

Faith, Justice, Dialogue: the Jesuit as an ecumenist in GC 35

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“Our mission of faith, justice, and all aspects of our dialogue with religion and culture” (GC 35-Decree 3, nr. 9)¹.

Looking for Jesuit identity in the decrees of GC 35 is like looking for a needle in a haystack. A first glance at the six Decrees of General Congregation (=GC) 35 in order to discover in them some particularly striking affirmation about the identity of Jesuits involved in ecumenical work will prove disappointing. None of the six Decrees bears a title which recalls in any way ecumenism. A second try is likely to be even more deluding: the word ecumenism simply does not occur. One might think that since GC 31 and 34 have had plenty to say about the matter a further Decree would be superfluous². In such cases, however, one usually resorts to a summary statement saying that the Society of Jesus approves – or disapproves – of what has already been done on this point.

What explanation could one offer for such a performance on the part of a GC? Is it to be explained through indifference to the cause of ecumenism, especially in view of the fact that great concrete results of retrieved communion are still lacking in spite of the great expectations raised by Vatican II? Or is the Society of Jesus perhaps having second thoughts, if we bear in mind that ecumenical policies have come in for so much criticism of late? One is tempted to content oneself with reflecting on the significance of what at first blush seems like the complete absence of a pertinent statement, especially in comparison with the weighty positions endorsed by recent GCs. Yet instead of resigning ourselves we may first (a) investigate whether there is not a different way of saying things, a rather indirect and implicit way, true, but perhaps not less valid than if it were more direct and explicit, and what would such an indirect reading of the texts

¹ Quotations from GC 35 are taken from *Decrees of General Congregation 35*, South Asian Edition issued by the Jesuit Conference of South Asia, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, P.B. 70, Anand Gujarat – 388 001, India 2008; abbreviated as *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, here 69. (Page references of this translation of the Decrees of GC 35 are given where there is a quotation).

² For a comment on what Congregations 31, Decree 26, and GC 34, Decree 12, had to say on ecumenism is found in E.G. Farrugia, SJ, “Identity of the Jesuit Ecumenist”, *Ignatiana* 4 (2007) 174-184; for the historical background, see idem, “On Saving My Partner’s Affirmation: Profile of the Jesuit Ecumenist”, *Ecumenism East and West*, Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue, Curia SJ (ed.), Rome 2007, 79-94.

afford. The method which recommends itself in this case is to go through all the documents and analyse their vocabulary in search of such indirect references. (b) On the basis of relevant elements gleaned from the first section we shall try to see whether a pattern does not emerge, one maybe capable of being succinctly expressed in a formula. (c) Finally, we have to draw a balance and ask whether GC 35 had really anything memorable to say on the identity of the Jesuit ecumenist or whether the little it seems to be saying does not make us rather look forward to GC 36 for more specific guidelines.

1. A different way of coming up with the truth

Let us then try to read the texts in such a way as to find out whether there is nonetheless something in the Decrees that may remind us of ecumenism. “[T]he Pope entrusts to us the task to ‘build bridges of understanding and dialogue’, in the best tradition of the Society, in the diversity of its missions”³, with Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China, Roberto De Nobili (1577-1656) in India, the “Reductions” in Latin America, taken from Benedict XVI’s Allocution to the Congregation⁴, being adduced as examples⁵. The initiative for the first mention of this important aspect of the Society’s mission came from the pope who affirms how heavily the Church relies upon “the Society’s responsibility for formation in the fields of theology, spirituality and mission”⁶. Decree 1 goes on to interpret what the pope expects from the Society of Jesus as being twofold: rigorous research in theology as well as “dialogue with the contemporary world, cultures and religions”⁷. Note that this solicited collaboration applies not only to theologians but also to the variety of our missions and apostolic work⁸. Already therefore on the very first pages of Decree 1 we come across an affirmation that gives us pause.

