

# STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

BENDING THE KNEE TO BAAL?

*St. Ignatius on Jesuit Vocation Promotion*

BARTON T. GEGER, SJ

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY TIMOTHY P. KESICKI, SJ

48/4 WINTER 2016

## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS is a publication of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is composed of Jesuits appointed from their provinces. The seminar identifies and studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially US and Canadian Jesuits, and gathers current scholarly studies pertaining to the history and ministries of Jesuits throughout the world. It then disseminates the results through this journal.

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ISSN 1084-0813

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## *a word from the Jesuit Conference . . .*

“Growth is the only evidence of life,” writes John Henry Newman in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. This mid-nineteenth century defense of the faith has become more than a prosaic argument: it can symbolize success for many organizations. Looking at the history of the Society, there is no question that we equate growth with vitality. Many of us walk in the footsteps of our founder in part to remember how vast and wide his vision has spread. Our mission, number, and legacy have left an indelible mark on the world, and we continue that mission today. But statistically there is a retrenchment in our ranks.

The 2015 census of the Society indicates, over the past fifty years, major demographic shifts that go against Newman’s understanding of vitality. For instance, the Society has experienced significant growth in the Southern Hemisphere, where we have increased 32 percent in South Asia and more than doubled in Africa and Madagascar. Conversely, we have seen the assistancies of Europe, Canada, and the United States decline by 72 percent. The assistancies of Latin America have dropped 49 percent, and Asia Pacific has seen an 18 percent decline. Overall, the Society has declined 53 percent since 1965.

There is a school of thought that says that size follows function. From this perspective, as long as we are fulfilling our mission, there is no right size for our organization. When I have discussed our assistancy’s reconfiguration with Father General, he is quick to point out that we are “right-sizing” our provinces and not “downsizing” the Society. But the fact remains that we are half the size we were at the convocation of the thirty-first general congregation (GC 31). What we will look like fifty years from now will require considerable thought, prayer, and action.

When I have spoken recently on these demographic shifts, I have emphasized the fact that the Society is the same size today as it was in 1910, and that our substantial increase in the mid-twentieth century was more of a “vocations bubble.” In other words, we should interpret these statistics as a burst in that bubble and not a monumental reversal of vocations. I like to emphasize how we should focus on the 16,600 Jesuits

on mission in the world and not dwell on our size fifty years ago. I then highlight how we are still attracting good men to the Society; and, compared to other religious institutes, we are ahead of that curve. I've even used the image of pruning a tree or vine: nature sometimes requires a cutting back so that new growth can emerge.

Many factors have contributed to these noteworthy shifts, from the role of religion in society at large to the postconciliar changes within our least Society. No single monograph or study could begin to explain these numbers, but it is important that we discern our role in vocation promotion in light of these radically-shifting demographics. Vocation promotion has real consequences for the Society; and, looking to the future, we need to deepen our understanding of how the first companions attracted vocations.

Fifty years ago, our understanding of collaboration and partnerships was still emerging. Most collaborators were hired to staff the rapid growth of our apostolic works. If we could no longer find a Jesuit for a job, we hired from outside the Society. This all changed after the Second Vatican Council. GC 34 and GC 35 formally decreed the essential nature of cooperation with the laity for mission. At the conference level, the *Assistancy Strategic Discernment* identified apostolic partnerships as a principal theme of our province reconfigurations. The dynamism of this collaboration gave credence to the thought that size follows function. Since our institutions no longer required the number of vocations that we attracted in the mid-twentieth century, we needn't be too alarmed by the rapid drop in Jesuit vocations.

In visits to our assistancy, superior generals spoke of the essential nature of collaboration, with an eye to Jesuits improving their relationships with collaborators. In 2004, in an address at Creighton University, Fr. Kolvenbach said, "we Jesuits need to be not only friends and companions of the Lord and each other, we must be friends and companions of our partners in mission. This reciprocity of personal presence is central to our identity as Jesuits." In 2009, during a visit to Loyola Marymount University, Fr. Nicolàs expanded this statement on collaboration by saying, "for there to be a partnership the question changes from 'How can lay women and men assist Jesuits in their ministry' to 'How can Jesuits serve lay women and men in their ministries?'" Im-

plicit in Fr. Nicolas's statement was the understanding that the word *their* means that both Jesuits and collaborators share in the mission of an apostolic work. While Jesuits welcomed these words as an affirmation of the progress that we have been making in partnership formation and cooperation with the laity, how many of us asked what happens if there are no longer Jesuits with whom our lay companions might collaborate? How can we understand Fr. Kolvenbach's call for reciprocity of personal presence if our Jesuit presence only continues to decline? How can we honor Fr. Nicolas's call to "serve lay women and men in our ministries" if the future plays out as these statistics suggest?

In 2011, as provincial of the Chicago-Detroit Province, I gave my state of the province address to the province congregation that preceded the seventieth congregation of procurators. In my summary comments, I stated that I perceived the Society as a "company of men" and not a "network of institutions." In choosing these words, I knew that they would be provocative if not polemical to the members of the congregation. Some immediately reacted by observing the facile nature of such distinctions—a predictable critique of Ours. Others asked if I was planning a major shift of Jesuits away from certain works. But I wanted to reflect on our image of the Society in a province and conference that was heavily invested in apostolic institutions. Just as Saint Ignatius uses the image of "laborers in the vineyard of the Lord" in part 7 of the *Constitutions*, I wanted to suggest images of how we perceived ourselves as a province. In my provincial visitations, I heard many a Jesuit celebrate the fact that, despite our dwindling numbers, we were beginning new works. I also heard how the efficacy of our cooperation with the laity gave our institutions a stronger Jesuit identity than they might have had fifty years ago. And while I cherished these great accomplishments, each year I heard the plea for more Jesuits in each of these works. In conversations with our collaborators, I heard that they were not enthused about promoting Jesuit identity without the direct cooperation of Jesuits. It was abundantly clear to me how much our networks depended on this company of men.

In the late nineties, when I studied educational administration at Teacher College in New York, I worked with the director of the Klingenstein Center for Private School Leadership on approaches to promoting mission and identity in schools that faced a decline in Jesuits. I even

asked what models existed for promoting the mission in schools with no Jesuits. The director encouraged me to study the Friends schools in the United States. These schools, which continue the core values of the Religious Society of Friends, do not necessarily have an established connection with the Quakers or the formal practice of that faith. While I found the comparison helpful, that prognosis seemed bleak to me. I couldn't imagine many of our schools wanting to go down this road. Redefining our apostolic commitments to serve a greater apostolic need is consistent with the best practices of the Society. But for us to withdraw continually, like a receding tide, because we simply accepted our downward vocations trajectory? This would lead many to question our vitality and prospects for the future.

Of course, the challenge of providing Jesuits for our apostolic works goes back to the first general congregation, which stipulated the number of Jesuits required for a school. As John W. O'Malley (CDT) writes in *The First Jesuits*, "by 1553. . . there were too few Jesuits for the number of schools, as well as for other commitments."<sup>1</sup> In this respect we have made great progress because, unlike those early years, we now have established statutes and sponsorship agreements for apostolic works. These agreements promise Jesuit identity with few to no Jesuits in the apostolate. Having helped draft and sign some of these sponsorship/sustaining agreements, I have witnessed this progress first-hand. I also know that in each case the agreement stipulates a clear and direct relationship with the Society.

GC 35's decree Collaboration at the Heart of Mission indicates how important this direct relationship is. "The local Jesuit superior and local Jesuits do much to foster the connection between a Jesuit ministry and the Society. All Jesuits, but especially those assigned to a work, can help to foster a spirit of discernment and collaboration by their example and their willingness to share their lives with others" (GC 35: 6, §13). In reading GC 35 together with our collaborators, many of them gravitate to this statement. They want to discern and collaborate with us. Decree 6 goes on to list the many works and associations with which the Society

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<sup>1</sup> John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 227.

has a bond and concludes by stating that they “deserve our continued spiritual accompaniment as well as our support for their apostolic service.”

There may not be an ideal size for the Society, but it is a challenge to understand how collaboration and partnership works when the Jesuits have moved out of town or are far away from the apostolate. Perhaps we need to approach vocation promotion with the same enthusiasm that we approach collaboration—both are necessary for the apostolic vitality of the Society!

I would be remiss to reflect on Jesuit vocation promotion without remembering my own call to the Society. I entered the Society two decades after this downturn in Jesuit vocations. My attraction to the Society was not abstract or distant: I came to know the Society through the Jesuits who taught me. As an undergraduate, I encountered Jesuits of all ages, and each one’s approach to vocation promotion was reflective of his respective generation. Those who were born before the Great Depression tended to evaluate a graduating class using the metric, *how many entered the Society this year?* On the other hand, those formed during or after the Second Vatican Council spoke of vocation more broadly, recognizing the importance of lay, religious, and priestly calls. It was no surprise that the more senior members of the Jesuit community were the ones who asked me to consider being a Jesuit. Often, when I attended a CLC meeting or proclaimed a reading at Mass, a senior Jesuit would come to me afterward and ask, “have you ever thought of becoming a Jesuit?” He would then put me in touch with a younger Jesuit whom he felt could “speak my language.” I recognize how many Jesuits played a role in assisting my vocational discernment and I wonder if I would have found the Society if someone had not first invited me to consider it.

Over the years, I have participated in many vocation meetings where I was asked to share my vocation story in a panel format alongside others. I cannot say that I looked forward to these meetings. While I was happy to see young people come to hear about religious life, I found my own story somewhat predictable and boring. I was reared in a strong Catholic family where the faith was the bedrock of our life. I had imagined becoming a priest when I was young and had a brother who was preparing for diocesan priesthood during the time of my discern-

ment. I had the opportunity to make the Spiritual Exercises in college and to work with a Jesuit spiritual director, and I had a positive visit to the Jesuit novitiate, which convinced me that I was called to this life. While I was grateful for the graces that had led me to this life, I didn't like to talk about them. Compared to others who left corporate life for a "higher calling" or those who had already made their mark on the world before deciding to give it all to Christ, I felt somewhat ordinary. I tended to forget that the kind of disciples whom Jesus missions in Mark 6 are ordinary men who have an extraordinary calling.

In 2011, the provincials of our conference met with Father General in Kingston, Jamaica. In his address to us, he asked, "how does a Society with so many admirers draw so few followers?" His clear straightforward message did not beg an immediate answer: he wanted us to reflect on these words. I hope that this current issue of *STUDIES*, devoted to vocation promotion in the Jesuits, further awakens our desire to invite more ordinary men to this extraordinary calling.

**A**lthough as president of the conference I have the care of *STUDIES*, I am not accustomed to writing in these pages. Since our new editor has written this issue, I am happy to use this occasion to offer my own personal thanks to the following people.

For the past thirteen years, Richard A. Blake (UNE) has served as chairman of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality and editor of this journal. He generously followed the outstanding twelve-year tenure of John W. Padberg (UCS). In addition to serving as a professor of fine arts at Boston College, Dick brought us more than forty issues of *STUDIES* and encouraged the level of depth to which Fr. Adolfo Nicolás has called us. Dick's generosity extends even beyond this service as he written in the pages of *America* magazine for decades as a film reviewer, having served as a managing and executive editor of *America*. When Dick accepted this mission to chair the seminar and edit *STUDIES*, he said that he wanted "to maintain the seminar as a place for historical and theological studies of Jesuits that will help direct us into the future." The Jesuit Conference is grateful to Dick for his success in fulfilling this mission.

