

# STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

SO WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

*The Jesuit Ministry of Reconciliation*

WILLIAM C. WOODY, S.J.

49/1    SPRING 2017

## 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 editor . . .*

**I**n the decades following the Second Vatican Council, the Society of Jesus in the United States and Canada was deeply blessed with such companions as John English, David Fleming, George Ganss, John Sheets, and many others, who dedicated themselves to writing on Jesuit spirituality. They had answered the summons of the council to engage in *aggiornamento*—that is, a rediscovery and recommitment to the original charism of the Society in a manner that takes account of the needs of the present and the “signs of the times” (*Gaudium et spes*, 4).

Today, the Society recognizes the necessity of cultivating a new generation of writers on Jesuitica. To that end, the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality has established an annual “Faber Symposium,” so named for St. Peter Faber, that first companion of St. Ignatius whose irenic, welcoming personality and intimate, personal journals on prayer and discernment speak with special relevance to Jesuits and their friends today.

At the Faber Symposium, Jesuits present papers on the Society’s spirituality, history, and way of proceeding. Afterward, presenters receive feedback from the audience in the context of an open discussion on their work, including encouragement, critiques, and suggestions for further research. Always present in the audience will be Jesuits who are specialists in the field, including one or more members of the seminar. While any Jesuit can present a paper, provided that his proposal is approved in advance, deference will be given to those men still in formation and to those who are relatively new to writing on Jesuitica.

For topics, Jesuits may choose material that they are preparing for term papers, theses, and dissertations, or for possible publication in *STUDIES* or in other journals. Seven papers were given last year, including “Psychology and the Spiritual Exercises” by Pedro Cameira (POR), “St. Ignatius and Vocation Promotion” by myself, “Liturgical Themes in the Spiritual Exercises” by Joseph Laramie (UCS), “*Cor Jesu* and Pope Francis’s Vision of a Merciful Church,” by Peter Nguyen (CDT), “The Beginnings of Jesuit Ressourcement? Pius XI, Ledochowski, de Guibert, and the Jesuit Quadricentenary,” by Mark Mossa (UCS), “Cultural Dif-

ferences and the Spiritual Exercises” by Quan Tran (ORE), and “The Jesuit Ministry of Reconciliation” by William Woody (MAR).

The 2017 symposium takes place June 16–18 at Our Lady of the Angels Mission in Chicago, about thirty minutes from O’Hare International Airport. Those attending will include Fr. John Padberg (UCS), historian and writer, former director of the Institute of Jesuit Sources and editor of the official English translation of *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (1996); Fr. André Brouillette (GLC), assistant professor and specialist in Jesuit studies at the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College; Fr. Michael Harter (UCS), member of the seminar, former novice director, assistant tertian director, editor of *Review for Religious*, and managing editor of *America*; and Fr. Casey Beaumier (WIS), member of the seminar and director of the Institute of Advanced Jesuit Studies at Boston College.

One could not ask for a finer example of what the Society can hope to gain from the Faber Symposium than the present STUDIES issue on the Jesuit ministry of reconciliation. Mr. William Woody, a regent at the College of the Holy Cross, is only the second Jesuit in formation to be published in STUDIES in the fifty-year history of the journal (the first being Mr. David Nantais in the autumn of 2004).

The timeliness of Mr. Woody’s essay is obvious. Pope Francis made the ministry of reconciliation a clarion call to the universal church, and declared the year 2016 an extraordinary jubilee of mercy, with special attention to reconciling sinners and those marginalized from the ecclesial body. As Mr. Woody reminds readers, the ministry of reconciliation was prominent in the thinking of the early Jesuits. As early as 1537—several years before the founding of the Society—an early follower of Ignatius described the First Companions as men who “walk with those who wander off the beaten path.”<sup>1</sup>

To tell the truth, I sometimes wonder whether the ministry of reconciliation is in fundamental tension, at least theoretically, with “the more universal good”—that other criterion for ministry that Ignatius identified explicitly as the interpretive key for the content of the Jesuit

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<sup>1</sup> *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* (MHSI), *Epistolae mixtae ex variis Europae loci ab anno 1537 ad 1556 scriptae*, 5 vols (Madrid, 1898-1901), I:11-12, my translation.