What catches the eye is the word “dialogue”. Discussing pluralism in religious language Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904-84), distinguishes between the pluralism that remains undifferentiated due to lack of intellectual, moral or religious conversion, and a differentiated consciousness⁹. Thus there is a religiously differentiated consciousness which is satisfied with the prohibitions of a negative theology not to pry into mystery, which is ultimately love¹⁰. If one objects that nothing is loved if is not previously known, Lonergan agrees, but excepts the love with which God floods our hearts (Rom 5:5), allowing for grace that seeks God through natural reason and through positive religion.

³ GC 35, Decree 1: “With renewed Vigour and Zeal”, nr. 6; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 40.

⁴ GC 35, Decree 1: “With renewed Vigour and Zeal”, nr. 6.

⁵ GC 35, Decree 1: “With renewed Vigour and Zeal”, nr. 6.

⁶ Benedict XVI, “Allocution to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (21. February 2008), §1, quoted in Decree 1: “With renewed Vigour and Zeal”, nr. 7, *GC 35, Asian Ed.* 40f.

⁷ GC 35, Decree 1: “With renewed Vigour and Zeal”, nr. 7, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 41.

⁸ GC 35, Decree 1: “With renewed Vigour and Zeal”, nr. 7.

⁹ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, London 1971, 276.

¹⁰ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, London 1971, 277f.

“[I]t is in such grace that can be found the theological justification of Catholic dialogue with all Christians, with non-Christians, and even with atheists who may love God with their hearts while not knowing him with their heads”¹¹.

The word “dialogue” therefore seems to put us on the right track of ecumenism, for it includes discussions on issues pertinent to their respective faith (or, in the case of atheists, their lack of it) between Catholics and other Christians or with members of non-Christian religions¹². And after this terminological clarification we may now grasp the pope’s point. Although Robert de Nobili was a missionary in India and thus potentially open to the charge of proselytism, what a difference in the approach and the results from those of another missionary in India, Francis Ros (Roz) (1557-1624). The latter has been described as “a scholarly and broad-minded Catalan Jesuit” “who won the affection of the Malabarese”¹³. But whereas de Nobili set new standards in what we would call nowadays “inculturation”¹⁴, Ros pursued the old strategy of making the Malabarians adopt Latin ways¹⁵. Indeed, de Nobili became a Hindu ascetic, following their ways without aping them¹⁶. The ecumenical difference between both is at once noticeable: had Ros, in his dealings with the Malabarese, shown an analogous capacity to surmount artificial barriers as de Nobili had¹⁷, he would have been an ecumenist *ante litteram*¹⁸.

¹¹ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, London 1971, 278.

¹² Dialogue, let us say, is a generic term which is sub-divided into various types: dialogue with other Christian denominations is called *inter-confessional or ecumenical*, i.e. **ecumenism** in the strict sense of the word, whereas dialogue with non-Christian religions is called *inter-faith or inter-religious*.

¹³ W. V. Bangert, SJ, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, St Louis 1986, 152.

¹⁴ In the spirit of GC 35 we may describe inculturation as a sort of incarnation of specific Christian values within a given culture by dialoguing with its way of thinking and way of life.

¹⁵ Ros himself, however, had serious misgivings about the means adopted to bring the Malabarese into line and in his letter to the Assistant Fr Juan Alvarez, SJ, all but repudiates the Synod of Diamper (1599), of which Ros, now first Latin bishop, retracted the more offensive decrees in a Synod of the diocese of Angamale he held in 1603; see V. Poggi, SJ, “Gesuiti e Diamper”, in G. Nedungatt (ed.), *The Synod of Diamper Revisited*, Roma 2001, 118-122; and also in the same book, G. Nedungatt, “Appendix II: Information about Mar Abraham (1593/1594)”, 283-298. V. Poggi adds two comments. (a) With reference to the comparison between de Nobili and F. Ros, one has to keep in mind that the Jesuits found it more easy to make concessions to non-Christians than to Christians who seemed to them to be in error, not to say “heretics” (ibid., 129f). (b) Then, he notes that Antonio de Monserrate, SJ, writing from Cochin, India, to the Superior General, Edvard Mercurian, SJ (12 January 1579), suggests the possibility that the Malabarese be made to depend directly on the Syrian Patriarch, i.e. the Chaldean Patriarch, the part of the Assyrian Church of the East which had recently become re-united to Rome. Poggi considers this to be a truly ecumenical proposal, because it respects the nature of an Eastern Church; ibid., 132f.

