

## To Console and Be Consoled: Exploring the Grace of Collaboration

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### Riassunto

Il saggio esplora la grazia della collaborazione nella vita e nella missione della Compagnia di Gesù, interpretandola come una via privilegiata per incontrare Dio. La collaborazione non è solo una risposta pratica alla diminuzione delle risorse, ma una trasformazione spirituale che ridefinisce l'identità apostolica dei gesuiti. Attraverso esperienze di perdita, vulnerabilità e condivisione, il testo riflette su come la collaborazione richieda una profonda disponibilità interiore, una nuova comprensione della povertà e una capacità di ricevere consolazione dagli altri. L'autore propone che la vita comunitaria stessa sia missione e che la grazia della collaborazione sia un dono da accogliere con umiltà, come espressione della *kenosi* di Cristo.

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### Abstract

This essay explores the grace of collaboration in the life and mission of the Society of Jesus, framing it as a privileged path to encounter God. Collaboration is not merely a practical response to dwindling resources but a spiritual transformation that redefines Jesuit apostolic identity. Through experiences of loss, vulnerability, and shared labor, the text reflects on how collaboration demands deep interior availability, a renewed understanding of poverty, and the ability to receive consolation from others. The author proposes that community life itself is mission and that the grace of collaboration is a gift to be embraced humbly, as an expression of Christ's *kenosis*.

### Parole chiave

Collaborazione, consolazione, identità apostolica, vita comunitaria, povertà spirituale, *kenosi*.

### Keywords

Collaboration, Consolation, Apostolic Identity, Community Life, Spiritual Poverty, *Kenosis*.

### Introduction

In his reflection on the Society of Jesus' Universal Apostolic Preferences, the late Philip Endean reminded Jesuits and all who find inspiration in the Ignatian charism that the preferences are

more than tasks to be done. In his view, they need to be seen as “openings to grace”<sup>1</sup>. In other words, in aspiring to (1) show the way to God, (2) walk with the poor, (3) accompany young people, (4) and collaborate in the care of our common home, a Jesuit is not simply fulfilling his mission, rather he is engaging in those ministries “where God’s word can be heard, God’s gift can be received, in particularly clear and challenging ways”<sup>2</sup>. Stated more simply, these preferences are the ways that the Society of Jesus believes that God prefers to meet us. In our “profound sharing of labor” with the poor and the youth, in spiritual conversation and in our care for the earth, we open ourselves to God’s action in the world<sup>3</sup>.

A basic supposition underlying these preferences is the grace that has been informing the Society’s way of proceeding since at least General Congregation 34: collaboration<sup>4</sup>. More than a response to declining manpower, collaboration might best be understood, borrowing from Endean’s vision of the Society’s apostolic preferences, as a way of opening ourselves to God’s life in the world. Though it may represent a relatively new aspect of the Society’s way of proceeding, it has roots in how Ignatius perceived God’s action in the world. In perhaps one of his more succinct formulations on the relationship that God seeks to establish with the person, Ignatius wrote that the “gentle disposition of Divine Providence requires cooperation from his creatures”<sup>5</sup>. God created the human person to work with God, and the Society of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Endean, “Introducing the Universal Apostolic Preferences,” 4. Online at [https://www.jesuits.global/sj\\_files/2020/05/introducing\\_the\\_uaps\\_philip-endean\\_en.pdf](https://www.jesuits.global/sj_files/2020/05/introducing_the_uaps_philip-endean_en.pdf). Accessed November 8, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase comes from General Congregation 35, decree 6. “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission,” n. 2, in *Jesuit Life and Mission: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 31<sup>st</sup> – 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 780; hereafter cited as *Jesuit Life and Mission*.

<sup>4</sup> In the *De Statu* of 2023, Fr. Arturo Sosa indicated that “reflection on collaboration of others in the Society... has been growing since the end of the 1980s.” In a footnote to the text, he specifies that 76 postulates asked General Congregation 34 to review the topic. See Sosa, *Sent to Collaborate in the Reconciliation of All Things in Christ: De Statu Societatis Iesu 2023*, 82; hereafter cited as *De Statu 2023*.

