

A Church of Passion and Hope: An Ignatian Perspective

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The format of this article is in three parts. After some initial observations the first section looks at passion with a small [p] in the sense of when we are passionate about something. The second section looks at Passion in terms of the Paschal Mystery, a reality at the heart of all our lives and therefore at the heart of the Church to which we belong. The last section focuses on hope, a grace/gift of the Holy Spirit, the true desire of our hearts and a source of energy and vitality in our Church, today. In each section I draw from some part of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola and in particular from his ‘Rules for Thinking, Judging, and Feeling with the Church’. Rather than being sixteenth century anachronisms, I would suggest that these rules are helpful guidelines for our twenty-first century.

#### Initial Observations

This origin of this article was the Veale Lecture given on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 which was the Feast of the Annunciation. We might also call this the feast of the Incarnation. In Mary’s fiat, her openness and receptivity to God, the Word became flesh. The Incarnate Word was brought to birth amongst us in Christ Jesus. In him, divine life and human life were inseparably united. He is, as the Chalcedonian formula puts it, consubstantial with the Father with regard to his divinity and consubstantial with us with regard to his humanity. In Christ God is seen to be irrevocably committed to human persons. God is on our side always!

The Incarnation is one of the most striking meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It encapsulates the Ignatian understanding of the universe, the Trinity and Christ himself. It is a microcosm of

Ignatius' theological understanding. It begins the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*. In this meditation the retreatant is asked to imagine the Trinity in conversation, as it were, discussing the salvation of the world. The three persons are looking down at the world with all the messy business of life going on. People being born, laughing, crying, hurting, joyful, dying etc. and into this great 'muddle' of life God decides to be present and part of human reality. Ignatius does not sweeten or falsify painful realities. Rather he begins with them exactly as they are -- poverty, forced displacement, violence between people, abandonment, structural injustice, sin.<sup>1</sup> Against this background, Ignatius asks us to consider the great desire in God for human salvation and reconciliation. The Second Person of the Trinity eagerly desires to be one with human persons.<sup>2</sup> In Christ God's love becomes present in our midst -- Emmanuel -- God with us.

Ignatius then asks us to shift in our imagination to the annunciation scene with which we are more familiar. Here he calls us to ponder the meeting between Mary and the Angel Gabriel. In Our Lady we see the fullness of a human response to God in her willingness to become the mother of Jesus -- the one who saves his people from their sins.

### Essential intimacy with the Lord

The grace asked for throughout the whole of this meditation on the Incarnation and throughout the whole of the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* is that of "an intimate knowledge of our Lord who has become a human person for me, that I may love him more and follow him more closely"<sup>3</sup>. This intimate knowledge is crucial. It is a knowledge that is not merely knowledge of the intellect, acquired through study -- epistemological -- though it is this also. Neither is it

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<sup>1</sup> GC 35, Decree 2: A fire that kindles other fires, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Wisdom 15, one of the readings in the Divine Office in the weeks prior to Christmas, gives this same impression of eagerness in the second person of the Trinity.

merely an understanding arrived at through our experience -- an existential knowledge -- though it includes this too. Rather it is fundamentally an apprehension at the level of our very being -- an ontological knowledge -- of God's passionate commitment to each one of us. This is the primordial reality that Ignatius is concerned that we should understand.

### passion

It is this most profound apprehension that is the source of true passion, that intimate knowledge of God at the source of our being. This intimacy with Christ fuelled Ignatius of Loyola's passionate commitment to the Church. Ignatius is often cited as a passionate defender of the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. He and his early companions clearly saw themselves as 'men of the Church'. The Society of Jesus was formed in order to be at the service of the Church. It did not come into existence for its own progress and development. Rather the Society was focused towards "the glory of God and the good of the universal Church".<sup>4</sup> Ignatius was concerned to promote what he called '*sentire cum ecclesia*' -- a way of thinking, judging and feeling with the Church that flowed from a creative and passionate fidelity.<sup>5</sup>

The very term *sentire* is not an easy one to translate literally. It is more than just being favourably disposed towards the Church. It is to be engaged at a deeper level -- to think and feel with the whole of one's being, head and heart, with the Church. It is to be willing to grow in communion with the Church. This seemed to involve for St. Ignatius a growth in being at-one with the

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<sup>3</sup> George E. Ganss SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1992, [104]

<sup>4</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus And Their Complementary Norms*, ed. John Padberg SJ, St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996, [136]

<sup>5</sup> From the early deliberations of the first companions in 1539 there was a common understanding that members of the Society were to "fight for God under faithful obedience to His Holiness our Pope and to the Roman Pontiffs who would succeed him".

