

A Next Generation of Questions for Ignatian Spirituality

by JÁNOS LUKÁCS SJ*

1. A Formator's Perspective on Contemporary Ignatian Spirituality

Young experts on Ignatian spirituality who met in Barcelona in 2009 projected an image of a thriving Ignatian spirituality. Within ten years, Ignatian research had produced almost 13,000 titles,¹ including several major reference works like the *Historical Dictionary of the Society of Jesus* and the *Dictionary of Ignatian Spirituality*. There has been a lot of academic activity: the “list of the many theses... reveals a great diversity of fields of interest and shows how lively Ignatian spirituality is”.² Other great signs of vigor are the “vast panorama of the various journals of Ignatian spirituality”³ and the “rich but impressive and complex diversity”⁴ of Ignatian university and spiritual centers worldwide. This global picture confirms my personal impression and that of many Jesuits and non-Jesuits who witness the great and manifold fruits of Ignatian spirituality in our local contexts.

At the same time, the Barcelona meeting also revealed several alarming signs of ambiguity. In the plethora of publications, “the work on the sources focused mainly on the Exercises”.⁵ Most publications are “in the third person, since they deal with Ignatius’s experience, rather than in the first person, reflecting explicitly on our own spiritual experience”.⁶ Carlos Coupeau pointed out the “radical question posed by such profusion: is this abundance of publications and translations a sign of dynamism or of inertia, repetitive and without great creativity?”⁷ The meeting saw a “resurgence of several major preoccupations concerning the challenges of our times: the issue of Ignatian formation, the growth and transmission of the Ignatian spirit; the issue of relations between

* JÁNOS LUKÁCS is Novice Master in the Hungarian Province; lukacs@jesuits.net

¹ SYLVIE ROBERT: “When Young Ignatian Researchers Get Together...”, *The Review of Ignatian Spirituality* - XL, 3/2009, p. 27. <http://www.sjweb.info/documents/cis/pdfenglish/200912204en.pdf>

² Ibid, p. 28.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵ Quotations from the talk given by CARLOS COUPEAU, *ibid*, p. 27.

⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷ Ibid.

academic research and pastoral practices and applications; the issue of dialogue with cultures and religions.”⁸

This listing of challenges also confirms my experience as formator and superior. I can certainly see and admire the abundant graces that Jesuits tend to receive during their yearly Spiritual Exercises and especially during the 30-day Exercises in the Novitiate and Tertianship. But I often find myself perplexed about how fruitfully Ignatian spirituality can help Jesuits deal with everyday issues of community life, the vows, fidelity in one’s vocation, and so on. While the Spiritual Exercises continue to make their way into diocesan seminaries, various religious communities and even Lutheran retreat houses, fewer and fewer persons consider the Society of Jesus to be an attractive and sufficiently supportive place to live Ignatian spirituality as a way of life.⁹ With a touch of sarcasm one could say that Ignatian spirituality seems to enjoy excellent health within the confines of the Spiritual Exercises, but is prone to get a cough as soon as Jesuits enter the daily routine of ordinary life, be it the seemingly endless studies of a scholastic, the heavy responsibilities of a formed Jesuit, or the utter powerlessness of old age after a life of competent service.

“What decisions should be taken institutionally to give an impetus to work on Ignatian spirituality?”¹⁰ This question was posed by researchers of Ignatian spirituality at the Barcelona meeting, and I would like to consider this very same question from the perspective of a formator, by presenting a thesis, proposing elements for an examen, and offering an invitation.

2. A Thesis

In his reflections after the same Barcelona meeting about how Ignatian studies could be taken further, Patrick Goujon SJ formulates a “criterion for going forward”.¹¹ Ignatian texts have a specific aim that should be respected: “According to Ignatius the texts do not exist alone and apart from their usefulness, from a ‘profit’ to be drawn from them”.¹² While this statement is usually self-evident in discussions where Jesuits are well represented, it can conceal great challenges to both researchers and to those on the pastoral side. Academic research environments often impose their own criteria for textual studies, making the properly Ignatian criterion nearly impossible to apply. For directors of the Spiritual Exercises and formators, however, the challenge consists in being knowledgeable about and remaining close to the Ignatian sources. As for the future of Ignatian spirituality, the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation”¹³ should play an important

⁸ Ibid, p. 34.

⁹ The Society in Numbers, April 2013.

¹⁰ SYLVIE ROBERT, op. cit., p. 34.

¹¹ PATRICK GOUJON, “Pilgrims of Ignatian Research: A Glimpse of Future Steps,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* - XL, 3/2009, p. 49. <http://www.sjweb.info/documents/cis/pdfenglish/200912206en.pdf>

¹² Ibid., p. 52.

¹³ Ibid., p. 50.

role in keeping scholars and those in the field of practice in conversation with each other. Collaboration between these two groups, interaction between the scholarly and the practical approaches promises fruits that Ignatian spirituality should not be deprived of. The criterion of coherence between text, usage and situation creates a fundamental norm of unity in the multiplicity of possible directions for the future of Ignatian spirituality.

