

GLOBAL NETWORKING IN THE SOCIETY OF JESUS: THE IGNATIAN ANTECEDENTS

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This conference is about the future, about developing international networking within the Society of Jesus in the context of accelerating globalization. My task, however, is to look back at the past, at Ignatian antecedents. What are the foundations in the Jesuit and Ignatian charisms which might inform and sustain a developed practice of international networking? What instincts have we developed in the course of our history that, in what are now new circumstances, we may need to refocus or even unlearn? What are the spirits moving in our inherited tradition? How can we become aware of them, so as to be able to accept the good and contain the bad?

In this paper, I propose to develop four (not very original) theses:

1. By virtue of its foundation, the Society of Jesus may fairly be defined as a network: a community in and for dispersion—we are in the business here of developing, not inventing, global networking.
2. The network is to be understood and specified in the light of its religious ends, a stipulation that tempers enthusiasm.
3. Fr Nicolas's vision of networking reveals a continuity of purpose with the Ignatian sources, both in what it encourages and in what it avoids.
4. We project the vision on to late- and post-modern times, places and circumstances rather different from the early modernity of Ignatius. His specific directives about how to network are indicative rather than prescriptive. (a way of thinking about these from which we can still learn, even when in other ways we go well beyond him.)

I will conclude by drawing attention to some ways of thinking from the *Constitutions*, particularly from Part X, on how the Society is conserved and developed in its wellbeing, in the hope that these might give us some inspiration as we face the present situation.

The Company of Jesus as a Network

Quite simply, the Society of Jesus is a network. The first companions had lived in close association for some years. As they were to be dispersed on mission by Pope Paul III, the vicar of Christ, they recognised that their group would simply dissolve unless they took decisive countermeasures. They opted to retain their cohesion, and to this end to take a vow of obedience to one of their own number, as well as to the Pope. Even though they were not living together, or praying office together, they remained united in a particular mutual concern (I am following the original closely here). They replaced choral office with networked ministry and internalized values. (Wolfgang Reinhard) In so doing, they were decisively extending the church's traditions of consecrated life, though it took another half century or so for that to begin

to become apparent. If the 1539 Deliberation is truly called the Deliberation that Founded the Jesuits, then in some sense to be Jesuit just is to be in a particular network.

I make at this point one incidental observation, at the risk perhaps of banality. In the post-conciliar period, Jesuit identity has been questioned radically, and each of the General Congregations has attempted to address the question anew. As Jesuit communities recede and withdraw from Jesuit educational institutions, much energy has been spent on somehow preserving the Ignatian and Jesuit character, largely, and to my mind unconvincingly, centred on spiritual values thought to be expressed distinctively in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. The 1539 Deliberation, and the vision of network it evokes, strikes me as a far more plausible way of approaching this issue of Jesuit identity. My sense as a secondary school pupil in the UK some forty years ago was that my Jesuit school, though in many ways all too comparable with its culturally close counterparts, had a distinctive identity in so far as there were links of many kinds, even then, between our operation and other Jesuit enterprises. We received and made visits of various kinds that gave our education a certain cachet. There was a unique selling point. Mere high-school students, even then, could feel linked, networked even, to something bigger.

Networks Towards God

But back to the main argument. This network was formed for a purpose. The networked ministry of the 1539 Deliberation emerged, from a particular set of desires and goals. This is how the first companions put their initial question:

... we were eagerly on the watch to discover some unobstructed way along which we might advance together and all of us offer ourselves as a holocaust to our God, in whose praise, honour, and glory we would yield our all.

... given that we had offered and dedicated ourselves and our lives to Christ our Lord and to his true and legitimate vicar on earth so that he might dispose of us and send us wherever he judged it to be more fruitful, whether to the Turks or to the Indies or to heretics or to others of the faithful or pagans given that, would it or would it not be more advantageous for our purpose to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical distance, no matter how great, would separate us?

