnation, “sharing with them their condition” (GP 1). Because of this, it is beginning with them – in whom the gift of God is most brightly and strongly manifest – that “Jesus invites all of us to give ourselves continuously to God and to bring about unity within our human family.”

It is out of the weakness and oppression suffered by the poor, out from where life is most threatened, oppressed or crushed, that the power and glory of God, the Lord of Life, can shine and sparkle most brightly. It is in the short and hard lives of the poor of the Earth that the full dimensions of what God is are shown: Creator and source of life, who can make the desert flower, raise dry bones to make a fighting army and make the virgin and the barren woman give birth (cf Is 65:1, Ez 37, Lk 1:36-48).

God does this, not by imposing from above, passing over time and the human condition, but by taking all this on from the inside, becoming a complete gift of love, stripped of glory and majesty, in all poverty, obedience and humility, in the form of Jesus Christ, Yahweh's servant,

"Obedient unto death on the cross" (cf Phil 2:5-11), in whom the primitive community and the first witnesses recognised the Lord, the Anointed One of God (cf Acts 2:22-36).

Our surrender to God

The dialectic between the **universal** of God and the **particular** of the human condition marks not only the moment of the Incarnation of the Word in Mary, but also the process of the Incarnation lived by Jesus. The Incarnation, though it was a mystery of universal dimensions, can only be seen, contemplated and lived in the particular, that is to the extent that it is made concrete in history.

Thus we, "members of the Christian Life Community", who have "composed these General Principles", are called to open ourselves to this gift of God which is brought to us in Jesus Christ and makes us capable of the gift of ourselves. We will live these dynamics in the particularity and the poverty of our lives, "in each situation of our daily life", open to "the needs of our times" (GP 2), in a "freely chosen local community" (GP 7).

The **gift of self** is the vocation of the CLC member. CLC is a path which enables us to respond to God's gift to us with a gift just as total, fervent and radical, though limited. This fervour and this radicality are expressed when we make our own "the options of Jesus Christ" (GP 1), when we take on poverty and humility in our lives (GP 8d), when our lives are centred on his paschal mystery (GP 5), when we participate frequently in the Eucharist and are nourished by his Body and Blood (GP 12a).

All of this will mean that each of us lives our vocation intensely in a world marked by injustice and poverty. It means living in such a way that the contemplation of the "mysteries of the life of Christ" – as offered to us by Ignatius in his Exercises – will lead us to share and feel for the situation of the poor, where Jesus continues today to be incarnated, to live his passion, and be resurrected in an Easter still

possible thanks to the love of God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Under the movement of the Holy Spirit

It is this same Spirit which continues today to bring about God's gift to us and to make it possible for us to give in return, "in all our particular circumstances" (GP 1).

This same Spirit, who touched Mary in all fullness at the Annunciation, and who made Jesus proclaim his mission in the synagogue in Nazareth, is the one who will make us into "witnesses before all people by our attitudes, words and actions", making ours Jesus's mission "of bringing the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, setting the downtrodden free and proclaiming the Lord's year of favour" (GP 8).

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, is the real possibility, given to humankind for ever, of making history over again. He gives history back a new logic, that can draw it back towards God, with that same God as its starting point. Human life – our life – founded on the Incarnation of the Word, is Christ-like life, a life of discernment in the Spirit, following in the path of the Son, and doing the will of the Father.

Contemplatives in action

Seeing history "in a contemplative way" has meant, since the Incarnation, seeing it through the eyes of the poor and exploited. The Incarnation demands of us and pushes us towards a change of view, a change of "from where" we see and understand history. God's power is only seen with the eyes of weakness, with the eyes of those who wait to be freed and to be recognised in their original dignity.

The experience of love which brings about the salvation of humankind and of history, which recreates history starting from God, becomes an experience possible for us. God offers it freely, the

Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and asks us to take part "Through Him, with Him and in Him" in this experience of love and service.

And so, the task put before us in following the path of Christ is the continuing of his work: to **bring people back** to God, to create and recreate the bonds of **sisterhood and brotherhood**, and rediscover **stewardship** of nature, putting it at the service of God's original plan.

The challenge thrown down to us is to make this present and operational in our social, economic, religious and cultural realities, so different and so changing. To put it another way, meditating on the Incarnation finds its natural continuation in the *Meditations of the Kingdom* (SpEx 91) and the *Two Standards* (SpEx 136).

Beginning with the love and service we receive from a God who promises and shows us everlasting faithfulness, we too, in CLC, can launch ourselves into the fascinating adventure, the continual apprenticeship of *loving and serving in all things*.

THE SPIRIT IS OUR GUIDE

GP 2 is a fundamental text, which gives primacy to the Spirit and at the same time recognises the necessity for intermediate structures, showing that there is no conflict between these two dimensions. In this sense, it could be said that GP 2 constitutes a key to reading the whole of the General Principles, since it indicates the attitude and tone with which they should be read. Because of this, failing to take in this Principle could lead to understanding the GPs and GNs too rigidly, and to an incorrect interpretation of the CLC process outlined in the General Norms. GP 2 also contains a rich summing-up of the CLC vocation and introduces from the start such important themes as discernment, freedom, and being at God's disposal, presenting the CLC style as an active opening to the Spirit of the Lord.

GP 2 IS A FUNDAMENTAL TEXT...

The primacy of the Spirit

This is a fundamental text because it provides us with the key to understanding the whole of the General Principles: they are not to be understood literally, but spiritually, that is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with a permanent attitude of discernment.

In comparison with the text of the GPs of 1971, a fundamental change can be perceived, present throughout the whole text, which makes a strong impression. Where it was said in 1971 "our Movement", we now say "our Community", showing how far we travelled before and after Providence '82 with the near-unanimous approval of that World Assembly: CLC is a World Community (see, further on, the commentary on GP 7).

The final phrase "for progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and the dignity of all people" did not appear in the revised text put

forward by the Executive Council. At the Bolivian community's suggestion, the Alternative Text, the one approved in this case, retained this phrase from the GPs of 1971. The Guadalajara World Assembly voted almost unanimously for the alternative version, which demonstrates the feeling of the assembled community about the CLC mission.

Saint Ignatius, in the Preface to the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, writes "for our part, more than any exterior constitution, the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit inscribes in our hearts must help towards this" (that is the service of God our Lord). With this, he gives the reason for and sense of the written Constitutions and establishes the balance between the external and internal law, giving priority to the latter. This is also the point of our GP 2.

A necessary intermedium

A possible trap we could fall into here, in particular the younger ones amongst us, would be to see the GPs (and the General Norms) as a "construction" imposed on life, as a "bureaucratisation" of life itself, failing to take account of the fact that fulfilling great ideals also requires organisation. A general allergy to the institutional is one of the signs of our times.

In the light of this text, a sense can be grasped of the kind of means necessary to live our ideal of life: to live it in relation to the Spirit, who dynamises us from inside. Without this it is not possible to understand the deep meaning of the GPs.

How to read them: a book for praying with

The text of the GPs is a spiritual text rather than a legal document. More than something to be studied and analysed, it is a text to be inwardly absorbed, a book of personal and community prayer. One of the deepest and most gratifying experiences of the World Assembly in Mexico, for many, was the "Communal Reading Groups" in which ten

to twelve people from different countries read together the main articles of the GPs. After personal prayer, we shared whatever struck a chord inside us about some passage or phrase. Through sharing and listening to what each person felt inwardly, we would learn how the Spirit itself was leading us to come together in close union.

THE CLC VOCATION SUMMED UP

"Let yourselves be led by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16)

CLC is a brother/sisterhood of the Gospel. What unites the Community is not a legal code but the spirit of the Gospel, which creates a way of life – a life experienced together and separately. It is the sharing of fundamental convictions, a system of gospel values, a way of going about things, priorities. These cannot be written down, but they are so deep and latent within us that they constitute our own vocation and identity, "unity in love and action" (GP 7).

Being a Christian way of life, it can only be centred on that which constitutes the centre of Christian life: love. Love is the Spirit of Jesus which lives in each one of us and inspires us from within to the way of following Christ. We are "Christians... who want to follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with him..." (GP 4).

The GPs are no more than an aid – a necessary means – to following this path. Without the *interior law of love*, though, they are meaningless.

The Christian option can only be a way of freedom: the freedom of the Children of God. "Christ freed us so that we would remain free" (Gal 5:1).

This *interior law of love* is a prompting inside of every person which drives us to do good through love. Thus human beings are free, autonomous, and at the service of others. "Serve one another in works of love" (Gal 5:14). Formed in this way is the principle of interiority

which was born with the preaching of the prophets in the Old Testament (cf Jer 31:31-34); and extended by Jesus.

We cannot, however, ignore the conflicts. Humankind is a remorseless idol-maker. We all have this tendency in us. The external and written rule is the kind of thing we often make into an idol. Our Community, everywhere and at all levels, could often suffer from the bitterness of these conflicts, but what God asks of us is love, not legal formulations, nor external observances.

Because of this, the personal, inward digestion of these GPs can help by purifying and balancing out, seeking, before all else, the Spirit of love and freedom. This Spirit lives in us, speaks in our hearts and expresses itself in our lives, in the communication of each one of us, and deep in every word of the GPs.

It is here that a listening attitude – characteristic of the way we run group meetings, encounters, courses and assemblies, and our own lives – comes into its own. It is here that it is meaningful and necessary.

The Spirit of freedom in ordinary life

The “interior law of love... which the Spirit inscribes in our hearts” is the source and the principle of our creativity and our bearing of the fruits of Christian and apostolic life, since it “expresses itself anew in each situation of our daily life.” If we allow ourselves to be moved by the Spirit, we will discover how the Spirit respects “the uniqueness of each personal vocation” – of every kind of man and woman (cf GP 4) – and makes us “open and free, always at the disposal of God.”

So daily life becomes a place graced with the experience of the Spirit. Our CLC vocation has as its peculiar characteristic the call to be lived and fulfilled in the everyday and the actual, because we are called to *seek and find God in all things*, including and above all in the humdrum, in the ordinary, in the tangible, those things in which we are most involved, and not just in the exceptional, the extraordinary or the most remarkable.

CLC spirituality, because it is Ignatian, is a spirituality of the real. God can be revealed to us in all things. We must *seek and find God in all things*. This pedagogy leads us to *love God in all things and all things in God*. "We try to give an apostolic sense to even the most humble realities of daily life" (GP 8c).