<sup>5</sup> *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus: A Critical Edition with the Complementary Norms*, ed. Barton T. Geger (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2024), n. 134; hereafter cited as *Constitutions: A Critical Edition*.

expresses its belief in this God who desires to labor with the person in its commitment to labor with others.

Understanding themselves as men “sent to collaborate in the reconciliation of all things in Christ” represents a new self-understanding for Jesuit identity<sup>6</sup>. Modifications such as this in Jesuit life are not new to the Society. An attentive reading of our history, specifically that of our founder, prepares us to look for the ways that the Spirit changed Ignatius’s understanding of his discipleship and mission. To point to just one example: commenting on the fasts and abstinences that Francis Borja was practicing, Ignatius wrote: “while I did strongly commend fasts, rigorous abstinence, and retrenchment from ordinary food, and for a time I was quite glad about them, I can no longer do that now”<sup>7</sup>. What was central to his understanding of spirituality and his relationship to God – fasts and corporal penances – shifted. Changes like this constitute a part of the Society’s Institute, so much so that Jesuit self-understanding includes a space for the way that the Spirit, working in our historical contexts, obliges us to reconsider our apostolic identity. In the words of Pope Leo XIV to a recent gathering of provincials in Rome, “when the Spirit leads the apostolic body elsewhere for a greater good, this may require letting go of long-cherished structures or roles – an exercise of Ignatian ‘holy indifference’”<sup>8</sup>. The pontiff read correctly our Institute: it calls us to follow attentively the Spirit and, when necessary, let go of certain self-understandings.

In sum, collaboration is transforming how we understand ourselves in our life-mission, and this article attempts to offer a reflection on collaboration not as a new way of working but as a new way of proceeding. Though younger generations of Jesuits may need to be reminded that collaboration is, as Congregation 35 has affirmed, “a grace given to us in this moment, one consistent with our Jesuit way of proceeding”, it is no longer necessary to debate its place in

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<sup>6</sup> The quotation is the title of Fr. Arturo Sosa’s *De Statu* 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius to Francis Borja, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, ed. Martin Palmer, John Padberb, John McCarthy, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 254-255; hereafter cited as *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*.

<sup>8</sup> Pope Leo XIV, “To the Major Superiors of the Society of Jesus.” Online at <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/october/documents/20251024-compagnia-gesu.html>. Accessed November 24, 2025.

our life<sup>9</sup>. This grace, as Ignatius understood God's communication, is opening a path before us, and though we may be at different stages of converting our hearts and our minds to a new way of proceeding, we are all on this path<sup>10</sup>. It is calling us to a humbler, more contemplative approach to our life-mission. It is providing us with the opportunity to live with greater depth what it means to be the least Society, one that has been called into existence to manifest to the world the life of Jesus, the one who came to serve and not to be served [Mark 10:45].

## **Collaboration and the inner life of a Jesuit**

If collaboration is a grace given to us by God, the historical circumstances in which it is coming are complex; it is emerging in a moment of diminishment in the Society of Jesus. Provinces are merging, novitiates are being shared, and international centers of formation are closing or finding new ways to pool resources. For many the reality of loss is close to home: communities, the places where we have lived and ministered, have closed. In short, our apostolic presence is not what it used to be. And this loss is most acutely felt at parish churches, works easily given back to their respective dioceses.

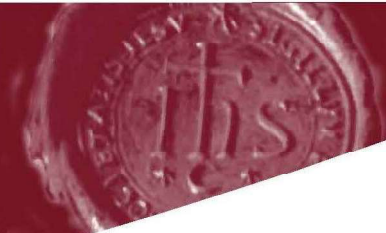
It is hard to avoid the feelings of loss, sadness, as well as a certain alarm at what younger generations may have to face since they will be the ones to bear the enormous institutional burdens that the Society has. Such a context tests our spiritual disposition and asks us if we have the inner resources to live in a Society of Jesus that experiences its weakness on a structural or institutional level. Regarding weakness and vulnerability, we are not without profound reflections on it as it concerns our personal or interior lives – one need only think of Michael Buckley's meditation on Jesuit priesthood titled "Beset by Weakness" – but less

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<sup>9</sup> See General Congregation 35, decree 6 "Collaboration at the Heart of Mission," n. 30, in *Jesuit Life and Mission*, 788.