Church, not just as a matter of loyalty but with an effective and indeed life-giving collaborative communion with those in authority in the Church. This is to recognize that not only is every member of the Christian community ‘the Church’, but that the differing levels of office-holders in the Church are also part of that self-same Church. Such an attitude will recognize and embrace all the life-giving forces within that collaborative communion.

### Thinking, Judging, and Feeling with the Church

So important was this relationship with the Church for Ignatius that he wrote a series of guidelines about this entitled, “Rules for Thinking, Judging, and Feeling with the Church”.<sup>6</sup> These are found within the *Spiritual Exercises* alongside the “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits”. The first of these guide-lines with regard to the Church gives the essence of both how he regarded the Church and the attitude or disposition he considered it important to promote. Ignatius refers to the Church as ‘the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, which is our holy mother the hierarchical Church’ [Exx. 353]. When Ignatius speaks of the hierarchical Church, he is referring to the institutional Church carrying the authority of Christ across all generations and visibly represented in the Pope and the different levels of Church authority. This first guideline gives the essential reason why Ignatius insists on the importance of a set of rules for thinking, judging and feeling with the Church. Ignatius loved the Church because he loved Christ. He recalled that Christ had guaranteed that his Spirit would be with the Church until the end of time.

Ignatius uses the terms ‘spouse’ and ‘mother’ -- two very intimate metaphors -- to describe the relationship of the individual with the Church. It is an intimacy implying communion of being

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<sup>6</sup> Exx. [352-370].

within the Church. It is to suggest that one and the same Spirit is behind both the hierarchical church and the most intimate personal experiences.<sup>7</sup>

Ignatius appreciated the hierarchical Church as a Church that mediates divine grace and saw this as operative through individual believers. So, as with a body, each part needs to fulfil its proper role. In a similar manner St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, speaks of the body of Christ and the importance of each part. As the previous Jesuit Superior General Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach reminds us, “Ignatius looks on the Church as a whole of which nothing can be ignored: neither its ecclesial hierarchy nor the rest of its members, neither its charismatic expression nor its canonical discipline, neither its holiness nor its sinfulness.”<sup>8</sup>

This first guideline sets the tone for the rest and looks to evoke a certain love for the Church which is not just intellectual or affective but which encompasses both these dimensions. It is a passionate and fervent love. It is to recognize within the Church, by the grace of faith, the source of life which is the presence of Christ. Love of Christ goes with love for the Church and needs to be expressed in concrete acts. It is important to note, however, that this passionate commitment has nothing to do with triumphalism. Rather it is most authentically expressed by the flowering of

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<sup>7</sup> Ignatius refers to ‘the hierarchical church’ here, though this description is rare in his writings. It is important that we do not misinterpret what he means here “Es muy frecuente confundir la expresion de 'Iglesia hierarquica' con la expresion 'jerarquia de la Iglesia', entendiendoademas esta 'jerarquia' como el conjunto de personas constituidas en autoridad en la Iglesia. Y mas en concreto todavia, de forma casi mecanica, se entiende que hablar de Iglesia hierarquica, o simplemente de Iglesia, es hablar de los obispos y del Vaticano. Esta confusion ha contribuido muy negativamete a la degradacion del concepto, de la imagen y - lo que es peor - de la vivencia de Iglesia, en nuestors tiempos.” Jesus Corella, SJ, *Sentir La Iglesia: Commentario a las reglas ignacianas para el sentido verdadero de Iglesia*, Bilbao, Ediciones Mensajero, Sal Terrae, 1996. A free translation would be: “We too often confuse the term ‘hierarchical Church’ with the term ‘hierarchy of the Church’. Also we understand this hierarchy as consisting of all persons in authority in the Church. And more specifically still, almost mechanically, we may speak of the hierarchical Church, or simply the Church, as meaning the bishops and the Vatican. This confusion has contributed very negatively to the degradation of the concept, of the image and - worse still - of the lived experience of the Church in our times”.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Hans Kolvenbach SJ, “The Rules for Thinking, Judging, Feeling in The Post-Conciliar Church,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, Number 105, XXXV, I/2004, 19-27.

humility within members of the church and the recognition of the need for ongoing conversion. Such a disposition is made concrete in the compassionate service of others.