Being at God's disposal: the key to our charism

The interior law of the Spirit of Love makes us "open and free, always at the disposal of God." These are the results of the action of the Spirit.

Such is the fruit of the Principle and Foundation of the Ignatian Exercises: indifference or inner freedom, which is not just freedom *from* all that is not God, but also freedom *for* all that God wants.

This emotional balance, which is Ignatian *indifference* and which puts us truly at the disposal of God's will, is the fruit of our emotional commitment to Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives. "Now this Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom", says St Paul (2 Cor 3:17).

The task of every CLC member, no matter what stage of the process they are at, is growing in being at God's disposal. This is the result of the grace of the Spirit, but is also very much a part of what each of us "wants and desires" truly and deeply. The goal or the end of our vocation and mission is "to follow Jesus Christ more closely and work with him....", "to become committed Christians" (GP 4); "to become more competent workers and convincing witnesses" (GP 12). It demands that we "put ourselves at God's disposal". Without being open and available in this way, we cannot make those radical choices which our vocation prompts us to make: "to work for justice through a preferential option for the poor and a simple life style" (GP 4). All of the General Principles ask of us this openness, this freedom and this availability. Without this, we will be able neither to hear nor to live out what they put forward as a Christian way of life.

Our task: to answer, with Christ, the needs of our times

It is the Spirit itself who "challenges us to see our serious responsibilities and to seek constantly the answers to the needs of our times".

When Jesus proclaims his mission we hear him saying "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour" (Lk 4:18-19). It is in this way that Jesus answers the needs of his time and those of all time. We are called like him and with him, to make our response. We have been anointed and consecrated by the Spirit, to bring "the good news to the poor". Like Jesus himself, we must say each day "this text is being fulfilled today". "Our life is essentially apostolic" (GP 8). We must work with "all those of good will for progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and the dignity of all people" (GP 2), "struggling to change oppressive structures" (GP 8).

In the contemplation in the *Exercises* of the "Eternal King", we listen to the call of the Lord to work with him, that by following him in suffering, we may follow him in glory. We ask "not to be deaf to his call, but prompt and diligent to accomplish his most holy will" (*SpEx* 91,95). In "To Attain the Love of God", we ask that with "intimate knowledge" of the many blessings received, we may "love and serve in all things" (*SpEx* 233). Accepting the spirit of these contemplations, we recognise that the encouragement and help to live everything in our life as a mission, announcing Jesus in word and deed, comes to us from the Spirit.

With discernment

It is the Spirit who guides us to permanent discernment "to seek constantly the answers to the needs of our times". "Personal and communal discernment" (GP 8c) is the tool which our spirituality gives us.

We should have mobility in mission; we can't turn what we achieve for others into an idol. Rather we should review it on the basis of analysis and discernment of the needs of our time, remaining open to the changes which the Spirit keeps prompting in us.

One of the dangers that can kill the life and creativity of our CLC groups, especially among adults, is settling down into a routine, into the routines of life; the routine of the group meeting, of its rhythm and frequency; the routine of our past experiences; the routine of what we have always done. Routine blocks the spirit of discernment and smothers the life of the Spirit.

At the heart of a Church that is communion

Union is also a fruit of the Spirit: "to work together with the entire People of God and all those of good will" (GP 2)

Our vocation is communal, ecclesial. We are companions of Jesus in his mission. Our charism and our spirituality are of and for the Church. We must know how to share within it, opening ourselves to working together with others.

This working "together" is what makes sure that CLC is not and cannot be a sect or a closed group in the Church. One of the most common risks is of turning our groups into cosy circles, which people feel good about because it gives them a feeling of security, so they get settled. This leads some to glorify their own particular group. The Spirit militates against this kind of settling-in. We are not there for ourselves, but for mission, to work in union with others, and to open ourselves to what others are doing in collaboration with us in our initiatives and institutions, for the building of the Kingdom.

A HISTORY OF GRACE

GP 3 helps us to see the persistence of the action of the Spirit. It invites us to rediscover our Ignatian origins, and to value the many gifts received over the centuries. It suggests to us an attitude towards our history and towards the present moment: gratitude, humility and faithfulness to this grace, a communion which transcends the limits of space and time, and a capacity for renewal in the Church. The text also has a juridical value, pointing out the fact of Pontifical approval and setting CLC within the visible fabric of the Church. It also has a practical, pedagogical value in that those groups who have not taken part in the renewal process may define their vocation and their service in the Church, either in the CLC World Community as expressions of such, or outside of it, as diocesan or national associations.

Ignatian origins

No.3 of the General Principles of the Christian Life Community sets the movement in a long history, underlining its continuity with the Sodalities of Our Lady, set up by the Society of Jesus and first approved papally in the sixteenth century. It is not possible to understand the CLC of today without knowing this thread of their history, in particular their origins around the charismatic personality of St Ignatius of Loyola, and his Spiritual Exercises.

The GPs, first approved in 1968, correspond to an attempt at a renewal of the rich tradition of the Sodalities. It was, on the one hand, an attempt to return to their original inspiration, lost over the course of time, particularly in virtue of their separation from the Society of Jesus from the time of its suppression in 1773. On the other hand, it was sought to adapt them to the present day, most of all to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the modernisation it gave rise to, though the idea of renewal was developing even before the Council.

The Sodalities are the fruit of Ignatius's Exercises. His first companions, as their missions in different Italian cities came to an end,

formed groups of laypeople, with the aim of helping each other to follow Jesus and to put into practice the attitudes of prayer and service awoken by this spiritual experience. Father Tim Quinlan SJ, in *Progressio* of May 1988, set out the experience of Peter Faber in Parma, and suggested that in this and similar happenings we could find what could be called the "prehistory" of the Sodalities, today CLC. Set in the same perspective was the address of the World Ecclesial Assistant, Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, to the World CLC Assembly in Guadalajara, particularly in the paragraphs relating to the first "companies" of Ignatian laypeople. There is no doubt that it was also part of this tradition when the Belgian Jesuit Jean Leunis, regarded as the founder of the Sodalities, brought together a group of students at the Roman College, with the aim of preparing them for apostolic work in the city of Rome. The particular characteristics of his group set it in continuity with these first "companies": the close union of faith and life; the emphasis on the community and apostolic dimension; and the Marian inspiration coming from the contemplation of the Incarnation.

Generally, in the Church, life is a step ahead of structures, and Church approval is the confirmation of an action of the Spirit which has already borne some fruit. Thus, after nearly twenty years, by virtue of its exceptional quality, and its location in the Roman College, model for the Jesuit schools which were springing up all over the place, the community founded by Leunis had become an example and a norm for the groups in the new colleges. This privileged position was recognised by Pope Gregory XIII in 1584, when he conferred on the Roman College Sodality the qualification of "Primary Group", which the others should reproduce and to which they should affiliate themselves.

This rich evocation of Ignatian origins and subsequent development is put together in GP 3, and confirmed by the authority of the Church in the decree of approval. It is interesting to note that GP 3 was the only one to be explicitly quoted and reiterated in that decree.

The persistence of grace

Having reaffirmed the richness and the originality of the "prehistory" and the first developments, GP 3 invites us to consider the

centuries that followed, in an attitude of openness and recognition towards our history.

Indeed, following the approval of the *Prima Primaria*, the Sodalities multiplied rapidly, as a lay movement at the service of the Church, animated by a deep spirituality and a great apostolic dynamism. This growth was founded particularly on the young vitality of the Society of Jesus itself, who offered just what the problems of the time demanded. The Jesuit college of that time, as an official institution of free public education, was in some way the heart of the town, and at its very heart, the Sodality and the Spiritual Exercises constituted the basic tool for the deepening of faith and apostolic service offered by the Jesuits to all those who aspired to keep growing in their Christian commitment.

Besides student Sodalities, there were also some from different social and professional groups. The importance of their contribution to the Church of that time is reflected in the enthusiastic words of Pope Benedict XIV in the bull "Gloriosae Dominae" of 1748: "The incalculable benefit that people of all classes of society have drawn from these Sodalities, gifted with holy and wise rules in keeping with the different circumstances of the sodalists, is incredible".

But in the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, the suppression of the Society of Jesus by Pope Clement XIV was to change decisively the course of Sodality history. Until that point they were all guided by Jesuits. With the disappearance of the Order, the Pope entrusted their supervision directly to local bishops, allowing them to create new groups. This decision gave rise to considerable growth. During the first two centuries, up until the suppression of the Jesuits, there were two and a half thousand groups. Afterwards, in the period up to the appearance of the GPs, over eighty thousand groups affiliated.

However, this evolution progressively distanced the Sodalities from their authentic spirit, not solely because of a massive expansion and a lack of selection and formation, due to the huge number of members, but also because of the abandoning of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, the guarantee of their specific charism. They turned into pious associations, given principally to encouraging devotion to the Virgin

Mary. Their Marian devotion had itself changed for the most part. Initially Mary, contemplated in the scene of the Annunciation, was seen as an inspiration for the Sodalists' life of faith by her self-offering in service to the Lord and her mission on Earth. Later on, though, she came to be seen as more of a protector against the perils of the world.

With the reestablishment of the Society of Jesus in 1814, the Jesuits again began encouraging the Sodalities, but the movement as a whole had escaped their control. Half way through this century, only one in twenty Sodalities was under their guidance, although the Holy See had newly entrusted them with the task of inspiring the movement and maintaining its original spirit. Not everyone realised what a change in identity had taken place in the Sodalities, but little by little, an awareness spread among the leaders of the need to return to the original Ignatian spirit. This was already being expressed in 1948, in Pius XII's Apostolic Constitution "Bis Saeculari".

In the time before the Second Vatican Council, a great number of Sodalities passed through periods of crisis. Many had started to use other names. At the request of the hierarchy, they became *Catholic Action* in many places. Others began to founder, and their activity diminished considerably. What was lacking was a more universal spirit, which is why it was necessary to recover the universality of the original charism, without jeopardising effective involvement in local churches and local realities.

The GPs of 1968 represented the formulation in universal terms of this renewal plan. Ratified by the Holy See, they constituted the new framework in which the Sodalities of the whole world were to move forward from then on. This was a deep-rooted change, symbolised by the discarding even of the traditional name of "Sodalities", now re-christened CLCs. Mistakenly, many were determined to see this as a break rather than a renewal, especially those who were ignorant of the first part of our history.