<sup>10</sup> In his letter to Francis Borja on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1548, Ignatius wrote: "For he [God] sees and knows what is best for the person and, knowing all things, *points out to him the way*." See *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, 255; emphasis mine.





consideration has been given to limitation or weakness on a communal level<sup>11</sup>. We simply cannot do all the things that we would like to do or that we did; our apostolic reach is limited. The impressive missionary and educational endeavors that populate our history continue to fire our imagination, yet they may also leave us feeling nostalgic for a Society that is distant from our actual experience.

This is the context in which the grace of collaboration is emerging, and it offers a new experience of poverty. It is not a poverty of resources, but one of our limitations and smallness. We have made our “offering of greater worth and moment” as we meditated on the call of the King, saying to our Lord that we would bear any poverty, “actual as well as spiritual”<sup>12</sup>. But a poverty of not being able to do and be all that we would like is hard. The diverse feelings that such an experience of poverty occasions in our interior make it challenging to say with Ignatius in Manresa *what new life is this?* But Ignatius’s words are instructive for us. Diminishment is not the only narrative in this moment. New life is upon us.

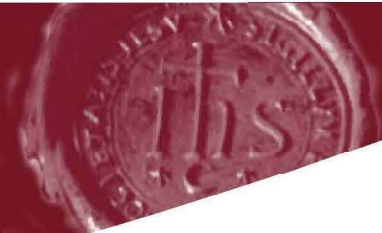
The recent gathering of Jesuit procurators in Loyola, Spain, may not have mapped out the path of this new life, but it did indicate, in accord with Ignatius’s own keen sense of the evil spirit, the ways in which we are tempted to avoid the new path before us. The conversations that Father General Arturo Sosa had with Jesuits from all over the world led him to name a series of tensions in Jesuit life, and he pointed to some of the ways in which we often fail to gracefully hold them. Referring to some of the effects of the pandemic on our younger brothers, Fr. Sosa wrote that “young Jesuits learned to take advantage of technology in order to not interrupt their studies, but some also developed an exacerbated addiction to technology, even frequenting pornographic sites or sites with conspiracy theories”. The upshot of such an exacerbated addiction to technology is the following: the men “move away from community life to isolate themselves in their own individualistic bubble”<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Buckley, *What Do You Seek? The Questions of Jesus as Challenge*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 88-90.

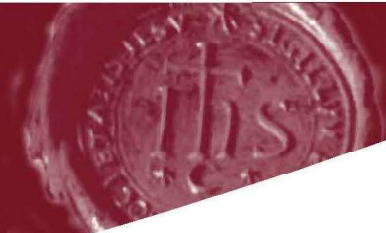
<sup>12</sup> *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. George Ganss (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), nn. 97, 98.

<sup>13</sup> Arturo Sosa, *De Statu* 2023, 74.



The mention of pornography and conspiracy theories in a *De Statu* of the Society of Jesus indicates a strong level of concern on these issues across the entire apostolic body. This is not the place to analyze the manifold reasons that some of ours, young or old, frequent pornographic or conspiracy theory websites – a conversation that the Society might well want to have at some point – but Fr. Sosa’s diagnosis highlights how such an addiction represents a movement away from the tensions in our life. The search for comfort in such material could be a response to diminishment, loss, and the decentering that is occurring in the Society as we discover that we are not the proprietors of the mission. Viewing pornography and immersing oneself in simplistic ideological positions might be our way of saying no to the grace that God is offering us. Afraid of losing ourselves in our shared labor with others in a new apostolic presence, we seek to find ourselves in secure individualistic bubbles.