'Advantageous for our purpose'. The network emerges from a positive answer to that question: as the best means by which goals—the glory of God, the universal good, the personal holiness of the members—could be realised. So the particular judgment they go on to make about obedience is precisely not about obedience as an end in itself:

Obedience to someone among us is highly advantageous and highly necessary in order to actualize more effectively and exactly our primary desire of fulfilling God's will in all details of life

Moreover, the ends which the companions seek are not simply ends they have chosen for themselves. They understand themselves as acting in close unity with God: the network they form is in some significant way a manifestation of God's own action, to which they respond and which they continue. Here is how they articulate their initial decision to maintain their union:

... in as much as our most kind and affectionate Lord had deigned to gather us together and unite us, men so spiritually weak and from such diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, we ought not to split apart what God has gathered and united; on the contrary, we ought day by day to strengthen and stabilize our union, rendering ourselves one body with special concern for each other, in order to effect the greater spiritual good of our fellow human beings.

The theological problem here about the unity and distinctions between divine and human action should not distract us from the strength of the companions' conviction about what they were doing:

We want it understood that nothing at all that has been or will be spoken of originated from our own spirit or our own thought; rather, whatever it was, it was solely what our Lord inspired and the Apostolic See then confirmed and approved.

It was of God, in some strong and significant sense.

The mentality here is marked by a striking contrast and interplay. On the one hand, the companions have a positive, confident conviction that we might call instrumentalist: we creatures can determine whether or not a specific option is conducive to the end for which we are made. Some forms of mutuality will be in keeping with God's action among us—letter writing, the account of conscience--and others will not, notably office in choir, or regular capitular general congregations, that will divert energy better spent on missionary work in the field.

At the same time, the ultimate criterion for such judgments is elusive: the greater glory of God and the universal good. The Christian tradition is, of course, rich in statements of how the diversity of creation reflects the glory of the single creator: Ignatius's *Contemplation to Attain Love* finds parallels going back to Paul's vision of the Church as a body with gifts differing and indeed to the Psalms. But it is a deluded mistake to suppose that we can, in the words Shakespeare puts on the lips of the demented King Lear as he dreams of a future with Cordelia, 'take upon's the mystery of things/ As if we were God's spies'. As creatures we are in no position to see how everything fits together. Karl Rahner made the point well, in a comment on one of von Balthasar's book titles: 'truth is symphonic':

If we were to behave as if our being Christian gave us a 'world-view' in which everything fits together harmonically, we would, in the end, be setting ourselves up to be God. This is because the whole of reality is a symphony only for him. To make pluralism into a symphony—as good old Balthasar doe—a symphony that we can hear as such: this is fundamentally impossible.

We meander towards the pleroma, tentatively and experimentally. We may know that all things turn out for good for those who love God, but the process of salvation, of getting from where we are to where God wants us to be, is far from clear. The Ignatian mindset combines a strong instrumentalism about means and an improvising vagueness regarding goals.

In Ignatian scholarship since the Council, the indeterminacy has been stressed, perhaps in contrast to the rationalism and rigorism marking earlier construals of the Ignatian heritage. As we have recognised the distinctive genre and character of the *Constitutions* (for a history see

Coupeau), the flexibility of Ignatius's attitude towards rules and law has become a commonplace. (insert reference, Evenett, Bossy) Dominique Bertrand's meditation on the 1539 Deliberation draws connections with high theology in ways that could fruitfully be extended to include doctrines of grace, faith, revelation and Trinity. However, in the *Constitutions*, the greater glory of God is closely associated, and perhaps even identified, with the 'universal good' – with human objectives realised interpersonally, interculturally. 'Perhaps God's self-revelation only ever happens when people are on the move, in exile, beyond their own frontiers' (Vermander). In a paper on networking, it seems appropriate to highlight the ethical indeterminacies which inevitably arise as one culture or group encounters the other.

Certainly a Christian standpoint must be, at some level, committed to a positive view of such encounter. The letter to the Ephesians, with its loving evocation of pagans being drawn into the chosen people's heritage, articulates a foundational Christian theme; ultimately we are committed to an ever more inclusive vision of God as all in all, and all things are to be reconciled in Christ. But when we start thinking about getting from here to there, about making our first networks in pursuit of this goal, tensions and questions arise.