### The impact of fervent commitment to the Church

It is my experience that this kind of passionate love is something both recognized and esteemed by many young people in the Church today. It is something they search for and in places where they find this, they wish to belong. By contrast, a lukewarm or cynical relationship with the Church they find very unattractive. A significant difficulty arises when individuals see themselves over against the Church and in conversation speak of 'the Church' in terms of the institutional structure which does not include them, failing to recognise the presence of Christ therein. As Fr Kolvenbach states, "There must be fervour in our adhesion to the Church, for how can we love the Lord more intensely and distinguish ourselves in total service to him, if we are lukewarm and sceptical towards his spouse?"<sup>9</sup> We are called to be passionate in our commitment to the Church that the Church may indeed be a church of passion.

We cannot be joined to Christ without being joined to the Church. So we are to be configured to Christ and the Church. In this regard the content of the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* assists our understanding. It involves a series of contemplations on the life of Christ. In spending this time in prayer the individual is asking for the grace to be drawn into that deeper relationship with Christ -- to be configured to Christ. And because of the intimate link between Christ and the Church the individual also becomes configured to the Church "in its fundamental service and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

intimate experience of Christ, even more, that one comes to participate in that service and experience.<sup>10</sup>

In this way, we come to see the profound nature of the relationship between the individual and the Church. In the one making the *Spiritual Exercises* the Church realizes, through that individual's experience, its own radical nature as the beloved of Christ -- as spouse of Christ. Also, it is in and through the individual's experience, that the Church re-appropriates her mission to be part of the redemptive work of Christ. We are all members of the Body of Christ and are called to participate in the mission of Christ our Head. It is through her individual members that the Church continues to participate in the struggle for human salvation. Thus there is a profound reciprocity between the individual and the Church, as the individual is configured to the Church and the Church realizes more deeply its own reality through the experience of the individual.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that participation in the mission of the Church is what conditions the legitimacy of any choice of a way of life or action made while undergoing the *Spiritual Exercises*. There is no provision for the ecclesially indifferent within the *Spiritual Exercises*. Their very structure assumes a commitment to the Church. The clarion call of Christ sounds a note designed to call forth a fervent response, a passionate response of commitment, and a willingness to engage in the struggle of Christ against those who oppose God's Kingdom.

### Passion

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Buckley SJ, "Ecclesial Mysticism in the Spiritual Exercises", *Theological Studies* 56, 1995, 441-461.

The struggle of Christ is the struggle of the Church. It is revealed most clearly in the Paschal Mystery. In this redemptive act of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, the love of the Triune God is made known. It is a love that reaches into the depths of death for the salvation of human beings. It is important to clarify here that, as with the Incarnation, the entire Trinity is involved in the reality of the Passion and the unfolding of the Paschal Mystery. Indeed, in the events of Holy Week, the heart of God lies open before us and the light of God's love shines before our eyes. The Paschal Mystery stands at the very centre of Christian faith and is the primordial revelation of who God is in God-self and in relation to human beings.<sup>11</sup>

The events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection are the most sacred mysteries of all Christian belief. The summit of the Christian liturgical year is the Paschal Triduum. In the drama of the cross where God is revealed most poignantly, God also hides in the horror of death - of the cross. This is a paradox of revealed-ness as hidden-ness, of the glory of God in degradation, of the fullness of life emerging from the brutality of death. In the great struggle in and through death to resurrection, God heals the wounds of sin and division in humanity.

The *Spiritual Exercises* understand the Church as the community gathered around Christ engaged in this mysterious and fundamental struggle that lies at the heart of human history. This is the intractable conflict between the call of Christ and the influences of the antihuman. The Church, both in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians and in the *Spiritual Exercises*, is a community in struggle. Indeed, the Church is the principal agent in this struggle with the antihuman.

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<sup>11</sup> Thus, "in the event of reconciliation on the Cross the true character of God -- and so the divine immanence -- God's 'in-God-self-ness' -- is seen." Aidan Nichols OP, *Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide Through Balthasar's Theology Beyond the Trilogy* Washington DC, Catholic University of America Press, 2007, 166.



Ignatius came to interpret and to present in symbols the profound contradiction that lies central to all human history, primarily as an enormous and continual struggle in history. But this struggle is not between human beings, but about human beings and the very destiny of human life. The definitive victory of redemption has been won by Christ. At the same time, Christ's redemptive work continues in our world in and through the Church.