This is a long way of stating that collaboration understood as a grace makes demands upon the inner life of a Jesuit. We may not be aware of how our life is shifting and the challenges that such a change carries with it, but we have to be lucid enough to know that our feelings may be a sign of the work the Spirit is carrying out in us. In a more collaborative life, the experience of the vows and their concomitant challenges change. Poverty feels different, affective and chaste relationships require work at all times and in all contexts, and obedience stretches us to listen deeply to others all the time. Moreover, our own understanding of our vocation might have to change. Collaboration asks the Jesuit to savor the grace of his vocation, in all its uniqueness and beauty, with the felt sense that the distinctiveness of his vocation is found in and with others. The lives of others are to impinge upon him, even upon that sacred place of his identity as a Jesuit. He is to find himself in solitude with his Lord, *and* he is to discover who he is in his vocation in his commitment to and for others’ vocations. And that commitment often assumes rather dreary, mundane, and undramatic colors: meetings, zoom conferences, travel, and the endless work of responding to emails. He is a man called, as Pedro Arrupe passionately put it, “to radically dedicate his life in solidarity to his brothers and



sisters”, and yet that solidarity with others may not often arouse passionate feelings<sup>14</sup>. His is a humble solidarity with and for others.

The grace of collaboration is descending upon us and carries with it a different kind of affective resonance. It consoles, but it is soft; it moves us outward, but that movement may not be towards the apostolic project we wanted or hoped for. It is a grace that lines up with the grace of the fourth week of the *Exercises*<sup>15</sup>. That grace represents the gift to experience the joy of the Resurrected Christ who continues his mission to console his friends. In the estimation of Santiago Arzubialde, the grace of the 4<sup>th</sup> week is the “ultimate purification”: it moves the person to love others in a disinterested fashion<sup>16</sup>. It opens us to selflessly give ourselves to the life, vocation, and project of another. As Michael Ivens has written, the joy of the 4<sup>th</sup> week “must always be measured in terms of depth and strength rather than emotional exhilaration”<sup>17</sup>.

Depth and strength to give ourselves to another is what this week of the Exercises calls forth in the retreatant. Forgetful of self, the joy of and with the risen Lord turns us outward to cooperate with others in *their* mission<sup>18</sup>. We move from the desire to be consoled to console. This is the path that the grace of collaboration invites us to traverse. With it we have the opportunity to live like our Lord who came to console and to help disinterestedly his friends.

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<sup>14</sup> Pedro Arrupe, “To be and to work with and like Jesus,” in *Challenge to Religious Life Today: Selected Letters and Addresses I*, ed. Jerome Aixala (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1979), 175-190, at 179.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, numbers 221-225 in the *Spiritual Exercises*. When referring to the text of the *Exercises*, italics will be used. When referring to it as a spiritual program or retreat, no italics will be used.

<sup>16</sup> Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de S. Ignacio. Historia y análisis*. Rev. ed. (Bilbao-Santander: Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 2009), 543.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, (Herefordshire-Surrey: Gracewing-Inigo Enterprises, 2016), 163.

<sup>18</sup> Paraphrasing and emphasizing a point made in Decree 13 “Cooperation with the Laity in Mission,” n. 1. In that document, General Congregation 34 boldly proclaimed: “We seek to respond to this grace by offering ourselves in service to the full realization of this mission of the laity, and we commit ourselves to that end by cooperating with them in *their* mission.” See, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, 608; emphasis mine.

## Supporting each other as we collaborate with others

The grace of collaboration is more than a call from God that sends us outward towards others in our places of ministry. It is more than something we do to or with others. It informs a new way of being on mission, and as one grace, it touches all aspects of our lives. It orients one's ministry, *and* it permeates all of one's relationships. For this reason, it is not surprising that concomitant to the emerging sense that collaboration represents a new way to follow Jesus, the Society of Jesus has also embarked upon a new way to understand and to live its communal life. Concretely, Jesuits now affirm that community life is "itself a mission"<sup>19</sup>. On a surface level, such an affirmation does not connect to collaboration, but collaboration understood as a grace that informs all of one's life allows for just such an expansion of how Jesuits consider their community life.