¹⁶ W. V. Bangert, SJ, *A History of the Society of Jesus*, St Louis 1986, 152-54.

¹⁷ See S. Ponnad, “De Nobili, Roberto”, *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, II, Roma – Madrid 2001, 1059-1061.

¹⁸ E. Hambye, “Ros (Roz), Francisco”, *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, IV, Roma – Madrid 2001, 3410. Hambye, himself a Jesuit professor in India for many years, passes a balanced judgment on Ros. On the one hand, Hambye says, he showed real breadth of vision by supporting de Nobili when the latter came under fire in Goa, whereas, on the other hand, he unfortunately helped destroy many Syriac documents because of his fear that the Malabarese were tainted by Nestorianism. Interestingly, Hambye sums up by saying: “In the end, both Ros and de Nobili were vindicated by Gregory XV” (pope, 1621-23).

A close reading of the texts shows how often the word “dialogue” turns up. Already in Decree 2, “A fire that kindles other fires: Re-discovering our charism”, the commitment to “‘the service of faith and the promotion of justice’, to dialogue with cultures and religions” is expressed in existential terms as taking Jesuits to “limit-situations”, where energy and life as well as anguish and death may spell out their common existence¹⁹. Moreover, the diction and the message again link lived with reflecting dialogue²⁰. This is further inculcated by the example Jesus himself set who, in his outreach, not only “embraced difference and new horizons”, ignored social and religious barriers, but also aimed at giving living water to “every parched area of the world”²¹. Having tasted this living water themselves Jesuits are urged to pass it on to all those who thirst and so foster an apostolate without frontiers so as “to bring a new culture of dialogue to a rich, diverse, and multi-faceted world”²².

The next step is of vital importance. After having explained in nr. 13 of Decree 2 that faith and justice are inextricably intertwined²³, the word pair faith-justice receives a third member as integral part of the triad: *dialogue*. In nr. 15 of Decree 2, it is said that, while the service of faith and justice, indissolubly linked as they are, lie at the heart of our mission, this option must now be extended for the followers of Jesus Christ to dialogue. To reach out to persons who belong to a culture and a religion different from our own is “integral also to our service of Christ’s mission”²⁴. The reason for thus enlarging the pair faith-justice to a third partner is seen in the context in which serving Christ’s mission today has to take place, its global context. In theology, for example, it would be inconceivable nowadays to abstract from the context, and contextual theology at least as a pre-supposition of a living theology has come to stay²⁵. The context in theology is dialogue with non-Catholic Christian denominations and with non-Christian religions. Theology is nowadays certainly not only a theoretical science, but is also a practical discipline. With globalisation and modern technology knocking down traditional boundaries everywhere and invading all spaces, of which environmental concerns are emblematic, GC 35 says,

¹⁹ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 7; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 51. See R. Cumming, “The literature of extreme situations”, M. Philipson (ed.), *Aesthetics Today*, Cleveland, Ohio 1961, 377-412. If the writers of the Decrees had belonged to the pre-Vatican II generation they may have been rather inclined to call these limit-situations the night of the Spirit.

²⁰ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 7.

²¹ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 12; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 55.

²² GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 12; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 56.

²³ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 13: “Faith and justice; it is never one without the other”; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 56.

²⁴ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 15; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 58.

²⁵ H. Waldenfells, SJ, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, Paderborn 1985.

[o]ur mission of faith and justice, dialogue of religions and cultures has acquired dimensions that no longer allow us to conceive of the world as composed of separate entities; we must see it as a unified whole in which we depend upon one another²⁶.

“*Our mission of faith and justice, dialogue of religions and cultures*” is a particularly well-sounding formula bound to have a future. Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the outgoing Superior General, puts it this way: our field of action is not an enclosed monastery but the entire world, for our concern is to dialogue with all who are open for such a dialogue²⁷. Indeed, the context of our mission changes with the shifting contours of the world. But in order to render “dialogue with religions”²⁸ possible we must point out to the Spirit at work all over the world and letting himself be found by those who seek him in all things.