It is certain that the renewal weakened those Sodalities which were not already weakened. Among them, many kept legally to the new pattern, and how things went subsequently varies very much from one part of the world to another.

An attitude to our history

The spirit of the GPs is universal. It invites us to draw lessons from our history, to grow in relation to it, in the continuation of time-honoured grace and to live "in communion with all those who have preceded us". Communion will be possible if we place ourselves before our spiritual tradition "in love and prayer", with a view to the Church who has suggested sound models to us, "friends and valid intercessors who help us to fulfil our mission." With confidence, we can ponder the examples of Saint Ignatius, of Saint Francis Xavier or of Blessed Peter Faber; of St Francis of Sales, Saint Alfonso Maria Liguori or Saint Claude la Colombière; or more recently Pier Giorgio Frassatti or Victoire Rasoarimalala. Long is the list of men and women canonised by the Church over the centuries, with whom we are in communion.

Today we find ourselves where the Spirit of the Lord has led us, which doesn't mean we have made no mistakes, nor that we won't continue to make them. The text and the spirit of GP 3 value positively the path that has been followed and the capacity to be renewed in faithfulness to a grace. In this sense the decree of approval which recalls the necessity for "renewal, in the Spirit, of the apostolic life, both personal and at the community level", is more explicit, having positively appreciated the origins and subsequent developments.

It is useless to go outside this dynamic process to look "from outside": from an idealised past, or a present seen in absolutes, with false dichotomies and spurious comparisons, by universalising a local situation or rigidifying the universal; with unfair questions or hasty judgements; or by underestimating the demands of a vocation. Rather, GP 3 invites us to consider our own experience "from within" a time-honoured process guided by the Spirit, "from within" the Church and its successive confirmations, "from within" the difficulties and successes of the path we are following.

The juridical value

It is certainly true that the juridical aspects are not the most important and should not be overstated. Nevertheless, it is important

not to fall into the trap of putting spirit and structures in opposition to each other. The Church, animated by the Spirit, has found and set up certain forms to contain the great richness of the gifts which the Spirit pours on the baptised. The juridical forms are neither perfect nor absolute, but they allow a clear and effective involvement in the communion and the mission of the Church. As expressed in GP 3 and confirmed in the Decree of Approval, the Christian Life Community is "a public international Association of faithful, of pontifical right". The decree is clear about being a "confirmation" and not a new canonical establishment or approval, so reaffirming the continuity with the origins themselves and with the initial approval given in 1584. Being "of pontifical right" is a form of words which demonstrates the universal value of CLC, and which doesn't need to be closely examined in each case to see whether or not it is an authentic ecclesiastical expression. It was along these lines that numbers 30 to 38 of the General Norms were drawn up, dealing with the setting up and development of national communities and their sub-sections.

The pedagogic and organisational value

GP 3 – establishing the continuity with tradition, positively valuing the renewal and clarifying the ecclesial aspect of CLC – has some important implications from the point of view of pedagogy and the development of organisation.

It is clear that no one can use the CLC or Sodality name itself unless they belong to the one international organisation which is in this tradition, according to the judgement of the authority of the Church. However, the international organisation which we have in front of our eyes does not set out to subdue or stamp out the life and richness that exists locally. One can play a part in this international organisation *pleno iure* by the true acceptance of the GPs and the guidance of the World Community (cf GN 3). But one can also contemplate having working relations on different levels, without usurping anyone's pastoral role, thereby creating a rich reserve of apostolic collaboration and means of formation. One could consider, for example, recognised associations in one diocese or more, necessarily subject to the bishops who approved

them, who wish to be linked with the CLC Community in order to gain from certain aspects of this tradition. Their belonging would have to be in line with General Norm 12 and its specific implementation in each country's national statutes (cf GN 35).

All in all, GP 3 is rich in spiritual and ecclesial content, and hence also rich in possibilities for planning future developments for giving better service.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY

GP 4 is one of the best short presentations of the whole of our identity. When inviting people to approach the GPs for the first time, it is helpful to begin with this, because it transmits the core of what CLC means to its members. In step with the logic implicit in our name "Christian Life Community", GP 4 first focuses on the following of Christ, then invites us to witness in our lives and finally highlights the meaning and importance of community. Work for justice and simple lifestyle are shown as distinguishing marks of our CLC.

Christians: building the Kingdom

We are Christians, in other words, people *who follow Jesus and work with Him in building up the Kingdom*. This is the core of what CLC is all about. "Jesus was not a Christian", is the rather provocative title of a recent book. It is worthwhile to reflect on this title, though the book itself is not of interest to us. It is true that Jesus was not Christian, true in the sense that his purpose was not Christianity, but the fullness of life for all people. Jesus dreamt of God's Kingdom – all exegetes agree on this point. Perhaps we don't always realise how the Kingdom is connected with our daily experiences, even the most profane ones. At his first appearance in Nazareth, Jesus reads from the book of the prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour", and further on, "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen." (Lk 4:16-21). Jesus was an incorrigible "world-improver", and this is also clear from his programmatic speech – the Sermon on the Mount. Maybe, though, it is even clearer in the description of the Last Judgement. It is by feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned (Mt 25:31-46) that you will reach God – and these are all rather profane actions!

Jesus' purpose was the Kingdom of God. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius lets the Three Divine Persons look down from heaven to earth and conclude that the Second Person will become human, in order "to bring about the salvation of the human race" (cf *SpEx* 102, GP 1). Again, Jesus' purpose is the salvation of all men and women, and our faith is related to this purpose. This purpose must also be, right from the start, the purpose of CLC. A spirituality only interested in or focused on its own inner development is false. Our being in CLC, our being in the Church, our Ignatian heritage, everything that we are, is for the service of the Kingdom of God.

When we bear in mind Jesus' purpose we can understand what it means *to follow Him more closely*. In Jesus, God's Kingdom has dawned. Not only does He make the Kingdom closer to us, but He is the Kingdom of God right amongst us. It is not just a coincidence that the expression "Kingdom of God" disappears from the Acts of the Apostles and from St Paul's Letters. It seems that it is to give space to the spirituality of the imitation of the Lord. For Paul, true life means life in Christ.

So far, the text of GP 4 is simply about being a Christian. The purpose of CLC is indeed simply to form Christians. Ignatius never wanted the Jesuits to be called "Ignatian" after him, like the Benedictines after Benedict and the Franciscans after Francis. Ignatius' disciples were to be called after Jesus, because they were "Companions of Jesus". Perhaps for the same reason the General Assembly in Rome 1967 decided to choose the name Christian Life Community, relating it to Christ our Lord and without other references, for example to Ignatius.

And yet, CLC is a *particular vocation within the Church*. Even though it is always about the same Gospel, there are many windows through which we can see that Gospel. The proper charism of CLC can perhaps be defined by two elements. On the one hand, there is the dynamic of the *Spiritual Exercises* (see GP 5, on our sources) that determines the way in which we work for the Kingdom. On the other hand, there is a real World Community to which we belong, normally through our belonging to a small particular group in which we exchange

about our faith and our life. CLC as a way of life rests on those two pillars.

Before going on to the second paragraph of GP 4, let us consider the importance of one or two passages in the first paragraph.

No restrictions are foreseen on membership of our Community – “Men and women, young and adults, from all social conditions”. While at the world level, eg. at any World Assembly, we can find this diversity, at the national level this is not always true. Sometimes we forget the youth or are not able to reach them. At other times, the number of men and women is not well balanced. Very often, our membership reflects only one kind of social background. GP 4 is a challenge in this sense.

Finally, it is important to understand that the expression “*more closely*” is related to the Ignatian sense of “*magis*”, and does not contain an implicit comparison, in the sense of better or worse, with other vocations within the Church.

Living: everything is possible, and yet not everything

How do we actually live our being Christian? How do we try to make the Kingdom present among us? That is what the second paragraph of GP 4 is about.

We aim to become committed Christians in witnessing to those human and Gospel values within the Church and society. The sentence could just stop here. The CLC call cannot be restricted, because it comprises every area of life. The highlighting of the *dignity of the person, the welfare of the family and the integrity of creation* is not intended to be restrictive, as everything can be included in these areas, but rather wishes to be inspirational. In fact, CLC doesn't have a specific content to develop, but should touch the whole of our life. Our engagement can be social, political, scientific, cultural, ecclesial... and in any area CLC will provide us with a method and an attitude.

However, this non restrictive approach does not mean neutrality. *“We are particularly aware of the pressing need to work for justice through*

a preferential option for the poor". The Spiritual Exercises, and the CLC way, help us to find out what is God's will in our lives. They enable us to make choices in the Spirit of the risen Lord and to remain open to any possibility in front of us. But this is always from the perspective of the poor and humiliated Christ and His gift of self on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8). This key element will protect us against a "neutral" reading of the Gospel, which often hides a desire for riches and power. There is an unbreakable bond between authentic faith and work for justice, and this is what this sentence of GP 4 reminds us of.

In the Meditation on Two Standards (*SpEx* 136-146), Ignatius puts in front of us the choice of riches or poverty. He warns us that the spirit of evil will first tempt us with material wealth and then will invite us to undertake the next two steps: honour and pride. The Lord, though, invites us to the highest spiritual poverty and, if God chooses us, even to actual poverty. Humiliation and dishonour will follow, and from here true humility can grow. All our other choices flow from our choice of one of these directions. Just as the adoration of riches is at the beginning of many other and perhaps more serious evils, detachment from everything you own is a basic Christian attitude out of which will grow a true confidence in God, and only in God.

Our preference for the poor becomes concrete in our *simple lifestyle*. Each of us lives in a particular culture and milieu, and it is part of our spirituality to live amidst our own world. Within this, however, we choose simplicity, which is more than just sobriety. The simple lifestyle is first of all an expression of our **freedom** for God – Ignatian indifference, inner freedom. The simple lifestyle expresses also our **solidarity** with the poor, as we try to look at our world and society through their eyes.

Community: in service of our mission

The third part of this text brings together all that has gone before in the Community: a gathering of people who want to integrate better their faith and their daily life in all its dimensions, and who can recognise themselves in our charism. This gathering in community is

immediately related to "*apostolic service, especially in our daily environment*", and to the "*response to Christ's call from within the world in which we live*".