*Constitutions.* As Jesuits are fond of observing, five percent of one's flock can occupy ninety-five percent of one's time. If Ignatius perceived a tension between serving the marginalized and serving the more universal good, he did not acknowledge it explicitly in any text of which I am aware. And yet I think of the Catholics in Morbegno who suffered long from a lack of good pastors and the pressures of Protestant proselytizing. They begged Ignatius to let them keep Fr. Andrea Galvanello as their pastor, even threatening to bring in a Protestant minister if Ignatius refused. Clearly, this was a case of a marginalized, angry flock. Nonetheless, Ignatius refused, on the grounds that Galvanello could serve a greater good if he remained on the move from one parish to another.

That being said, if there is a tension, then Jesuits seem to live it rather well. The First Companions might have tasked Ignatius with caring for the universal Society, but he also worked simultaneously at the micro-level to reconcile estranged spouses, find husbands for reformed prostitutes, and accompany individuals back to communion with the church. Perhaps modern Jesuits can find a connection between the two criteria for ministry in what Mr. Woody calls the "capacious and expansive" nature of the work of reconciliation (pp. 31–34). Like any dedication to the more universal good, reconciliation requires collaboration, dialogue, and a magnanimous heart that comes from knowing that Christ, in his one great act of reconciling the entire universe back to the Father, did not forget to seek, find, and give a mission to each individual sinner in the Society that bears his name.

*Barton T. Geger, SJ*

*Editor*

*The seminar invites all Jesuits to the Faber Symposium to participate in the conversations. To reserve a bedroom for the weekend, contact the STUDIES editor at [studieseditor@regis.edu](mailto:studieseditor@regis.edu).*



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# “So We Are Ambassadors for Christ”:

## *The Jesuit Ministry of Reconciliation*

### Introduction

From the earliest days of the Society of Jesus, the ministry of reconciliation emerged as a defining characteristic of the Jesuit charism. The first companions identified “reconciling the estranged” as a principal ministry—a claim made manifest in their early apostolic engagements and in the writings of Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), Jerónimo Nadal (1507–1580), and Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517–1576).<sup>1</sup> More recently, the Society revisited this aspect of its mission with renewed emphasis, as recent general congregations and both Fathers General Adolfo Nicolás and Arturo Sosa have expounded upon the Jesuit commitment to the ministry of reconciliation in a contemporary context.<sup>2</sup>

The scope of this ministry transcends institutional affiliations, individual disciplines, and specific approaches. As such, every Jesuit stands to benefit from reflecting more deeply upon how his experiences of reconciliation—both spiritual and apostolic—shape his self-under-

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<sup>1</sup> FI 1550, no. 1; *The Constitutions and Complementary Norms of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 4.

<sup>2</sup> GC 35, d. 3, nos. 12–36. See also Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, “Reply to *Ex Officio* Letters 2014,” in *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu (ActRSJ)* 25 (2014), 1032–38. Decree 1 of GC 36 emphasizes the Jesuit mission with Christ the Reconciler in numerous dimensions—with God, within humanity, and with creation. Father General Arturo Sosa, in his letter dated 6 January 2017 promulgating the decrees of GC 36, observes that “striving for reconciliation in all its dimensions” is an “imperative of our faith” and a guiding theme that “animated all the deliberations during the six weeks of GC 36.” Unless otherwise noted, all references to the decrees and accompanying documents of General Congregation 36 are from [https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC\\_36\\_Documents.pdf](https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC_36_Documents.pdf).



standing as a man who is sinful “yet called to be a companion of Jesus,” and as an “ambassador for Christ” collaborating with him in his ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20).<sup>3</sup> Amidst the brokenness and seemingly endless strife in the world today, reconciling the estranged takes on an ever more pressing and pertinent role for both the Society of Jesus and the church as a whole. By reflecting on the spirituality behind a ministry of reconciliation and on the historical undertakings and characteristics of this ministry, the Society of Jesus can renew this important aspect of its charism.