We can draw on examples that will be close to the experience of almost everyone at this conference. What happens when we who are not US Americans come to live in this rich, fascinating world? How is theology enriched as we recognise secular experience as a *locus theologicus*, and the capacity of lay people, even women, to do theology? The interactions can take various forms. We may define the good in terms of what the dominant group has hitherto regarded as normative: we who were born outside the land of the free and the home of the brave can nevertheless come to share in that inheritance. We may, alternatively, insist that there are complementary visions of the good which must not be confused: we may need to reverence and honour the female experience of grace, but woe betide us if we suggest that women try to symbolize the presence of Christ in ways reserved to men. We might hold that the interaction itself changes both parties so that a new, more synthetic realisation of the good comes into being. (reference Mary Aquin O'Neill). Moreover, the interaction might lead to significant criticism: much as I admire many aspects of US Jesuit culture, I find very strange the ways in which communities seem effectively to shut down for major family holidays, and might, in my less polite moments, be heard to utter expressions not just of anthropological appreciation of cultural difference, but of downright critique. And all these interactions are shaped by inequalities of power: a history in which the USA is the most powerful nation on earth, a theological tradition where the shaping voices have overwhelmingly been male and clerical. 'The impulse to gather the whole earth into one encounters resistance. It clashes with the profound reality of difference, whether cultural, religious, ethnic or economic.' (Vermander)

It is of faith that the human good is necessarily a common good: we are daughters and sons of the one creator God. It is also the case that we have to attain this common good through a confrontation with forces of darkness and sinfulness. In and through our interactions we have to learn, slowly, the difference between authentic help and oppressive manipulation, genuine

Christian mutuality and exploitation. To reverse a trope of Newman's: the distant scene may be present to us an uncontroversial hope, but sorting out which one step is enough here and now may be a very shady business.

Of course it is a good thing that human beings should share with each other, interact with each other, move into deeper and more inclusive communion. Self-evidently, everyone will recognise the 'universal good'. But that goal is often too nebulous effectively to guide our actions. Not every interaction in fact serves the ultimate good: the particular goods we seek here and now may or may not be conducive to that universal end. There is therefore a permanent need for discrimination (a rather better word, because less arcane in its connotations, than 'discernment') between what does and does not serve the good.

Networking is central to the Christian enterprise, and in one sense almost its definitional equivalent. Nevertheless, we need always to be asking ethical and prudential questions. And because the ultimate and universal good is seen only 'through a glass darkly', it is impossible to codify such discernment. It has to be left to the prudence and good sense of agents on the spot, feeling their ways forward—or, as the *Constitutions* put it, the supreme wisdom and goodness of God our Lord and the internal law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts. It is worth noting that one of the places in the *Constitutions* where Ignatius speaks most strongly about the direct presence of the Spirit among us is when he is referring to the General's power to dispense from them when he judges that such a course would correspond to their original purpose. Now: we may indeed trust in the power of the Spirit amid all the messy compromises. But nevertheless, if we are talking about networking in the Society of Jesus, we need to move beyond pious exhortation, and think realistically about what forms of networking will really advance the common good in our present situation. The role of a historical theologian here is one simply of reinforcing the importance of good social science.

Fr Nicolás in Mexico

My reading here of the *Constitutions* and the 1539 decision to establish the Jesuit network has of course been influenced by the goal of this conference, and by Fr General's visionary speech in Mexico City two years ago. The subtitle of the Mexico City gathering was 'Networking Jesuit Higher Education for a Globalizing World'. The very fact that, there as here, people are coming together from different places, generates a certain enthusiasm, a feeling that networking of any kind is itself a good. But Fr Nicolás's presentation tempers and focuses that enthusiasm, also insisting that we need to discern the forms of interaction and networking that genuinely serve the Kingdom, and throw our energy quite selectively behind these.

Institutional networking as such comes to prominence only in the second of the three main sections of Fr General's presentation, 'Re-discovering Universality'. The argument starts with an evocation of papal teaching and the self-understanding of the University of Central America as a *proyecto social*. It is perhaps significant that the first mention of the phrase

preserved the Spanish—the ethical commitment here is in some tension with the understanding of a university dominant in the Anglophone world.