Community is formed only with a view to the Kingdom of God, which grows through our being with Christ and working with Him, and through our being together with other companions in this great enterprise. The group, and the wider community therefore are never goals in themselves, but they are indispensable for us to develop a CLC way of life aiming at the growth of God's Kingdom. Like Ignatius and his first companions, we also want to remain united and permanently connected with each other for the sake of Christ's mission, which is ours.

The reason why the group – the local group and the World Community – are such powerful tools for the Kingdom becomes clear further on in the GPs. The group is "*a concrete experience of unity in love and action*" (GP 7). The group is thus a community of love. The group is also a faith community, ie. it is for the members "*a primary means to continue their growth*", a place where a deep sharing of their faith and their life occurs on a permanent basis (GP 11).

SOURCES OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

The basic point of GP 5 is the spirituality of CLC. It realises that, like all Christian spiritualities, CLC spirituality centres on Christ as presented in various bearers of the Christian tradition. It delineates this Christian spirituality, though, in accordance with the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. GP 5 reminds us that we are people of process and discernment and, to sustain this vocation, recommends some well-proven means of growth in the Spirit.

Ignatian sources throughout the text

To a certain extent one can read and recognise different elements of Ignatian spirituality in the GPs which precede and follow GP 5. Let us look at the GPs in terms of Ignatian spirituality.

GP 1: The first GP recalls the way St Ignatius has the exercitant pray with the contemplations of the Annunciation and Incarnation. We are to continue the work of the Trinity's initiative in sending Jesus, and take up his options.

GP 2: That the GPs are not to be understood as formal laws but as responses to interior inspirations of love (from the Spirit in our hearts) for the good of all in our world.

GP 3: CLC follows the example of Ignatius who inspired small groups of women and men to grow in love for God and all humanity.

GP 4: Ignatius related to all manner of people who felt a sense of Christ's call. CLCs come together for the spiritual good of their own members and to bring gospel values to all humanity, especially the poor.

GP 5: Ignatian spirituality is the basic theme of this GP.

GP 6: Ignatius was always somewhat suspicious of his own motivations. For this reason he constantly discerned his interior movement of spirits and he referred with great deference to the larger

faith community's directives. Reading the signs of the times in tune with the Church's desire for the progress of all peoples fits Ignatius' spirit very well.

GP 7: Ignatius saw the Church as the extension of Christ in our world. He would appreciate the image of each local CLC relating to the World Community as a cell of the mystical body of Christ.

GP 8: This GP expresses the basic insight of Ignatius when trying to determine our apostolic missions, ie. "Grace flows from the interior to the exterior." Thus our own conversion of heart and the conversion of hearts of those we relate to apostolically are primary, and from this flow all other goods.

GP 9: Mary, Our Lady to St Ignatius, is a very significant person in the Exercises. This is especially so in the Triple Colloquies. Ignatius asks the exercitant to seek Mary's intercession when being challenged in various spiritual ways. Of course she is a notable person in the contemplations of the Incarnation, Nativity, Hidden Life, Passion and Resurrection. Interestingly enough, the chapel of the Annunciation at the Jesuits' Roman College was the site of the first officially recognised Marian Congregation under John Leunis.

The Paschal Mystery

GP 5 emphasises that CLC spirituality centres on Christ and in particular the Paschal Mystery – Christ's Life-Death-Resurrection.

Spirituality includes people's attitudes, desires, motivation and spiritual energy which helps them to live the Christian life in this world. Basic to Christian living is a personal relationship with Christ and the following of his example of selfless dedication to humanity.

The concept of Paschal Mystery refers to the Hebrew Testament "Passover". There is the Passover of the angel in Egypt and the paschal lamb as the symbol of God's concern for the Hebrews. There is the passage through the desert under Moses' leadership and the Hebrews' crossing over the Jordan under Joshua, from Babylon to Jerusalem. For

the Israelites these Passovers were a passing over from slavery to freedom, from wandering in the desert to the promised land, from exile in Babylon to a return to Jerusalem. In Christ's case it is the passing through suffering and death to resurrection.

Recognising God in each moment calls for recognition of the ever-present life cycle – the birth, death and regeneration of life.

Revelation and Tradition

Basic to any authentic spirituality is the tradition from which it comes. So GP 5 insists that the spirituality of CLC is based on Scripture, the liturgy and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. The CLC understands tradition as a living legacy influencing our lives. GP 5 also draws attention to the historical elements in our faith by pointing to the doctrinal development of the Church and the presence of God in the events of life.

All CLCers are expected to learn how to pray with Scripture and use Scripture to understand and live their lives. They are expected to have a deep appreciation of the Church's communal worship of God, the Eucharist, recognising that it is the place for their full participation in the Paschal Mystery. They are to bring their personal lives, concerns and activities with them to the Eucharist frequently.

CLC spirituality takes seriously what has happened historically and what is happening in individuals' and humanity's ongoing life experience. It is important to appreciate the ways the Church's interpretation of the events of Christ's life develops down the centuries to meet the constant changes in the experiences of humanity. We believe that God is constantly relating to all of us, even adjusting to us and calling us forth to love each other. This belief that God is active and working in our world calling us forth in responsibility to build a realm of peace, justice and love requires that we become discerners of the Spirit's activity both internally and externally as individuals and communities. CLC spirituality demands that we do social analysis in concrete situations and read the signs of the times as the human race lives through its various crises, successes and failures.

The Spiritual Exercises

It is important that the spirituality that flows from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius be experienced and understood by CLCers. The *Exercises* were first experienced by Ignatius at Manresa. He kept notes of his experiences and then gave some of them to different women and men whom he thought would be helped by doing his spiritual exercises. Only after observing their effect and constantly rewriting them did he make the final composition now known as the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*.

Ignatius saw how much his Exercises benefitted those who made them. He saw how they helped people to recognise God in their lives and assisted them to discern how the Holy Spirit moved them to decide and act.

The full Spiritual Exercises are a series of about 120 prayer periods done intensively in 30 days or extensively over a 10 to 15 month period. The one performing them is accompanied by an experienced spiritual guide. They are designed to bring a person through various conversion experiences of creaturehood, sinfulness, call and intimacy with Christ in his birth, public life, passion, death and resurrection. Within these conversion experiences the person gains appreciation of God's love and the necessary freedom to respond to the love of God moving her/his being in a manner of companionship with Christ.

People of process and discernment

Vocation is a significant description of CLCers' approach to their life. This life is not approached as a drudgery to be endured, a task to be accomplished or a career to be fulfilled. Rather, life is an ongoing relationship with God who is constantly drawing us beyond ourselves in an I-Thou relationship. This relationship involves mutual sharing on the part of ourselves and of God. As the Trinity give Themselves to us and call us forth to participate in the ongoing work of salvation, so we are to give ourselves and respond (cf GP 1). But both the call and response are in a historical, developing world filled with many good and many

bad ways of influencing the future. Discernment of spirits is imperative in a free global society in which we are partners with God and each other in building a better world.

GP 5 lists a number of practices to assist us in cooperating with the life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit. They are basically instruments to heighten our awareness of the interior movement of spirits as to whether they are from God or from our own selfish spirit within, or a deceptive spirit from beyond us.

Prayer for a CLC'er is always within the concrete world situation of life. It builds on a true sense of identity; that we are the beloved of God and, although limited creatures and sinners, we are called to be companions of Jesus. At times it will focus on our needs as dependent creatures caught in our sinfulness, begging forgiveness or seeking the grace to forgive someone else. At other times it will focus on helplessness as we face an apostolic call, or suffering in mission. But, for the most part, it is prayer, especially the contemplation of gospel events, that is the way to develop a relationship with Christ. Such prayer also assists the disciple in today's world to take on the mind and heart of Christ as the basis for decisions in today's world.

Such experiential knowledge of Christ is the basic criterion for personal and communal discernment so necessary to live the CLC way of life. The communal dimension of CLC emphasises the truth that no personal discernment takes place without communal discernment and no communal discernment takes place without personal discernment. The distinction between personal and communal discernment comes from who is in fact making the final decision. Communal evaluations and suggestions as well as actual prayer about a member's situation are important for personal decisions. Similarly, personal prayer and discernment are necessary in all aspects of communal decisions from the discussion of an issue to the evaluation, the recommendation, the decision and the action.

What makes the process *Ignatian discernment* is the use of the knowledge of the interior movement of spirits gained in prayer by both the individual and the community. There are two types of movements.

One type is basically the spiritual sense of being united with Christ in love received and given. The other type is the experience of being separated from Christ and all alone – desolation.

GP 5 then refers to two important instruments for gaining such discerning knowledge, the examen of consciousness and a spiritual guide. Building on the experience of personal prayer mentioned above, they heighten awareness of one's interior experiences of desire and motivation as inspired by "the love of God flooding our hearts" (Rm 5:5), or disordered affections such as Paul lists in Galatians (5:16-26).

GP 5 ends with Ignatius's well-known phrase, "*seeking and finding God in all things.*" The phrase picks up the grace desired in the *Contemplation to Attain the Love of God* of the *Exercises*. It is an expression of CLC spirituality which calls us to be *Contemplative in Action*, using the dynamic of remembering Jesus' constant love for us in our history, of focusing on the very presence of God's Spirit in all things, recognising the patient, vulnerable labour of God, bringing the world through freedom to completion and raising our sensitivity to the simple but sublime way that God's love keeps coming to us in everyday experiences "like water flowing from a fountain, and rays of light from the sun."

SENSE OF THE CHURCH

All the General Principles and their evolution over the years can only be understood in the context of the church. GP 6 is intended to be an ecclesial text, to make clear where it recognises the Lord in the Church, where Christ has touched our lives and has called us to follow him in ways that we cannot predict, where we have been called together as a community of the faithful, guided by the Spirit of the Lord. GP 6, however, invites us to encounter Christ in all people and all situations, to reach outside the Church, with a concern for the progress of all.

The unity of Christ, the Church and the Spirit

In describing the CLC charism, the GPs devote the whole of no. 6 to the *Sense of the Church*. Not surprising, given the place this occupies in Ignatian spirituality. At times, *Sense of the Church* is seen too narrowly, connected solely with the "Rules" which Saint Ignatius suggests in the *Exercises* (*SpEx* 352-370). It is better and more authentically understood in relation to the experience of loving and following Christ: of this Lord who saves me through his cross (*SpEx* 53), who calls me to work with him on the building of the Kingdom (*SpEx* 91ff), whom I desire to know with all my soul, better to love and serve him (*SpEx* 104).