I also want to thank Fr. Barton T. Geger (UCS) for so generously saying *yes* to serve as the new general editor of *STUDIES*. Bart sees *STUDIES* as

unique among Jesuit publications. When accepting this mission, he said, “as far as I know, there’s nothing quite like this in the English-speaking world.” Bart values this journal since it is dedicated to keeping our institute alive, particularly a contemporary appropriation of our constitutions, complementary norms, the Spiritual Exercises, relevant letters, and our history. As a scholar of the *Constitutions* from Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Bart is uniquely suited for this mission.

Finally, as we reflect on vocation promotion in the Society, I want to express my thanks to the vocation directors and promoters in our conference. While my introductory remarks highlight the demographic challenges that we now face, it is worth noting that this year our conference accepted its highest number of novices in a decade. While there is so much that affects a man’s discernment, we could not accept new novices without the tireless commitment of these fine men. I hope that all of us have the freedom to say *yes* when asked to promote vocations to the Society.

*Timothy P. Kesicki, SJ*  
*President, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States*

### *and a word from the editor . . .*

**D**ue to pressing commitments that he could not avoid, Fr. Geoffrey “Monty” Williams (CDA) has had to step down as a member of the seminar. Fr. Casey Beaumier (wis app MAR) has graciously agreed to take his place. The seminar thanks Fr. Williams for his kind service and looks forward to his eventual return.

*Barton T. Geger, SJ*  
*Editor*



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# Bending the Knee to Baal?

*St. Ignatius on Jesuit Vocation Promotion*

## I. Introduction

Jesuits have different ideas about the proper way to attract men to the Society. That will come as no surprise. Until recently, the tension has had little occasion to manifest itself in the everyday communal and apostolic life of the Society, and probably for that reason it seems to have gone largely undiscussed, at least in any deliberate manner.

Now, the situation is changing. Vocation promoters in the United States and Canada are calling for a more proactive approach to recruitment, both at the province level and in communities.<sup>1</sup> They report that their efforts have met with some ambivalence and even resistance, not only from rank-and-file Jesuits, but also from some provincial curias that see no gain to dedicating more manpower and monies to the task.

In truth, for many years there has been a deep-seated inertia in the Society with regard to vocation promotion. In the last fifty years, the Society has been slashed by more than half, from 36,000 men in 1965 to 17,000 men today. Incredibly, during that same period, the delegates of General Congregations 32 to 36 devoted only one, short, perfunctory decree to vocation promotion: decree 10 of GC 34. It opened with the

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<sup>1</sup> Here, *vocation promotion* means any measures taken to encourage men to consider a Jesuit vocation, including discussing the subject with potential candidates, programs such as Come and See weekends, promotional materials and activities produced by apostolates and provinces, and the formal assignment of Jesuits to the apostolate of vocation promotion. Not included here are the considerations involved with application to the Society, evaluation of applicants, formation of men once they enter, and measures taken to preserve vocations.

reluctant line, "The Society of Jesus cannot fulfil its mission without further vocations."<sup>2</sup>

Recent general superiors have acknowledged the inertia. In 1997, in response to decree 10 of GC 34, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach sent a letter to the whole Society in which he noted that "there exists more preoccupation with the lack of vocations than real interest in promoting them."<sup>3</sup> He added:

but we should also recognize that the Lord calls us to be more active and "aggressive," to make use of all the means and resources necessary to collaborate with grace in the raising up of vocations, following the example of St. Ignatius and continuing the tradition of the Society. For these reasons I ask the Major Superiors to consider the promotion of vocations a real apostolic priority.<sup>4</sup>

Ten years later, notwithstanding Fr. Kolvenbach's identification of vocation promotion as an apostolic priority, the delegates of GC 35 chose not to write a decree on the topic. They did, however, create a commission to discuss it and to make recommendations to the ordinary government of the Society. They lamented that "some Jesuits, unfortunately, are not convinced and concerned about vocation promotion."<sup>5</sup>

In 2012, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás observed in his *De Statu* letter:

it strikes me as strange, as perhaps even irresponsible that, in some places in the Society, complaints about the lack of vocations are not accompanied by proportionate attention and efforts toward vocation promotion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 594.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 97/2, dated Sept. 29, 1997, "Regarding Vocation Promotion."

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

<sup>5</sup> In the English translation of "GC 35: Other Documents: Issues for the Ordinary Government of the Society of Jesus Studied at the 35th General Congregation," p. 5, available at [www.sjweb.info](http://www.sjweb.info).

<sup>6</sup> Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, "De Statu SJ," CP70, Nairobi, July 9–15, 2012, p. 10.

What is puzzling about this lethargy is that St. Ignatius himself had rather clear ideas about Jesuit vocation promotion and its importance to the Society. Furthermore, his ideas were remarkably consistent with, and illustrative of, his broader spirituality. For that reason, to know something about the first helps Jesuits to understand the second more profoundly. But for the same reason, we shall see that the first, like the second, was not without controversy.

For the purpose of illustration, one might summarize the tensions surrounding vocation promotion in terms of two views:

**View A: Jesuits should not spend too much effort on vocation promotion. We are men sent on mission by the Lord. If we live that mission faithfully and generously, then the same Lord will ensure that men are attracted to the Society. Furthermore, explicit focus on vocation promotion raises a number of concerns.**

- It implies an inwardly-focused preoccupation with the Society's survival, as opposed to an outwardly-directed focus on mission. Pope Francis criticized this attitude in *Gaudium Evangelii* with regard to the Church.
- It seems to belie all the Jesuit talk in the last forty years about entrusting the mission to lay collaborators.
- It suggests that Jesuits are placing more trust in human strategies than in God's providential care for the Society.
- It distracts Jesuits from their work. For the same reason, Ignatius did not want the Society to hold regular general congregations.
- It can make men feel pressured, thereby compromising free and tranquil discernments. This is the point of annotation 15 of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

**View B: No one lived the mission more faithfully than Jesus, but he still saw the need to ask men to join him. Jesuits therefore should be intentional about identifying and approaching viable candidates, and prepared to discuss with them in a heartfelt**

**manner the Society's mission and the joys and challenges of a Jesuit vocation.**

- To present a man with options about the manner in which he serves the Lord is a quintessential example of “spiritual conversation” and “helping souls” as Ignatius understood them.
- An invitation to consider the Society is no less divine because a man hears it from the mouth of a Jesuit as opposed to sensing it within himself.
- Vocation promotion does not distract from the mission: on the contrary, it is an essential expression of the mission.
- Telling men that they are ideal for the Society, and that they are greatly needed in it, does not impose upon their freedom: rather, it allows them to exercise it more maturely.
- Unlike the Catholic Church, the Society of Jesus was never promised by Christ that it would survive until the end of time.<sup>7</sup> Jesuits must work for the preservation and increase of the Society without undue presumption.

The tension between these two views is hardly recent. It is one manifestation of a perennial and much broader tension in Christian spirituality regarding the degree to which one can legitimately serve God using human means—for example, efforts, strategies, worldly wisdom, money, materials, and aid from dubious sources—without compromising one's religious principles or implying a lack of trust in God.

As a case in point, consider that in the sixth century, monastic communities were puzzled by what to do with *gyrovagues*: monks who wandered from monastery to monastery, enjoying the hospitality of each one for a few weeks before proceeding to the next. When gyrovagues were asked either to make a commitment to just one monastery, or at least to compensate for their visits by assisting with the chores, they responded that they alone—as opposed to their hosts—were truly em-

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<sup>7</sup> Matt 16:18.

bodying Jesus's injunction neither to store up goods for themselves on earth nor to worry about the morrow.<sup>8</sup> In other words, according to the gyrovagues, only they were focused entirely on prayer and the mission that God had given them.

Much more recently, the vice president for advancement at Regis University tells the story of how he had been hired by a Catholic college that was struggling to survive. At his first board meeting, the mother superior pulled him aside and said, "we hired you against my better judgment. Until now we have always trusted that God will take care of us." The fundraiser replied, "he still does: he sent me to you." The superior was silent for a moment, then smiled and said, "I think I'm going to like you."

The tension between divine providence and human effort is manifest throughout the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The ancient Israelites insisted on having a human king, despite pleas by the prophet Samuel that they rely solely on God for protection and guidance.<sup>9</sup> After all, the Israelites were supposed to be a witness to other nations of the power of their God; but how could they do that if their government relied on human power in the same way as did other governments?

Jesus taught his followers that they could not serve both God and money.<sup>10</sup> But he also told them to be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves, and to make friends for themselves by means of dishonest wealth.<sup>11</sup> Nor should they rashly enter the service of God in the blithe trust that he would provide all that is needed. Rather, they should first calculate the cost, lest they lay a foundation that they are unable to complete.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the tension between the two views should not be perceived as a matter of orthodox vs. heretical or worldly vs. pious.

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 12:16–34. The tension over gyrovagues is found in "The Rule of St. Benedict" I:10–12, and in the older "Rule of the Master" I:13–74.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Sam 8:1–27; 12:1–25.

<sup>10</sup> Matt 6:19, 24, 31–32.

<sup>11</sup> Matt 10:16; Luke 16:8–9

<sup>12</sup> Luke 14:28–32.

They represent two legitimate Christian spiritualities, both of which are needed in the church. Either of them embraced in isolation from the other can lead to ruin, as happens when Christians deny medical care for their children on the grounds that prayer alone should suffice to heal them; or again, when Christian schools so accommodate themselves to the values of secular culture in an effort to stay alive that they effectively abandon their religious identity.

In the Middle Ages, people who were perceived to put too much emphasis on human means were accused of “bending the knee to Baal.”<sup>13</sup> Conversely, “tempting God” was the charge commonly leveled against those who tried to coerce God to act according to their own desires or timetables.<sup>14</sup>

So, where did Ignatius fall within this spectrum? When he was superior general, people accused him more than once of bending the knee to Baal.<sup>15</sup> His approach not only to vocation promotion, but also to fundraising, choosing ministries, defending the reputation of the Society, and evaluating candidates—to name but a few—all shared a remarkable emphasis on the importance of using every morally-permissible human means in the service of God.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rom 11:1–6; 1 Kgs 19:18.

<sup>14</sup> Deut 6:16; Luke 4:12; 1 Cor 10:9. See Ignatius’s “Autobiography,” §79.4.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase appears in volumes of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* (hereafter *MHSI*), e.g., *Polanic Complementa, Epistolae et commentaria P. Joannis Alphonsi de Polanco*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1916–1917), II:226; *Patris Petri de Ribadeneira Societatis Jesu sacerdotis Confessiones, epistolae aliaque scripta inedita*, 2 vols (Madrid, 1920–1923), I:177. For a reference to the story of Elijah in 1 Kgs 19, see *Epistolae mixtae ex variis Europae loci ab anno 1537 ad 1556 scriptae*, 5 vols (Madrid, 1898–1901), III:40. See also Hugo Rahner, *St. Ignatius Loyola: Letters to Women*, trans. Kathleen Pond (New York: Crossroad, 1960), 385.