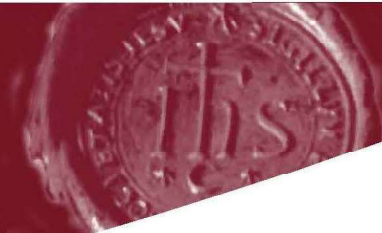
Such a consideration of community as mission invites Jesuits to look anew at their communities and to see their quotidian life with Jesuit companions as a part of their mission. Our life – at meals, in our communal spaces, and at the Eucharist – is the place where we also live our mission as companions of Jesus. Though we may not experience our communal ties with our Jesuit brothers with the same fervor as Ignatius and the first companions, if in fact their life was lived at the fervor we imagine, at the heart of our vocation is the belief that God has brought us together and that somehow, with them, we will discover our deepest identity in Christ. Borrowing again from Philip Endean, our community is something more than the place where we live; it is an opening to grace. It is a place where God wants to meet us.

Given the diversity in the apostolic body, it is understandable that we inhabit different emotional and spiritual places with respect to the idea that our community life is mission. For some of us, such a formulation diverges from our Institute. In such a line of thinking, some state that we are meant for diaspora; being on the road constitutes who we are. With such a view, the idea of community as mission represents a quasi-betrayal of the apostolic boldness

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<sup>19</sup> See General Congregation 36, Decree 1 "Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice," n. 9, in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017), 19.





with which Ignatius wanted the Society to live. For others, however, community life might be mission, but it is primarily lived in more utilitarian terms. In such an approach, community living is the place where we are present, do our part, and then return to the comfortable spaces we have carved out. Finally, there are those among us who continue to wonder how we might live and express more concretely our community *ad dispersionam* alongside of our shared life as *koinonia*, that “close sharing of life and goods”<sup>20</sup>. For we too are the Church, and the Spirit invites us to engage in spiritual conversation and practice – in ways that matter – communal discernment.

Considering our growing sense of our community life as mission as coming from the grace of collaboration allows us to live the complexity of this aspect of our mission with ease, equanimity, and understanding. We are still finding our way in this part of our mission. Nevertheless, this grace does signal the limits of a way of living our common life which has no future: a functionalized approach to living together is not sustainable<sup>21</sup>. Living our apostolic commitments along with some interest and investment in our Jesuit companions is the call of this grace. Moreover, our charism does have much to say about our interpersonal and communal ties. Number 250 of the *Constitutions*, written for the spiritual formation of novices, outlines a way of living together. In that paragraph, Ignatius animates the Jesuit to esteem others in their hearts, show them the reverence “appropriate to each one’s state...so that they might thus grow in devotion and praise of God our Lord”<sup>22</sup>. A path of esteem, reverence, and devotion may strike us as painfully remote from our quotidian communal lives, yet this is the path of our Institute. A more contemporary expression of this, coming from Adolfo Nicolás, simpler and more direct, might resonate more with us: “forget the self and take a stand for the life of these people”<sup>23</sup>.

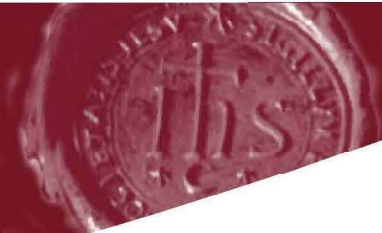
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<sup>20</sup> See “Complementary Norms 315” in *Constitutions: A Critical Edition*, 450.

<sup>21</sup> Limitations pointed out by Michael Buckley in his essay on Jesuit community life. See, Buckley, “Mission in Companionship: Of Jesuit Community and Communion,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 11, no. 4 (1979): 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Constitutions: A Critical Edition*, n. 250.

<sup>23</sup> Adolfo Nicolás, “From Distraction to Dedication: An Invitation to the Center,” *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 27, no 3 (2020), 946-952, at 951.



The freedom to show reverence or to take a stand for another can be thought of as aspects of the grace of the 4<sup>th</sup> week. In those series of contemplations, Ignatius directs the retreatant's attention to the effects of the resurrection, and the effects are visible manifestations or movements outwards towards others. More than feelings, these effects, like grace itself, are visible; one notices them in acts of service and love. Participating in Jesus' joy provides the retreatant the freedom to move into the world and to live like him. Even in our communities.