But how is the Church to be a true reflection of Christ in this struggle? What about when the Church appears to be divided, polarised, and at enmity within itself? In our contemporary scenario, when the Church has been humiliated by public scandal, many seem paralysed by grief and cynicism. When mourning abounds and when the grievous sins of a minority seem to obliterate the memory of the compassionate, faithful service of the dedicated majority, how is the face of Christ to be seen within the Church --within ourselves?

#### Praying for enlightenment

I suggest that Ignatius may help us here. Within the *Spiritual Exercises* he proposes a prayer for the ongoing purification of our own spirit. This is a prayer also possible and indeed one he advocates, outside the context of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius is convinced that the ongoing conversion of all members is necessary for the health and vitality of the Church. Against this subtext of a Church in struggle Ignatius proposes a crucial prayer for enlightenment. This prayer asks for the grace of knowledge of the deceptions of 'the enemy of our human nature' [this is the way Ignatius often referred to the devil] in order to reject them. And the grace of the knowledge of the way Christ is calling, in order to follow him more closely. This prayer is indeed, the cutting-edge for ongoing conversion to the call of Christ.<sup>12</sup> So crucial does Ignatius see this

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<sup>12</sup> "A Colloquy should be made with Our Lady. I beg her to obtain for me grace from her Son and Lord that I may be received under his standard; and first, in the most perfect spiritual poverty; and also, if his

important grace that is desired, that he forms a solemn ritualised form of the prayer whereby the intercession of Our Lady is sought, where a request is made to Christ himself, and then to the Father. It is known as the prayer of the Triple Colloquy -- colloquy as indicative of the conversational nature of the prayer.

Ignatius knows from his own experience, how easy it is for us to become ensnared by things which draw us away from God. There are various forms of 'riches' which do not need to be material things but good things we are over-attached to. There are 'honours' which may be as simple as being overly dependent upon what others think of us. Both of these can lead to a pride which sees itself over against God. In order to combat this, and desiring to receive the grace really to see how we are deceived in these things, Ignatius asks us to pray for the opposite. He asks us to pray for true spiritual poverty, and even actual poverty, if that is the way the Lord leads us, that we might truly know our dependence upon God.

Ignatius invites us to behold our lives in the world through the lens of this prayer. It is a constant learning process. It is to see the way in which our deeper and more subtle attachments induce us to cling to what is familiar and safe. Joseph Veale SJ expressed it well when he wrote, "always looking on, quieting your imagination, being sensible, marking time, being sage before the risks of deciding, fearful of creativity."<sup>13</sup> By contrast the divine initiative often moves the individual and the Church beyond rationality, into areas of the mission which do not always fit with human prudence.

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Divine Majesty should be served and if he should wish to choose me for it, to no less a degree of actual poverty; and second, in bearing reproaches and injuries, that through them I may imitate him more, if only I can do this without sin on anyone's part and without displeasure to the Divine Majesty. Then I will say a Hail Mary. A Second Colloquy will be to ask the same grace from the Son, that he may obtain it for me from the Father. Then I will say the Soul of Christ. A third colloquy will be to ask the same grace from the Father, that he may grant it to me. Then I will say an Our Father". Exx.147.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Veale SJ, "St. Ignatius Asks, 'Are you sure you know who I am?'" *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 33/4 September 2001, 1-38.

It is not that the divine initiative calls us to a course of action that is less than rational. Rather, divine prudence is infinitely creative and can enable the fulfilment of the mission far beyond what human beings initially considered themselves capable of undertaking. How often in our own experience have we accomplished things with prayer and reliance on the Lord that we knew to be far beyond our own sense of our capabilities?

This prayer of the Triple Colloquy is vital since it helps the individual to see the many subtle variations there are in personal 'riches' and 'honours' by which we are deceived. Virtually anything, which is not God, can become riches. We need always to be on the alert. As Veale reminds us, "The more the enterprise is selfless, idealistic, and noble, inescapably what justice or truth demands, the more it needs scrutiny, needs the scrutiny of the Spirit."<sup>14</sup> There is, therefore, an ongoing need for purification, not just of reason and will and desire, but also of the very spirit of a human person. Such purification is vital, not just for the individual, but so that the body of Christ, the Church, may be healthy also. The well-being of the Church, and the truth and integrity of her living, depends on the way in which individual members are faithfully living in Christ.<sup>15</sup>

#### The experience of the cross in our lives

The person praying the Triple Colloquy is asking to be drawn at an ever-deeper level into the experience of Christ -- which is often when we become fearful. For we know the experience of Christ includes the Passion. It is the way of the humble, poor and loving Christ. Indeed, all Christians at some time in their lives must face the full, dramatic horror of the cross. This occurs

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Conjoined to Christ and the Church, the good lives of the members of the Church contribute to the life and health of the Church. Conversely the sins of her members contribute to the diminishment of the Church.

when they confront the suffering of Christ for their sinfulness, their alienation from themselves and God through sin, and the continuing suffering of Christ in the contemporary human realities of poverty, violence and oppression.