<sup>16</sup> See Thomas H. Clancy, SJ, “Saint Ignatius as Fund-Raiser,” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 25, no. 1 (1993); Clancy notes the expression “bending the knee to Baal” in this context. See also Augustine G. Ellard, SJ, “So Trust in God as if. . .,” *Review for Religious* 12 (1953), 9–14; J. P. M. Walsh, SJ, “Work as if Everything Depends on—Who?,” *The Way Supplement* 70 (1991), 125–36; William W. Meissner, SJ, “The Ignatian Paradox,” *The Way* 42, no. 3 (2003): 33–46.

Consider, for example, Ignatius's response in 1549 to the Jesuit Juan Álvarez.<sup>17</sup> Ignatius had authorized Jesuits to take legal action against the Dominican theologian Melchior Cano, one of the first and most vociferous opponents of the early Society. From the pulpit, Cano was calling the Society the antichrist and was accusing Ignatius of being a vain fraud. Álvarez balked on the grounds that lawsuits were unseemly and did not demonstrate sufficient trust in God's protection. He suggested that Ignatius was bending the knee to Baal. Fr. Juan Polanco (1517–1576) responded to Álvarez on behalf of the superior general:

even if we examine your spiritual philosophy itself, it does not seem very solid or correct—namely, that to employ human helps or resources and take advantage or make use of human influence for purposes that are good and pleasing to our Lord constitute bending the knee to Baal. On the contrary, it would seem that a person who deems it wrong to use such means or to invest this talent among others bestowed by God, claiming that this would be to contaminate the higher spiritual means of grace with the leaven of lower ones has not correctly learned how to order all things to God's glory or to make the most of all things and means for the ultimate end of God's honor and glory. A person might [rightly] be said to bend the knee to Baal if he places a higher value and more reliance on such human means than on God and on his gratuitous and supernatural helps. But if, while grounding his hope wholly in God, he carefully uses for God's service the gifts that he bestows, both interior and exterior, spiritual and physical, in the conviction that his infinite power can accomplish what he wills with or without such means, but that he is pleased by such efforts when properly undertaken out of love for him, then this is bending the knee not to Baal but to God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The recipient of this letter, the Jesuit Juan Álvarez of Granada, is sometimes confused with the Spanish Dominican and Cardinal Juan Álvarez of Toledo (1488–1557). Juan Álvarez of Granada entered the Society as a secular priest about the age of thirty. See Antonio Astrain, SJ, *Historia de la Compañía en la Asistencia de España*, 7 vols. (Madrid: Razón y Fe, 1905–1925), I:266, 326–40. See also Ignatius's letter to Álvarez about Cano (no. 0486-aD), dated Nov. 25, 1548, in *MHSI, Monumenta Ignatiana. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Societatis Jesu fundatoris epistolae et instructiones* (henceforth MI Epp.), 12 vols. (Madrid, 1903–1911), XII:487–90.

<sup>18</sup> Letter 776, *MHSI*, MI Epp. II:479–80; trans. Martin E. Palmer, SJ, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 287–88.

If one applies Ignatius's logic to vocation promotion, it becomes clear that his views on the subject were firmly in the camp of View B. Again, this does not mean that View A is wrong; but neither does it represent the characteristic emphasis that Ignatius wanted to bring to the Jesuit way of proceeding.

By way of comparison, one could say that early Theatine spirituality represented View A.<sup>19</sup> Theatines wished to exemplify reformed clergy who relied solely on God for their needs, as reflected in their formal name, Congregation of Clerics Regular of the Divine Providence. They took as their primary mission to say masses for specific intentions and to pray the office; and, as a result, they operated largely out of the public eye. They did not own property or beg monies for their support, but rather waited for benefactors to give spontaneously. They were not to recruit, in the trust that God would provide them with vocations. They also shunned, as much as possible, institutional infrastructures, including even written constitutions, since these too might stifle a more spontaneous, immediate trust in God's providence.<sup>20</sup>

Under these conditions, it is no wonder that the order grew slowly. Two hundred years after its founding in 1512, there were less than 2,000 Theatines.

At present, less than 200 Theatines remain in the entire world.

## II. St. Ignatius's Principle and Foundation

**I**n 1536, Ignatius wrote a letter to Cardinal Carafa, co-founder of the Theatines, offering unsolicited advice about the young order. Ignatius clearly understood that writing the letter was a bold move. He

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<sup>19</sup> See William V. Hudon, ed., *Theatine Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996); [anonymous], *The Life of Saint Cajetan, Count of Tiene, Founder of the Theatines*, trans. Lady Herbert (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1888), esp. pp. 226–34. English-language resources on Theatine spirituality are few.

<sup>20</sup> In 1524, the pope gave to the Theatines permission to craft their own constitutions, but they delayed for eighty years. Ignatius's stated reasons for composing the Jesuit *Constitutions*, located in the preamble (§134), should be read in this light.

began by assuring Carafa of his good will in writing it, and begged him to read it “with the same love and good will with which it is written.”<sup>21</sup>

The letter is important for two reasons. That Ignatius chose to write it at all, despite the likelihood of alienating the powerful Carafa—he later became Pope Paul IV—shows how strongly Ignatius felt about the matter. It also reveals that, three years before the founding of the Society, Ignatius already had clear in his own mind some emphases that would later constitute the Jesuit way of proceeding.

Ignatius understood that Carafa and the Theatines desired to glorify God by their lives. He acknowledged as much in the letter. But if they desired to serve the *greater* glory of God, then they were taking the wrong measures. Ignatius writes:

there seem to me to be sufficient arguments . . . for me to fear or think that the religious group given to you by God Our Lord may not spread out at all, whereas *if it were to increase in companions, then it would be more likely to be of greater service and praise of the Lord.* I restrict myself here to explaining only part of what I can understand.<sup>22</sup>

Every Jesuit will recognize “the greater service and praise” of God as one of Ignatius’s favorite expressions. In the preceding passage, he uses it as the basis for his argument that Theatines should concern themselves with increasing their numbers. Ignatius clearly did not intend it for merely rhetorical or inspirational effect—something like *go set the world on fire!*—because he drew from it a specific and practical conclusion that he expected Carafa to understand, if not necessarily to endorse.

Ten years later, in the Jesuit *Constitutions*, Ignatius appealed to the *greater* service and praise of God, or his *greater* glory or the *greater* good, approximately 140 times, usually to justify specific affirmations therein. In part 7, for example, he made it the specific criterion by which Jesuits

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<sup>21</sup> Trans. Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 141. For an extended study of the letter, see Peter A. Quinn, “Ignatius of Loyola and Gian Pietro Carafa: Catholic Reformers at Odds,” *Catholic Historical Review* 67 (1981): 386–400.

<sup>22</sup> *MHSI*, MI Epp. I:115–16; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 141; my italics.

are to choose ministries. When Jesuits are presented with two or more good options in the service of God, they should, all else being equal, endeavor to discern that which will make a wider impact on God's people. Ignatius called this "the more universal good."<sup>23</sup> He then provided a list of more than twenty practical conclusions that derive from that objective criterion.<sup>24</sup>

Less well-known is that this objective criterion also undergirds the *Spiritual Exercises*. The Principle and Foundation begins as follows:

the human person is created to praise, reverence and serve  
God our Lord, and by so doing to save his or her soul.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius equates the praise, reverence, and service of God with the glory of God. The four terms are used interchangeably and in a variety of combinations.<sup>26</sup> For that reason, one can rephrase the first line of the Principle and Foundation thusly: *the human person is created to glorify God*.

Then, Ignatius concludes the Principle and Foundation with his characteristic *more*:

We should desire and choose only what helps us more [*más*]  
towards the end for which we are created.<sup>27</sup>

In short, for Ignatius, an exercitant ideally should choose only that which gives *greater* glory to God. He reiterates that point in the *Spiritual*

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<sup>23</sup> Ignatius and his aide, Fr. Juan Polanco, SJ, derived the expression *the more universal good* and its meaning in the *Constitutions* from Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. See David Hollenbach, SJ, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–9.

<sup>24</sup> Cons. §§ 622–24.

<sup>25</sup> Spir. Ex. §23; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 289.

<sup>26</sup> Spir. Ex. §§20.6, 46, 98.2, 150.2, 155.2, 157.3, 167.1, 168.2, 169.2, 169.7, 177.1, 177.2, 179.1, 179.3, 180.1, 181, 183.2, 189.5, 189.9, 240.2, 316.3, 322.2. *Praise, reverence, and service* are found in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas to describe the end and virtue of religion (II.II., Q. 81, articles 1–8).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*; my italics.

*Exercises* no less than nine times.<sup>28</sup> He also conveys the same idea negatively, and in quite strong terms, when he affirms that the presence of the enemy is clear whenever one is inclined to withdraw from the service of a greater good toward that of a lesser.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, for Ignatius, in order to have the interior freedom to choose that which serves God's greater glory, one should adopt a particular attitude of indifference toward all created things, so that one is able to take or leave any of them depending upon their utility. For example, if a modern man living in an apartment wants to be a hermit and in this way to glorify God by a life of lengthy prayer, penance, and humble reliance on divine providence, then he legitimately can decline as antithetical to his chosen form of service certain good or morally-neutral activities—for example, going to the theater, conversing with neighbors, opening a high-interest savings account, or recruiting other men to imitate him. But if he wishes to bring as many other people to God as possible, then he can no longer reject any of these activities categorically. He must be willing to adopt them, at least in theory, if they can serve his purposes without sin.

Ignatius made this very point in his letter to Carafa, in language that clearly resonates with the Principle and Foundation:

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<sup>28</sup> Spir. Ex. §§ 152, 168, 179, 180, 183, 185, 189, 240, 339. I respectfully suggest that there is widespread misunderstanding about Ignatian discernment on this point. Put crudely, the misunderstanding is, "I will discern between options A and B, and I will know what God wishes me to choose when I experience more consolation with one than with the other, or when one option feels more consistent with my authentic self." Understood thusly, there is no external criterion by which to evaluate options, and therefore, from a human perspective, the fact that God calls a person to A and not to B remains a mystery, his reasons inscrutable. For Ignatius, however, discernment always requires rational evaluation of the objective qualities of each option regarding how well they serve the universal good. Since this discernment must take into consideration one's gifts, limitations, circumstances, and the relative depth of one's own magnanimity—hence Ignatius's repeated proviso "all else being equal"—the more universal good is not always, or perhaps even usually, clear on the basis of reason alone. Consequently, consolations serve to confirm—or not—the choice to which one is leaning. The *Spiritual Exercises, Constitutions*, and letters of Ignatius all make the centrality of this objective criterion quite clear. See Joseph Veale, SJ, "Ignatian Criteria for Choice of Ministries," *The Way Supplement* 55 (1986): 77–88; Barton T. Geger, SJ, "What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters," in *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16–31.