This freedom to move into the world, serve it, and serve one's Jesuit brothers has always been a part of the Society's Institute. The first companions would not have formulated their community life as mission, but they were convinced that God brought them together and that they were responsible for caring for each other. Perhaps one of the more moving examples of this care for a companion comes from the Jesuit often regarded as the black sheep of the group. I refer to the man from Palencia, Spain: Nicolás Bobadilla. We know of Ignatius and Bobadilla's testy exchanges as well as Bobadilla's conversations with Pope Paul IV to intervene in the Society after Ignatius's death. Certainly, he had his ideas about the Society's leadership, its mission, and the direction of the Church. In that regard, he prefigured many of us.

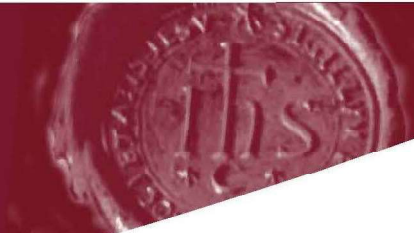
Nevertheless, it is also true that his feisty exchanges with Ignatius disclose affection and respect. He himself said as much in a letter to Miguel de Torres, writing "my rough writing (if indeed it should be called rough) does not have to exclude charity and fraternity"<sup>24</sup>. He may have been a gruff and difficult companion, but he was a friend in the Lord. And Bobadilla seems to have taken seriously his identity as a friend in the Lord to his Jesuit brothers. Evidence of this is a long missive he wrote to his Jesuit companion Jerome Doménech that he titled "A Small Consoling Book"<sup>25</sup>.

The situation in which Bobadilla wrote this letter to Doménech was challenging. In 1570, the Society in Sicily was hemorrhaging men, and Doménech was dismayed at the fact that so many men were leaving the Society. His feelings were only compounded by the fact that

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<sup>24</sup> Alfonso Bobadilla to Miguel de Torres, 16 July 1546, in *Nicolai Alphonsi de Bobadilla Sacerdotis e Societate Jesu Gesta et Scripta* (Madrid, 1913), 99-103, at 99; translation mine.

<sup>25</sup> See Mario Scaduto, ed., "Il 'Libretto consolatorio' di Bobadilla a Doménech sulle vocazioni mancate," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* (1974), 85-102; all translations mine.



Francis Borja, the general at the time, sent a man from Rome to ascertain the situation, but rather than resolving the situation, Borja's delegate seemed to make it worse. Or so thought Doménech. This Jesuit, Juan Montoya, Borja's special envoy, found the Sicilians hard headed and in need of what he deemed "an exemplary punishment"<sup>26</sup>. His exemplary punishment was to dismiss more men from the Society. Seeing the situation unfold and cognizant of Doménech's consternation, Bobadilla did what a friend does – he sought to console him.

He began his letter with an exposition in which he outlined the difficulty of discernment. He then turned to encourage and console his addressee. He argued that divine providence was at work in bringing men to the Society *as well as* in having them leave<sup>27</sup>. Appealing repeatedly to divine providence, Bobadilla encouraged Doménech to let go of his frustration or indignation. Furthermore, in an astounding vision of vocation and religious life, Bobadilla wrote: "how many that have left, been dismissed and not received in the Society have gone to paradise and how many in it, both great and small, will go to hell"<sup>28</sup>. And his concluding words were direct: "a superior ought to embrace in all things divine providence...vesting himself with the grace of God and with love for one's neighbor"<sup>29</sup>.