In its basic structure, Ignatius's spiritual journey ties together the Church, Christ and the Spirit – inseparably. There is no other way to the Father. To make the election in the *Exercises*, the retreatant discerns the different spirits (*SpEx* 176), whilst continuing to contemplate Christ (*SpEx* 135), and such things as s/he chooses must be "such that they are lawful within our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church, and not bad or opposed to her" (*SpEx* 170). The *Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* and the other *Rules for Thinking With the Church* are aids to keeping the Church and the Spirit united in the apostolic following of Christ, in order to work for the Kingdom.

Given this threefold connection which underpins and dynamises the sense of the Church, we can see how the General Principles deal

with the Church in the apostolic perspective of the Kingdom. The Exercises make us accompany the Lord who builds the Church with actual people and real actions. Hence, the growing identification with Christ leads to a progressive growth in identification with the people and the deeds of the Church. The "true sense" of the Church – which the rules indicate – is not just a question of intellectual knowledge but of an instinct for adapting which springs from love and an inner sense. It is a question of an "intimate knowledge", of "tasting and relishing" (*SpEx* 2, 104). This is the trusting faith in the whole of Christ, Head and members: *credo Ecclesiam*. It is in love for the Church and the people who form it that the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is ever extending to the point of wishing to embrace all the men and women in the world. However, being rooted in the *sequela Christi*, the following of Christ, it is a love which sends you to work and to serve. We can see this by analysing the text of the GPs.

The Church on mission

We have already drawn attention to the important emphasis placed on mission which we find throughout the GPs of 1990. The passage concerning the sense of the Church already dwelt on this in the 1968 version, and the 1990 formulation restricted itself to some fine adjustments. Let us see how the idea of mission is presented in the new text, summing up what has always been, and looking at the new elements.

In the Church, "Christ here and now continues his mission of salvation." Being part of this is not something static, but a call to become "sensitive to the signs of the times and the movements of the Spirit". Being called becomes being sent to "encounter Christ in all persons and in all situations."

The richness we get from belonging to the Church moves us to take part in the liturgy, meditate on the Word of God and learn about Christian teaching. Immediately, though, this richness becomes mission: "We work together with the hierarchy and other ecclesial leaders, motivated by a common concern for the problems and progress of all people". In this last phrase, there is quite a significant modification: To

the clear and determined wish to work together with Pastors, the expression "and other ecclesial leaders" was added, so giving a better account of the complex origin of many apostolic ventures.

At the Church's furthest frontiers

The last part of GP 6, sharpens the focus of the whole paragraph on mission, putting our sense of the Church in terms of the work of "advancing the reign of God on earth". Immediately after this, almost as a logical consequence, there comes a clause which was a new addition in the 1990 text: it affirms that the sense of the Church "includes a readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand."

This phrase, which is perhaps the most significant change to the paragraph, can be understood in the light of the life of the Community over the last years. Since *Providence*'82 there had been examples of people who gave up their ordinary lives and jobs to respond to the needs of the Church. This was endorsed strongly at *Loyola*'86 and has continued to spread, be it a case of service abroad or in the home country. This is also a response to the missionary drive the laity have been urged to by the hierarchy at every level.

The idea of "going to serve" should not be reduced to the sense of a merely geographical displacement. It may be enlightening to read the expression "what the Church needs" as "what the Church lacks", for there is no need to restrict the sense of "need" which always includes that of "lack". Thus it is a question of concerning ourselves with reaching where the Church doesn't reach, to the frontiers of the faith, to the least evangelised areas of culture, to men and women who reject or criticise the Church, to the least evangelised aspects of Church life itself. This idea could give a great impulse to CLC collectively and to its individual members.

Formation and mission

The Church – and CLC – find their meaning in mission, as has already been brought out. But this doesn't take away the importance of

its being a place of formation and growth – and a sign. Where previously only “spreading Christian doctrine” was talked about, the new text says we “learn, teach and promote Christian doctrine.” In this way, we express the twofold call to be formed and to go out on mission, to drink from the sources and be sources for others. In this context we come up against what is today a fairly widespread phenomenon – the lack of awareness about aspects of doctrine on the part of CLC members themselves.

This connection between formation and mission should not be understood as one of continuity, but more as interactive exchange, as this is how we live in the Church and how Jesus formed his apostles.

A demanding charism

Sense of the Church is, therefore, constant attention to the Christ of the Gospel, to the needs of the Church and of people, and to the movements the Spirit stirs in our hearts to “love and serve in all things”. It is a will committed to being faithful to the call to be with Christ and to work with him for the Kingdom of the Father, accepting – with all our hearts – emotional, doctrinal, disciplinary and missionary communion with the Church. This requires our discernments of every kind to be brought before the Church for confirmation.

There is no doubt that the sense of the Church is something very demanding. It could not be otherwise, rooted as it is in the following of Christ, carrying his cross with him every day.

With this, we must recall the need to use the Ignatian pedagogy of steady growth. Because it is a pilgrim attitude, the sense of the Church develops bit by bit, and is closely connected to the different stages of development of CLC members and communities. Ripe like the corn of the parable, it goes through temptations against which the rules for discernment of the Second Week warn us, and we must struggle to maintain this sense of the Church in times of crisis.

The *Contemplation to Attain the Love of God* places us in front of God our Lord, “the lover” who wants to communicate with us: giving to

us and self-giving; coming close to us, to the point of making our hearts into holy temples; working in the world and in us through love. For CLC, this contemplation is the normal path towards enrichment and growth in the sense of the Church.

COMMUNITY BONDS

GP 7 explicitly deals with community life. It can be read, lived and understood in different ways by people at various stages of growth and at different times. The fact that we have chosen to be one World Community, the meaning and implications of this fact, the role of the small local community in relation to the wider community, the elements that bring us together, the way in which we build community and reach out to meet others, are some of the points which GP 7 puts to us for reflection and action.

The journey towards World Community

The journey to the CLC World Community has taken just over 400 years! The first part of this journey has already been commented on, in the section on GP 3. Now it would be worthwhile to consider the most recent part of this journey, which is very much the inspiration of GP 7.

In 1953 the Sodalities throughout the world decided to form *The World Federation of Sodalities of Our Lady* and set up a process of renewal that, inspired by Vatican II and its emphasis on the role of the laity, eventually led to some very significant changes. At the World Council (Assembly) meeting in 1967, they declared that the Sodalities were henceforth to be known as *The World Federation of Christian Life Communities*; that they were now an autonomous lay *movement*, whose *charter for living* was no longer the *Common Rules* promulgated by the General of the Jesuits, but their own General Principles and Statutes; and that the World Federation replaced the *Prima Primaria* as "The Mother and Head of all Sodalities" and the guarantor of their authenticity.

As time went by, and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius had more and more impact on the life of the CLCs around the world, there was a growing experience that the CLCs were much more a World Community than a World Federation, for, as contacts between CLC members grew more frequent on the local, national and international

levels, they began to discover, whenever they met, that they were sharing a common journey, a common way of life that was actually a *worldwide* experience.

At the risk of oversimplifying: in a World Federation structure, the primary commitment is to the local group; and then, through a series of affiliations, to the World Federation. So delegates at a General Assembly of a World Federation tend to be representatives of their national Federation. In a World Community structure, the primary commitment is to the common *worldwide* way of life – the World Community – through belonging to a local group; and delegates at a World Assembly do not represent their national Community, but are the World Community *in operation*, ie. the governing body of the World Community.

Part of the genius of the CLCs – which comes from their Ignatian heritage – is that structures evolve to reflect people's experience, and so, at the World Assembly in Rome in 1979, the theme for the Assembly was "*Towards a World Community at the service of One World*". The delegates were asked to vote on the question "*Should we now actively strive to become a World Community ?*", to which a majority of delegates replied 'Yes'.

At the World Assembly at Providence (USA) in 1982, the delegates were asked the question "*Do we feel called, now, to become a World Community ?*" Though the previous Assembly in Rome had voted to strive actively to become a World Community, the vote had not been unanimous. The point of the present question was very much in the nature of an Ignatian repetition and evaluation – it was the opportunity for the delegates present to review the decision taken in Rome, to reflect on their experience since then, and, in the light of all this, to express whether or not their feelings resonated with a call to World Community. Of the 39 delegates eligible to vote, 37 answered 'Yes' and 2, for different reasons, abstained. No one answered 'No'. Many of the delegates declared they felt the breath of the Spirit in such an extraordinary expression of unanimity.

At Loyola, in 1986, it was simply taken for granted that the delegates at the World Assembly were the governing body of the CLCs throughout the world, not representatives of the people who had sent them – a very moving experience, and a privileged one, of what it is to be a World Community.

The movement from a World Federation to a World Community called for a number of substantial changes in the General Principles, since their first appearance in 1967. A special committee was established to draft revised General Principles; and after a lengthy process of worldwide consultation, the revised General Principles were approved by the World Assembly in Mexico in 1990, and subsequently confirmed by the Holy See. Number 6 of the General Principles of 1967 states: *"Our gift of self finds its expression in the commitment to a particular freely chosen community"*, whereas number 7 of the new General Principles begins: *"Our gift of self finds its expression in a personal commitment to the World Community, through a freely chosen local community"* – clear evidence of the long journey travelled to World Community.

Ignatius' experience of community

In reflecting on the 1971 text of the GPs, Fr Louis Paulussen SJ spoke of the insistence on community life as a new aspect, and yet of our historical sources revealing a strong communal spirit in the first group in Rome in 1574 – a spirit which progressively diminished across the common rules (1587, 1855, 1910) to become quite authoritarian. It seemed important at this stage of CLC that our experience and understanding of the community of GP 7 resonate with St Ignatius's own personal and communal journey, especially before the first Ignatian community, "friends in the Lord", decided in the deliberations of 1539 in Rome to maintain unity by a vow of obedience to the superior, thereby transforming the nature of the community and making it a religious congregation – the Society of Jesus. Until then we can see them as the first Christian Life Community in essence – they were laypeople for much of this time.