While this essay examines on a macroscopic level the spiritual motivation and historical undertakings of the Society’s ministry of reconciliation, my initial desire in reflecting on this topic stemmed from my own experience of ministry during the summer of 2014. Fresh from a year of philosophy studies in New York, I spent the summer as an intern at the Father Horace McKenna Center in Washington, DC—a center dedicated to the assistance and accompaniment of homeless men in the nation’s capital. There I came to appreciate in the tireless labors of the center’s staff a prime example of a ministry of reconciliation on a personal and social level, in matters both practical and spiritual.

On the surface, the phrase *ministry of reconciliation* conjures up images of sacramental confession and priestly ministry—topics to which I, as a non-ordained scholastic, would have very little to contribute and so could effectively end the article here. Yet what struck me most in the various outreach programs at the McKenna Center was the need for reconciliation on a broader level and in many different areas: for some, familial estrangement compounded by economic difficulties; for others, self-shame in ongoing struggles with addiction; for all, the reality of social effacement and marginalization by our wider society. The unfortunate reality of these estrangements highlighted the need and desire for, and many possible approaches to, a ministry of reconciliation.

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<sup>3</sup> GC 32, d. 2, n. 1; in *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), 291. Scriptural citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.



Many of the guests at the center did express a sense of estrangement from God and would sometimes speak painfully of feeling "too far gone," revealing the desire for spiritual accompaniment and sacramental reconciliation. But the need for reconciliation permeated many other aspects of life under the burden of homelessness and extreme poverty. Granted, while no individual and no outreach center could possibly cure every addiction, heal every wound, restore every relationship, or end all homelessness, the McKenna Center's small yet meaningful contributions to reconciliation provided much-needed hope and practical aid.

In some ways, reconciliation simply meant recognizing the humanity of another and restoring a sense of belonging, dignity, and value through caring attention. To many whose humanity had been effaced—ignored or avoided by the hurried passersby on the streets of DC, or reduced to a statistical problem for the government to handle—the simple act of recognition by the sharing of meals and stories, or accompaniment amidst struggles and hopes, marked a meaningful first step in reconciling estrangement.

Practically speaking, the McKenna Center also provided numerous programs for restoring a sense of self-worth, identity, meaningful labor, and a place within society at large. From matters as simple as obtaining an identification card to securing long-term housing, or for addiction treatment programs and job-skills training, various efforts aimed to provide support and new opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, the center became a source of hope in the caring accompaniment by staff, provided a place of stability and reliability in otherwise tumultuous circumstances, and held up the stories of several McKenna Center visitors as hopeful testimonies to finding a pathway beyond homelessness.

The powerful witness and humble work of the McKenna Center served as the basis for further conversations with Fr. Gaspar LoBiondo (MAR), former director of the Woodstock Theological Center and frequent visitor to the McKenna Center, as well as for a social analysis course offered to scholastics the following spring by Fr. Joseph Sands (MAR). In many of those discussions and reflections, I grew in my conviction about

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*A personal experience of forgiveness initiates this process—a moment that liberates us "so as not to remain helplessly fixed on past offenses."*

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the need for collaboration between direct contact through social ministries and systemic engagement through theoretical analysis. The apostolic engagements and priorities of the Society of Jesus have historically highlighted this need, and the contemporary Society stands well-poised to foster such collaboration—one that can provide for personal relief as well as policy change; that can address the immediate suffering of our sisters and brothers while assessing persistent root causes of injustice and estrangement.

Regarding the ministry of reconciliation, my experience at the McKenna Center offers one, limited vantage point, albeit one that provided a strong sense of the need for and urgency of this ministry. My initial motivation and numerous attempts at writing this article have been further shaped by the experience of the Jubilee Holy Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, by his numerous writings on mercy and forgiveness, and by the recent decree on reconciliation from General Congregation 36. As such, reflection on the themes of reconciliation and forgiveness seem particularly apropos in that they represent a hallmark of our Jesuit heritage and vocation.

Furthermore, the themes of mercy and reconciliation have grown increasingly important in the contemporary context, and the signs of the times place reconciliation at the forefront of global concerns: a world marked by greater interconnectedness and cross-cultural contact, yet paradoxically also marred by increased division and fragmentation. Personal alienation from God, a shameful sense of self, strained or broken relationships with others, exclusion from institutions, and marginalization by society all await the restoration of relationships, the reclamation of justice, and the rebuilding of connections. Some examples from the past few months alone point to the need for this ministry in today's world.