I believe that the argument of Patrick Goujon is a powerful one and that we can and should profit from it more fully. In fact, the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” can serve as a criterion of discernment not only for the future, but also for a better understanding of the present and the recent past of Ignatian spirituality. It can shed a beam of light on some of the fundamental questions brought up at the Barcelona meeting and help us identify a core issue that does not seem to have received sufficient emphasis. My thesis is the following:

The reason why Ignatian spirituality is both thriving and showing inertia at the beginning of the 21st century is that its relationship with the two primary Ignatian writings, the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* is fundamentally ambiguous. In the case of the *Spiritual Exercises* a long and inspiring learning process on how to apply the hermeneutical criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” took place from the 1950s to the end of the 20th century, whereas a similar process has hardly begun to unfold in the case of the *Constitutions*.

The renewed interest in the *Spiritual Exercises* from the 1950s focused on whether and how particular practices, exercises, hints and explanations in the text can be understood and explained in such a way that they become useful in helping individuals who come from a broad variety of personal life situations. Greater attention to the text proved helpful in the practice of accompanying persons, and greater attention to the actual spiritual experiences of those doing the Exercises proved indispensable in better understanding the particularities of the Ignatian text. The criteria of remaining close to the text, making it useful in “helping souls”, and of adapting it to particular circumstances were not simply fulfilled simultaneously, but were in fact discovered to be mutually relying on each other. Ignatian spirituality in the second half of the 20th century exemplified the extraordinarily creative power that can be released when the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” is applied to a major Ignatian text.

The understanding of the *Constitutions* also changed during this period as more and more authors began to interpret this book as a spiritual text, allowing readers to break free from the legalistic interpretation that seems to have prevailed until the 1950s. In the meantime, the purposeful and laborious yet inspiring work of comparing specific expressions, teachings and prescriptions of the text to the lived experience of Jesuits has not even started. Part of the reason for this could be that the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* has ‘stolen the show’. In the mind of contemporary readers, the *Constitutions* still tend to appear as a repository of spiritual, anthropological and social convictions that can hardly be applied under 21st century conditions, even though its many spiritual gems make it a worthwhile source for the occasionally relevant quotation. The *Constitutions* can be all too easily discounted as a ‘text’ of spirituality that is out of tune with our times, unfit for being consistently probed for coherence with ‘usage’ and ‘situation’.

This tacit lack of appreciation for the text of the *Constitutions* became, in turn, out of tune with our times, when in 1996 *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* were published. The text was presented to the Society of Jesus with an emphasis on its renewed authority. Authority was not simply based on tradition, although the text retained “a genuine fidelity to its proper character and original mission”.¹⁴ Nor was the authority of the text uniquely based on the authority of General Congregation 34 that promulgated it “with the greatest consensus and the greatest joy in the Spirit”, as it would have been normal and sufficient in the case of a legal document. The text was to have authority because it had been “purged of elements that were obsolete or had been formally abrogated”, because it expressed the work started by GC31 (1965-66) and GC32 (1974-75) which “thoroughly adapted the Society’s life and apostolate to the new needs of the times”, and because the text gave a “formal, normative structure to the many decrees embodying this renovation and accommodation”.¹⁵ The book of the *Constitutions* was to be trusted as a document that is relevant and applicable to the many daily issues of formation and contemporary Jesuit life.

The fact that the text of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* has been imbued with new authority means that it is now ready to face the challenge of the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” being applied to it. About half a century after the *Spiritual Exercises* captured the attention, the trust and the curiosity of Jesuits, the *Constitutions* has become approachable and worthy of the same level of attention. The volume of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* is on the start line, waiting for a new learning process to unfold. The question is: How can the text become useful in the varied situations of Jesuit life? How can coherence between text, usage and situation begin to develop?

As the Barcelona conference indicated, Ignatian spirituality does not seem to have taken notice of the historic novelty of the publication of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms*. The overwhelming majority of the 13,000 Ignatian publications in the next decade still focused on the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the case of the *Constitutions*, the gap between research and practice has remained wide open. Among the formation meetings that I have attended in the past years, I do not remember any that would have stayed ‘close to the text’. As for academic publications, I am not aware of any initiatives concerning the “verification that what is given is well received”.¹⁶ It is understandable that of the five particularly important challenges ahead of contemporary Ignatian spirituality the Barcelona meeting voted to the top these two: “How do we effectively live according to this spirituality?” and “How can we make this Ignatian tradition our way of being and of acting?”¹⁷

¹⁴ “Preface of VERY REVEREND PETER-HANS KOLVENBACH, Superior General of the Society of Jesus,” no. 2., p. xi. In: *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, 1996.

¹⁵ Ibid, nos. 2 and 3a, pp. xi-xii.

¹⁶ PATRICK GOUJON, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁷ SYLVIE ROBERT, op. cit., p. 28.