In Decree 3, “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, the link of the new formula is established with GC 34 on faith and justice. On the presupposition that the aim of our mission in the Formula of the Institute is the service of faith and that the integrating principle of our mission is the inseparable link between faith and the promotion of justice for the kingdom, the conclusion is then drawn:

“... [T]he aim of our mission (the service of faith) and its integrating principle (faith directed toward the justice of the Kingdom) are dynamically related to the interculturated proclamation of the Gospel and dialogue with other religious traditions as integral dimensions of evangelization²⁹.”

Seen in this perspective of “dialogue with people belonging to different cultures and religious traditions”³⁰ and in the light of the experience of the last years, faith and justice cannot be considered to be simply one ministry among others, but are integral to all ministries. The confirmation for the Society’s conclusion comes from Benedict XVI’s Allocution, in which the Society is encouraged to approach the new millennium with its backlog of social and political challenges with the new possibilities of dialogue³¹. Catchwords to render this upheaval comprehensible are, to speak with GC 35, globalisation and post-modernism³². We thus witness the fixation of the triad as “our mission of faith, justice, and all aspects of our dialogue with religion and culture”³³. This triad has variants: “call to serve faith, promote justice, and dialogue with cultures and other reli-

²⁶ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 20; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 61.

²⁷ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 23.

²⁸ GC 35, Decree 2: “A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering our Charism”, nr. 24, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 63.

²⁹ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 3; this is quoted from GC 34, Decree 2, n.15. See *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 67.

³⁰ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 4, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 67.

³¹ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 6; Benedict XVI, Allocution (21.02.08), § 2.

³² GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 10.

³³ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 9, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 69.

gions...”³⁴. To demonstrate the *Formgleichheit* – that “sameness in the form” – of various Jesuit missions for all the difference in the concrete execution, the very same dedication with which various specific activities may be pursued in the spirit of St Ignatius, GC 35 gives by way of example Ignatius who sends Xavier to the Indies and Laynez to Trent as tantamount in both cases to being sent to the front³⁵. Or, to use another paraphrase, the mission of the Jesuits is to know no boundaries and build bridges across barriers in order to reach out to people and bring home the message of salvation³⁶. Globalisation has helped bring about a dominant worldwide culture which positively helps access to information, but negatively promotes moral relativism, a situation which makes necessary a continuous dialogue about “faith and reason, culture and morality, and faith and society”³⁷. To keep up with the rapid pace of cultural change without losing one’s balance Jesuits are enjoined to enter into a dialogue with God”³⁸. Again, to come to terms with the world of religious and cultural pluralism in which we live we have to indulge in a fourfold dialogue, an explicit reference to the fourfold dialogue – of life, action, religious experience and theological exchange – already mentioned by GC 34³⁹. When the global preferences are enumerated, a “respectful dialogue” is advocated with China⁴⁰. Dialogue is related to obedience in our contemporary set-up in the sense that we prize respect for others and openness to creative alternatives, with an innate tendency to excessive self-reliance, which obedience has to off-set⁴¹. This does not, however, dispense superiors from their duty to dialogue with those entrusted to them⁴². Superiors and directors of works are also enjoined to dialogue⁴³. Dialogue is farther extolled as a factor of further enrichment by the Society’s encounter with communities with different religious and spiritual experiences than its own⁴⁴. Moreover, if one distinguishes carefully between an *Ignatian work*, characterized that is by Ignatius’ own personal charism of seeking God in all things, and a *Jesuit work*, that is to say a work related to the Society of Jesus as such, one sees dialogue with the experience of the given person or group as more constitutive of a Jesuit work⁴⁵. The kind of dialogue needed is de-

³⁴ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 12, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 70.

³⁵ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 15.

³⁶ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr.s 14 and 17.

³⁷ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 20; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 74.

³⁸ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 21, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 75.

³⁹ GC 34, D. 5, n. 4, referred to in GC35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 22.