- Civil society faces a breakdown in public discourse and a growing political divide, marked by mockery and the absence of listening. The increasingly bitter discourse between and within both major political parties turns differences of opinion into personal loathing, which in turn precludes the possibility of informed discourse or reasonable compromise. Dissent on positions becomes personal vitriol. And this breakdown extends,

regrettably, beyond the United States and this particular election cycle. European politics similarly face increasingly divisive, bitter exchanges in the public realm, alongside the rise of polarizing parties and leaders: from the resurgence of Marine Le Pen’s *Front National* in France, to Nigel Farage’s Brexit campaign in the UK, to the rise of Norbert Hofer’s Austrian far right *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* in the 2016 presidential election, to name a few.

- The bitterness of discourse notwithstanding, the rise of nationalism and xenophobia in response to waves of refugees, recent terror attacks, or dwindling economic prospects further cements the divisions across ethnic, cultural, and linguistic grounds. This foments distrust and maltreatment among groups, and the isolation prevents encounter. Global terrorism and radical Islamic extremism compound these sentiments and breed Islamophobia, often targeting innocent, peaceful people.
- Deep-seated mistrust, violence, and animosity between law enforcement and minority communities likewise reveal the need for reconciliation and peace. When overly facile explanations and sensationalist claims become the controlling narrative, unfounded prejudices on both sides entrench themselves as the prevailing mindset. In this regard, summer 2016 brought tragic scenes of explosive violence in the Dallas terror attack against police and in the assassination of three officers in Baton Rouge, alongside numerous nationwide police shootings, seemingly carried out with shocking impunity, of unarmed African Americans.

These are but a few of the dismal situations that, at the time of this writing, featured prominently in the news. More will undoubtedly follow. Yet despite the overwhelming number of conflicts and divisions, ministers of reconciliation must not yield to hopelessness or to cynicism. The work of reconciling the estranged demands patience, dedication, trust, and hope. In this spirit, through an examination of Jesuit engagement in the work of reconciliation, this study aims to provide a greater understanding of, and to instill a deeper desire to engage in, this key aspect of the Jesuit charism.

To promote such reflection, the purpose of this essay is four-fold—spiritual, historical, analytical, and existential—proceeding in the four sections that follow.

1. **Spiritual:** to discuss the spiritual development and impetus behind the Jesuit ministry of reconciliation, whereby one develops from experiencing reconciliation to promoting reconciliation himself, as a collaborator in Christ's mission.
2. **Historical:** to explain the historical importance and concrete undertakings of this ministry for the early Society, as well as its contemporary significance.
3. **Analytical:** to identify, as far as possible, the essence or defining characteristics of a ministry of reconciliation. Namely, does there exist an essence of a ministry of reconciliation? Across the wide variety of ministries, do common features transcend any one work or institution?
4. **Existential:** to invite Jesuits to reflect upon how their individual missions and apostolic work serve to further Christ's redemptive mission of reconciling all things to God (Col 1:20). Beyond individual reflection, the Society of Jesus should assess the capacity and resources it has at its disposal to bring about reconciliation, attending to what it can uniquely offer in this undertaking.

This brief study, which shall by no means have the last word on the matter of reconciliation, might still offer an invitation to continued prayer and further reflection on the ministry of reconciliation. In doing so, Jesuits may set out with renewed vigor and clarity of purpose to reconcile the estranged and to heal a broken world.