<sup>29</sup> Spir. Ex. §333.

this love [for you, Cardinal Carafa,] is so genuine and sincere that I can beg and implore the infinite and supreme Goodness . . . to grant to you, on exactly the same terms that I ask for myself, whatever is good in this life and the next, all good for both soul and body, and all else that may be required for God's most holy and due service. . . . I hold it as a maxim [*máxima*] that God our Lord has created everything in this life to satisfy human needs, and to serve and preserve the human race.<sup>30</sup>

In his letter to Carafa, Ignatius applied his maxim to several aspects of Theatine life. He noted that Carafa lived a comfortable lifestyle compared to other Theatines. He conceded that this was not necessarily evil, and could actually serve the apostolate when one has to interact with high-ranking visitors on a regular basis. But Carafa was also the co-founder of an order, and his devoted disciples would naturally be inclined to imitate his example, even perhaps "beyond its limits."<sup>31</sup> In light of this wider impact on the Theatines and on the faithful in general, a simpler lifestyle on Carafa's part would be "directed completely to His greater service and praise."<sup>32</sup>

Ignatius also noted that the Theatines expected benefactors to appear on their doorstep spontaneously, even though Theatines were usually hidden from public view in their residences, saying masses and praying the office. Again, Ignatius conceded that, all else being equal, spiritual works of mercy are more important than corporal works of mercy, insofar as the first attends more directly and explicitly to people's eternal salvation.<sup>33</sup> But still, he advised Carafa to let Theatines do at least a little preaching in public, or dig graves for the poor, or engage in other corporal works:

then they would have a way of giving *greater* service to God our Lord in a religious manner, and the general public would

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<sup>30</sup> Trans. Munitiz and Endean, 141. That Ignatius called it his "maxim" here, and his "principle and foundation" (*principio y fundamento*) in the *Spiritual Exercises*, suggests that he had been thinking of it for some time as his personal philosophy.

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Munitiz and Endean, 142.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> See also Cons. §623b.

be *more* inspired to maintain them and would show much *more* charity towards them, and other clerics would try to interest *more people* and prick their consciences.<sup>34</sup>

Then, in a rare display of irony, Ignatius identified himself with those who are “weaker” and thus more disposed to rely on human means:

I can certainly agree that if one decides not to beg, but simply to serve God Our Lord and to hope in His infinite goodness, this is enough for one to be both kept and well fed. However those who are weaker or more preoccupied, as I mentioned, with worldly matters may well object that Saint Francis and the other blessed saints are believed to have had this hope and confidence in God Our Lord, but that did not stop them establishing the means that seemed most appropriate to ensure that their houses were *maintained and expanded*, to the *greater service and greater glory* of the divine majesty. Any other form of action would have seemed to be tempting God, whom they were supposed to be serving, rather than following a path likely to lead to His service.<sup>35</sup>

The significance of this final passage cannot be overstated: Ignatius was advising Carafa to choose ministries based in part on what would reap more vocations for the Theatines.



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<sup>34</sup> Trans. Munitiz and Endean, 143. In truth, Ignatius’s description of Theatine lack of interest in charitable works, and almost certainly of Carafa’s lifestyle as well, were inaccurate. Yet for identifying Ignatius’s values, it is sufficient to note that he believed, for whatever reason, that they were accurate. There is evidence to suggest that Ignatius never sent the letter (see Quinn, “Ignatius of Loyola and Gian Pietro Carafa,” 389–91), which, if true, raises the possibility that someone had corrected him on the matter.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid; my italics.

### III. Implications for Jesuit Vocation Promotion

In light of the above, it is now possible to identify key points about Ignatius's approach to vocation promotion. We will see that these points are fully corroborated by various passages in early Jesuit texts.

First, for Ignatius, all else being equal, the greater the size of the Society, the more it will serve God's glory and the universal good.<sup>36</sup> In the *Constitutions*, Ignatius identified the greater glory of God as the Society's very reason for being: not the glory of God, as with other orders, but the *greater* glory of God. Thus, he wrote to the Jesuits in Coimbra:

examine the nature of your vocation, and you will see that what would not be slight in others would be slight in you. . . . while all institutes of Christian life are directed to these ends [God's honor and glory, your own salvation, and the help of your neighbor], you have been called by God to this one, where, not with a mere general intent, but with an investment therein of your whole life and all its activities, you are to make yourselves a continual sacrifice to the glory of God and the salvation of the neighbor, towards which you are to cooperate not just by your example and earnest prayers *but also by the other outward means ordained by his divine providence for our helping each other*. From this you can realize what a noble and royal way of life you have taken up: for not only among human beings but even among angels, there is no nobler activity than that of glorifying their Creator and bringing his creatures back to him to the extent of their capacity. Therefore, study your vocation.<sup>37</sup>

What Ignatius writes here is more profound than simply "more Jesuits means more good work done," although that is on his mind too. The Society is a body of men who have embraced the highest ideals possible for any human being in this earthly plain: an exclusive dedication

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<sup>36</sup> This assertion is not belied by the original restriction to sixty professed members found in *Regimini militantis ecclesiae*. The restriction—subsequently lifted—was a concession to Cardinal Bartolomeo Giudiccioni, who had resisted strongly the creation of new religious orders.

<sup>37</sup> Letter 169, *MHSI*, MI Epp. I:497–98; trans. Palmer, 166–67.

to God's greater service and praise, and a request of the Father to imitate the Son in his deprivations and sufferings—that is, the “actual poverty” described in the *Spiritual Exercises*. As far as Ignatius is concerned, no greater witness is possible. Thus, the Society of Jesus serves the greater glory of God simply by virtue of being what it is.

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*Ignatius affirmed no less than three times in the Constitutions that it is the duty of the Superior General to pray for an increase of Jesuits.*

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Note too that “all else being equal” is a critical proviso that appears repeatedly, in so many words, throughout the *Constitutions*. Ignatius was prudent enough to know that increasing the size of the Society cannot be an absolute value to consider in isolation from other values. For example, he noted that Jesuits might to all outward appearances be greatly talented, but nonetheless harbor hidden vices that “offend His Divine Majesty.”<sup>38</sup> Such men should be dismissed at the discretion of their superiors, even though their continued presence in the Society would otherwise contribute to its growth and good reputation.

Or again, Ignatius wanted Jesuits to exercise discretion in vocation promotion—a point to which we will return. In the early years of his spiritual journey he erred grievously by recruiting unqualified men to help him, and he seems to have carried those lessons with him.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, there was a dynamic tension at work in the early Society, which Fr. Jerome Nadal aptly articulated when he wrote that Jesuits should endeavor to recruit “as many as possible of the very best” (*quamplurimi et quam aptissimi*).<sup>40</sup> Ignatius acknowledged the same tension in the *Constitutions* when he warned against accepting a “mob” (*turba*) into the Society. “Such persons,” he wrote, “even if numerous, would be considered a select group [*gente escogida*], not a mob.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cons. §210.

<sup>39</sup> See Barton T. Geger, SJ, “The First First Companions: The Continuing Impact of the Men Who Left Ignatius,” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 44, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>40</sup> *MHSI, Epistolae P. Hieronymi Nadal Societatis Jesu ab anno 1546 ad 1577*, 5 vols. (Madrid, 1898–1905), IV:548. See also Cons. §144.

<sup>41</sup> Cons. §658, see also §657, §819. *Gente escogida*, literally “chosen people,” was likely an allusion to the ancient Israelites as the chosen people of God. Fr. Hugo Rahner, SJ, summarized Ignatius's views accurately when he wrote that Ignatius wanted the

From this it follows—and Ignatius explicitly states this in the *Constitutions*—that it is proper to the end of the Society to increase the number of its men.<sup>42</sup> Or to put it another way, the increase is not simply a preference or an ideal: by definition, it is integral to the end for which the Society was created.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, Ignatius affirmed no less than three times in the *Constitutions* that it is the duty of the Superior General to pray for an increase of Jesuits.<sup>44</sup> He also wrote to the Jesuits in Coimbra:

if this is true of every Christian who serves and honors God, you can understand what your own crown will be if you live up to our Institute, *which not only [calls you] to serve God yourselves but to draw many others to work for his service and honor*. . . . This [principle] should be applied to themselves by those [Jesuits who focus on their work in the belief that this is sufficient] with earnestness and diligence, both later in the battle itself and during the time of preparation for it. From elsewhere [in the Scriptures] it is clear that *merely engaging in actions that are intrinsically good does not suffice*.<sup>45</sup>

Since the size of the Society is a consideration inseparable from its end, proactive vocation promotion is not a distraction from the mission, but proper to it. For this reason, to choose apostolates on the basis of what will reap more vocations for the Society is fitting and even required. Ignatius made this clear in a letter to a new Jesuit community in Ferrara in 1551, in which he listed their apostolic priorities. The first was “the preservation and increase of the Society in spirit, learning and

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largest membership possible without the Society becoming a “mass of men” (*Ignatius: The Man and The Priest*, trans. John Coyne [Rome: CIS, 1977], 45).

<sup>42</sup> Cons. §204.3.

<sup>43</sup> Some writers claim that the *Constitutions* “institutionalized” the dynamic spirit of the Spiritual Exercises. Whatever else that might mean, nothing, in a most important sense, could be further from the truth. The Spiritual Exercises hold up as the ideal the greater service of God, which by its nature points to a coordinated group or groups—as opposed to autonomous, charismatic individuals—explicitly dedicated to the same ideal. For Ignatius, the existence of the Society of Jesus as such realizes the highest graces sought in the Spiritual Exercises.

<sup>44</sup> Cons. §§ 719.5, 789.3, 790.1.

<sup>45</sup> Letter 169, *MHSI*, MI Epp. I:500–501; trans. Palmer, 168–69 ; my italics.

numbers.”<sup>46</sup> Only in second place did he put “the edification and spiritual advancement of the city.” In third place he put “the consolidation and increase of the new college’s temporalities [i.e., financial and material resources], so as to provide for the better service of the Lord in the first and second areas.” This letter became a template for new communities in other cities.

What also follows from the above considerations is that Jesuits can and should use any morally permissible means to increase their numbers. At the beginning of the *Constitutions*, in the preamble, Ignatius explicitly affirms that his emphasis on human means will underpin everything that follows:

although it must be the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness of God our Creator and Lord which will preserve, direct, and carry forward in His divine service this least Society of Jesus, just as He deigned to begin it; and although what helps most on our own part toward this end must be, more than any exterior constitution, the interior law of charity and love which the Holy Spirit writes and engraves upon hearts; nevertheless, since *the gentle arrangement of Divine Providence requires cooperation from His creatures*, and since to the vicar of Christ our Lord has ordered this, and since the examples given by the saints and reason itself teach us so in our Lord, we think it necessary that constitutions should be written to aid us to proceed better, in conformity with our Institute, along the path of divine service which we have entered.<sup>47</sup>

Note that here Ignatius repeats the same points that he made to Cardinal Carafa ten years earlier. Then, later in the *Constitutions*, Ignatius makes good on his promise by tying human means to the increase of the Society. In part 9, he acknowledges that the growth of the Society ultimately is attributable only to grace, but then adds that God wills this growth to be accomplished through the cooperation of his creatures:

When based upon this foundation [of grace], the natural means which equip the human instrument of God our Lord

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<sup>46</sup> Letter 1899, *MHSI*, MI Epp. III:542–43; trans. Palmer, 346.