⁴⁰ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 39; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 82.

⁴¹ GC 35, Decree 4: “Obedience in the life of the Society of Jesus”, nr. 18.

⁴² GC 35, Decree 4: “Obedience in the life of the Society of Jesus”, nr. 25.

⁴³ GC 35, Decree 5: “Governance at the Service of Universal Mission”, nr. 40-42.

⁴⁴ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr. 5.

⁴⁵ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr. 9-10. The distinction between an Ignatian and a Jesuit work, while valid as far as it goes, has to be used with caution when we turn to dialogue, a term laden with present-day connotations, lest we read the present into the past and falsify matters. One has to avoid applying anachronistically categories which ill fit the authoritarian times in which Ignatius lived, without denying that Ignatius felt as much at home with paupers as with emperors, and whether acquiring

scribed soon afterwards: dialogue must be “conducted in a spirit of trust and with respect for appropriate subsidiarity, serves to promote discernment, accountability, and a clearer sense of collaboration for mission”⁴⁶. Indeed, the capacity to carry on a respectful dialogue is listed as one of the constitutive elements of a collaborative mission⁴⁷.

2. Force of a formula, “faith, justice, dialogue”

As one can gather from the foregoing examples, whereas the word ecumenism is not referred to a single time in the six Decrees of GC35, a cognate word, dialogue, is therein mentioned 27 times⁴⁸. The first thing we had to do is to sort out these various usages to see whether we can decipher any message, and, then, to figure out the impact of that message in terms of the formula which incorporates it. And yet it was useful to go through this laborious work and try to work out a link, however tenuous, between formal and explicit ecumenism and dialogue. A twofold element will emerge, not completely unrelated to ecumenism in the strict sense of the word: *objectively*, we have to do with a pluralism of cultures and faiths which we cannot eliminate through proselytism; and, *subjectively*, qualities are enumerated that should serve as part of the baggage of one working in this field to be able to confront this situation in the right spirit.

a. Pluralism as a theological and spiritual watchword

If we try to perceive some pattern in what GC 35 has to say on ecumenism albeit in not as an explicit a way as a fervent ecumenist might wish to have it spelled out, maybe this pattern lies on various levels.

property or legislating on religious poverty. Again, the famous “Reductions” in Latin America, indicated by GC 35 as a successful experiment in social justice and extolled both by L.A. Muratori as “a case of fortunate Christianity” and by Voltaire as a “triumph of humanity”, have been criticized by B. Melia for their paternalistic structures; cf B. Melia, “Reduktionen”, LThK³ 8, 924f.

⁴⁶ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr. 12, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 133f.

⁴⁷ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr. 12.

⁴⁸ One is surprised, however, that, in the touching letter of the 35th Congregation to Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach (4 March 2008), *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 154-158, he is extolled for his part in promoting faith and justice, but nothing is said of his being a man of dialogue and a member of the official Joint Catholic-Orthodox Commission. However, in “GC 35’s Words of Gratitude to Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ” (14 January 2008) following his resignation, the letter expresses its appreciation for the “charism of union that you and your governance have represented for us, especially in the light of the Society’s ever greater plurality and cultural diversity”; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 185, words which re-echo in the Letter of 4 March 2008: “It was your gift to motivate us to take up the opportunities for mission provided by these new contexts”; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 156.

⁴⁹ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr.5; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 130.

⁵⁰ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr.5; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 130.

⁵¹ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr.5, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 131.

⁵² GC 35, Decree 6, “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr.10, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 133.

⁵³ GC 35, Decree 6, “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr.11.