Ignatius was led from the purely personal service of God to the communal. The meditations on the King (*SpEx* 91-100) and Two Standards (*SpEx* 136-148), the heart of the mystery of Christ, gave Ignatius a new vision of the Eternal Sovereign and the call to service – he came to understand the invitation of the Father in Christ to a life of apostolic co-operation. No longer a Christ to imitate, but a living and active King who looks for generous co-workers and friends in the world today. Like Ignatius, this is the call of Christ and GP 7 for us – “*our life is essentially apostolic*” (GP 8.)

Experience soon taught Ignatius that speaking with people was of use to them and that giving of what he had received did not diminish his store but was beneficial to his spiritual life (*Autobiog.* 29). As a result of his experience, he responded by abandoning his former excesses and cutting his nails and hair. Encounter with others led him and later the early Ignatian community to shape themselves for the purpose of the apostolate. God led them by means of their experience and historical circumstances. Each reflected on their experience, noticed the movements within them, sifted and discerned those movements in community and then responded to God. This is the core of CLC formation for mission.

Ignatius's first attempt at community in Barcelona was short-lived. When Ignatius left for Paris, the group languished and each went their own way. In Paris, Ignatius met Faber and Xavier and a deep friendship developed between the three. Here the “process of exchange” which was to become a feature of that first community of ten was initiated. Each gave what they had to the others. Others joined them; and Ignatius gave the Exercises to each one separately after a long preparation time. Ignatius had learned from his experience in Barcelona. Each of them independently, voluntarily and spontaneously came to the same decision to consecrate their life to God in the service of others in line with the way of life they had experienced. Their preparation had meant four years living together with Ignatius as spiritual father – they had experienced a process of spiritual growth in community – they had known the life, lived and tried it, and come to identify themselves with it. This spiritual maturity was inspired by the

spirit of the Exercises which they had lived as a group under Ignatius's guidance.

Two distinguishing characteristics of that first Ignatian community are especially important for us. Firstly, their close association with the poor, and secondly the unity in their "way of proceeding" which constitutes the peculiar charism of their apostolic vocation.¹

A vocation matured in community

This same "way of proceeding" underpins everything in CLC. The CLC communal process, that of the Spiritual Exercises in community, the way of discerning love in action is core and key to our way of life. It is first introduced, experienced and learned in the local community in formation, and it is here and in the wider community that a person's vocation to this "way" is tried, lived and discerned over considerable time (General Norms 1,2,3,4). People not called to this way should be helped to find another group or way. "*We are bound together by our common commitment, our common way of life and our recognition of Mary as our mother*" (GP 7). Our vocation is to a way of proceeding, a way of life – this is our *particular vocation* (GP 4). Our community is born of people living a common vocation. It is our common call and engagement with this way that binds us together, unites us in community. This is experienced in that sense of belonging and moving in a common way that CLCers have when they are with the wider community.

Mary is our model of loving response in faith to the Father's initiative – not always understanding, sometimes afraid, but open, listening, attentive and actively responding.

We are centred on the Eucharist, where we grasp the 'World Vision' that the Eucharist fosters, which is also a reminder that the CLC is a World Community: Jesus's Kingdom – the Reign of God – crosses all barriers and embraces all peoples.

The sense of process into an apostolic community

World CLC is generally young in terms of Ignatian apostolic formation – CLC formation for mission takes years. Fr Osuna in “Friends in the Lord” distinguishes between apostolic community and the “community of formation which is obviously of a provisional kind and directed to the preparation of the definitive apostolic community”, which “ought to adapt itself to the latter and receive its inspiration from it”.¹ We do not have many “formed” or experienced CLCers or communities from which communities in formation can “draw inspiration”. (“Formed” does not mean finished or “there”, but it would seem that there is a maturing of becoming a “person of CLC process” when one’s way of proceeding becomes Ignatian in nature. We are always being formed!) In other words, we have few models of apostolic Christian Life Community. This is not to say we do not have persons in many CLCs who live apostolic lives. We can say from experience that there is a *difference between a CLC where some or all members are apostolic and an apostolic CLC.*

An apostolic CLC is a community which in response to an experience or situation, is able *truly* to discern a decision in community with all members participating, to wait for confirmation, and then to follow through or live out the decision openly. This way of proceeding then becomes their way of operation.

In an apostolic CLC community there is a deep desire to seek God’s will, a relating in the Spirit, a meeting on a level which transcends differences. Our gift of self is expressed in letting go of my own ideas and wants to be free to accept, in fact desire, the greater glory of God in the communal decision – to know and believe that the Truth of the Spirit lies within the community and trust that the Spirit will speak to the group discerning in common. This requires tough love, honesty, deep trust, listening and a degree of spiritual freedom. The community would have already experienced the redemptive or group sin stage of community at deep levels. The meditations of the King and Two Standards, key to understanding the apostolic community of CLC and GP 7, are situated at the end of the first week and mid second week of

the Exercises. The person or community comes to these key meditations and graces only after experiencing the first week – the Redemptive stage – which often we avoid and little understand on the communal level (See Survey). Just as that experience of deep gratitude of the loved, forgiven, saved sinner on the personal level leads to desire to be with Christ on mission, so too in the communal experience of deep gratitude for the acceptance and love I receive from God and others, is contained the *energy* for *mission*.

It is in this deep communal experience of our sinfulness and utter dependence on Christ for salvation that we come to “know” unity in our diversity, Christ as the source and focus of our community, and our union in and with Him as co-labourers, as Eucharistic people.

The Christian Life Community of GP 7 at its deepest or maturest level is an apostolic community. The way of proceeding is that of the early Ignatian community. CLCs in formation are provisional in a sense and need to be guided towards, and receive their inspiration from, apostolic communities. This does not mean that any stage of CLC is superior to any other but it recognises that there are different levels of living this graced way of life.

GP 7 can be read, lived and understood in different ways by people at various stages and at different times. This is as it is in the life of the Spirit. All is gift and grace.

Our “gift of self” will be expressed in different ways as our commitment to, ie. our engagement with, CLC deepens in our drawing into that spirit of gratuitousness, of mutuality of giving and receiving, which is at the heart of the Exercises and our way of life. We are never “there”. There is always “more” as we are drawn deeper and deeper in to the love and mystery of the Trinity and one another.

At the beginning of the journey in to CLC, the new member will express their gift of self by attending meetings and sharing something of their life and prayer in a new community.

To the experienced CLC'er in a "community becoming apostolic", this gift of self can mean a deep commitment to a community of people in the process of discerning love and dialogue with the Spirit, sharing lives and prayer (i.e touches of the Spirit and disturbances of the evil one), reacting to and responding to one another, sifting the movements and discerning the way of the spirit in the reality of this situation/event, little by little becoming more attuned and sensitive to the Spirit – finding God in more things. The quality of presence and capacity to love of the person/s changes as opening to the Spirit occurs and they become vehicles of Christ facilitating and enabling others to touch in to or recognise that place of the Spirit within themselves, attuned to the movement of the Spirit in others/groups, becoming persons of CLC process – finding the All/God in more.

Reaching beyond... to people of good will.

How do we understand *our responsibility to develop bonds of community...with all people of good will*?

Good will comes from the Spirit. All goodness comes from God even though the "person of good will" may be unwilling to use the term "God". Many are rejecting church and our "God language" as irrelevant and meaningless, but many are also expressing a hunger for meaning and goodness – for a deeper dimension to life – for God! There is a huge block between people's perception and the reality of God. Ignatius was a master at both spiritual conversation and discernment. This way of interaction seems to be a call of "bonds of community" and of this GP. It is a deeply listening, enabling attitude of the person of CLC process (an attitude which has been experienced, learned and practised in the community over a period of years). It seems that *listening* to another for expression (in that person's own language and way) of that deep level and place of the Spirit, *bearing*, resonating with and being attentive to the movements of the Spirit elicited within oneself, then *responding* by *enabling* the person to articulate a little more of what is almost inexpressible – all this is deeply Ignatian and apostolic. What is more liberating and encouraging of the truth and love of the Spirit than to have another "hear", and then, in

resonance with it, confirm? People of "good will" at every level of society can be helped to recognise their being drawn towards God/Good and to respond. This may seem to be an elementary, secular-level type of discerning, but I believe it is real for our day. The peace and life and energy of the Spirit once experienced and recognised give a base with which other movements can resonate and be compared. With help, people can be encouraged to notice what leads them away from that goodness. This is a way of "transforming the criteria by which judgements are made in our society" (Josefina Errázuriz, in *Progressio* no.4, 1990)

The facilitatory, listening attitude of the person of process would seem to embody both the Ignatian characteristics of spiritual conversation and discernment. It is a deeply communitarian attitude, it can also be profoundly apostolic. It is also contemplation in action. (GP 8 a,b,c & d can also be read in the light of this).

We believe that God is being revealed in our day in cultural expressions which are not traditional God-language but which nevertheless are of God. We have the means, and in these GPs, the call to listen and respond. The harvest is great and the way is radical, deeply challenging and rewarding. Is this a way of communal mission?

The early Jewish Christians had to find new language when the Greek converts came into the early church. Ignatius and his companions were led to a radical, unprecedented way of proceeding as an apostolic community in the sixteenth century. I believe with Fr Osuna that the *truly Ignatian understanding of community contains the seeds of an updating to respond* to our day and world. One of the "seeds" of updating lies in our CLC process and people of process who little by little can become free to allow others to express their experience in their own language and way, "to go in at their door" (see Clancy) and facilitate a greater awareness of and response to God. Our process offers a way of inculturation and deep dialogue of finding truth in differences, of evangelisation and universality. This way of the Spirit is limited only by our refusal to respond!

GP 7 is a principle to be deepened and lived wherever we are in our CLC journey – not an ideal we can never attain. The deep call to apostolic community of GP 7 is profound, relevant and prophetic today.

References

1. *Friends in the Lord* by Javier Osuna SJ. The Way Series 3, 1974.
2. *The Conversational Word of God* by Thomas Clancy (a commentary on Ignatius's doctrine concerning Spiritual Conversation). The Institute of Jesuit Sources. St Louis 1978.
3. *SURVEY of the Formation Process in the Christian Life Communities*. CLC World Secretariat, Rome.
4. *A Commentary on Saint Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* by Jules J Toner SJ. The Institute of Jesuit Sources 1982.
5. Document on Bonding by CLC working group 1990 – CLC World Secretariat.