<sup>47</sup> Cons. §134; my italics.

to deal with his fellow human beings will all help toward the preservation and growth of this whole body, provided they are acquired and exercised for the divine service alone; employed, indeed, not that we may put our confidence in them, but so that we may cooperate with the divine grace according to the arrangement of the sovereign providence of God our Lord. For He desires to be glorified both through the natural means, which He gives as Creator, and through the supernatural means, which He gives as the Author of grace. Therefore the human or acquired means ought to be sought with diligence.<sup>48</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Constitutions*, Ignatius reiterates:

Just as care should be taken to cooperate with the divine motion and vocation, endeavoring to secure in the Society an increase of workers for the holy vineyard of Christ our Lord, so also much thought should be given so as to admit only those who possess the qualifications required for this Institute, for the divine glory.<sup>49</sup>

In sum, Ignatius's position on Jesuit vocation promotion was both consistent and provocative. But what did it look like in actual practice? And what were some reactions from both inside and outside the Society?

## IV. Fishing in Jesuit Schools

**F**r. John W. O'Malley (CDT), in his book *The First Jesuits*, describes an early pastoral strategy—and one that Ignatius discussed explicitly in his letters—whereby Jesuits went into public places two-by-two for the purpose of engaging people in spiritual conversation.<sup>50</sup> They called it *fishing*—an allusion to Jesus's metaphor “fishers of people.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cons. §814.

<sup>49</sup> Cons. §144.

<sup>50</sup> John W. O'Malley, SJ, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1994), 112–14.

<sup>51</sup> Matt 4:19.

Usually, the specific goal was to get people into the confessional or to hear a sermon in a nearby church—a church that, quite deliberately, had other Jesuits waiting in the wings to continue the conversations. O'Malley described this strategy as “devout conversation, commando style.”<sup>52</sup>

O'Malley noted two particulars about Jesuit fishing that are relevant for our subject. First, Jesuits kept track of their progress. In a 1559 letter to the universal Society, for example, Polanco recounted that he had seen with his own eyes how the scholastics at the Roman College got four hundred people into the confessional within a span of five days.<sup>53</sup> Second, Jesuits enlisted laypeople to help them. Nadal cautioned, however, that men and women should not go out two-by-two unless married, and that they should generally limit their “pond” to their relatives, friends, and servants.<sup>54</sup>

Early Jesuits also spoke of fishing with reference to vocation promotion. In fact, Nadal urged it in his letters and lectures to Jesuits. To those in Germany, he wrote:

we have to ensure with all diligence and effort that many Germans enter the Society. . . . This fishing is necessary everywhere, but all the more in Germany, and so it should be recommended to all our Superiors. And although it might end up being difficult to feed all those Germans whom the Lord calls to the Society, the Lord will sustain those He has called.<sup>55</sup>

Nadal's choice of words is enlightening. He did not see incongruity between asserting on the one hand the need for “devout recruitment, commando style,” and on the other hand that the Germans so recruited would still have been truly called by the Lord. This illustrates his underlying theological conviction about God's grace working through human strategies. For that reason, we will see the same affirmations paired together in other writings by Ignatius and Nadal.

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<sup>52</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 113.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *MHSI*, Nadal IV: 214–15; see also Nadal III:664; IV:238; and O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 234–37.

One tension felt by Ignatius and early Jesuits was whether and to what extent to go fishing among their own students in the schools. The Society's emphasis on using all legitimate human means meant that fishing was appropriate in principle, and indeed even required by the dictates of reason, insofar as the schools provided the ideal conditions both for increasing the size of the Society and for offering as many men as possible the opportunity for an exceptional life. Yet those same conditions made Jesuits vulnerable to accusations of coercing naive youth, ranging in age from twelve to eighteen, and of exploiting the educational apostolate.

There is no question that the schools were a principal reason why the Society grew so rapidly. By 1556, Jesuits were running some thirty-five colleges, the student population extending from sixty in Venice to nine hundred in Coimbra.<sup>56</sup> In 1974, Thomas Vance Cohen of York University released a fascinating study of hundreds of responses given by early Jesuits to a questionnaire, composed by Nadal, that had asked their reasons for joining the Society, and also of ninety-two spiritual autobiographies written by Polish Jesuits between 1574 and 1580.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to what one might assume, few Jesuits indicated that they had been inspired by the works of the Society or by its unique way of proceeding.

Instead, a pivotal influence was the regular contact between students and Jesuits made possible by the schools, and the attractiveness of the Jesuits' personal compartment. Students and non-students alike noted their affability, camaraderie, and general esprit de corps. Cohen estimates that in the late 1560s, seventy-five percent of the novices in Rome, who came from all over Europe, had spent time in a Jesuit school. In Poland in 1570, "probably more than half" came from the schools.<sup>58</sup> In French Flanders in the 1590s, the figure topped almost ninety percent.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 206–07.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Vance Cohen, "Why the Jesuits Joined 1540–1600," *Historical Papers* 9, no. 1 (Canadian Historical Association, 1974): 237–58.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 250–51.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Consequently, the median age of men entering the Society was quite low. In 1560, it was nineteen; only one in ten was over thirty. A considerable percentage was sixteen or younger: 9.8% in Spain, 25.6% in Portugal, and 31.8% in Germany.<sup>60</sup>

But there were difficulties with fishing in the schools. First, many students came from the middle and upper classes, and their parents put up fierce resistance to their sons entering the Society.<sup>61</sup> Often, as with St. Stanislaus Kostka (1550–1568), whose father was a Polish senator, and St. Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–1591), whose father was a military man, the parents had career aspirations for their sons. Parents' possessive love was another factor.<sup>62</sup> Either way, noble parents had access to cardinals and popes by means of which they could lodge furious complaints about the Society.<sup>63</sup> They were also able to discourage would-be benefactors with relative ease.

Second, some Jesuit schools like the German College were dedicated to the education of diocesan clergy.<sup>64</sup> If Jesuits working in those schools were perceived to be poaching the best seminarians, the Society's reputation among bishops could be seriously damaged. According to Cohen, many early Jesuits had been diocesan students destined for prestigious ecclesiastical careers. Evidence suggests that their Jesuit confessors and teachers had not been shy about discussing the perils entailed by the life "in the world" of a diocesan priest when compared

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>61</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 240.

<sup>62</sup> In 1554, an exasperated Ignatius wrote to Fr. Louis Coudret, "we have here a boy who cannot be more than sixteen or seventeen, but he seems to possess the judgment and physical presence of someone older. He is called Juan de Ricásoli. He has a mother in this city, and an uncle who is the bishop of Cortona. We have had considerable difficulty keeping him here. We are rather tired of the headaches that the parents of such young men typically cause us" (Letter 4860,1; *MHSI*, MI Epp. VII:636; my translation).

<sup>63</sup> Ignatius's greatest headache seems to have come from one Madonna Cesare, who furiously resisted her son Ottaviano's entrance into the Society. Ottaviano believed himself to have a legitimate vocation and so entered anyway, but in the end his mother enticed him out again. See Rahner, *Letters to Women*, 396–400.

<sup>64</sup> See O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 232–39.

with the regular order of the Society.<sup>65</sup>

Third, the more indiscriminately or imprudently that Jesuits recruited from among their students, the more that these students would fail to persevere in the Society. In turn, the high attrition rate would likely frighten students who had legitimate vocations, to say nothing of harming the image of the Society. In 1546, Polanco was consulting regularly with Ignatius, then superior general, about the content of the *Constitutions*. During or after each conversation, Polanco took notes of what he said:

a love for the Society should be seen in [candidates], and sincere intention, which is had by virtue of a divine vocation. Those who come with an intention not completely pure, or partly motivated by necessity, or with human contrivances—even if these can be rectified—should be subjected to greater tests, or not admitted at all, because such persons either leave, or end up being ambitious or lukewarm in religious life, etc.<sup>66</sup>

Fourth, ever since the Church Fathers, there had been a long-standing debate about the propriety of accepting minors into religious life without the permission of their parents. One school of thought held that youths sinned by entering under these circumstances, insofar as they were not honoring their parents' authority under the dictates of the divine and natural law. But the prevailing opinion, generally held by the Fathers as well as by St. Thomas Aquinas, was that youths did not sin by doing so.<sup>67</sup> Their first allegiance was to God, and their first duty to the salvation of their own souls. Since evangelical perfection was recommended to all by Christ himself, parents did not have the right to deny their children this opportunity.

Ignatius held the second opinion. In November of 1553, he had Polanco write a letter to Fr. Adriaan Adriaensens (1520–1580), a slightly eccentric but otherwise effective Jesuit who was passionate about recruiting from among the students at Louvain. He had been put in jail

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<sup>65</sup> Cohen, "Why the Jesuits Joined," 242–43.

<sup>66</sup> *MHSI, Polanci Complementa* II:731; my translation.

<sup>67</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II.II, Q.189, art.5.

briefly for accepting boys without the permission of their parents, and the resulting firestorm rekindled the old debate among the professors there. Polanco writes:

Your Reverence writes that there are more than a few [scholars at Louvain] who opine that youths act wrongly who leave home to enter the Society without the knowledge or against the will of their parents; and that in fact there are some [scholars] who have the opinion that such sons are in a state of sin, as violators of the Fourth Commandment and the Natural Law, etc. And so you ask me to write back to you about this at length and formally. To tell you the truth, Father and dearest brother, I do not think we should deplore the unrestrained feeling of the parents as much as [we should deplore] this sort of blindness of the so-called “scholars” [*doctulorum*], and I am very surprised that Your Reverence wants to get weaponry from so far away [as myself] to counter a dogma resting on such a weak basis. Why don’t you turn to others at so celebrated a university who are so much closer to you? And even if the others have fallen short in their duty, would the lord dean and chancellor have been able to do so? Is it possible that in these miserable times there could be doubt among Catholics regarding that which all those saints and doctors have consistently upheld in God’s Church by their examples and their writing and their general consensus? Surely we would seem to be doing a disservice to these learned and holy men if we endeavored to prove with our own arguments a truth attested by so broad a consensus for so many centuries.

But if you still think, Father, that it would be worth the effort to have something formally composed on account of those individuals who have fallen into error, take it up with the chancellor, to get it clearly defined whether it is permissible for persons of mature age to enter religious life without the knowledge or against the will of the parents. It belongs to charity and to his office to oppose such errors with his authority and with that of others.<sup>68</sup> But if you prefer that we handle the matter, write us again and it will be done, even though we

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<sup>68</sup> While today one generally thinks of Rome as the adjudicator of theological disputes, in the late Middle Ages the universities commonly handled them.

are very busy.<sup>69</sup>

It is instructive to juxtapose this letter with another that Ignatius wrote only four months later. While his theological convictions on the above matter were clear, he nevertheless could simultaneously hold, in equally strong terms, that it would be damaging to the long-term reputation of the Society, practically speaking, if Jesuits accepted boys without parental consent. Ignatius sent the following circular to all Jesuit superiors working at the schools:

it being our intention that in their colleges and schools the youths be taught and established in letters and good morals, and that their relatives be given proper edification in this direction, as well as in the other exercises of charity that our Society makes use of—such confessions, preaching, and the like—it has seemed advisable in our Lord to order all and to strictly command you on behalf of God our Savior that no young persons who are under the care of their relatives be accepted into our Society, whether it happen there in the colleges or by having them sent to other cities, without the will and consent of those entrusted with their care.<sup>70</sup> And you should not even move or urge such schoolboys toward our religious order, because, although it is something licit in itself and praiseworthy to help those who have reached the age of discretion and even to urge them toward the state of perfection, that is, religious life, nonetheless this manner of urging or accepting them for the greater divine service and the more universal good, which we require more than the particular [goods], according to the demands of reason, is not judged to be prudent in our schools. And to make clear to you this order and decree of ours, we have written to all the colleges in this same tone.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *MHSI*, MI Epp. V:739–40; trans. Claude Pavur (ucs) and myself. See also MI Epp. VI:233–34.