(a) *Lexically*, a language is used which, though it could have been more explicit, is *unmistakably related to formal ecumenism*. This word is **dialogue**. Even then, when CG 35 suggests that there is a difference or barrier of religion are we sure that it is inter-religious dialogue that is meant? Could it not mean others who have a different religious outlook – even within the same faith, as the post-Vatican II experience showed so eloquently? If we take the case of Northern Ireland, the difference between Catholics and Protestants is inter-confessional, a difference between Christian denominations. And yet, where dialogue did not succeed, the violence that erupted makes the difference look as if it were a struggle between two different religions; on the contrary, where dialogue succeeded, the difference seemed one of religious outlook, one of friendly neighbours to whose church one could occasionally go for service. One need only remember the yeoman service that Jesuits did there to bring about peace to see how dialogue and promotion of justice can be at the service of faith and faith witness. One can thus argue that it is too restrictive an interpretation to affirm that only inter-religious dialogue is at stake in the documents of GC 35. We can best see this if we go through the uses of “religion” and “religious” in Decree 6. We find in it “various religious and cultural contexts”⁴⁹, “religious”⁵⁰ as Catholics with the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, “different religious and spiritual experiences”⁵¹, “inter-religious dialogue”⁵², a technical expression for dialogue with non-Christian religions. In the light of the foregoing, can we interpret the expression, “of religious or spiritual traditions different from our own”⁵³, as excluding differences in religion between Christian denominations, which is what ecumenism is concerned with? It would really come as a surprise, in view of GC 35’s reiterated insistence on pluralism of cultural and religious experiences that it was here meant to *formally exclude* dialoguing with Christian denominations. If the accent in GC 35 seems to lie on dialoguing with non-Christian religions this is due to the dramatic plight of refugees, now somehow co-opted as potential partners of dialogue, many of whom are Muslims and members of non-Christian religions. Furthermore, the expression “Christian believer or member of another faith community, or person without a religious affiliation”⁵⁴ is a clear attempt to be all-inclusive, going through the whole gamut from members of the various Christian denominations to atheists. Finally, as the phrase that clinches the deal, when our mission is described as one “of faith, justice, and *all aspects of our dialogue with religion and culture*”⁵⁵ no

⁴⁹ GC 35, Decree 6: “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission”, nr.18, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 136.

⁵⁰ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr. 9, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 69. Underlined by EGF.

⁵¹ Postmodernism is often “defined” by way of contrast with the modern age and so characterized by an irreducible pluralism of views, philosophies, theologies, and an acute interest in religion as witnessed by the teeming of sects in so many parts of the world. See G. Puglisi (ed.), *Pluralismo e postmodernismo: Le sfide alla religione*, Roma 1997.

⁵² GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr.23, *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 76.

reasonable doubt can remain that inter-confessional dialogue is also envisaged. On this analysis, it is obvious that what is here said about dialogue includes not only the inter-*religious* and inter-*faith* dimensions, not to mention dialogue with atheists, but also the inter-confessional or ecumenical dialogue. Thus, ecumenism, though rather in a hidden way, is nonetheless thoroughly present in GC 35.

- (b) *Contextually*, GC 35 faces full square the fast changing context and tries to express it in a new key, that of *post-modernism*, a context under which ecumenism in the strict sense of the word may thoroughly be subsumed⁵⁶. Indeed, given the situation of pluralism and the lack of a unique philosophical infrastructure for theology, there is need of dialogue within the very same Catholic Church, sometimes within the very same small province of the Society of Jesus! The Decrees of GC 35 expressly mention dialoguing with culture/s. The word “post-modern” occurs once in the Decrees of the General Congregation in the context of our mission “in this fast-changing post-modern culture”⁵⁷. Again, we come across the noun “post-modernism”⁵⁸ only once, this time in the context of how globalisation is steadily changing our world, already badly tried by post-modernism. The importance of this is that dialogue has thus joined for good the big league of the well-established pair “faith and justice”, assuring by association a greater and better disposed audience.
- (c) By way of *synthesis*, from the picture thus assembled from the parts there emerges *something which reflects on the central charism of the Society of Jesus*. It is remarkable under which auspices talk of *dialogue* is introduced. Given that the *service of faith* and the *promotion of justice* are highlighted as expressing the basic Jesuit charism, or what is specific to our identity, the Jesuit identity as such and not simply that of the Jesuit ecumenist is characterized by proclamation of faith, promotion of justice and indulging in dialogue with those with a different religious worldview and culture. Given this threefold task incumbent on the Jesuit, he must be trained for them already in his formation and exercise himself in them once formed.

b. The spirit with which the Jesuit should conduct dialogue

If our interpretation is correct we can thus reverse the initial pessimistic assessment that GC 35 has been particularly stingy with ecumenism. What GC 35 did rather may be interpreted as follows. Given the older meaty declarations of GC 31 and 34, the Congre-

⁵⁸ GC 35, Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission today. Sent to the Frontiers”, nr.10; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 69.