A university becomes a social project. Each institution represented here, with its rich resources of intelligence, knowledge, talent, vision, and energy, moved by its commitment to the service of faith and promotion of justice, seeks to insert itself into a society, not just to train professionals, but in order to become a cultural force advocating and promoting truth, virtue, development, and peace in that society. We could say every university is committed to caritas in veritate – to promote love and truth – truth that comes out in justice, in new relationships, and so forth.

In this context, Fr General, alluding to GC 35, notes that the global spread of Jesuit universities presents an “‘extraordinary potential” for “universal” service’ that we have not yet fully realized:

Can we not go beyond the loose family relationships we now have as institutions, and re-imagine and re-organize ourselves so that, in this globalized world, we can more effectively realize the universality which has always been part of Ignatius’ vision of the Society? ... If each university, working by itself as a proyecto social, is able to accomplish so much good in society, how much more can we increase the scope of our service to the world if all the Jesuit institutions of higher education become, as it were, a single global proyecto social?

He then specifies in various ways, citing the need of some institutions in poorer countries for direct help, and the de-centralization of the Jesuit Historical Institute,

... because this is the time that every culture, every group can have its own voice about its own history – and not have Europeans interpreting the history of everybody else.

He then expresses the hope that we can network globally, and develop

... operational consortia among our universities focused on responding together to some of the “frontier challenges” of our world which have a supra-national or supra-continental character.

In this context he mentions the new atheism, poverty and environmental degradation.

The ethical concerns here are patent. The section concludes with a reminder of the *Constitutions*: ‘the Society of Jesus accepts “charge of universities” so that the “benefits” of “improvement in learning and in living . . . be spread more universally” (Const 440)—not because of a disinterested quest for truth wherever it leads, or because we want to be powerful and influential. The discussion of networking in this institutional sense is embedded within concerns about the right use of the new potentials given us by globalization: the concern that we preserve ‘depth’ in human thinking, in face of the flattening and homogenizing tendencies of an ever more closely linked world, and the development of a learned ministry that models appropriately an integration of faith and reason in the face of growing secularism and fundamentalism. At the end of the talk, Fr General does not hesitate to raise the question as to whether, were we starting from scratch, we would develop the apostolic instrumentality of universities at all—and insists that our journey is as yet unfinished, that we must be facing the question of re-creating. If not, we have lost the spirit.

Implicit in Fr General's Mexico City address is a recognition that the appropriate means of tackling some issues involves wide, even universal networking. Given the nature of the occasion, the expansiveness of this vision dominates the tone. But the correlative is that there are other issues which are better dealt with purely locally or with relatively narrow networking. And in both these cases, the judgments are empirical: we make them on the basis of founded hope, and we need to test and evaluate them as we come along. Coming as I do from the home university of Richard Dawkins, I react with some initial scepticism to the suggestion that I might be helped in my addressing the apostolic problems he raises by dialoguing with, say, my French Jesuit colleagues across the Channel—it strikes me I might spend the time better studying some remedial biology. We might sensibly judge that it is worth trying such a strategy, but we must surely also be open to the possibility that the outlays of various kinds required to set up such networking might be disproportionately burdensome. Similar points could be made about the other cases Fr General names: is it sensible, say, to transfer library books from a rich institution to a poorer one when information is being digitalized at an exponentially increasing rate? Will the vision of decentralized historical study implicit in the changes regarding the Historical Institute—changes about which some of us who are professionally interested have serious reservations—actually work?

Clearly, networking, the universal spread of culture, the formation of one body in Christ—all these goals are self-evidently desirable. But our Ignatian antecedents remind us that some forms of mutuality may not, despite their initial attractiveness, in fact promote the universal good. They encourage us to a hopeful, but hard-nosed empirical scrutiny of just how well particular means serve the universal end. And in these respects, Fr General's inspirational encouragement in Mexico City stands in continuity with the Ignatian antecedents.

Early Modern Sources and Late Modern Globalization

So far, I have been stressing a continuity of purpose and inspiration between the Ignatian sources and our most recent reflections on globalization and networking. The import of Fr Nicolás's challenge, however, does not fully come across unless we recognise that this particular kind of continuity between Ignatian inspiration and Jesuit educational institution could come to expression only as the result of technological and cultural developments of the twentieth century. When the early Jesuits institutionalized, they had no choice but to obscure these continuities; the technologies of globalization enable us to retrieve them.