<sup>70</sup> Jesuits sometimes sent boys to distant cities if the boys' parents were hostile to their children's religious vocation. From the boarding school in Vienna, St. Stanislaus Kostka walked 340 miles to Dillingen, whereupon the German Jesuits instructed him to walk another 640 miles to Rome, all to evade the political reach of his father.

<sup>71</sup> Letter 4222, *MHSI*, MI Epp. VI:410; my italics and translation, with the assistance of Dr. Ronald DiSanto, Regis University. A letter of similar import from Ignatius to the provincial of Spain, dating two years earlier, reads: "although no one may urge

If one were to read the second letter in isolation from the first, one might suppose that Ignatius's prohibition against fishing in schools was inspired by theological concerns regarding free and mature discernments. So interpreted, fishing in schools would seem by its nature always and everywhere illegitimate. But, as Ignatius makes clear even in the circular letter, fishing in the schools is acceptable, and even required by the dictates of reason, as a result of Jesuits' dedication to the more universal good. But all these truths notwithstanding, it is still not "prudent" (*non si reputa conuenire*), in light of practical considerations, for the long-term good of the Society.<sup>72</sup>

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*At first glance, Nadal seems to flout Ignatius's strict orders against fishing, but in fact his thirteen points are a faithful elaboration upon the underlying nuances of Ignatius's thought.*

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In 1564, eight years after Ignatius's death, Nadal composed a list of thirteen points for Jesuits in schools with regard to fishing. He was walking a fine line. He wanted Jesuits to promote vocations as vigorously and strategically as possible, while at the same time trying to avoid both the appearance and the reality of importuning impressionable boys. At first glance, Nadal seems to flout Ignatius's strict orders against fishing, but in fact his thirteen points are a faithful elaboration upon the underlying nuances of Ignatius's thought. So that, in the twelfth point, he reiterates Ignatius's injunction that youths not be accepted without

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students, particularly young boys, to enter the Society, nevertheless, through good example and personal contact, as well as the Latin declamations on the virtues held on Sundays, young men are spontaneously attracted, and many laborers can be won for the vineyard of Christ the Lord. So much for the advantages [of these methods] to the Society itself" (*MHSI*, MI Epp. IV:7; trans. Palmer, 362).

<sup>72</sup> A similar misunderstanding occurs regarding annotation fifteen in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Writers often affirm that Ignatius forbade directors, as a matter of principle, from encouraging exercitants to consider religious life, as he wanted to protect the sanctity of God's immediate communications with the exercitant. But other early texts indicate that, depending on circumstances, Ignatius allowed and even recommended such input from directors. The similarity of language between Ignatius's circular letter and annotation fifteen—"although it is something licit in itself and praiseworthy . . . to urge them toward the state of perfection"—suggests a standard verbal formula that he used in such contexts. On this point, see Geger, "The *First First Companions*," 32–37.

the permission of their parents.

Notably, Nadal begins by citing Jesuit dedication to the more universal good:

First: All [Jesuits] in our schools should be convinced that among all the works proper to our Institute, there is none more important, none more useful, than working to ensure that as many [students] as possible from among the very best are called [to the Society]. Because it is much better to engage in projects that serve many souls [over the long run], than to concentrate on helping one soul at a time.

Second: We must take great care that the strong desire for many vocations does not prompt Ours to go beyond what is appropriate. . . .

Third: Ours should not give themselves indiscriminately to this ministry. The Superior will understand better who are those who will not serve it well, because they lack the aptitude for it, and he will choose those whom he feels are better suited for such a distinguished and vital ministry.

Fourth: They will not only offer prayers for the success of this sacred fishing, but they will see that many Masses and prayers of others are applied to this effort.

Fifth: They will carefully observe in good time the talents and other gifts of their students with whom they are familiar, especially of the boarders if there are any, and they will do all they can to see whether they have personal gifts that make them suitable for the Society.

Sixth: When someone is found who seems well-suited, if he is one of our students, then Jesuits should inform their Superior, so that he may be mindful of him and encourage our promotor to attend to helping him and even assist him with some instruction.

Seventh: When it becomes clear that he needs some guidance with regard to that resolve, the first thing must be to persuade him to confess and receive communion frequently, and there will be appointed certain fathers in the school, who are out-

standing in their skill and experience and spirit for helping them. . . . They will try to persuade them, when they are truly contrite and have confessed, to give up any bad habits and associate with those who are spiritually helpful, and there can be easily designated those with whom they can become familiar. Then they can be persuaded to pray more frequently and with deeper devotion, and to read some spiritual books that it will be good to assign for them, such as Gerson's *The Imitation of Christ*, Landspergius's *Quiver of Divine Love*, *The Spur of Divine Love* from Bonaventure, and his meditations; likewise the lives of the saints and the lives of the [church] fathers, and some books from Blossius and the like. But these books should not be pushed on him all at once, but taking thought for the appropriate time and gradually, each in its own place. For if they take fruit from someone, he will be told to keep it until it seems good to move on from there and look for more.

Then a confessor can inspire him to love of spiritual things.<sup>73</sup> And so he can first impress in him a hatred of sins, then a disregard for worldly values, then a fear of the dangers in which those who live in the world are constantly involved; a fear of the particular and universal judgment of Christ, and a horror of hell, a love and hope and longing for Paradise. The confessor can broach all these things in confession, and the vocation promotor can likewise take them up with him at an opportune time.

Eighth: It does not seem prudent that [a confessor] raise the subject of entering the Society with [a student] if [the student] is not the first to mention it; and when the student indeed does so, he is to be helped as is appropriate, but in such a way that the confessor does not lead him on, but only strives to promote that principle and grace that the person raises.

Ninth: The Jesuit who is the promotor in this matter will be able to add other points to facilitate this undertaking, beyond

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<sup>73</sup> In 1551, Ignatius instructed that all students in Jesuit schools confess at least once a month (*MHSI*, MI Epp. IV:6; trans. Palmer, 361. See also Cons. §395). Nadal's description of the student-confessor relationship seems to imply that each boy was assigned to a specific confessor, which over time would have facilitated more substantial conversations that perhaps approximated what we think of today as spiritual direction.

what we have noted above, as he thinks appropriate and timely, in consultation with the Superior. Sometimes he will be able to gather such points on the spot and at particular opportunities that he will notice as they naturally arise. In addition, the promotor will be able to treat with the individual openly about the matters of the Society, share news, and letters to read from India and elsewhere that seem to make for edification. In brief, whatever from the life of the Society will make for his spiritual progress will be worthwhile for the promotor to communicate with the individual.

Tenth: All the aforementioned points concerning not only the confessor but also the vocation promotor are intended to animate piety in the hearts of all who seem fit for the Society, to let them be moved by divine grace on the basis of universal principles bearing on Christian piety and perfection.<sup>74</sup> But when Jesuits discuss topics with them or show them letters [e.g., from Jesuits working in the missions] that pertain specifically to the Society—even though it is our goal and completely our intention that these things move them to enter the Society—nevertheless we must take all precautions that they are moved by God and that they desire and petition the Society spontaneously.<sup>75</sup> For we so accept them on the basis of the second chapter of the examen: “That the one to be received ought to be asked whether he has been moved to this by anyone of ours; and if he says that he was so moved (even though he might have been moved licitly and deservedly) it seems good nevertheless for his own greater spiritual good, if a time is prescribed for him so that in thinking over the entire matter, he may commend himself entirely to his Creator and Lord, just as if no one from the Society had moved him, so that he might be able to proceed with greater strength of spirit to the greater service and glory of the divine majesty.”<sup>76</sup> And so the one we wish to be joined

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<sup>74</sup> By “universal principles,” Nadal had in mind, for example, the idea that, during vocational discernment, one should always seek the greater divine service; or again, all else being equal, that one should regard as ideals the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

<sup>75</sup> Once again, Nadal does not perceive any incongruity between, on the one hand, using any legitimate means to recruit boys; and, on the other, affirming that God alone calls them to the Society.

<sup>76</sup> Nadal is quoting from the general examen in the Jesuit *Constitutions* (§51).

to the Society should be brought [to the point] where he might be able to profess freely that, even if he has heard many things from Ours that could move him, he nevertheless has in himself by the grace of God another movement by whose inspiration he is eager to be received into the Society.

Eleventh: All this being true, as it is also true that we usually do not tell students that they should enter the Society, and we do not openly try to persuade anyone; nonetheless it might happen that we see someone with such great promise or character that we could say to him (if he hesitantly entrusts the entire matter to our judgment and advice) that it would be most fitting for him to join the Society, as much for his own good as for Ours. But this will happen rarely, and this procedure will be followed only with older persons or those who are clearly adults. In our Father Ignatius we have two examples: the first regarding two men who are now leaders in the Society, both doctors; but we also have the contrary of Father Ignatius himself in [the case of] two other doctors whom he in no way wanted to advise.

Twelfth: When someone who seems suitable has fully decided to apply to the Society, we have to examine his constancy a little. If he is judged to be constant, he still can be told that we are unwilling to admit him unless he has the consent of his parents or of those who are his legal guardians and that he ought to encourage this by letter if his parents are not present; and if they consent, or at least if they do not object, he will be able to be accepted. This is understood if they are our students and especially if they are not fully adult.

When the parents or guardians are not Catholic, as might happen in Germany or France, and if it is feared that the youth might lose his Catholic faith if he is not allowed to enter, we can take recourse to a Catholic prince, or try some other means by which he may be admitted. And if this method does not succeed, others will have to be tried. Yet others ought to be explored, if it is not possible to wrest consent from the parents or guardians, making use of some shrewd means [*sagacia aliqua industria*] in the Lord.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> One reviewer of this essay, concerned for the negative connotations of

Thirteenth: I must add to the above that, when someone presents himself to us whom we judge suitable for the Society, and he is not a boy, but fully grown [i.e., eighteen], and we do not have any other means available to bring him in, it would be appropriate to give him the Spiritual Exercises along with the elections in which he has to make a choice about a state of life. This would likewise be helpful for others [i.e., non-students] whom we would like to help in this regard as well, so that we advise them at an appropriate time to make a general confession of all the sins in their lives at once. And it would not seem inappropriate to give them some Exercises of the First Week and a few meditations, according to what it says in the last few numbers of the first annotations of our Exercises.<sup>78</sup>

## V. A Little More on “Tempting God”

**A**s the foregoing analyses might suggest to some readers, a curious double standard seems to exist with regard to vocation promotion. When Jesuits tell the story of Ignatius laboring to create the Society—a story that includes his constant efforts to recruit men like Peter Faber and Francis Xavier—they portray him as faithful, passionate, and visionary. But when modern Jesuits urge their companions to more proactive vocation promotion, their companions sometimes perceive them as being distracted from the mission.