Since our relationship with the *Constitutions* comprises a core component of our Jesuit identity, the unresponsiveness of Ignatian spirituality and of Jesuit formation to the promulgation of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* has repercussions throughout the Society. A good decade after 1996, GC35 received a significant number of postulata about evergreen issues concerning some of the most important dimensions of Jesuit life. In the meantime, the weariness of companions who felt that “we had enough texts” was also manifest.¹⁸ The need to do something at the Congregation about clearly problematic issues seemed obvious, yet there was no point in writing new decrees as long as previous ones had not been sufficiently implemented. By the time that the Congregation opened, a noticeable discrepancy between the supposedly normative texts of the Society and lived reality was perceptible, even though this inconsistency was never expressed as directly as in the case of GC29 when “[m]any postulata had come to Rome asking that new decrees not be multiplied, but that old decrees be put into practice. This the congregation decreed, in urging execution of the decisions of the previous congregation [...]”.¹⁹

Although at GC35 there was a lot of talking about the need to “implement” already existing documents, this urgency was not decreed. Instead, recurring topics of concern like Jesuit formation, community life or finances were relegated to the ordinary government of the Society.²⁰ The drawback of this choice was that the Society as a whole was not prompted to face the discrepancy between documents and life, ideal and reality. The advantage however was that the verb “implementation” did not become a buzzword in the Society, and its possible negative overtone of enforcing regulations – a one way movement from rules to praxis – could be avoided. Jesuits have been left free to turn toward the *Constitutions and the Norms*, taking seriously both the text and the Ignatian insistence on using it for the good of individuals and of the body of the Society. The space remained open for a new learning process to begin, one that focuses on the understanding and the use of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms*, analogously to what we are already familiar with from understanding, giving and engaging in the Spiritual Exercises.

The Barcelona meeting raised the question of possible institutional responses in order to give new impetus to research in Ignatian spirituality. From what has been said above, it seems clear that such responses will have to do with placing the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* at the center of the attention of researchers and formators alike. The direction to be taken for Ignatian spirituality seems clear and so does the

¹⁸ The Congregation adopted this position: “From the beginning, the 35th General Congregation, in harmony with the proposals of the *Coetus Praevius*, had expressed its desire not to produce a large number of documents.” In: “General Congregation 35: Historical Introduction,” 6.c. See *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st-35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, 2008, p. 720.

¹⁹ JOHN W. PADBERG, S. J., “The General Congregations of the Society of Jesus: A Brief Survey of Their History”, *Studies in the Spirituality of the Jesuits*, Vol. VI, Nos. 1 and 2, 1974., p. 66.

²⁰ *Jesuit Life and Mission Today...*, op. cit., p. 721.

urgency to expose our Jesuit life to fresh, powerful Ignatian impulses. What is still blocking us? How could the process of a deeper reception of our Ignatian heritage gain momentum again?

3. Elements for an Examen

If it is true that Ignatian spirituality has lost vigor because we had been pushing the pedal with one foot only, why has the promulgation of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* not released new energies? Why does Ignatian spirituality still tend to disregard this powerful Ignatian resource? Is it simply a matter of ringing the bell more loudly, to indicate that the time has come to allow the ‘practice’ of daily Jesuit life and the ‘study’ of the text of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* influence each other more directly? This could well be the case. But it seems to me that there is a further, somehow masked factor to be considered here.

The question of why we do not live according to our potentialities typically calls for an examen, and this is the form of reflection that seems appropriate here. Of course, the need to reflect on the relationship with the Institute of the Society is above all a personal responsibility to which the *Formula of the Institute* attributes great weight: “let any [member of the Society] take care, as long as he lives, first of all to keep before his eyes God and then the nature of this Institute which is, so to speak, a pathway to God”.²¹ A collective reflection can and should not take the place of a personal examen. It could, however, offer some elements for consideration that could form a common basis for understanding where we are.

The first point of the Examen is “to give thanks to God our Lord for the favors received”,²² and I would like to develop a few thoughts under this heading. Most Jesuits speak fondly about their experiences of having done the individually accompanied Spiritual Exercises, and we would certainly agree that the renewed understanding of the Spiritual Exercises in the second half of the 20th century was a gift from the Holy Spirit, a providential outpouring of the richness of our Ignatian heritage. Yet a grateful acknowledgment of the powerful movements of the Spirit in the second half of the 20th century can make our present inertia seem all the more curious. Would the Spirit stir us less energetically than before? Or would contemporary Jesuits be less willing to cooperate with the movements of the Spirit?

I propose that instead of moving too quickly to the second point of asking for grace to know our sins, we would do well to dwell on the first point a little longer. My intuition is that while deliberating possible institutional initiatives to foster a desired new Impetus for Ignatian Spirituality in the 21st century (let us call this IIS21), we could be helped greatly by considering more in detail the immense 20th century Impetus for Ignatian

²¹ *Formula of the Institute*, 1550, no. 1

²² SpEx. 43

Spirituality (IIS20 for short). What exactly happened then? In what ways were we gifted, perhaps without even noticing? How did the Lord foster the long learning process that individual Jesuits and the Society went through during those years?