APOSTOLIC LIFE

"I have chosen you, and have commissioned you, to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last". It was under this passage of Scripture that the General Assembly that approved the GPs was gathered. The common concern was mission, and it was clear for everybody that this was not a problem of adopting a programme, but of remaining with Christ to be able to bear fruit. GP 8, the longest text in part one, succeeds in defining our mission as participation in Christ's mission and in challenging us as individuals and communities. It also gives some helpful guidance for evaluating and extending our apostolic involvement.

GP 8 in context

GP 8 is in *Part One: Our Charism*. This serves to remind us that apostolic work is not merely an activity of the CLC: it is an intrinsic part of its charism. That charism contains three inseparable elements: *Community, Spirituality and Mission*. When the CLC ceases to be apostolic, it ceases to be CLC. The CLC can never be merely a prayer group, a spirituality circle or a discussion group.

Neither can the CLC be merely a social action group, a pressure group or a work unit. By virtue of these General Principles, the CLC is committed to the work of removing all the obstacles to the reign of God in the world, whether those obstacles be personal, social or structural. As such, the CLC believes, and must believe, that it can only effectively do this through its charism, what GP 1 calls *the influence of the Holy Spirit*. A charism is experienced as enlightenment, imperative and promise.

The sequence of the various principles in Part One is no accident: the sequence itself reveals to us some of the deeper elements in each principle.

GP 8, on Apostolic Life in CLC, picks up the themes which open and close GP 6. GP 6 opens with the theme of Christ's continuing

"mission of salvation". It concludes with the themes of "advancing the reign of God on earth" and "readiness to go and serve where the needs of the Church so demand".

While there is one universal Church and one mission, there is a plurality of charisms given by the Holy Spirit. Hence there is a plurality of lay, clerical and religious vocations in the Church. We must read GP 8 in the light of Jesus' choice to found an open and flexible community as the main instrument for continuing his work on earth.

Between these two General Principles dedicated to the "Sense of the Church" [GP 6] and "Apostolic life" [GP 8] comes GP 7, dedicated to the notion of "Community bonds". As a Community with a sense of the Church, the CLC must appropriate its own particular charism and cherish its own gift of bonding. Only then can it be a fit instrument for the work of the Gospel.

GP 8 is, in turn, followed by the "Marian Principle" [GP 9] of CLC mission, where we look to Mary as the model of our mission.

Pilgrimage and apostolate

"As members of the pilgrim People of God"

In greater fidelity to a model of the Church proposed by Scripture and by Vatican II, GP 8 adds the word "pilgrim" to describe the people of God. This word reminds us constantly that we do not have here a lasting city but are seeking one that still lies ahead [Heb 13:14]. Working for the establishment of the reign of God on earth is not a contract that we can complete within a certain time or with certain desired results. As a pilgrim people, we must be prepared to move on beyond whatever point we have reached, beyond the achievement of the moment: we seek the God who is always greater [cf. 1 Jn 4:20]. Schooled in Ignatian discernment and "sensitive to the signs of the times and the movements of the Spirit" [GP 6], we will often be called to go beyond "the letter of this text" [GP 1], to listen to the Spirit speaking with new voices in the Church and in our world.

Vocation from God: Mission from Christ

“We have received from Christ the mission of being his witnesses before all people”

Whereas the main body of GP 8 says that our mission is from Christ, section [a] below tells us that “each of us receives from God a call”. Each personal vocation comes from God, from whom “all that is good, all that is perfect” comes [James 1:17; cf. *SpEx* 237]. In virtue of the Incarnation, which is the “work” of the Trinity [*SpEx* 108], every vocation blossoms in a mission received from the hand of Christ, for he himself is the primordial “mission” of the Trinity to the World.

Conversion and apostolate

“by our attitudes, words and actions”

In renewing the Covenant, Jesus taught us that external actions and words are not the only areas where we are touched by sinfulness: we must also learn to look to the heart and mind [Mt 5:20-48]. Similarly, in the Preparatory Prayer for each meditation of the Spiritual Exercises we pray for “grace that all my intentions, actions and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of the Divine Majesty”.

It is in this spirit that the GP 8 now adds the word “attitudes” to the former text, which spoke only of “our words and actions”. We can often be painfully aware of a dichotomy between our words and the inclinations of our hearts [cf. Isaiah 29:13, Mk 7:6]: It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions emerge [Mk 8:20]. My own heart is an important part of the battlefield where the struggle for the Kingdom of God takes place. Personal conversion is an integral part of apostolic engagement.

Prophetic and messianic apostolate

“...mission of bringing the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, setting the downtrodden free and proclaiming the Lord’s year of favour.”

The source of these words is both prophetic and messianic, both Old Testament and New Testament. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read this passage from the prophet Isaiah [Is 61:1-2; cf. Lk 4:16-22]:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has anointed me.

He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

We must suppose that Jesus deliberately chose this passage to read, fully conscious that in these words he had found his own messianic mission. In different contexts and in different ways, Isaiah repeated this fundamental conception of the mission of the Suffering Servant of God. Similarly, Jesus returned to these words at other times in his life to convey again the character of his mission [Mt 11:1-11]. He must have considered that these words were the best and most succinct expression of his life's purpose.

A similar sense of deliberation drives the CLC to use these same words to express its own appreciation of the meaning of the mission received from Jesus.

The prophetic and messianic background of these words is an important element of their inclusion in the General Principles. The text is not a list of civic or social duties, not a programme for involvement. Primarily, the text cannot be seen as inclusive of everything that mission means: **The field of CLC mission knows no limits.**

Like every word of God, the text of Isaiah used by Jesus is revelation, invitation, command and promise.

The text is revelation, for God enlightens our way with a revealed and revealing word. God has the power and the right to command, to show us the imperative at the heart of concerned love. Still, divine love always respects the freedom given to us at creation as a part of our

heritage, and so divine commandments are heard as an invitation [cf *SpEx* 91-98], a vocation, a call from God [GP 2, GP 8 (a)]. The text is, finally, promise, because it is always God who crowns all our apostolic efforts with fruit which is purely gift.

The text is revelation, because all Christian mission is ultimately God-given. God's revealed word points beyond merely human wisdom to call attention to the world as the Blessed Trinity sees it, with its "great diversity of persons, places and situations" [GP 1, GP 8 (a), *SpEx* 101-109]. There is no one "strategic plan" which will always and everywhere bring justice either to a particular society or to a particular individual.

The first sentence of GP 8 does not contain the opening words of the passage from Isaiah as read by Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me". The CLC is nevertheless conscious that those opening words proclaiming the presence of the Spirit are important. This importance is reflected in the words of GP 8, *our life is essentially apostolic*, and then in the words *opening our hearts to conversion*. Jesus does not send his Apostles out without the gift of the Spirit [Jn 20:21-23, Acts 1:8]. It is as anointed Christians, open to ongoing conversion, and possessing a special charism, that CLC members can experience the imperative in the words of Isaiah.

Orientation for CLC apostolate

It is against this background, and in the light of the principle of discernment intrinsic to Ignatian spirituality [GP 2, 8 (c)], that we must understand GP 8 (d). This more "programmatic" section spells out some of the areas of modern human experience that ought to claim our attention. Though this section can very easily and fruitfully form the basis of an effective and productive programme for promoting mission, it nevertheless is meant to be a "principle" and not a programme. Individual Communities might well need to spend time discerning the relative importance of any particular "item" in the section.

It is very significant that section (d) opens and closes with the same principle: the Word of God, the Gospel of the poor and humble Christ.

The General Principles once again remind us of the essential difference between a mere programme of social action and a Christian involvement in preparing this world for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The affirmations of Section (a) about the indispensability of the personal apostolate are balanced by Section (b). The word "Community" in the name of the CLC reflects another intrinsic element in the charism of this "Way of Life". Hence, in fidelity to the charism, part of the mission exercised by members of the community must have a corporate or group dimension. While a CLC member may show great initiative in individual apostolic work, he or she must at some point experience what it means to work for the reign of God in union with others.

The General Principles allow a wide liberty: communal mission may be experienced outside the CLC as well as within. Whether one's mission, apostolate or service area is a matter of individual involvement or a matter of communal effort, each of us needs to stay attentive to the voice of the Spirit. We do this mainly through the "Review of Life", as it is called in GP 8 (c), or the "daily examination of consciousness", as it is called in GP 5 [cf. *SpEx* 43]. Even when members find themselves engaged in structures that do not belong to the CLC, they will still draw their apostolic strength from the Community and its spirituality.

Section (c) of GP 8 also encourages us "to be always open to what is more urgent and universal". Expressed in different words and images, this theme occurs strongly in the Spiritual Exercises and in other writings of Ignatius. Anything that is narrow and confining, anything that is too local or parochial, too self-regarding, is incompatible with the mystery of the Trinity contemplating the universe.

Conclusion

"Our life finds its permanent inspiration in the Gospel of the poor and humble Christ."

This final sentence of GP 8 serves as a recall to the basic principle of all apostolic mission and service, the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In

the General Principles, the word "humble" occurs for the first time in GP 8, and it will be helpful to link together the two sentences in which it does occur: the final phrase of section (c) and this final phrase of the whole GP 8. While it is true that the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth is a past event, we must realise that it is never simply past: the self-emptying of Jesus continues in our lives as we engage apostolically **"even in the most humble realities of daily life."** [GP 8 (c)].

Seen in this way, such things as "work for the reform of structures of society" are not mere additions to proclaiming the Word of God: they are, rather, some of the more potent ways in which we bring the Gospel to today's world.

MARY, MODEL OF OUR MISSION

No. 9 of the General Principles stresses our union with Mary, and the Marian dimension of our spirituality. Mary is for us a vivid model to follow. She is included in the story of Christ. She leads not to union with Christ, as we are already united with Him in Baptism, but to a deepening and intensification of that union as we contemplate her in the Annunciation and Incarnation, in the Spiritual Exercises.

Louis Paulussen SJ, of revered memory, in his foreword to José Gsell's *Companions of the Road with Mary*, tells us "that we cannot penetrate the mystery of Mary without Christ, the light of the world who illumines all mysteries of faith. Marian devotion for example is inexplicable without the light of Christ, without the vision of our incorporation in Him." This is what the beginning of our GP 9 seeks to establish. Again in the same foreword he says, "The well known group of Leunis (called the *Prima Primaria*) chose the name of the Annunciation because it was the title of the chapel of the Roman College. The mystery of the Annunciation and Incarnation is the point of departure, the foundation and the heart of the General Principles."

