

Christian Life Community World Assembly

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## A Discerning Lay Community in the Service of Reconciliation

Arturo Sosa, S.J.

CLC World Ecclesiastical Assistant

It gives me great pleasure to share this day with you all. This is the first time that I am participating in a CLC World Assembly as CLC World Ecclesiastical Assistant. A million thanks for your warm and fraternal welcome.

As some of you may know, my personal history, since my early days, has been linked to the Marian Congregation of the Colegio San Ignacio in Caracas, Venezuela. I participated in the Kostskas Congregation, which was for the younger ones, and later, in the San Luis Gonzaga Congregation during the last years of my secondary education. It was through the Marian Congregation that I learned to include time for personal prayer, participation in the Eucharist and apostolic commitment, in my daily schedule, in addition to responsibility for my studies and family life. Being a member of the Marian Congregation was undoubtedly of great importance in the maturing of my vocation to the Society of Jesus.

Consequently, I am profoundly grateful to those who directed the Marian Congregation and my fellow companions during my youth. With them, I shared the initiation to the spiritual, apostolic life and community life, as well as the encounter with the social reality of my country. In that environment I lived Vatican Council II passionately, as it developed, and the refreshing shake up it brought to the Church.

### **Strengthening and Deepening**

The celebration of the first fifty years of the Christian Life Community is an invitation to look at and recognize the many gifts we have received. It is a time for gratitude and renewal of the decision to follow the Lord in service to the Church and the world. To give thanks to God for so many gifts in the lives of so many people who, in this half century, have found in the Christian Life Community a path to personal growth and to following Jesus more closely. To give thanks for all of the apostolic work fostered, directly or indirectly, by members and communities throughout the entire world...

Vatican Council II brings to the forefront the lay character of the Church, which is defined as the *People of God*. The profound renewal of the Marian Congregations inspired by Vatican II gave birth to the CLC communities, seeking to put in motion a part of God's People through Ignatian Spirituality. The renewed

experience of the Spiritual Exercises leads to the decision to follow Christ in a lay life that is nourished by communal experience and apostolic commitment.

Gathered here in San Miguel, Buenos Aires, for this World Assembly, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of CLC, we also feel the Spirit's gentle breeze, which invites us to strengthen and deepen our experience in order to respond to the new challenges of the human and Christian life, at the dawn of a new era for humanity. We experience how the Lord continues to act in history to reconcile all things in Himself. He continues to call men and women to follow this spiritual, communal and apostolic path, which CLC has opened, to contribute to the strengthening of the lay Church.

In celebrating these fifty years, let us listen to the voice of Pope Francis, in this place which he knows so well, as he speaks to the entire Church and to all people of good will in a language that seems so familiar. His dream is to see the spirit of Vatican II incarnated in the Church as a body. His dream is a Church, the People of God, emerging from the experience of the One who was crucified and is risen, who gathers His followers in a community of service for the reconciliation of human beings among themselves, with the environment and with God. A community attentive to the *signs of the times*, committed to the fight for social justice and the liberation of peoples.

### **A Discerning community**

Pope Francis continues to remind us how, in good times and in bad, the Christian life is a source of joy. A deep and interior joy which in Ignatian language is called *consolation*. A joy which comes from having recovered the freedom to put oneself in the service of others. Discernment is the key to staying in touch with the source of joy of living as disciples of Christ. That is why Pope Francis invites us to make discernment a normal part of our personal lives as Christians, in the life of the community and of the Church. In his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, he returns to this theme:

*The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as being valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G.E. No. 167

Among the few *loaves and fishes*<sup>4</sup> that CLC has to share with the Church and the world, there is the experience of personal and communal spiritual discernment. Ignatian spirituality introduces us to discernment and trains us to develop it as a habit in our Christian life. Pope Francis has asked the Society of Jesus for specific help in spreading discernment within the life of the Church. This call extends to all who share Ignatian spirituality. CLC, as a lay movement of Ignatian inspiration, is best placed to help and develop a lay Church which is capable of discerning personally and as a community.

*Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. It is a means of spiritual combat to help us to follow the Lord more faithfully. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's times and those of His grace, lest we fail to heed the promptings of Lord and ignore his invitation to grow. Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities.*<sup>5</sup>

Discernment is complex and demanding. It involves acquiring and maintaining that Ignatian *indifference* that derives from that inner freedom by which we overcome any attachment to our own interests, possessions, or the use of instruments. It also involves developing a sensitivity to the signs of the times, learning to perceive where and how the Spirit is acting in today's world, in the social context in which the life of each one of us, of our society and our environment unfolds. Discernment demands that sort of silence that sets itself apart from the noise that hampers the opportunity of listening to the Spirit.

The CLC General Principles indicate the regular practice of the Spiritual Exercises, the school of discernment, as *the specific source and characteristic instrument of our spirituality* (PG5). This is how the lived experience of personal and communal discernment can become a truly shared gift in the Church, and a tool of wisdom for all activity in the world, at the service of the joy of the Gospel, which is the main nucleus of *the Christian lifestyle* (PG 2) that is CLC.

Consolation is a gift of the Spirit that we need to ask for insistently. Practicing and teaching this prayer of asking for consolation is a way that helps us to share with others the joy of the Gospel. This deep experience is born of deep union with Jesus in constant prayer and generous service. Taking care of these fundamentals is a priority, both in the formation of new members of CLC and in the constant spiritual growth of those already committed. It is in sharing those few *loaves and fishes* with others that the Lord multiplies them so that there is enough for all, even for the late-comers.

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<sup>4</sup> Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

<sup>5</sup> G.E. n. 169

This is the way the CLC charism is realized: helping many, both within the Community and it, to experience the joy of the encounter with the Spirit and to commit themselves to participate in the liberation of human beings and the transformation of society.

Discernment is always an exercise that consists in looking at the world, in all its reality, while letting oneself be moved internally and dedicating oneself to the greater service. Discernment leads to an action that prolongs that which Jesus started for the redemption of human life. We know this well from the contemplation of the Incarnation in the Spiritual Exercises, which inspires CLC's General Principle 1.

The 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus recommends the frequent use of *spiritual conversation*, i.e. dedicating time to share with others, in simplicity, the fruit of personal prayer or reflection, as a useful tool to create and strengthen the habit of personal and communal apostolic discernment. This entails a deep desire to both listen to the other and attention to the movements and new understandings that arise from this listening.

CLC has long practiced spiritual conversation, especially in the regular meetings of small groups. The experience of the community dimension of discernment is a richness that can be shared with others in the Ignatian family. The efforts of constant integration, in all dimensions of life, of the three pillars of the CLC charism - spirituality, community and mission - and the tool of the four verbs -discerning, sending, supporting, and evaluating- have already borne many fruits in the life of the community. They are part of the gift received in these fifty years.

In order to enrich CLC's service to the Church and the world, the top priority should be to sustain and develop this gift in the personal life of each member and in the communal life of each local group, of the national communities, and of the one Christian Life Community.

### **Companions in a mission ...**

The Society of Jesus has a very special spiritual and formal bond with CLC. Our spiritual and historical closeness commits us to a shared responsibility in the mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel from the Ignatian perspective as each one lives out the charism received according to one's religious or lay vocation.

This responsibility in mission does not belong exclusively to us, because it is the mission of Jesus Christ, in which we are invited to participate. It impels us to look for new ways of deeper collaboration between CLC and the Society of Jesus. Collaboration in the best interest of the mission of Christ, according to one's own vocation, without seeking to protect one's own personal or corporate interests.

What is pointed out by the 36th General Congregation for the Society of Jesus, is equally valid for CLC and for the whole Church: The magnitude and the interconnectedness of the problems that affect humanity, presenting great and diverse challenges to the mission of the Church, are so

great that only by working in collaboration with others, cooperating with each other - hand in hand - can we, in fact, contribute effectively to their solution.