I suggest that a main reason why IIS21 fails to start is that some of the critically important conditions that were providentially provided for us during IIS20 will demand conscious attention in the case of IIS21. IIS20 was not the result of an institutional decision. It had not been planned, and it was not controlled by anyone. IIS20 could certainly not have happened without dedicated Jesuits, religious and lay persons who were open to the movement of the Spirit and ready to give their best to cooperate with it. But beyond the initiation of the Spirit and generous human cooperation, IIS20 was made possible by a number of circumstances that easily remain invisible to us, simply because we tend to take them for granted. If we look back from our context, we can – in the spirit of the *Examen* – discover that these conditions were indeed among “the favors received”. A glimpse at the historic reality of IIS20 could therefore help us identify areas where purposefully setting up some of the indispensable conditions could enable us to move forward with IIS21.

As we try to establish a fruitful relationship with the text of the *Constitutions*, we do not simply continue IIS20. In many ways, of course, we can enjoy the fruits of the labor of our predecessors. In some way, however, we are taken back to the time when these companions began to relate the other major Ignatian text, the *Spiritual Exercises* to the lived experience that the text was referring to. There was a lot of cautious experimenting, a real sense of breaking new ground in an unknown land. In a sense we will have to go through a similar experience as we open the book of the *Constitutions*. Proper understanding of how things happened in the past with the *Spiritual Exercises* could enlighten and encourage us to look ahead and move forward with the task that is now being assigned to us.

Taking the time to chat, close to the text and close to practice

Since I am not aware of any historic records of the earliest beginnings of IIS20, I rely on a memorable conversation that I had with the French Jesuit Fr. Maurice Giuliani in 1996, when I was a scholastic studying theology in Paris. He talked unassumingly yet with a sparkle in his eyes about the times when several Jesuits who were active in the ministry of giving the Spiritual Exercises became unsatisfied with the way preached retreats were customarily given those days. They believed that, although gifted and popular preachers elucidated eloquently most major themes of the *Exercises*, there was something more to be found in the Ignatian text. Fr. Giuliani’s small group studied the text of the *Exercises* (they had access to modern results of scholarly research on Ignatian texts), but they also began to experiment with talking less and listening more to the experiences of those doing the retreat, in the spirit of Nos. 2 and 7 of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Week by week, the small group of companions came together in the recreation room to share their experiences and questions about graces received and issues to be clarified. As I was listening to Fr. Giuliani, I could almost smell the scent of the “tisane” that these Jesuits were sipping while engaged in fraternal and relaxed, yet at the same time precisely focused

conversations. These early conversations in the wake of IIS20 were decisive because these Jesuits began to apply the hermeneutic principle of “coherence between text, usage and situation” to the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* and to the experiences they gained while listening to people talking about their prayer. They mutually encouraged and helped each other as they moved into hitherto unexplored land of Ignatian spirituality.²³

It might not seem especially noteworthy that such a series of inspired conversations would take place and slowly but surely clear the way for IIS20. Yet it could only happen because a group of Jesuits, capable of such informal yet persistent conversations, happened to have been assigned to the same ministry and at the same geographic location. This unintended circumstance proved to be a providential condition for IIS20 to gain momentum well before Fr. Giuliani was asked by his Provincial to launch an Ignatian spirituality journal (which became the review *Christus*). The fact that those companions could and wanted to spend time together discussing their experiences about the Exercises was a small and seemingly negligible detail in the historic process of IIS20, but it is worth being counted among the ‘graces received’ because this small detail was a necessary condition for setting in motion the process as a whole.

I find it quite astonishing that a small, informal group of Jesuits could play such a decisive role in the development of IIS20, which could be rightly put forward as perhaps the single most important example of creative fidelity in recent Jesuit history. How could these Jesuits have the leisure to set off regular quality time for discussions that could easily look more like a hobby than a serious apostolic engagement? Their approach seems to contrast sharply with the hectic life of active Jesuits of our day, who tend to keep a tight schedule in order to be able to face the heavy pastoral, administrative or managerial burdens that they have taken on their shoulders.

What used to be a providential circumstance for our predecessors becomes for us a matter of conscious choice: can quality time be set aside for Jesuits in order to engage in a Society-wide project that will perhaps only begin to bring fruits in many years’ time? Could a group of contemporary Jesuits have the leisure to explore the by and large uncharted terrain which opens up when the hermeneutic principle of “coherence between text, usage and situation” is applied to the *Constitutions* and to formators’ and superiors’ experiences? Such a group could contribute to the beginnings of IIS21 in a truly efficient way. If such groups exist already, time and resources could be allotted to them to share their research more widely. If no such groups exist, then individual Jesuits, especially formators or superiors of formation communities, could be encouraged to begin thinking about such issues, even at the price of diminishing their more locally important commitments. *Voilà* a couple of issues that would merit consideration, it seems to me, in view of an institutional response to the current inertia of Ignatian spirituality.

²³ To get a sense of what it meant to be a “pioneer” of IIS20 in the United States, only few years after the earliest beginnings in Europe, see the videos produced for Georgetown University by Frank Frost Productions: <http://www.georgetown.edu/content/1242663501852.html#Videos> (To view online, click the links at the bottom of the webpage under the heading *Disc One: Renewal of the Spiritual Exercises*.)