## Part 1: Spiritual Grounding for a Ministry of Reconciliation

Father General Adolfo Nicolás, writing in response to the *ex officio* letters of 2014, underscored the centrality of a ministry of reconciliation to the Society of Jesus. Looking to the work of reconciliation that Christ accomplished, he proposes a framework by which to reconsider the “necessary elements” of reconciliation: progressing from forgiveness and healing to empowerment and mission.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, he considers these four dimensions “necessary elements in our own time for the many situations where reconciliation is needed,” though they also aptly capture the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises.<sup>5</sup> When read alongside the experience of the First Week, followed by the Call of the King and the meditation on the Incarnation, this framework describes how the experience of personal conversion and forgiveness in the First Week leads into collaboration with Christ in the Second Week.<sup>6</sup> This dynamic of forgiveness enabling or impelling the reconciled sinner to mission provides the spiritual impetus for the ministry of reconciliation—“a ministry given to us” by Christ, whose call we encounter in the Eternal King.<sup>7</sup>

A personal experience of forgiveness initiates this process—a moment that liberates us “so as not to remain helplessly fixed on past offenses.”<sup>8</sup> One cannot share the gift of forgiving love without first experiencing mercy and forgiveness, for one cannot give what one has not received. An intensely personal experience of forgiveness by the God who loves us first and who seeks out the lost sinner thus initiates the process. This encounter then flows into healing, which leads to empowerment “so that every person can help establish filial bonds that rec-

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<sup>4</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1033.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *SpEx* 91–109; *Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises*, trans. David L. Fleming, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 82–94.

<sup>7</sup> See 2 Cor 5:18 and *SpEx* 95.

<sup>8</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1033.

reate God's family around a common table."<sup>9</sup> The culmination of this dynamic in mission characterizes the grateful response with which the reconciled person responds to God's initial gift of mercy. Or, as General Congregation 34 describes this movement in the spiritual lives of Jesuits, "the mission of the reconciled sinner is the mission of reconciliation: the work of faith doing justice. A Jesuit freely gives what he has freely received: the gift of Christ's redeeming love."<sup>10</sup>

Ministers of reconciliation strive for the reestablishment of right relationships—a labor in which both mercy and forgiveness factor prominently. A word of clarification may prove helpful here, in order to understand better the relationship among *mercy*, *forgiveness*, and *reconciliation*. Of the three, mercy has received a considerable amount of attention from Christian philosophers and theologians throughout the ages up to the present day, most recently in the writings of Pope Francis. Christian theology understands mercy as a moral virtue and an action directed outward, marked by sympathy and compassion for the plight of another in distress. Augustine describes it as "a kind of fellow-feeling in our hearts for another's misery, which *compels us to come to his help by every means in our power*."<sup>11</sup> Aquinas adopts and expands this definition, explaining that such an action tends properly "toward another, not to oneself," and involves a moral virtue that may arise either as a sensitive passion (a feeling) or an intellectual movement (reason) of the mind.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of how the motivation arises, mercy entails a compassionate disposition directed outward that manifests itself as an action, rooted in sympathy and pity but never in condescension and scorn. Further

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> GC 34, d. 26, n. 4; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 659. See also GC 35, d. 2, n. 4: "fundamental for the life and mission of every Jesuit's mission is an *experience* that places him, quite simply, with Christ at the heart of the world. This experience is not merely a foundation laid in the past and ignored as time moves on; it is alive, ongoing, nourished, and deepened by dynamic Jesuit life in community and on mission. The experience involves both conversion *from* and conversion *for*," in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 734, italics original.

<sup>11</sup> Aug. *Civ.* 9.5; Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 349, my italics.

<sup>12</sup> *ST* IIa-IIae q.30 a.3; *The Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Latin-English Edition*, ed. Heidi L. Keiser, vol. 5, *Secunda Secundae*, Q. 1–56 (NovAntiqua, 2011), 363–64.

highlighting the active and performative nature of mercy, Pope Francis describes it as a “concrete reality” rather than an abstract idea, explaining that mercy makes love “visible and tangible . . . something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living.”<sup>13</sup>

From this perspective, both the victims and the offenders stand in need of mercy. In the former case, mercy can facilitate the process of forgiveness and reconciliation by strengthening and supporting victims, enabling them in turn to offer mercy and opening the possibility for forgiveness. In the latter case, mercy initiates the process of forgiveness for offenders by creating a space for recognition of guilt, repentance, restoration of justice, and a new mode of relationship. Mercy, therefore, provides a context for genuine forgiveness to take place, though mercy alone is not a sufficient condition for forgiveness. While mercy can be undertaken as a unilateral action by an individual, genuine forgiveness necessitates an encounter that requires mutual recognition—an encounter in which mercy is offered and accepted, given and received.