⁵⁹ Karl Rahner’s well-known shift in the period following Vatican II from a more classical repertoire of theological questions to one that stresses the position of the Church in the world is partly due to this. He felt that in our times a similar shift has taken place from an overriding interest in the humanities to a more technical approach in resolving questions. See his *Zur Reform des Theologiestudiums*, Friburg i. Br. 1969, 59-61.

gation felt no need to add another paper document. Instead it preferred to say something new, and on two fronts. On the one hand, the formation of a triad, which had already been used in GC 34, now receives a new and authoritative emphasis. What was new was that, given the formation of this triad as something which found approval in yet another Congregation its reiteration indicates *the three-pronged spirit with which this dialogue has to be carried out*. Faith, justice and dialogue are henceforth the key to the Jesuit charism as understood by the last Congregations. Indeed, if we were to summarize the whole thrust of the Congregations after Vatican II, the search of aggiornamento so much sought after by the pope who convoked the council, John XXIII, now finds a concrete and possibly epochal expression, which renders justice not only to the bias of the practical so visible in the contemporary world and so well analysed by Karl Rahner⁵⁹ (1904-84), but also to the whole intellectual tradition of the Order. Both traditions are well entrenched in the Order, if we think of St Peter Claver (1580-1654)⁶⁰ and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617)⁶¹. But the two traditions often lived side by side. Now it is required of the Jesuit who does social work to remember that he needs to be up-to-date in order to drive home his arguments with people who wield the levers of power. At the same time, those who do intellectual work should remember that they are not to indulge in a theology for the élite, but as a pastoral service for the Church to help in the long run (if not already in the short) to give those who are open for others the right ideas to heal wounds.

Faith, justice and dialogue: does the formula say more about the *identity of the ecumenist*, who has to relate more specifically to faith and justice, or is it a more general formula about the *identity of the Jesuit*, who, besides promoting faith and justice, must try to do so by means of dialogue with people with various religious viewpoints, ranging from those within his own Church, to members of a non-Christian religion, including their culture, or even atheists? That is now the question if we are to evaluate what GC 35 said about the identity of the Jesuit ecumenist.

3. Should we await GC 36?

Balance of GC 35 on the identity of the Jesuit ecumenist

If our reflections have not led us completely astray, there emerges from the 6 decrees of GC 35 not only a blueprint of action patterns, but also an ethos to guide these activities in favour of faith and justice by means of dialogue. Assimilating this the Jesuit in

⁶⁰ J.M. Pacheco, "Claver, Pedro", *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, I, Roma – Madrid 2001, 823-24.

⁶¹ E. Elorduy, "Suarez, Francisco", *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, IV, Roma – Madrid 2001, 3654-6.

⁶² Thus, GC 35, Decree 2: "A Fire that kindles other Fires: Rediscovering Our Chrism", nr. 3, contains references to the Deliberations of the early fathers and the Constitutions, and in CG 35, Decree 6: "Collaboration at the Heart of Mission", nr. 9, the declaration that the quintessential Ignatius lies in the Spiritual Exercises includes obviously dialogue and ecumenism.

formation deepens his identity and prepares himself for the specific mission of the Church. Moreover, to the mind of GC 35, this formula expresses something central to the Society's understanding of itself as it grapples with contemporary issues and tries to dialogue with the Supreme Pontiffs she owes allegiance to. While GC 35 claims that this corresponds to Ignatius' mind and seeks confirmation for this in his life and writings as well as in the Deliberations of the early fathers and in the Constitutions,⁶² nowhere does it claim that its formula is a perennial formula. Better formulae could presumably be devised expressing St Ignatius' mind more poignantly and perhaps even more accurately, most of all in a way to better respond to the varying priorities of an age.