Expectation-free conversations

The Jesuits who gathered around Fr. Giuliani in the early 1950s were passionate about helping souls and passionate about appropriating the Ignatian way of doing this. They were no mere theoretical specialists on the Exercises, and they did not need to behave as if they had answers to everything. They certainly shared their discoveries, the lights and graces that they experienced underway, but they also had the liberty to talk about what they did not understand or could not use in practice. They did not withhold their observations about tensions between text and usage, between generally valid norm and uniquely particular situation. The early beginnings of IIS20 seem to have depended on Jesuits who were able to admit their lack of understanding, their incapacity to help in the way they would have liked to, and their frustrations about not yet being able to link the understanding of the text to lived practice.

Such “low threshold” conversations seem to be a rarity in the life of formators today. We need to be competent vis-à-vis Jesuits in formation; we are generally esteemed in our provinces for being knowledgeable about Ignatian spirituality; we often need to take the initiative in the formation of non-Jesuit religious formators; we give talks at Jesuit meetings; and we tend to like when our Provincials regard us as able persons to whom they can entrust Jesuits in formation. So many different contexts make demands on us that we have developed fine ways of demonstrating what we all know. The flipside of this situation is that we are in danger of losing our ability to talk about our questions in depth, about our doubts concerning the ways of doing that we inherited from our predecessors, and, in general, about the lights and shadows of our work as formators.

To give a hint of what issues could be raised in a “low threshold” conversation about the *Constitutions*, let me offer some examples. These questions could constitute something like a starters’ kit for a conversation between Novice Masters who want to respect the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation”.

Commentators sometimes consider Const. 250 to be the heart of Part III of the *Constitutions*. Are you at ease with this statement? What elements do you emphasize when explaining this paragraph to novices? What are the typical misunderstandings? Do novices tend to accept the text without question or do they show resistance? Have you developed ways of helping them to overcome these? What culturally distorted caricatures tend to change the meaning of Ignatian terms? How do you recognize whether or not the assimilation of this passage brings fruits in the life of a novice? What secondary sources do you use in order to clarify the meaning of the Ignatian text? How do you “take care” that novices “put what they have learned into practice” [cf. Const. 277]? What typical resistances do you encounter in yourself as you try to make Const. 250 useful for novices? Should there remain difficulties in understanding the Ignatian text, how can you invite novices to stay close to the text and play a constructive role in the act of interpretation? How does Const. 250 help a novice move ahead along a pathway of human, spiritual, psychological and moral growth?

Such questions, although they are almost word by word applications of the questions that we customarily deal with in the case of each and every significant paragraph of

the *Spiritual Exercises* while learning to give individually guided retreats, are likely to create uneasiness in the case of the *Constitutions*. Resistances could mean that applying the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” brings us away from our usual areas of expertise where we feel more self-confident. The very principle of “complementarity between two definable orientations, towards the sources on the one hand and towards experience on the other”²⁴ that attracts us to the *Exercises*, faces us in the case of the *Constitutions* with work to do but also with a sense of confusion about whether this work is worth doing.

“Confusion” in the *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx. 48) is the grace that accompanies the passage from a fixed way of seeing things to a slowly emerging new vision. In the history of science, confusion has been an almost necessary condition for new scientific paradigms to emerge.²⁵ Sharing uncertainties and asking questions can seem like an inefficient and even confusing mode of conversation, but this mode of communication played an instrumental role at the early beginnings of IIS20. Would it be advisable to recur to some similar practice in the hope of receiving similar graces? I would certainly not want to imply that sharing our ignorance should be the only possible way to talk about the *Constitutions*. There is a lot of knowledge and plenty of experience around, and nothing excludes these from being shared. Yet if we want to remain open to be as profoundly transformed by IIS21 as it was the case with IIS20, we could well begin to value conversations that reveal our ignorance as well. Mutual confidence and trust in the rich potentials of Ignatian spirituality would be prerequisites. Sharing our weaknesses could thus become, instead of being mere lamentations, necessary steps toward finding what is currently beyond our perspective.

A place to meet

Fr. Giuliani’s group of Jesuits had a place to come together, probably the recreation room or perhaps a meeting room at the big Jesuit residence of Chantilly. I do not know whether at the end of the day they counted this space among the “goods received”, but it was certainly among the conditions that enabled IIS20 to gain momentum at the very early stage. It was an obvious condition at the time but it is far from being obvious as we ponder the circumstances among which IIS21 could set in.

Researchers of Ignatian spirituality and formators who could bring in valuable contributions to the initial phases of IIS21 – since they are close to the text of the *Constitutions* or to the daily challenges of helping other Jesuits – are scattered around the globe. For example, Novice Masters in the Central-Eastern European Assistancy work at hundreds of kilometers from each other, and these distances can reach thousands of kilometers in other regions of the world. Under such conditions, meeting rooms where form-

²⁴ SYLVIE ROBERT, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁵ Cf. THOMAS S. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962, p. 115.

ators could come together become difficult to find. Who among us would be ready to convince himself and his superior that a series of “expectation-free conversations” where we could share what we do not know and do not feel comfortable about was worth paying the high costs involved in terms of money and time?