On a strictly human level, the plea or requests for forgiveness may prompt and precede the act of mercy, but genuine forgiveness always follows mercy in its being offered and accepted. Divine mercy, on the other hand, precedes us and loves us first, and thus always holds open the possibility for forgiveness should we have the grace and humility to accept it. In both cases, the encounter and exchange of mercy that characterizes forgiveness leads to reconciliation. Genuine reconciliation thus arises as the new state of relation among those parties involved, be they individuals, groups of people, or the all-merciful, compassionate God.

But if the profound personal experience of reconciliation with God serves as the basis for healing, empowerment, and mission in a wider ministry of reconciliation, then it becomes necessary to consider further exactly what this experience entails, or how an individual recognizes this reconciliation. Does such a personal experience necessarily manifest itself with tears and trembling, in an overwhelmingly affective or emotional response? Or does a rational, cognitive understanding of for-

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus* (MV) 6, 9. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from papal documents are from versions uploaded to the Vatican website, w2.vatican.va.

giveness and a more intellectual assent characterize better the moment of personal forgiveness and reconciliation?

It seems perfectly legitimate that some people will experience forgiveness and reconciliation primarily in an affective manner, as deeply felt, emotional consolation. Yet others may experience forgiveness in a primarily cognitive or intellectual way, as a trusting assent and sure knowledge of the mercy of God. The danger arises when either the affective or the cognitive dimension characterizes the sinner's experience of forgiveness exclusively, or at the expense of the other. From this perspective, a purely cognitive understanding of the intellect runs the risk of either solipsistic rationalization or constant questioning and scrupulous doubts. On the other hand, an exclusively affective response can become dangerously self-absorbed and individualistic, remaining ignorant of the need for restitution and occurring as a fleeting emotional experience that does not last.

From this perspective, it seems that a genuine and enduring experience of divine mercy and forgiveness that in turn heals and empowers the penitent for mission may manifest itself primarily in one form or another, though not exclusively so. Whether slight or profound, the affective dimension provides assurance that reconciliation is not a self-deceptive rationalization, while the cognitive dimension safeguards the need for justice and restitution, providing long-term trust and stability to an experience the emotional intensity of which will eventually wane. The need for both dimensions notwithstanding, individual penitents will experience the proportion and intensity of each in diverse and personal ways.

Whether the retreatant experiences reconciliation primarily in an affective or in a cognitive manner, the effect of personal conversion for mission commonly marks the transition from the First to the Second Week of the Exercises. An individual's experience of mercy and forgiveness during the First Week leads to a space in which he or she can share this grace with others. Moving into the Call of the King and the meditation on the Incarnation, retreatants focus less on personal sinfulness, finding themselves instead caught up in the wider horizons of this mission—not as an audience of idle bystanders but implicated and invited to share in the work of “the redemption of all humankind,” to “labor



with Christ, that following him in the pain, we may also follow him in the glory."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the experience of Christ's forgiveness, while always a good in itself, is never a definitive end in itself. Divine mercy opens the sinner to the possibility for a new life: the apostolic life as a disciple of Jesus. The Evangelists present this trope time and again in the Gospel narratives, where forgiveness and healing lead to interior freedom, personal conversion, and the ability to follow Christ. Unsurprisingly, retreatants may frequently draw from these Gospel figures in their own contemplations on sinfulness. For example, the healing of blind Bartimaeus, who upon receiving his sight got up and "followed Jesus on the way," sheds light on Jesus's healing of one's spiritual blindness, removing any obstacles to following him more closely (Mark 10:46–52).

Or, involving reconciliation more explicitly, consider the story of Zacchaeus, whose encounter with Jesus leads him to restore the spoils of his fraud and extortion, having been reconciled both to God and to the poor of society (Luke 19:1–10). Similar experiences of conversion for mission appear in the call of Levi the tax collector, in Mary Magdalene's steadfast devotion to Christ after having been "cured of evil spirits and infirmities," and in the conversion of Saul to become the Apostle to the Gentiles (Matt 9:9–13; Luke 8:2; Acts 9:1–19). Such stories open avenues for the sinner to encounter the forgiveness of God that lead to companionship with Jesus. The experience of mercy and reconciliation with God then enables them—or perhaps even imposes a duty upon them—to do likewise with others.