Part VIII chapter 1 of the *Constitutions* (text given in a separate document, along with an illuminating commentary by Franz Meures), begins, as Bertrand notes, with a reminder that we have to see unity and dispersion as somehow complementary:

The more difficult it is for the members of this congregation to be united with their head and among themselves, since they are so spread out in diverse parts of the world among believers and unbelievers,[a] the more should means be sought for that union.

Systematically, the chapter outlines some of these means: a small and select membership; obedience, now treated in the context of mission and mutual support; the ‘subordination’ of superiors one to another (the precise import is unclear, but it seems in context to centre on good communication); the communicative holiness and wisdom of the superior (striving to be loved rather than feared, though ‘everything helps’); the love of God in the group as a whole spreading down through the Society across the whole human race; an external uniformity to the extent possible (a qualification made twice in one relatively short sentence); quite complex, and new, conventions of letter-writing.

Unless, however, we regard Jesuit history since 1540 as founded on a mistake, we have to take this text as indicative rather than normative, as exemplifying a prudent way of proceeding rather than a set of ideal norms. What John O’Malley says about poverty in connection with the development of Jesuit schools illustrates a wider reality: ‘hardly had the ink dried on ... the *Constitutions* that deal with this matter before the reality outstripped the theory’ (*Heythrop Journal*, 1990, 484). The text seems often to presuppose a ‘very little’ (not least) Society with a maximum of sixty professed members, supported by a network of coadjutors. But between 1540 and Ignatius’s death in 1556, its membership had risen to a thousand. The intuitive immediacy of contact presupposed in Ignatius’s account of Jesuit government could no longer exist. The version of the Company that grew had to depend on a more reverential and distant vision of authority, on rules and uniformity, on an account of obedience that was far more ascetical and voluntarist.

The affluence and technology of late modernity change these conditions. In particular, we can easily believe that we have somehow reappropriated the original inspiration of the Society after centuries of distortion. Fr Nicolás’s address to a global meeting can seem close in concern and purpose to the *Constitutions*. Fr Arrupe once wrote to a Jesuit who, along with others, was finding his vocation difficult as follows:

You seem surprised at how, as you yourself put it, I deal with you as with friends. But isn’t that precisely just Ignatius’s idea: he wanted the Society to be a group of ‘friends in the Lord’. (Endean 1993, 71)

Fr Arrupe is here picking up on just one phrase in a very early Ignatian letter, from the period of the first companions, and some subsequent commentators—notably Fr Kolvenbach—have respectfully noted how the highlighting here may be questioned. But it is the human reality of Fr Arrupe’s governmental style that is more significant here. No general before him could have appeared to more than a few Jesuits as anything other than remote and august. It is a globalizing technology that enables his personal warmth, and that of his successors, to be an instrument—arguably the principal instrument—of their government. Ignatius tells us that love consists in *comunicación*, in interchange. What it is to be a Jesuit and to be a Christian changes quite dramatically as the potential for communication increases.

This line of reflection could no doubt be taken much further, and Benoît Vermander’s paper, which I have included in the supporting materials, points us in some useful directions, on which I shall leave the comment to others. Here I simply offer one further thought about the

use in late modernity of a charism originating in early modernity. It is well-known that in early Jesuit discourse the term 'mission' was transposed from Trinitarian theology, where it denotes the movement of the Son and the Spirit from the Father, and came to denote the spreading of Christianity beyond Christendom. The conventional use of the word has its roots in a situation of Christendom beginning to recognise in a real way that it is not co-extensive with human culture as such. But only beginning: there is a stable Christian world from which missionaries can be sent into the unknown. Though the cultural and imaginative boundaries have begun to melt, Europe still serves as a geographical frontier, beyond which the missionary is at work. The idea of sending out into the unknown shapes the way in which we think about the reality in question. Significantly, we now speak of ministry 'at' rather than 'beyond' frontiers. Our consciousness, our everyday experience, is somehow more pluralist, and our being Christian is dependent on an option that could, quite realistically have been made differently. Those of us nourished by the Ignatian heritage may still imagine ourselves, legitimately, as apostles on mission. But the very category of mission implies a defining role to our sense of being sent that may in fact distort the true reality of the interactions, the networks that we form. (Standaert on missiology and sinology).