There is, of course, nothing new in the phenomenon that Jesuits need to bridge over great distances for the sake of communicating with each other. Letters and books have served this purpose from the outset, and modern communication technology has brought a whole range of new possibilities that many Jesuits make use of on a daily basis. Yet it remains true that the mere possibility of writing books and articles, sending emails and using cell phones has not given the impetus that we hope for Ignatian spirituality in the near future.

Among possible institutional responses to the current situation of Ignatian spirituality, a more purposeful use of the Internet, the construction of an online meeting place seems an obvious opportunity. Although communication on the Internet is certainly impersonal and limited in many ways, thriving social network sites and professional intranet sites demonstrate how efficiently barriers can be overcome when there is sufficient motivation. Privacy issues do exist, but risks can be managed to some extent and, with some prudence, kept within realistic limits. Communicating over the Internet could be compared to communicating in a foreign language, a somewhat cumbersome and at times humbling yet rather eye-opening experience that we Jesuits usually need to accept as part of our vocation.

An easily accessible text

When IIS20 began to pay special attention to the *Spiritual Exercises*, it had to do with a manageable, slim volume of 370 paragraphs only, a large part of which was a simple listing of points for biblical contemplations. Focusing on the *Constitutions* will mean dealing with a text consisting of 827 paragraphs (including the General Examen), many rather long and complex. The fact that the *Constitutions* and the *Complementary Norms* are printed together means that a single and manageable volume, containing all references to abrogated and modified parts of the original text, can become the object of our attention. Yet for everyday use this volume, which also includes a voluminous index of topics, remains somewhat awkward. Few books demand so much turning of pages when someone tries to get informed about a single issue (e.g. “What do the *Constitutions* and the *Norms* say about obedience?”). The sheer volume of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms* can discourage potential readers, increasing the psychological barriers that make us hesitant about devoting our energy to IIS21.

I am inclined to count among the providential circumstances at the outset of IIS20 the fact that the *Spiritual Exercises* is a small pocket-size book. In order to facilitate IIS21, could we not do something to make the *Constitutions* more accessible? The difficulty is once again not new; Nicolas Bobadilla perhaps spoke the mind of several companions when he said that “the *Constitutions* were a ‘prolix labyrinth’ that neither supe-

riors nor subjects would ever be able to understand.”²⁶ Jesuits from the first generations onwards tried to dodge the difficulty by publishing smaller “Summaries” that reproduced some of the key passages from the *Constitutions*. Such solutions had obvious limitations and they certainly did not comply with our contemporary hermeneutical criteria for understanding the text, but they were nevertheless suitable for opening a window to the text of the *Constitutions* for generations of Jesuits.

With the onset of IIS21, a number of practical questions will arise: how to organize the knowledge that we already have and that we have yet to discover? Detailed commentaries of any classical text tend to exceed the volume of the original text itself considerably. How can one possibly manage such quantities of information? In this area of handling our documents and organizing our reflections over them, some institutional response could be helpful. In this entire area again, we should be thinking about using contemporary information technology in a more purposeful way.

A spiritual and psychological dynamic of progress

I would like to mention a final area where attention to IIS20 could help us identify a condition of possibility for IIS21. For about twenty years at the beginning of IIS20, understanding and elucidating “the dynamic of the Exercises” was a central preoccupation both for researchers and for “practitioners” of Ignatian spirituality. A dynamic of constant spiritual progress, with its various characteristics according to the Four Weeks, served as the central reality that made it possible to understand both the particular details of the Ignatian text and the meaning of corresponding spiritual experiences. The question of “What does this point (exercise, notion, explanation, etc.) of the Ignatian text mean?” could be translated into “How does this point contribute to fostering the dynamic of the Exercises?”, and the answer to this latter question could be sought in listening to the experience of those doing the Exercises.

For those giving the Exercises, the dynamic of the Exercises served as a hermeneutical bridge between text and usage, between ‘study’ and ‘practice’. One could also say that when the researcher of Ignatian spirituality talks about the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation”, the person who gives the Spiritual Exercises understands “according to the dynamic of the Exercises”. From a practical perspective, the condition of possibility for applying the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” during IIS20 was the progressive clarification of the concept of the “dynamic of the Exercises”.

The challenge and the beauty of IIS21 will be that while applying the criterion of “coherence between text, usage and situation” to the *Constitutions* and to Jesuit formation and Jesuit life, we will be obliged to focus on the specific process of growth that a Jesuit goes through during the years of formation. Currently the unfolding of IIS21 seems to be hindered by the fact that neither researchers of Ignatian spirituality nor psycholo-

²⁶ JOHN O’MALLEY, *The First Jesuits*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 334.

gists or formators seem to consider this area of research as their own. French-speaking scholars began to talk about an “incarnational dynamic” of the *Constitutions*²⁷ long ago, but we seem to have made little progress in clarifying the details of this somewhat generalized concept. How could one describe a “dynamic of Jesuit life” with similar sophistication that we are familiar with in the case of the dynamic of the Exercises? And how can we relate such research to central expressions of the Ignatian text like “a pathway to God”?²⁸ Without developing solid answers to these questions, the Ignatian character of our formation efforts will remain as questionable as the competence of someone who would try to give the Spiritual Exercises without proper understanding of the Four Week dynamic.