This dynamic plays out not only in the Gospel stories, but also in the seminal moments of the Society of Jesus before its formal approval. The stories of Ignatius and Peter Faber (1506–1546) in particular provide striking paradigms of forgiveness leading to mission in the service of reconciliation. More than mere historical examples, these stories witness to a dynamic of personal conversion for mission that lies at the foundation of the Society of Jesus. Indeed, without the personal conversion of Ignatius and his companions, the Society would never have exist-

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<sup>14</sup> *SpEx* 95, 107; trans. Fleming, 84, 92.

ed. Yet the struggle with personal sinfulness, and the subsequent grace of reconciliation, enabled Ignatius and others to work in the service of this same reconciliation—a mission that “God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, has given to us” (2 Cor 5:18).

Ignatius makes no secret of his repeated struggle with scruples for past sins, suggesting in the “Autobiography” at times that he saw himself as irredeemable, unlovable, and beyond God’s mercy. Such scruples

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*The founding documents of the Society of Jesus reflect the increasing understanding of reconciliation as proper to the Jesuit charism.*

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deeply distressed him during his time at Manresa, and he suggests that he had even been tempted to take his own life as a result.<sup>15</sup> He similarly speaks of his desire to do extreme penance, though he feared that he

would not be able “to give vent to the hatred that he had conceived against himself.”<sup>16</sup> Yet once liberated from his scruples, as if through a miraculous intervention that granted him “great clarity of mind,” he found himself transformed and marked by gratitude for the rest of his life.<sup>17</sup>

Such a profound struggle enabled him to help Faber, who for his part suffered tremendously from scruples, temptations, anxiety, and bouts of depression.<sup>18</sup> Yet Ignatius instructed and guided Faber to a place of peace and tranquility (affective dimension) as well as understanding (cognitive dimension). After making the Exercises under Ignatius

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<sup>15</sup> *Auto.* 22–26; *A Pilgrim’s Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 69–73.

<sup>16</sup> *Auto.* 12; *A Pilgrim’s Journey*, 51. Specifically in this context, Ignatius speaks of his initial desire to enter the Carthusian monastery in Seville to undertake extreme penitential practices. He notes further, in the same paragraph, that such a desire “cooled” when he realized that the life of the Carthusians would not afford him the means to suffer sufficiently severe penances.

<sup>17</sup> Ignatius recounts the moment in which he was liberated from his scruples after a prolonged struggle in a rather abrupt fashion (*Auto.* 25; *A Pilgrim’s Journey*, 72–73).

<sup>18</sup> *Faber Mem.* 9–12; “The Memoriale,” trans. Edmond C. Murphy, SJ, in *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 65–66. Faber’s struggle with scruples further highlights the dangers of a maintaining a divorce between one’s feelings and one’s understanding of forgiveness.

himself, Faber resolved “to try to follow Iñigo in a life of poverty” with others of like mind.<sup>19</sup> Faber’s transformation from scrupulous anxiety to the tranquility of reconciliation enabled him to become, in Ignatius’s own estimation, unparalleled in giving the Spiritual Exercises.<sup>20</sup>

The spirituality behind the Jesuit ministry of reconciliation finds its roots in such personal experiences of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation, in a moment of interior healing that leads to conversion and empowerment for mission. Yet this progression from forgiveness to mission does not develop strictly and rigidly, in a linear fashion. Quite the contrary, the mission requires constant renewal and nourishment by a dynamic and growing understanding of one’s own forgiveness. As such, anyone who responds to the call to labor alongside Christ in the ministry of reconciliation must constantly return to this graced experience of personal forgiveness and conversion. Otherwise, without a regular return to those graces for renewal, the zeal and enthusiasm with which a Jesuit ministers will wane. Further still, the graced experiences of ministry and accompaniment of others in reconciliation can provide a greater appreciation for—or understanding or feeling of—one’s own forgiveness. In this way, laboring in the ministry of reconciliation can enhance one’s capacity to recognize oneself as a loved sinner, reconciled to God and called to be a companion.