Mary's cooperation with God begins with her "Yes"

José Gsell gives a beautiful meditation on Mary's *Yes*. **Her Yes is a faith-response.** She is called. And she should respond. It is a total Yes to her Lord. It is the placing of herself in the hands of God. It is the accepting of her vocation, whose meaning and consequences the passage of time will trace out concretely. There is a unity between the person that she is and the mission that she receives. The uniqueness of her person and her participation in the mission, "being" and "doing", are now forever one.

Her Yes is a love-response. Touched by the Love that gives of itself, she becomes love that receives and transmits Life to the world. In

her is brought about the union of God who saves and humanity that is saved. The mission that she receives links her to the salvation history of the world. Mary becomes the hyphen between heaven and earth, the earthly spot where the source of life has now welled up, and from which it will pour out in floods upon humanity, for in Mary there are no obstacles to block its passage. She is total availability, totally at the disposal of God. She is the Lord's servant. It will happen to her as the Lord said it would.

We may add to José Gsell's meditation a further point. **Her Yes is a life-response.** It is an expression of her total abandonment to God, through which she surrenders her body to God, and all her possessions are also included in this one act of abandonment. Uttered in a moment, it is spelled out in her life time. Mary understood the meaning of life and lived it in its fullness. Being fully human and totally free, Mary becomes for us a living presence and a climate of life which promotes and sustains us in the search for the glory of God. The glory of God is men and women fully human, fully alive (St Ireneus).

As a sheaf is bound in the middle and fans out towards the ends, so the life of Mary, in all its bounty, is held together by this little word, Yes. All her years before this moment flow into it and all the rest of her life flows from it. God's grace enables her to say it, and in saying it, she enables God's grace to work in her. It directs her whole being towards God and away from selfishness and self-concern. It makes her completely transparent so that through her the Light in its fullness can come into the world. It creates the room God needs to become human. Jesus is the embodiment of Mary's Yes, the fruit of her fiat; greater fruitfulness is inconceivable. Her fiat in no way stymies her personality; in fact, it brings her utter fulfilment and is the prototype of all Christian fruitfulness.

We come to you,
Mother of our Lord and Mother of us all,
to thank you for your Yes
that gave us the incarnation of God's own Yes
and brought life to its fullness.
We ask you,

teach us to follow you in saying our *Yes*
with faith and courage.

You know the cost of living the *Yes*;
protect ours in integrity and joy.

Ask your Divine Son
for the grace always to repeat our *Yes*
with an ever-growing surrender
and to experience how this increases
the meaningfulness of our life.

Under your inspiration
may we help to build the Kingdom of God
today and every day, for ever and ever. Amen.

Rev Fr Peter Hans Kolvenbach, commenting on Mary's *Yes*, has
this to say:

"To accomplish this mission of mediation the Lord God has asked
Our Lady for her *Yes* in His work of salvation. In the prayer of the
Kingdom, Ignatius does nothing but trace the contours of this invitation
and this *Yes*. In encouraging us to pray the mysteries of Christ, to seek
for the intimate knowledge of the Lord to be able, in His Spirit, to make
the choices and take the decisions which incarnate our *Yes* in daily
living, Ignatius always makes us have recourse to Our Lady, to learn how
to enter into a colloquy with her Son and to grasp how to say *Yes* to God
the Father. How does this fellowship with Our Lady inspire the
Christian Life Communities in the way they go about translating the
Kingdom into daily reality? Of course, nothing in the Gospels tells us
about evangelisation as practised by Our Lady. She does not belong to
the Twelve and she only speaks through her simple presence among
them. The Lord does not call us to copy the manner in which Our Lady
has concretely expressed her *Yes*, not even to imitate her. However, the
concrete manner of realising the Kingdom to which the Lord calls each
one of us and the Christian Life Communities will always be inspired by
the dynamism which is fundamental to Our Lady's way of acting. This
dynamism is first and always marked by the radical character of the *Yes*.
This radicality impels the Christian Life Communities, following Our
Lady's example, to know nothing except the Gospel, and the whole
Gospel. We do not get caught up in slogans and ideologies, with

secondary problems and doubts for the pleasure of doubting. Of course, our lives are complex and our organisations complicated, but this is one reason more for returning to the radical sense of this *Yes* of Our Lady, that Ignatius situates amidst the turmoil that marks the life of men and women."

Our devotion to Mary has begun to take a new meaning as CLCers are growing to be more mature Christians. The attitudes of Mary which keep growing in meaning are: her openness and pure receptivity, transparency, her unconditional acceptance of God's will which makes her an extraordinary woman in the ordinary, her poverty of spirit. Our Lady, as St Ignatius calls her, is a woman of deep faith, trust and prayer (Lk 2:19), interiorly free and able to discern God's will continually. By means of Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, Mary brings us to understand the true meaning of our devotion to her and the true requirements of our CLC commitment. She invites us to deepen the meaning of her *Yes* to God's plan and she presses us to make our lives a *Yes* to our mission.

The Visitation and the Magnificat: her 'Yes' becomes visible

Her moving in haste, her greeting, the proclamation of her faith were at once affirmed by Elizabeth, her cousin. Her presence and help for three months (till John the Baptist was born) were concrete and visible signs of her effective service to Elizabeth. Her hymn of praise to God on that occasion, the Magnificat, gives us insights into Mary as model for mission today. The first part (Lk 1:46-50) deals with what God has done to Mary, a woman of low estate. The second part (Lk 1:51-55) moves out from that single experience and universalises it. How God has acted in regard to Mary is typical of the way God acts towards humankind and creation. This is the God faithful to promises, who exalts the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, scatters the proud, puts down the mighty from their thrones and sends the rich away empty. We can see here a call to justice – to be like our Father and his Son who have a preference for the poor. This second part of the song is of a God who punishes injustices and rectifies the situation of the oppressed. This God reverses the situation in which worldly might and

wealth, however gained and maintained, are the sole determinants of one's standing before God and one's neighbour.

What enabled Mary to a total offering of herself, in her poverty as a simple creature, was her strong faith in the steadfast love of God. From the scriptures she learned that it is God who is the Lord of history, whose ways are not the ways of men and women, and for whom nothing is impossible. By calling herself a lowly servant of God, Mary has really participated in the brokenness of the people of her times. We too are called to participate in the brokenness of the oppressed, the marginalised and the needy. We must struggle with them to promote the values Jesus held and to establish the Kingdom of God. Mary is thus our embodiment of hope and joyful expectation in helping us understand the plight of the poor, by counting herself among the poor.

Mary identified with the mission of her Son to liberate people from all bondage, and succeeded not through agitation, aggression and violence, but through her total commitment to Jesus and to His mission, using only the means of self-giving, loving service and compassion for the needy. Mary incarnates the attitudes of which our society has great need today – to be attentive and to listen to what the life around us is telling us, whether in our family life or life within society, and in a most special and preferential way to the needs of the weakest among us, the marginalised, the despised and scorned, the voiceless, helpless and powerless. Mary challenges us in CLC who long for a new and just world to focus our attention on Jesus to bring about a radical change in the world. In our evangelical approach, the emphasis is on the urgency of personal assimilation of Christ. By sharing in the life of Christ, as Mary did, we shed away our false selves and we become free to discern and grow in truth, by the power of the Spirit who dwells in us and who builds up our communities of love and service.

Fr Kolvenbach, in his *Mary in the Spiritual Exercises*, says, "The response that Our Lady graciously gave to the invitation of The One Whose Name is Holy has been an endless source of inspiration, in terms of some particular aspect, for so many personal and communitarian initiatives in the building up of the Kingdom."

Mary's mission and CLC spirituality

In this sense, the Marian dimension of the spirituality of the Christian Life Communities has been fashioned by the particular characteristics of Our Lady's mission, which struck Ignatius of Loyola in a deeply personal way. Ignatius always respects the spiritual 'taste' of each person in their encounter with the Lord, and imposes no particular devotion.

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius is content to exhort us to pray the *Hail Mary* with the Church, and he invites us to discover to what extent her mission in the work of salvation of her Son continues today thanks to our labours and commitment – because that is the way God wants it.

If the CLCs draw their inspiration from the spirit of Ignatius, the criterion for the authenticity of their spirituality is the concrete commitment to the service of others which incarnates that spirituality. Ignatius does not invite us to plumb the depths of the mystery of Mary, the feelings of her heart, but to receive from the Lord, as she did, our mission today in the Christian Life Communities. Whoever moves with Ignatius through the mysteries of Christ constantly discovers Our Lady in her mission of mediating life. This mission of Our Lady emerges all the time from a hidden and obscure life; it emerges from the humdrum, impoverished existence of some poor woman from an obscure corner of Palestine, far removed from great history, high politics and refined culture. However – very significant for our mission – Our Lady knows herself to be an intermediary; she knows she is mediating salvation, life for others. Each one of us is very much aware that we have received all that we are through the intermediary of others. In our modern society so many incidents and accidents confront us with the fact of our mutual dependence and show us how our lives, and even our salvation, are mutually linked. This 'solidarity' is inscribed in our human nature because it is a reflection in every person of the trinitarian communion. Still in our own days, in the case of a disaster, we assist at and we share in gestures, reactions of generous and spontaneous solidarity. However, in general, it is still extremely difficult for us to share, to communicate to others what we owe to others, what we have received, thanks to others.

Illuminated by Mary's example, CLCers have felt a greater desire to live the spirituality of Mary: belong to the poor of Yahweh, trust in God, be open to God's plan and available to God. Mary, as we see her in the Passion, accompanying Him on His journey to Calvary, sharing His pain, with her tears, her sorrows and her solidarity, freely shoulders all with Jesus in order to bring redemption, expiation and liberation.

After Jesus, no one is more closely united to all human beings than Mary is. Living in glory as she is now, she is not indifferent to the human drama. Even as in the Magnificat she took sides with the lowly against the proud, the poor against the powerful, so now she continues to offer us especially as CLCers, strength and encouragement, with her look of understanding, support and approval, to be committed to achieving freedom and justice for all.

Accompanied by such a loving mother, we find the strength and inspiration to show the same loving compassion to all those laden with life's burdens, grief, heartaches, sicknesses and crosses, until we reach the point where suffering will end and liberation will break through.

Our experiences of faith in CLC and the Spiritual Exercises, especially through Annotation 19, have led many of our CLCers to a greater consciousness of Mary as a precious gift to us !

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