In the last fifty years, the Society of Jesus has been learning to be a collaborator with others in mission. Here, too, there is a rich experience in the relationship with CLC. The starting point for a fruitful collaboration in the service of Christ's mission, greater and more complex than the apostolic activities of the Society of Jesus and of CLC, is the recognition of each one's vocation and the charism of each institution. This recognition means respect for one's own institutional characteristics, as well as the legitimate and necessary autonomy of each entity. By recognizing the other, we recognize the richness of the Lord's gifts to his followers, in the effort of building a new humanity reconciled in Christ.

We know of many examples of joint work between Jesuits and members of CLC, with their bright and their dark points. There has been much fruit, as well as misunderstandings and even conflicts. There is much scope for growth in the collaboration between the Society of Jesus and CLC, to contribute together to the service of the mission of Christ. I would say that it is a challenge of hope that opens new apostolic horizons for each one of us.

### **Mission of reconciliation and justice**

The 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus once again made the exercise of contemplating the world with the eyes of the Trinity and, at the same time, inspired by the Contemplation to Obtain Love, looked for the traces of God's work in the world. GC36 heard the clamor of the millions of forced migrants, of the victims of violence and of the growing economic and social inequality. GC36 understood the challenge of announcing the Good News in the new digital ecosystem, in secularized societies and those dominated by religious or ideological fundamentalism. GC36 confirmed the need to build bridges, to promote citizen commitment in democratic political regimes that have the common good as the basis of their action. GC36 noted the negligence in failing to reach agreements to stop the deterioration of the environment and to care responsibly for our Common Home.

Consequently, the way in which the 35th General Congregation (2008) had formulated the mission of the Society of Jesus-- companions in a mission of reconciliation and justice-- was reaffirmed. We feel the call to participate in the work of reconciliation that God is carrying out in our wounded world, a work in at least three intimately related dimensions: *reconciliation with God, with one another and of human beings with creation.*<sup>6</sup>

CLC General Principle 1 also includes this contemplation: *The Three Divine Persons, contemplating the whole of humanity in so many sinful divisions, decide to give themselves completely to all men and women and liberate them from all their chains.* It also recognizes a call: *Jesus invites all of us to give ourselves continually to God and to bring about unity within our*

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<sup>6</sup> GC36, D1, 21

*human family ... in all our particular circumstances.* CLC, in the document that formulates its charism, proposes to work for unity against all the divisions that affect humanity.

These divisions simultaneously affect social, economic and political relationships, interpersonal relationships, and relationships with the environment, a whole that Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Sí*, defined as a single and complex socio-environmental crisis. It is the whole human person, in all its dimensions, that experiences disunity, disintegration, in relationship to God, to others and to creation. Thus, the three dimensions of reconciliation must always be present, together. Reconciliation with God is not possible if, at the same time, reconciliation with other human beings and with the natural environment are not realized. It is necessary to work holistically against these divisions, in favor of this multiple reconciliation that includes, of course, the struggle for justice and the social transformation that leads to creating the conditions for a decent life for all peoples and for each human being.

The spiritual experience of CLC has as its starting point the reconciliation of each person with him/herself, an experience of integration that is the response to the desire of *people... who feel a more urgent need to unite their human life in all its dimensions with the fullness of their Christian faith.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CLC GP 4

The unification of one's life is a challenge that is particularly felt in the lay life, which develops in cultural contexts that favor the dispersion and disintegration of people. Ignatian spirituality has always proposed to seek and find God in the midst of the world, without fleeing from it; on the contrary, it promotes learning to find God in all things in order to love and serve in all things.

Working for reconciliation, or the unity of the human family, is a necessity and a task to which we, Jesuits and CLC, feel called. From our particular experiences we feel the call to contribute to that mission. We are encouraged by the same spirituality and by having traveled a long way together ... let's not hesitate to explore new forms of collaboration and deepen our joint service to the mission of Christ in the midst of this wounded world.

I want to end my address with a heartfelt word of thanks as Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Thanks to CLC for all the companionship, for so much apostolic collaboration and spiritual wealth shared with so many Jesuits throughout all these years.

May Our Lady of the Way, a particular devotion of Ignatius of Loyola, continue to accompany our journey and help us to turn to Jesus, her Son, to meet with Him, to found in Him our Hope and to give our life so that others may have it in abundance.

Thank you very much.