It is perhaps St. Paul who best articulates the centrality of the Cross, wanting to “know nothing but Christ crucified.”<sup>16</sup> This is the supreme ‘foolishness’ of God which paradoxically reveals God’s power and wisdom.<sup>17</sup> As women and men of the Church this ‘foolishness’ is the ground on which we stand. It inevitably means being open and willing to embrace the reality of the cross in our lives both as individuals and as communities. It means living a life of ongoing conversion, and through that way of the cross, we are drawn deeply into the life of the Trinity. It inexorably means coming into confrontation with our own very human temptations to independence and self-aggrandizement. The fruit of this prayer is a real humility that is able to put a good construction on the words and actions of others. For Ignatius this would also have a particular application to our attitude to office holders in the Church.

This is a prayer which acknowledges that even through the most seemingly destructive experiences of insults, contempt, betrayal, abuse and death we are not separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus and the reality of God’s redemptive work may still be made known. We are actually praying to enter into Christ’s work and his way and the consequences that may flow from this. Always the final hermeneutic is the cross without which there can be no resurrection.

In this prayer of the Triple Colloquy which assists the refining and purifying of the individual spirit we embrace the reality of the Passion and cross in our own lives. At the same time when we

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 2:2.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. I Cor. 1:18.

act in this way we contribute to the life and health of the Church and the redemptive work of Christ.

### Living positively with Church Authority

Another way in which Ignatius may assist our particular contemporary difficulties is with regard to his understanding of Church authority. He always espoused a positive attitude in relation to Church authority.<sup>18</sup> In the tenth rule for thinking, judging and feeling with the Church he states: *We ought to be more inclined to approve and praise the decrees, recommendations, and conduct of our superiors [than to speak against them].* Our habitual attitude is to be a positive one *more inclined to approve and praise*, not only the various teachings and recommendations that superiors might make, but also the very *conduct* of superiors also.

In this rule Ignatius is not being naïve nor deliberately averting his eyes from the reality of sinful human nature and the consequences of this in human action -- even of superiors. He is well aware that in the Church there are people in authority whose conduct leaves much to be desired, and in some cases their acts are not, or were not, praiseworthy. The sixteenth century and the twenty-first century share a common reality here. His response to this is to indicate that in such a case it is unprofitable to make public denouncements *either by preaching in public or by conversing among the ordinary people.* In our twenty-first century the available media outlets for making such public denouncements include television, newspaper interviews and the internet.

Ignatius cites as the reason for his reluctance to enter into the public realm on such issues his fear of causing unprofitable public *scandal*. Moreover he sees the possibility of a public backlash that

would not address any particular situation. Instead of adopting these means Ignatius suggests that the way forward is to approach those *who can bring about a remedy* for the bad conduct that has been identified. There is a clear logic here. If something needs to be addressed with regard to a particular superior, it is better to speak about the matter privately with those who would be able to influence that superior and resolve the situation. This is more effective than arousing a public scandal, which can only be detrimental to the Church as a whole, and will not necessarily address and resolve the original problem.

This rule brings into focus the issue of public accountability that is such a crucial question in the twenty-first century Church. An objection that might be raised is that Ignatius' passion for the Church, and in particular his support for authority (exemplified most of all in his attitude towards the Pope), is to ignore situations that have caused discouragement and despair. Today this may be identified with very serious issues of physical or sexual abuse of the vulnerable. Clearly these situations, as Pope Benedict XVI stated, "can never be sufficiently deplored" and indeed "the Church herself suffers as a consequence of infidelity on the part of some of her ministers."<sup>19</sup>

The wisdom of this rule is perhaps to stress that although abuse of authority, as well as bad conduct, have occurred on occasions, this does not, in itself, undermine the legitimate authority that does exist within the Church. Also, that in the majority of cases, resolving such breaches of conduct is more likely to be successful in private conversations with those who can address the issue, than in a public campaign of defamation.