Facing these issues will require a thinking that is capable of synthesizing spiritual, psychological, philosophical and historical insights, and the entire discussion will have to be kept close to the text and close to the practical questions of formation. Some institutional coordination of such research will probably be necessary in this area as well if the incarnational dynamic inherent to Jesuit life is to play the role of a hermeneutical bridge between ‘study’ and ‘practice’, between text, usage and particular circumstances.

4. An Invitation

In order to avoid mere analysis that never gives way to action, at the end of these musings about contemporary Ignatian spirituality I would like to offer a possible vehicle for moving ahead with the project of putting the *Constitutions* and Jesuit life at the heart of Ignatian spirituality. I would like to extend an invitation to discover and use a website that has been built with the aim of taking care of some of the presumed infrastructure needs of IIS21.

InstitutumSJ.net has been constructed to be an online meeting place for those willing to go ahead and exchange ideas concerning these issues. The website is password protected, and registration is not automatic. Requests for admission are approved manually for applicants who can be identified as Jesuits on the basis of the data they provide about themselves.

As a virtual meeting place for Jesuits, the site offers – similarly to many publicly accessible sites – the possibility of starting discussions about particular topics. Users of the site can read each other’s comments and respond to them. Discussions can be “low threshold”; there are no expectations of academic quality. Any question can be asked and any ignorance can be admitted, while nothing excludes highly professional topics being dis-

²⁷ ANDRÉ DE JAER SJ, *Together for Mission: A Spiritual Reading of the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, The Institute of Jesuit Sources, Saint Louis, 2001, p. 75. DOMINIQUE BERTRAND SJ, *Un corps pour l'Esprit: Essai sur l'expérience communautaire selon les Constitutions de la Compagnie de Jésus*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1974, pp. 11–41.

²⁸ For an introduction into how the Ignatian term relates to our modern expression of a dynamic, see “Jesuit formation according to the Constitutions”, in Hungarian: LUKÁCS JÁNOS SJ, *Jezsuita képzés a Rendalkotmányban*, L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2013.

cussed. Discussions that have come to a conclusion can be kept indefinitely or moved out of the way and archived after a couple of weeks. This feature should take care of the presumed need for ongoing communication while keeping the price negligibly low.

Another feature is the use of wikis, a private version of Wikipedia. Wikis are texts that are special because multiple editors can produce and modify them. For example, Novice Masters could exchange 'good practices' concerning the online life of novices. Once the discussion has come to a temporary conclusion, a participant with good writing skills can create a new wiki that summarizes the discussion. The new wiki could contain a list of the most fruitful ways of doing, and mention points needing further attention. Another editor could later complement the text with a detail that had been left out by mistake. A newly appointed Novice Master can thus have immediate access to the information that will enable him to make informed choices. The wiki also remains sufficiently flexible to be adjusted when new gadgets or innovative technological possibilities begin to occupy young Jesuits. Discussions among Novice Masters can resume until some conclusion can be reached, which in turn can be easily added to the wiki treating the question of good practices.

Writings, texts, images and even sound files can be uploaded and made accessible to others as Shared Materials. These can include articles, papers for discussion and the rest. Texts that have been translated into another language can be uploaded again and attached to the original. This feature reproduces in the online world a shared filing cabinet which is at the disposal of any formator who works, for example, at the stage of post-novitiate formation.

Discussions and shared materials are not visible to everyone. The nature of a topic can be such that it is better to discuss it in a small group. For example, Novice Masters can have a group for themselves, or even the Novice Masters of any Assistancy can create a new, even smaller group. Such a group would be a closed group where new members need to be approved by the moderator. Smaller groups can work at a higher level of confidence, while larger ones can draw on a broader base of experience. But a group can also be open. For example, if someone asks a question in a group that is open to 'anyone who is interested in Jesuit spirituality', then he can seek answers from a larger number of interested persons who might contribute on the basis of their Jesuit life experience without being formators themselves.

The website makes electronically accessible the fundamental Documents of our Institute, currently an English translation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the *Constitutions* and the *Complementary Norms*. The texts can be browsed section by section; one can go directly to a paragraph or use the Index of Topics. Footnote references and references within footnotes become, as one would expect on the Internet, clickable links that bring up the text in question. The system is quite fun to use, and it makes it easy to follow footnote references that contain several references to paragraphs some of which have footnote references themselves. Later additions will also be possible. For example, other translations of the *Exercises* could be included, which would make it easy to display a line by line comparison of a translation with the Spanish autograph or with the Latin approved version.

All the above elements can be combined in quite creative ways. The above mentioned discussion about the use of the Internet in the Novitiate can be linked to Const. 244 which calls it “highly expedient” to set limits to novices’ communication when necessary. When someone reads Part III of the *Constitutions* in the Documents section of the website, information about this discussion appears on the margin next to #244. The Ignatian text can be thus read in a context of “usage”, which can contribute to making the text less abstract. Hopefully, the discussion itself can also be enhanced and made more focused by the simple reminder that the topic of Internet use is to be treated in the context of Const 244. Should someone want to make reference also to CN 96 §1, he can insert this reference in his comment as a hyperlink, so that the quoted paragraph of the *Complementary Norms* pops up at the click of a mouse or a tap of a finger on a touch screen.