Bobadilla's letter to Doménech represents one example of the care and concern that Jesuits have always had for each other in their mission. It may feel new to us to think of our community life as mission, but Bobadilla's missive suggests that it is how we understand our lives. Even the more crusty of those among us have demonstrated a largesse of generosity, affection, and concern. But more than an awareness of the special bonds that unite us, Bobadilla's letter exudes hope and confidence in God's providence, and that hope led him to believe that God was taking care of everything. Somehow, God's providence has brought us together in this mission. That providence guides us on the path of collaboration, a path that reminds us of our responsibility to care for and support our Jesuit companions.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, my emphasis.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

## Letting our friends console us

The grace of the fourth week of the *Exercises* is not only about giving consolation; it is about receiving it. One gives and another receives, and the one who receives can also, in his or her turn, become the giver. For this reason, a further exploration of the grace of collaboration understood vis-à-vis the grace of the fourth week should accent one's experience of *being* consoled. In other words, Jesuits are not simply those that attempt to offer consolation to others. We are an apostolic body attentive to the way that the Lord consoles us through our friends. The mutuality that is at the heart of our spirituality calls us to look to the manifold ways in which others in our mission console us.

The consolation from those with whom we collaborate comes in many forms. It may be a kind word, a willingness to commit more deeply to arduous and arid work, or the enjoyment that comes from spending time with remarkably gifted and generous colleagues and their families. But one of the aspects of the grace that I have noticed has to do with the way that collaboration widens us; it awakens us to something new. As is often the case, this newness comes to us in the most quotidian moments of our work. And since grace is always historical, concrete, and rooted in a context, this is an opportune moment to share a personal story of mine that describes an example of what this grace looked like in the educational apostolate where I work.

A colleague and I were talking about life in San Francisco, California, and we were marveling at the beauty of the natural world that surrounds us. He shared a story of a friend of his who owned a small plane and who took him and his son for a ride over the city. Even one unfamiliar with the bay area could imagine how spectacular the views were. But what was even more interesting was the reflection that this teacher offered about what it was like to see the city, the bay, and the mountains that envelop this part of California. Upon returning to his home that evening, he did what we might call an examen of his experience, and he shared with me the fruits of his reflection: *Chris, I live in one of the more beautiful parts of the world, and I can spend my days in my office doing what I think is most important. And I miss the beauty that*



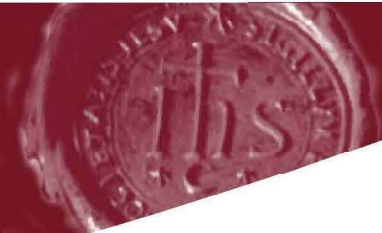


*surrounds me. I immerse myself in my small world, and I go about my days oblivious, blind as it were, to the beauty that surrounds me.*

At the time that this colleague shared his reflection with me, I did not feel any particular movement of consolation in me. I did not find myself stirred in any particular way towards a greater sense of faith, hope, or love, nor did I find myself inflamed with a sense of God's presence in creatures or creatures' life in God. But curiously, I kept thinking about this conversation, replaying it in my mind as if I were contemplating it. I found myself returning to his wonder at the world and his surprise at the smallness with which he could inhabit that world. When I replayed in my mind his marvel at the beauty of the ocean and the trees, I could feel that beauty. And when I returned to how emphatically he spoke of not paying attention to that world by holing himself up in his office, I could feel the smallness of that world. As I kept thinking about this conversation, I started to imagine what it was like to see from the sky the Pacific Ocean, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the redwood trees in Muir Woods. I found my world expanding; I was seeing more and more beauty.

In addition, I was struck by the clarity of my colleague's reflection; this was no ordinary experience for him, and the fact that he was retelling it could have been his way of reminding himself not to miss the beauty of the world. That idea grew in me as I recalled our conversation. I began to hear him telling me that there is more to our life-mission than what goes on in offices and classrooms. Such a conclusion may strike the reader as rather obvious, even banal. One might say, *of course, there is always more to the mission than what we do*. But reminders are helpful and, at least speaking for myself, I need them more than I imagine. Moreover, I began to take note of the fact that this story was helping me to see something new. A colleague was offering the kind of help and consolation that a friend offers, communicating with excitement what he saw: there is something greater and more beautiful here than we realize.