3.1. *The Jesuit in dialogue*

The Jesuit who indulges in inter-faith or inter-confessional dialogue has now the encouragement of GC 35 to look to. Moreover, GC 35 gave him an adequate job description: he is to live in a close relationship to Jesus Christ and yet be conversant with the ways of the world so as to put both in contact and so help to overcome barriers, especially such barriers which derive from an immature personality unable to see the beam in one's own eyes but only the straw in one's neighbour's. Yet, if the common platform of dialogue between those who do not have religion in common may reduce to the human desire to seek and meet the other and abandon unnecessary presuppositions, dialogue is never adequate if it is only a dialogue about social justice. Such a dialogue may be conducted even by one who does not believe, whereas believers should feel how duty-bound they are, in view of their religious ideals, to right the wrongs. Ultimately, however, even if only they were to agree to disagree, partners seeking to improve a group's lot must be guided by the guidelines of faith, and must know how to indicate that certain positions ascribed to one or the other party simply are caricatures. Finally, the platform which the Society affords through its Decrees is by no means already known, accepted and assimilated, but parts of it has met resistance in the past. Maybe through the new company it keeps with dialogue, the harsh tones of a one-sided involvement with practical matters in justice promotion finds its balance in a dialogue, which, though it is not only intellectual, ultimately calls for knowledge of history, theology and culture. The formula thus augurs to be one of peace.

a. What GC 35 did not say

With this said and done, this does not mean that one may not express some criticism at GC 35 in a spirit of open loyalty. Even after all that has been said, the Jesuit dedicated

⁶³ GC 35, Decree 6: "Collaboration at the Heart of Mission", nr. 12; *GC 35, Asian Ed.*, 133.



to ecumenism may nonetheless feel both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the end product. I shall here enumerate some points which may be open to criticism.

- (a) The fact that the Congregation never mentions ecumenism explicitly is to be regretted, because it would not have taken much space and it would have served as an indication of future policies and priorities. At the same time, this absence should not be overrated. Even in our normal approach to people, at least in certain cultures, we start with the titles, making as it were fuss over nothing, to pass after a while to the first name, and then even to pass to a phase in which we use the first name but rarely. If the Congregation does not make an explicit reference to it, probably it is because ecumenism is taken for granted in the current situation of the Church.
- (b) While the Congregation relates dialogue to an ethos which ultimately involves concrete engagement in favour of people rather than simply discussing abstract issues, the Congregation hardly gives an ethos of dialogue as such. What are its presuppositions, from an ecclesial, theological and societal point of view? There is, for example, little talk about conversion or change in our own attitudes in conversing with others, how to hold firm without breaking the dialogue and where to show flexibility in order to go on agreeing to disagree.
- (c) Again, the Congregation said mighty little about concrete steps to take as an interim programme in which to move towards compromise, tolerance, agreement, a *modus vivendi*, full communion or at least friendly and not merely pacific coexistence.

Conclusion: Partly because of the decrees on ecumenism which already existed, but partly also because of the needs of the Church and the Society at the time when GC was convoked and held, the result of GC 35 with regards to ecumenism as inter-confessional dialogue may appear thin, and even disappointing. But an injunction has the best chances of being executed when it has become interiorised. As experience shows, things which have become second nature are often taken for granted – not because they are less important, but because their importance needs no longer to be insisted upon. Yet by advocating to conduct dialogue on the basis of our core spiritual values as Jesuits while integrating them into a full platform of differentiated contacts where doing good to one another is indispensable – the dialogue of love can do more good than trying to persuade one another in a dialogue of truth – the Congregation has launched a powerful formula which has a future. If the last word should be left to hope, precisely this is not the hope of a drowning man clutching at the straw of an uncertain future, but the hope of the Jesuit, so aptly described in the Decrees of GC 35, as able to discern the Spirit at work not only in a formal dialogue of truth but also in concrete gestures of righting the wrongs in the love of Jesus Christ – whereby “[r]egular dialogue ... serves to promote discernment ...”⁶³.