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<sup>18</sup> George Ganss makes the point that "*Mayores* here means our superiors, as the Vulgate translates it; i.e., the officials or authorities both ecclesiastical and civil". George E. Ganss SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1992, 199.

<sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, "Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 'Dies Natalis' of the Curé of Ars" 16 June 2009.

Nevertheless, it may be that it is appropriate that a scandalous situation be made public if there is no other way to correct it. Here, Fr Kolvenbach reminds us that “Ignatius believed that if our love for Christ, inseparable from love and solidarity for the Church, his Spouse, prompts us, after a prayerful discernment, to speak out, the result will always be [ultimately] constructive.”<sup>20</sup>

The way Ignatius frames this rule is that such times will be exceptional rather than common occurrences. This rule emphasizes that the general attitude to Church authority should be a positive one. When there is clear evidence of unbecoming conduct, the normal manner of dealing with this will be in a private not public manner, with the assistance of others who can deal effectively with the situation.

At the heart of this particular rule is the clear belief that the Spirit of Christ continues to be at work within the Church and within those who hold office therein. It is this belief that sustains the vitality of the relationships between individuals and office holders even when the reality of the cross seems most evident within these relationships.

In these two ways (praying the Triple Colloquy which assists the refining and purifying of the individual spirit, and having a positive disposition towards authority) we embrace the reality of the Passion and cross in our own lives. At the same time each one who acts in this way contributes to the life and health of the Church and the redemptive work of Christ.

### Hope

The reality of hope is always a gift of grace and is dependent upon the inspiration of the Spirit of God. It is in essence some realisation of the passionate loving commitment of God to human

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<sup>20</sup> Kolvenbach, “The Rules for Thinking, Judging and Feeling” with the Post-Conciliar Church.

persons and the action God takes on our behalf. In the ‘Contemplation to Attain the Love of God’<sup>21</sup>, situated at the end of the Spiritual Exercises, one of the points of the meditation asks us to consider the reality of God as a labouring God.

It is a very evocative term, conjuring pictures of hard manual labour that involves toil and sweat, tears and blood. It is an important image as it causes us to ponder that God continues to work in our world, and in the Church, and that actually God is most present when we have little sense of that presence. There, in God’s seeming absence, God most continues to work away for the good of human persons. This understanding of our ‘working’ God is one source of our hope.

In the ‘Contemplation to Attain the Love of God’ we also pray for the grace to become united in love and grace with the Lord (Christ). And we recognize that this same Lord (Christ) is always bringing God’s redemptive work to fruition through all created things. So as we share in the relationship between Christ and the Church, we are brought to a deeper union with God. We are also drawn into a more profound participation and personal embodiment of the mission of the Church. This gift of God’s love and grace is consistently given to the Church across all generations. When recognised, this love and grace is a rich source of hope. It is a gift that abides within the Church despite any sinfulness of the Church on the part of her individual members.

The last of the guidelines for thinking, judging and feeling with the Church also echoes the theme of the ‘Contemplation to Attain the Love of God’. We are to value above all, it states, service that is offered to God out of pure love. It is in this way of service out of love that we live in relationship with the Son of God. It is a love that enables us to recognize our own sinfulness and yet know that we are called to be a brother or sister of Christ, a child of God.

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<sup>21</sup> Exx. 230-237, Ganss, 94-95.



It is this rooted sense of our place in the family of God and humble acknowledgement of our own sinfulness that enables us to contribute to the life of the Church. As Fr Kolvenbach reminds us, “This state lived in the Spirit helps us to keep in balance contradictory realities -- the lights and shadows of the Church.”<sup>22</sup> We know such lights and shadows to be also part and parcel of our own individual lives. We live in the sure hope that God’s love is always gently drawing to an ever greater illumination.

### Creative Tension

Another important hopeful recognition is within the tension that exists at the heart of our Christian endeavours. Here the Spirit of God speaks through the experience of individual discernment, but this always needs to be ratified in relation to the body, namely the Church. Ignatius saw here no definitive conflict but a creative tension: between the freedom of the Spirit operating, both in the individual and in the authoritative voice of the Church. For Ignatius, this tension could not be understood as conflict. He saw all human beings as individuals in relation to the Church.<sup>23</sup> Our difficulty so often is that we desire to resolve that tension. It is part of our unwillingness to live with our own limitations and the fragmentary nature of human existence, the place where the cross truly touches our lives. When we begin to see that this place of tension is also a place of creativity, and a place that deepens our human integrity, then this too is reason for hope.