Constitutional Inspiration

I finish by pointing to three passages from the *Constitutions* about Jesuit life in a mature and developed form as a way of highlighting the concerns of this paper. The first comes as Ignatius speaks about the devotional life of the Jesuit apostle:

Because, given the time and positive testimony of life waited for before admitting to profession (and also in the case of formed coadjutors), it is presupposed that those admitted to the Society be spiritual persons who have profited from this in order to run along the way of Christ our Lord to the extent that their bodily disposition and outward occupations of charity under obedience allow-- because of this it does not seem good to give them any other rule in matters concerning prayer, meditation and study, or in the bodily practices of fasting, vigils and penances, other than that which discriminating charity will dictate to them, with the confessor always being informed, and, if there is doubt as to what is appropriate, the Superior as well. Only this will be said in general: that care should be taken both that the excessive use of these things not weaken bodily strength so much and take up so much time that these do not suffice for the spiritual help of our neighbours in accordance with our institution, and, equally and conversely, that one not desist from them so much that the spirit becomes cold and the low human passions are enkindled.

The patterns of thought here may be helpful as we consider the issue of networking. There are rights and wrongs: some things are more conducive to the end we seek than others. But they cannot be specified, principally because the reality of the Kingdom's coming is a dynamic one; we are running along a way. There are forms of mutuality that are too narrow and constricting; there are forms of mutuality that are too weak, insufficiently sensitive to the variety of God's creation; and forms that are insufficiently in contact with the unifying reconciling divine design. We can read Fr Nicolás's insistence on 'depth' and learned ministry as reminders to keep alive our sense of complexity, and his encouragement towards institutional networking as an

invitation to consider whether we should somehow become less competitive, and more integrated and global. The judgments remain a matter of discriminating love. They must be informed by good relationships and appropriate factual knowledge, but they cannot be codified. Apostolic networks, interplays of grace, are irreducibly reciprocal.

The second passage is Ignatius's final statement about authority:

It is also highly important that ... the individual superiors should have much authority over the subjects, and the general over the individual superiors, and, on the other hand, that the Society have much authority over the general ... so that all may have full power for the good, and kept under complete control if they act badly.

As long as our thinking is shaped by power relationships, the paradox at the opening of this sentence is merely a contradiction. Ignatius holds out to us a vision of mutuality that expands the capacities of all, a style of relating that increases our ability to do good and avoid evil, and that is not trapped within a competitive zero-sum game. We have gathered to talk about networking through the generosity of perhaps the richest and most powerful Jesuit institution in the world. If we are to succeed, we need to work with the disparities here creatively, transfiguring them in the light of gospel hope.

The final passage seems initially to be about canon law and ecclesiastical diplomacy:

It will help to use with discernment and moderation the favours conceded by the Apostolic See, seeking only the help of souls, with complete sincerity. For thus God our Lord will carry forward what he has begun; and the fragrance, grounded in truth, of good works will increase people's devotion, so that they come to be helped by the Society and to help it towards the end which it seeks: the glory and service of His Divine Majesty.

But this penultimate paragraph of Ignatius's main text can be read as a piece of high theology. When institutional Christianity welcomes and accepts the Jesuit charism, it is acknowledging the limitations of its own norms, and, in a spirit of trust, entrusting the ones sent on mission with dispensations and special favours. These privileges need to be exercised discerningly, with discrimination, 'seeking only the help of souls'. Wrongly used, they will come across as disrespectful, or as one expression more of oppression and dysfunctional power. Rightly used, they enable God's people to breathe. It is perhaps no coincidence that at this point Ignatius uses the metaphors of smell and fragrance, arousing 'the benevolent desire of others'. In some mysterious way, there is a divinity of the soul (Exx 124) that good networking calls forth from darkness.