A widening of our vision to that which is around us might be one of the more important aspects to the grace of collaboration. Others – religious, lay, married, single – broaden our sense of our life. We may not feel any deep affective resonance in this consolation, but the



point of the grace of the 4<sup>th</sup> week is not simply to feel; it is to be moved into a new way of seeing reality. It opens us to see the divinity shining through more gloriously in the Resurrected Christ, who, in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, “plays in ten thousand places”<sup>30</sup>. But we need help to contemplate the play of this grace that happens all around us. It is not something that we can do on our own. Like the disciples on the road to Emaus, the Society of Jesus needs to be accompanied by the risen One who comes to walk alongside of us, and He walks alongside of us in the person of a fellow collaborator in mission.

To highlight the importance of *being* consoled is to express the fullness of the grace of collaboration that is offered to us. We are surrounded by testimonies, stories, and invitations that come in the most unlikely forms that can help us to find our path with the Lord. Yet, being consoled requires a certain humility and self-forgetfulness. It also depends upon a more contemplative stance in our lives: a spiritual movement needs time and attention to develop. Words, stories, and images require attention over time so that they might grow and help us see something new. The Ignatian name for this contemplative and humble reception is availability. Such availability to be moved, taught, and widened by another may represent a certain frontier in our experience of collaboration. For some of us, depending on our work, our culture, and our family background, it may be too much to imagine that a lay colleague could be the one who helps move us further along the path of our Institute. Yet, this might be the *kenosis* that we are called to live in collaboration. In his *kenosis*, Jesus let go of his identity as the Son of God in order to be with us. Maybe this is the as yet untraversed path of the grace of collaboration: the freedom to let go of how we understand ourselves so that we can freely give and receive love.

Embracing collaboration does mean that the Society of Jesus abdicates its responsibility to know its tradition, to listen contemplatively to the Spirit, and to discover as an apostolic body how Jesus is calling us. Though we may be allergic to writing and reading more documents from future general congregations, the thinking and reflection that goes into such work is

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<sup>30</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame,” in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Alexander W. Allison et. al. (New York: Norton & Company, 1975), 427.

essential for the vitality of our mission. Nevertheless, the spiritual journey that we are on in collaboration points to a new depth that we can reach when we are available to be moved by the lives and the stories of our friends on mission.

## **Conclusion – asking for the grace that we desire**

Quite possibly the grace of collaboration is the grace that our world most needs at this moment. Moreover, it seems to be the grace the Church continues to place before us. Following the magisterium of Pope Francis, we believe that “synodality is walking together and it is what the Lord expects of the Church in the third millennium”<sup>31</sup>. God is creating something new in our Church, and God wants a response. And this newness extends to our very self-understanding of who we are as disciples and how we encounter the Lord. For example, where General Congregation 36 affirmed that “our fraternal bonds proclaim the Gospel”, we might now be in a position to say that in our bonds and relationships the Gospel is being proclaimed to us<sup>32</sup>.

Perhaps, too, this is a grace that the Society of Jesus needs in this moment. For we too feel, suffer and are affected by all that happens in our world. We might be tempted to think that we inhabit different discursive and social spaces than those that surround us. Or that somehow our way of treating each other is better or different. Such a posture bespeaks a considerable naivete. For this reason, it might be opportune for us in this moment to ask humbly for the grace of collaboration. Though it may be upon us and informing the texture and structure of our lives, it might be prudent to turn to the Lord to ask for the grace to console as He consoles, and for the grace to receive the consolation that He wants us to receive. Following the wisdom of our founder, should we not feel this desire, perhaps we can ask for the desire to desire it,

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, address to the members of the International Theological Commission. Online at [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191129\\_commissione-teologica.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191129_commissione-teologica.html). Accessed November 25, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> General Congregation 36, Decree 1 “Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice,” n. 9, in *Jesuit Life and Mission*, 19.

trusting that what our Lord has begun in us in this moment in our shared life in this apostolic body, he will bring to completion.

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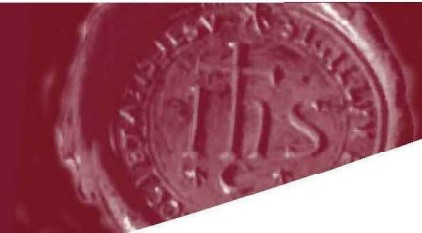
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