Similarly, a group could discuss Benedictine, Dominican and similar influences in the text of the *Constitutions*, partly to popularize research already done, partly to identify open questions. Members of this group would see their discussions as marginal notes appearing next to the paragraphs of the *Constitutions* that are being discussed. Let us imagine that a Jesuit in Tertianship has to prepare an in-depth talk about a given section of the *Constitutions*. Since he is not particularly interested in textual criticism, he would normally not be a member of the group of researchers, but he could join the group for the time of preparing his talk. He would thus have easy access to knowledge and resources shared in the group of experts, and he could use these to help fellow Jesuits in Tertianship stay close to the Ignatian text.

InstitutumSJ.net is about infrastructure. It could be used in various ways. Ideally, it would help pull together a spontaneous group of Jesuits who are motivated by a spirit of adventure and the desire to break new ground in what appears to be a current impasse of Ignatian spirituality. Such a group of first followers, ready to dance to the music orchestrated by GC34, could pull IIS21 through the initial bottleneck of having to spend time and energy without immediate and obvious results, somewhat like the group of Fr. Giuliani cleared the way for the first phase of IIS20.²⁹ But it is also possible that a more organized way of proceeding will prevail. For example, a ‘call for best practices’ related to a given issue could be announced with a due date to various groups of formators, after which a secretary could organize and edit the received information so that it becomes easily accessible to all. Both spontaneous and centrally organized initiatives have their strengths and weaknesses, and InstitutumSJ.net is open to both approaches.

Whatever its actual use will be, InstitutumSJ.net aims at helping to harmonize Jesuit life and documents of the Society, ‘letter’ and ‘spirit’ more meaningfully, according to the very definition of the term ‘Institute of the Society’: “The term Institute of the Society means both our way of living and working and the written documents in which this way is authoritatively and legitimately proposed” (CN 7).

²⁹ About the role of first followers, see the talk of DEREK SIVERS at TED2010: *How to start a movement*, http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement

Conclusion

I have argued that the signs of inertia in contemporary Ignatian spirituality are to be taken seriously, and that there is an urgency to take action because of the serious impact on the life of the Society of Jesus. It has also become clear, I hope, that the necessary means for moving ahead both in spirituality and in practice can be closer at hand than we might think, because the onset of a new impulse for Ignatian spirituality might depend on a small number of conditions, indispensable in the past but not readily given to us today. Nevertheless, giving new impetus to Ignatian spirituality will require concerted effort and sustained, focused work for a period of time, until the fruits can become manifest and sufficiently attractive for the process to continue to unfold in a more unprompted manner. If we become ready to face the challenge inherent in the promulgation of the *Constitutions and the Complementary Norms*, considerable work will await us but also the joy of discovering hitherto unknown treasures. Although we seem to be hesitant about passing this important threshold for Ignatian spirituality, an examination of where we stand may certainly elicit the restlessness of great visions and desires, high flying dreams and daring decisions that Pope Francis recommended to us at the beginning of this jubilee year 2014.³⁰

A website in itself will not give new impetus to Ignatian spirituality. Communication on the Internet has obvious difficulties, and some learning will surely be necessary before this type of collaboration can reveal its full potential. But assuming that the Spirit will continue to agitate us, and assuming that there will be companions available and willing to engage in the work entailed, the Internet might prove to be among the most viable means of communication when realistically compared to other possibilities. It will never create a community of researchers or interested formators but once such persons present themselves, it might help them to pass beyond well known frontiers and begin moving into the vast and poorly known terrains of Ignatian spirituality that are still waiting to be discovered by us.

At first sight, these new frontiers could seem restricted in comparison to what we are already familiar with. It is clear that, while the *Spiritual Exercises* are open to any Christian with a desire to find God, the *Constitutions* and formation issues only concern Jesuits and some other Ignatian religious congregations. Yet while the *Spiritual Exercises* aim at “preparing and disposing the soul” (SpEx. 1), the *Constitutions* focus on the longer and more comprehensive process of forming individuals and an apostolic body in the spirit of the *Exercises*. By beginning to examine familiar issues of our Jesuit life with more focused attention to our spiritual heritage, we will soon be led to a more profound Ignatian understanding of the great questions of our times: how to live a fulfilled life, how to prepare ourselves better to the challenges of interpersonal relationships, how to understand and use authority, how to find freedom in the Spirit in the

³⁰ Homily at Mass in the Church of the Gesù, January 3, 2014. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140103_omelia-santissimo-nome-gesu_en.html

midst of many pressing occupations, and the like. Just as it was the case during the inspired years of IIS20, theoretical insights and practical graces can be expected to appear hand in hand, in such a way that the work that focuses on the Institute of the Society will be beneficial “not only to the salvation and perfection of [Jesuits’] own souls, but also with that same grace [...] toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their neighbors” (Const. 3). The *Constitutions* promise to be an Ignatian resource not any less universal than the *Spiritual Exercises*.