Medieval thinkers were aware of this bias. They often cited a passage from the Roman poet Ovid: *non minor est virtus quam querere, parta tueri*, which translates loosely as, “it is no less a virtue to preserve what has been created than to have created it in the first place.”<sup>79</sup>

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“shrewd,” suggested a different word to translate *sagacia*. But I propose that Nadal was acknowledging frankly how one might perceive the Jesuit way of proceeding. There is reason, after all, why the early Society earned a reputation for Machiavellianism. More studies on early anti-Jesuitism would deepen appreciation for the distinctive and controversial nature of Jesuit spirituality.

<sup>78</sup> *MHSI*, Nadal IV:548–52; trans. Pavur and myself.

<sup>79</sup> Ovid, *Artis amatoriae* II.13. Albertus Magnus, *Politica* 222a; Bonaventure, *Commentario in Quatuor Libros Sentiarum* II:1.1.6; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians* I.1 and Conclusion.

Ignatius himself appears to have cited this proverb with regard to vocations. In the aforementioned notes that Polanco took during his consultations with Ignatius on the *Constitutions*, he quoted the superior general:

for as they say, *quod non minor est virtus quam querere, parta tueri*, the third topic [in the *Constitutions*] will be the preservation of those who have been recruited. I speak of those who are not yet professed, since the preservation of the latter will be addressed in the twelfth topic on the preservation of the whole [body of the Society]. And by “preservation,” I mean not only the number of men but also their virtue.<sup>80</sup>

One sometimes hears it said that Jesuits, like Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines, offer a spirituality of the sort that assures their continued existence in the church. Be that as it may, Ignatius himself does not appear to have enjoyed any assurances about the Society’s continued existence, his mystical experience at La Storta notwithstanding. There is the well-known story of how he blanched upon hearing the news that Carafa had been elected pope. Ignatius later told a Jesuit that he felt his body convulse on the inside. He immediately retired to his quarters to pray over the very real possibility that the fledgling Society was about to be suppressed. Fifteen minutes later, he returned to his friends calm, cheerful, and ready to accept God’s will whatever it might be.<sup>81</sup>

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*A curious double-standard seems to exist with regard to vocation promotion.*

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Jesuits have been guilty of over-confidence in the past. In 1640, Belgian Jesuits published the *Imago Primi Saeculi*, a large book commemorating the Society’s accomplishments in the first century of its existence.<sup>82</sup> The authors were so effusive in self-congratulations and smug

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<sup>80</sup> *MHSI, Polanci Complementa* II:734–35; my translation. This passage corresponds to what became part 3 of the *Constitutions*, while the “twelfth topic” later became part 10.

<sup>81</sup> See *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola; The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, trans. Alexander Eaglestone, SJ, and Joseph A. Munitiz, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 55–56 (§93).

<sup>82</sup> See *Art, Controversy, and the Jesuits: The Imago Primi Saeculi (1640)*, ed. John W. O’Malley, SJ, Early Modern Catholicism and the Visual Arts Series 12 (Philadelphia: St.

assertions about the Society's providential role in history that they enflamed an anti-Jesuitism that lasted for centuries. The book contributed to the universal suppression of the Society in 1764.

In a similar vein, one would err to presume that the rapid growth of the Society in its first centuries was due to its innovative spirituality. From 1540 to 1700, the Dominicans increased from 15,000 to 30,000, and the Franciscans surged from 50,000 to 110,000. "Contrary to a widespread assumption," writes John P. Donnelly (wis), "the older forms of religious life, particularly the mendicants, remained the most popular [forms] throughout the Counter-Reformation."<sup>83</sup>

Throughout the *Constitutions*, Ignatius refers several dozen times to the "preservation and increase" (*conservación y aumento*) of the Society.<sup>84</sup> That fact alone illuminates two truths. First, the possible dissolution of the Society deeply concerned Ignatius. Second, he considered an increase of numbers and spirit as inextricably associated with the preservation of the Society.<sup>85</sup>

In fine, one can rework as follows what Ignatius wrote to Carafa: *to expect God to keep the Society of Jesus in existence would be a tempting of him whom Jesuits are supposed to be serving.*

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Joseph's University Press, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> John Patrick Donnelly, SJ, "Religious Orders of Men, Especially the Society of Jesus," in *Catholicism in Early Modern History: A Guide to Research*, ed. John W. O'Malley, SJ (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1988), 148.

<sup>84</sup> In those or similar words. If one allows for Ignatius's references to "preservation" of the Society without "increase," then the total number of references approximates three dozen.

<sup>85</sup> In the *Constitutions*, Ignatius linked the possible extinction of the Society to demonic assaults, laxity—especially regarding poverty—and false innovations in the Society (Cons. §553, §816).

## VI. A Little More on “Compromising Freedom”

If anecdotal evidence is any indication, some Jesuits resist vocation promotion on the grounds that the very act of encouraging a man to think about the Society makes it more difficult for him to discern with tranquility and equilibrium. The man should always be the first to raise the subject, at which point a Jesuit should do little more than provide a listening ear and, if asked, offer some advice about discernment.

This point of view follows from certain ways of understanding personhood and vocation, prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, that continue to exert significant influence today. Inspired by the existentialist and personalist philosophies of the time, spiritual writers tended to emphasize the following:

- the radical uniqueness of each person;
- the idea that God speaks to individuals in the wordless, pre-conceptual depths of their individual being;
- the idea that these wordless communications correspond with one’s deepest desires; and
- that individuals can never articulate fully to themselves, much less to others, what God speaks to them in their depths.

From this perspective, using rational arguments and objective facts to explain to a man why he should consider the Society is, at best, tangential to a real discernment. Rational arguments depend upon abstract truths that, by virtue of being abstract, do not pertain to *this* particular person. Likewise, objective facts like *the Society needs men like you*—however true they might be—indicate nothing one way or the other about what God is communicating to *this* particular person.

To illustrate, consider the following vocation pitch: *Tom, you have certain gifts that the church really needs, and you tend to think and act like a Jesuit. Have you considered that God might be calling you to the Society? In light of everything that the Society has done for you and yours, what might you give back to others as a Jesuit?* When a Jesuit speaks in this way, or otherwise ventures to suggest what a man *ought* to do with his life, he imposes his

own values on the man—an imposition that will either confuse the man or make him feel pressured or guilty.

A well-known book on spiritual direction by Thomas Hart, published in 1980, further illustrates this perspective. Here are a few excerpts:

“The kingdom of heaven is within you,” the gospel says (Lk 17:21), and the saying seems to have several levels of meaning. One of them pertains especially to our present concern, the way God ordinarily communicates with us. It amounts to this: that the will of God is found not so much in the entrails of birds as in our own entrails. It is manifest deep within, where the Spirit dwells, bearing witness with our spirit (Rm 8:16). When we come in touch with our own deepest orientation and desire, our own real interior élan, we have also found God’s direction for our lives. This is the fundamental principle around which the discernment process pivots.<sup>86</sup>

Suppose someone is trying to know whether he or she is called to religious life or priesthood. Where will the answer be? Not outside, but deep within. Conversations with other people will help. The steps of a formula of discernment will be of some use. Prayer will offer some guidance. But ultimately the answer is found inside a person. It is a pervasive feeling which says, “This is right for me. This fits. This is what I want to do.”<sup>87</sup>

Wants are mine; shoulds are someone else’s. Someone else’s shoulds, whether they be my parents’, the church’s, my culture’s, or my peer group’s, can be so deeply ingested by me that they almost seem to be my own. Yet often they are not, and usually they get separated out when they are tested by various pressures. With a want, the case is different. It comes not from outside, but from inside. I can really own it as mine.<sup>88</sup>

To the question: “God, what is your will for me?” the answer is understood to be: “I want you to be yourself. I leave the details

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas Hart, *The Art of Christian Listening* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 75.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

of that up to you.”<sup>89</sup>

[The director] is not the final decider, the advice-giver, or the subtle persuader. These misguided playings of the part are harder to avoid than might appear. One has to be aware of one’s biases.<sup>90</sup>

Here is not the place to analyze different theories of discernment. But since the above ideas bear on one’s understanding of vocation promotion, I wish to call attention to an untrue conclusion that is often derived—rightly or not—from those same ideas.

Making a difficult decision, one that weighs on a man, is not the same thing as making a decision with compromised freedom. Spiritual writers often appear to confuse the two. To say to a man, *the Society needs men like you*, or *what do you owe the church?* might—and should—make him feel the gravity of his decision all the more keenly, but that is not the same as hindering his discernment. On the contrary, this feeling means that he is making his discernment with greater maturity and balance.

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*It should raise a red flag whenever truth, any truth, is vaguely regarded as an obstacle to discernment.*

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It should raise a red flag whenever truth, any truth, is vaguely regarded as an obstacle to discernment. Consider for example the oft-heard statement, *your wants are yours; the shoulds you feel belong to someone else*. The implications of this are quite troubling. Is there really no pertinent consideration to be found in a should?

The great irony is that, in our schools, Jesuits do not scruple to tell students that they *should* be men and women for others, that they *should* be dedicated to social justice and the common good, and that they *owe* this to the poor and marginalized. But when the topic turns to religious vocations, shoulds are suddenly verboten.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 80.

In point of fact, the *Spiritual Exercises* is replete with shoulds. As noted earlier, Ignatius reiterates no less than nine times that exercitants *should* choose *only* what serves God's greater glory and the more universal good.<sup>91</sup>

In the Kingdom meditation, the king summons the exercitant to a deeper service, one that will require sacrifice and suffering. Ignatius gives three reasons why the exercitant should say *yes* to a king so generous and kind. One is the exercitant's fear of how he will be perceived by others if he says no:

I consider what reply good subjects should make to such an open and kindly king, and on the other hand, if anyone refused to accept the request of such a king, how greatly such a person would deserve to be blamed by everyone and to be judged an unworthy knight.<sup>92</sup>

A second reason is a sense of duty derived from reason:

If such a call made by an earthly king to his subjects is worthy of our consideration, how much more is it worthy of consideration to see Christ our Lord, the eternal King, and before Him the entire human race, as to all and to each one in particular His call goes out. . . . We should consider that all who have judgment and reason will offer themselves completely for the task.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See note 28, above.