Hope is closely related to joy. Real joy is something that can co-exist with suffering. It has nothing to do with mindless optimism. In the Fourth Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* the grace

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<sup>22</sup> Kolvenbach, Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> This understanding was reaffirmed by Vatican II in the document on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. All people are in relationship to the Church by the very fact of a common human creation, whether they are

that the retreatant prays for is to joy in Christ's joy at being risen. Christ is seen as the great consoler, the one who is fully alive, and who brings life-giving energy, vitality and joy to others. We see this in the resurrection appearances, which are the focus of the prayer during this Fourth Week. We see it also in the young Church after Pentecost, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The source of our joy then, it is clear, is not in ourselves, but in the reality of God's definitive victory in Christ and the continued outworking of the redemptive mission of Christ. This is the ground of our being as Christians, and it gives our hope a sense of the future as well as of the present. Hope thus becomes the certainty of the irrevocability of God's love operative in individual lives, and corporately in the life of the Church.

#### The credibility of divine love

*Caritas Christi urget nos* -- the love of Christ impels us. This *crie de coeur* from St Paul is a helpful reminder, because it calls to mind the focus for our living and activity as hope-filled men and women who are part of the Church. Love alone makes us credible witnesses to our faith -- not a love manufactured by our own efforts and will but the love of Christ, deeply rooted in his relationship with the Father and empowered by the work of the Spirit.<sup>24</sup> It is this Trinitarian love which is the root and ground and heart of Christian hope. It is the foundation of the Church.

It is the beauty of this love that calls forth our diverse vocations to marriage, priesthood, religious life, or the single life. It inspires all our activity and communicates through our joyful witness the eternal hope of the gospel and the reconciliation that God so desires for our fractured world.

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members of a Christian denomination, members of other religious faiths, agnostics or even atheists. Thus all have a relationship with the body of Christ. Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, [10]..

It is the love of God in action in the person of Christ which opens our hearts and minds to the reality of intimacy with our God. It is from this depth of Trinitarian intimacy that we draw the resources for a realistic hope and a credibility of love for all with whom we live and work. It is the imperious nature of this love that it has the power to draw us beyond the destructive ‘political’, polarised struggles in which we all too readily engage; and the gentleness to disarm even those who have grown hardened; and it can lead us to seek what is common to every vocation in the Church -- an intimacy with the Lord and a sharing in his redemptive mission.

### In Conclusion

For Ignatius, the Church is more than merely a context within which the human person comes to experience God. For him, the Church is not an external organization or a structural framework in which he sets himself and his order. Nor is it a body to which he has some loose association and of which he can be highly critical. Primarily the Church for Ignatius is the visible embodiment of Christ himself. And it is to Christ, our Creator and Lord, and to his greater glory that he offers his service and that of the members of his order. In this manner Ignatius wrote to the entire Society of Jesus in 1553, “We should love the whole body of the Church in her head Jesus Christ”<sup>25</sup>

This ‘fervour’, ‘zeal’ and ‘fidelity’ of Ignatius find an echo in the recent documents of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. These documents lay stress on the ecclesial experience of being one with Christ at the service of the Church. They indicate that such experience is lived out in an ongoing process of conversion. They emphasise that the spirituality underpinning the Society of Jesus is ecclesial. It involves thinking, judging and feeling with the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. John 15:16.

<sup>25</sup> Ignatius Loyola, Letter to the Whole Society, July 23 1553, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, ed. Martin E. Palmer S.J. John W. Padberg S.J. John L. McCarthy S.J., St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006, 434.

Church as an immediate consequence of love for Christ who continues his promised presence within her.

The call received by Christians today is to a passionate, loving commitment to Christ -- the one who is Our Lord and Head. It is a call to a similar commitment to his body, the Church, of which we are all members. In and through this twofold commitment the passionate love of God flows into the Church's mission, which is the redemptive work of Christ for the life of the world.

The reality of the cross, which is a share in the Passion of Christ, is an inevitable part of life within the Church, which is -- as we are -- both sinful and holy. Yet, this intimate, loving union with Christ, which leads into the heart of the Trinity, is the source of our hope as individuals, and communally as the Church. It is the heart of the gospel. In a Church of passion and hope there is a beacon of light, life and hope to illuminate a darkened world.