<sup>92</sup> Spir. Ex. §94; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 303. Ignatius is working from a medieval truism that three legitimate but unequally-ideal motives exist for doing God's will: fear of punishment or other negative consequences, a sense of duty that derives from reason and universal principles, and magnanimity born of gratitude and love. Duty is more noble than fear, because fear is concerned solely for oneself, whereas duty recognizes obligations to others. Magnanimity then is nobler than both fear and duty, because the latter are satisfied with doing the minimum, whereas magnanimity seeks grander ways of serving the beloved—of going above and beyond the call of duty. The triad is presupposed in Spir. Ex. §§165–68 and §370. In the "Spiritual Diary," Ignatius refers to his efforts to cultivate magnanimity but concedes that he sometimes acts out of fear: "when one does not achieve a lover's reverence and submission, one must seek for the submission of one who fears, considering one's own faults, in order to gain the submission of love" (entry for April 4, 1544; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 104).

<sup>93</sup> Spir. Ex. nos. 95–96; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 304.

The third reason is magnanimity born of gratitude and love. Ignatius has this in mind when an exercitant asks for actual poverty:

Those who will want to respond in a spirit of love, and to distinguish themselves by the thoroughness of their commitment to their eternal King and universal Lord, will not only offer themselves bodily for the task, but rather by going against their sensuality and their carnal and worldly love will offer greater and more important sacrifices.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, a principal leitmotif of the *Spiritual Exercises* is the cultivation of an ever-increasing devotion within exercitants that allows them to embrace *that which they already know they should*. This is most explicit in the *Contemplatio* of the Fourth Week, which is not about asking for more of God's love, but rather for a deeper love for God.<sup>95</sup> Ignatius writes:

To ask for what I want. Here it will be to ask for interior knowledge of all the good I have received so that acknowledging this with gratitude, I may be able to love and serve His Divine Majesty in everything. . . . then to reflect and consider within myself what, in all reason and justice, I ought for my part to offer and give to His Divine Majesty, that is to say, everything I have, and myself as well, saying, as one making a gift with great love: "Take, Lord, and receive."<sup>96</sup>

In short, when Ignatius asserts that all those with reason and judgement *should* say yes to the king, and that they *will* say yes to him, even at the cost of suffering and sacrifice, is he compromising their freedom?

Or is he simply telling the truth?

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<sup>94</sup> Spir. Ex. no. 97; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 304.

<sup>95</sup> A popular rendering of the Suscipe, "give me only your love and your grace," reinforces this misunderstanding. The official Latin translation, *amorem tui solum cum gratia tua* ("give me love of you along with your grace") probably captures more accurately what Ignatius had in mind.

<sup>96</sup> Spir. Ex. §§233–34; trans. Munitiz and Endean, 329.

## VII. Conclusion

What follows are some practical suggestions for vocation promotion today. To be sure, individual Jesuits and provincial curias practice some of these already. Not everything here will be new or surprising. The essential point is that each of these suggestions exemplifies the spirituality of St. Ignatius and the classical Jesuit way of proceeding.

**Point 1: General superiors, provincials, and general congregations should proactively instruct Jesuits that deliberate and strategic vocation promotion constitutes an essential expression of our spirituality and mission.**

In this regard, the aforementioned appeal by Fr. Kolvenbach to the Society summarizes the position of Ignatius perfectly: “[Jesuits] should also recognize that the Lord calls us to be more active and ‘aggressive,’ to make use of all the means and resources necessary to collaborate with grace in the raising up of vocations, following the example of St. Ignatius and continuing the tradition of the Society.”<sup>97</sup>

**Point 2: General superiors, provincials, and general congregations should make vocation promotion a principal criterion for the selection of new apostolates.**

Point 2 might seem overstated, but Ignatius repeatedly affirmed that Jesuits should not evaluate the capacity of an apostolate to serve God’s greater glory apart from that same apostolate’s impact on the size and well-being of the Society of Jesus. Nadal put it bluntly:

among all the works proper to our Institute, there is none more important, none more useful, than working to ensure that as many students as possible from among the very best are called to the Society.<sup>98</sup>

**Point 3: The ability of apostolates to produce Jesuit vocations should**

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<sup>97</sup> See note 3, above.

<sup>98</sup> *MHSI*, Nadal IV:548; trans. Pavur and myself.

be a principal criterion in the evaluation of the Ignatian identity of those same apostolates, as determined by the institutional exams conducted by their provinces.<sup>99</sup>

**Point 4: Provincials should make vocation promotion a principal criterion for the assignment of scholastics at regency.**

Both the Cohen study of Jesuits who lived five centuries ago and the CARA report of 2009 show that men are attracted to camaraderie, mutual affection, and a common life.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, provincials have a powerful case for putting all their regents in the same school, even if other schools go without regents indefinitely. Which schools get regents? Per Point 3, the schools that prove themselves either more serious about vocation promotion, or more adept at generating vocations.

**Point 5: Jesuits working in schools should prepare strategies for identifying and approaching quality students and colleagues and assisting them in a discernment process. Furthermore, Jesuits should keep records of the success that various methods have afforded them and share the results with other schools.**

**Point 6: It is characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding to play the long game instead of focusing on immediate results. We change the culture at our apostolates in such a way that vocation promotion is a collective enterprise and ever-present in the air.**

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<sup>99</sup> See, for example, a 2015 document produced by the provincial assistants for secondary and pre-secondary education: *Our Way of Proceeding: Standards and Benchmarks for Jesuit Schools in the 21st Century*, Standard 7.7 (Jesuit Schools Network, Canada and United States Assistancy, Washington, DC).

<sup>100</sup> Mary E. Bendyna, PhD, and Mary L. Gautier, PhD, "Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference," Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., August 2009), pp. 12, 56–58: "the most frequent comments [of those interviewed] centered on the example of members, especially their sense of joy, their down to earth nature, and their commitment and zeal; community life and a sense of welcome and feeling 'at home' with members; the spirituality and prayer life of the institute and especially common prayer and certain devotional practices; the spirituality or charism of the founder; and the mission, ministries, and/or apostolate of the institute" (p. 58).

According to a second CARA report, commissioned in 2012 by Boston College and the Jesuit Conference, a man is five times more likely to consider the priesthood seriously if three different persons raise the subject with him.<sup>101</sup> This indicates that a collective, coordinated approach to vocation promotion is vital.

**Point 7: A collective approach requires that we ask lay colleagues to assist us in identifying and approaching suitable candidates for the Society.**

There is no more sincere sign that our lay colleagues love Jesuits and believe in the worthiness of our life than when they ask men to consider joining us—starting with their own sons.

**Point 8: Jesuits should engage parents explicitly about vocation promotion. We alert them to our intentions, respond to their questions and anxieties, and challenge them as much as we challenge their children to think beyond themselves to the needs of the people of God.**

We have seen that parental resistance to a son's Jesuit vocation is nothing new. But instead of lamenting a supposed slide from the "good old days," we can turn this resistance into a teachable moment. At parent-teacher nights in our schools, or from the pulpits in our parishes, we should remind parents of all that they have received from the church, and therefore all that they owe the church.

Of course, parents' prayerful input into their son's discernment is usually appropriate. But Jesuits should remind parents of the wisdom of Gamaliel.<sup>102</sup> If their son does not have a Jesuit vocation, he will discover that soon enough on his own. He will not need any pleading, bartering, or coercion from them. But if their son does have a vocation and they compel him to walk away from it, then they will find themselves opposing God.

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<sup>101</sup> "College Experience and the Priesthood: A Summary Report of the 2013 Boston College Summit on Vocations to the Priesthood," compiled by Tim Muldoon, PhD, p. 11; online at [bc.edu/priesthoodsummit](http://bc.edu/priesthoodsummit).

<sup>102</sup> Acts 5:33–42.

**Point 9: If a man has the character and gifts to be an excellent Jesuit—one who will bring innumerable people to deeper faith and justice—then the burden does not fall on the Jesuits to explain to him why he should do it. The burden falls on the man to explain why he should not.**

People do not fear suffering and sacrifice. Not really. What they fear is not having a sense of meaning in their lives, of not having a reason other than habit or debt for getting up each morning. Ignatius knew well that if a man believes in something deeply, if he sees the point to living for something bigger than himself, then he is quite willing to suffer and sacrifice for it. “The Call of the King” does nothing else but speak to that truth.

Vocation promotion means we throw down the gauntlet. I daresay that most men will appreciate being challenged in this way.

**Point 10: To the extent that prayerful discernment suggests it will be effective to do so, provincials should mission Jesuits to full-time vocation promotion work, even if that means taking them from other works where they have succeeded.<sup>103</sup>**

Many Jesuits hesitate on this point. The question arises: how much does the Society lose by pulling a man from a different apostolate, especially from the classroom?

The question is understandable, but it stops short of engaging the full implications of Ignatian discernment. No one questions that a great good is lost. But that is precisely what *indifference* means: Jesuits let go of a great good now, as difficult as that might be, for the sake of what we have discerned will be an even greater good later.

Moreover, the above question does not admit of a quantifiable answer, except to say *a lot*, which adds little to the discernment process. But we can turn the question around in a way that is indeed quantifiable. If another man in full-time vocation work results in only one ad-

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<sup>103</sup> This approach is consistent with the findings of the 2009 CARA report, pp. 118–19.

ditional novice every two years, will the extra assignment be worth it? What about every four years? Every six years? Provincials can ask what they consider an acceptable return on their investment, and then proceed from that.

Here is another way that one might quantify the discernment. The apostolic gains of a single vocation, over the course his entire lifetime, will more than compensate for the six or seven years of gains that were lost when his vocation promotor was assigned to that ministry.

As a case in point, consider that in the summer of 2015, the Chicago-Detroit and Wisconsin provincials committed five men to full-time vocation work and hired a laywoman as their administrative assistant. One member of the team described this decision as “invaluable,” both in terms of the mutual support for the team-members—the work is exhausting—and also because they could contact and visit inquirers with greater alacrity.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, some candidates for the Society have indicated to the team that they had inquired into other religious orders, but the orders had not responded to their initial inquiries, or had not expressed due care and attention to them.

**Point 11: Jesuits need not feel embarrassed or awkward about asking men to consider the Society. On the contrary, we do them a tremendous service. We offer them a life of beauty and grace, a band of brothers that encircles the globe, and the chance to make an eternal difference in the lives of thousands.**

Many times people ask me if I like being a Jesuit. I imagine that most of Ours hear that question with fair frequency. In the past, I used to answer it with something like, “Yes, I do, and here’s why.”

But I noticed something peculiar. It was subtle, but I saw it especially in their eyes. My interlocutors often appeared to lose interest as soon as I starting going into my reasons. Their eyes drifted ever so slightly. I do not know why. Maybe they were just trying to ask a polite question. Maybe they were hoping that I would break down and unburden some dark pain, or that I would give them a privileged insight into

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<sup>104</sup> The 2009 CARA report confirms the utility of this approach (p. 10).

the inner workings of this mysterious Jesuit life.

So I tried a different tack. I waited for someone to ask me the question again. When he did, I replied, "If I had to do it all over again, I would."

The difference was amazing. My interlocutor's eyes zeroed in on mine. "What? Really?"

That was ten years ago. Since then, I have always responded to the question in the same way; and almost every time, the eyes widen in surprise. It might have something to do with the concreteness of the answer. I tell them that, as a Jesuit, I have had experiences with people that were so powerful, that if I had had only one, all the sacrifices and everything else would be worth it. That is the truth.

In the end, perhaps it is the only thing that most people want to hear.

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