Furthermore, Jesuit ministers of reconciliation must maintain an appropriate perspective if they are to labor authentically as companions of Christ. For while invited to co-labor with Christ as servants of his mission, failing to recognize the mission as properly belonging to Christ can easily lead to cynicism and disenchantment in the face of failure, or endless frustrations and spiritual torpor. At best misguided and at worst presumptuously arrogant—not to mention lapsing into Pelagian heresy—losing sight of Christ as reconciler can lead to burnout, apostolic exhaustion, and delusions of self-importance. While ministers of reconciliation can facilitate, accompany, and strive for the restoration

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<sup>19</sup> *Faber Mem.* 13; trans. Murphy, 66–67.

<sup>20</sup> *Gonçalves Mem.* 226; *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola; The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, trans. and ed. Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz, SJ (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 130.

of right relationships, Jesuits cannot approach the task as if it were their proprietary purview. Christ does not relinquish his mission of redemption to humankind, saddling them with the responsibility to reconcile all things to God. Rather, he seeks out companions and servants of that mission which remains Christ's and his alone.

Ignatius provides a helpful corrective against such egotistical tendencies in the *Spiritual Exercises*, particularly in the meditation on the Incarnation. In the Call of the King, Christ invites the retreatant to this ministry; but the meditation on the Incarnation reveals the divine ownership of the mission as well as its all-encompassing scope as both preceding and exceeding any individual's abilities. Here Ignatius emphasizes God's desire to accomplish this task undertaken purely through the Trinity's initiative, declaring "let us work the redemption of the human race."<sup>21</sup> Finally, humankind is not the source of this mission, and when we cut ourselves away from the source or when we fail to return to it for nourishment and renewal, the spiritual impetus behind our ministry withers and dies.

In recent interviews, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás has emphasized this role that Jesuits fulfill as servants of Christ's mission.<sup>22</sup> He notes the shift in emphasis by General Congregation 34, where Jesuits "formulated our mission as a *part of Christ's mission* of which we consider ourselves servants. . . . we cannot continue thinking that our work is 'ours,' or that we are carrying 'our' limited mission, but that we are only one minimal part of God's mission."<sup>23</sup> Jesuits adopt the role of "simple and humble collaborators in the 'work of God,' called to offer ourselves to this work."<sup>24</sup> General Congregation 36 subsequently reiterated this humble disposition of service as key to the mission of reconciliation, emphasizing that "we seek to understand *how God invites us* . . . to share in that great work" of reconciliation.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the ministers of reconciliation

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<sup>21</sup> *SpEx* 107; trans. Fleming, 92.

<sup>22</sup> "Conversations with Father General: Mission and Cooperation," in *Jesuit Curia Digital News Service* 20, no. 6 (21 March 2016).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Italics original.

<sup>24</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1034. See also John 6:28–29.

<sup>25</sup> GC 36, d. 1, n. 3, my italics.



are, as St. Paul writes, “ambassadors” and not replacements for Christ (2 Cor 5:20).

Nonetheless, the personal experience of reconciliation and the Call of the King impels the reconciled companions of Christ outward into the world to carry on this mission of mercy and forgiveness. Both the historical and contemporary endeavors of Jesuits reflect the Society’s commitment to this ministry, and an accounting of these various undertakings in the subsequent section will flesh out the apostolic fruits of this spiritual motivation.

## Part 2: Historical and Contemporary Approaches

### Historical Undertakings

The spiritual impetus to co-labor with Christ in his mission of reconciling all things to God manifested itself with great fervency and diversity in the early days of the Society. Numerous approaches to such reconciliation arose, ranging from work with prostitutes and orphans to theological disputes in universities, prison ministry with incarcerated individuals, and peace mediation in larger instances of social strife and violence, all while celebrating sacramental reconciliation by hearing confessions.

The founding documents of the Society of Jesus reflect the increasing understanding of reconciliation as proper to the Jesuit charism. The first companions inserted and emphasized twice in the second *Formula of the Institute* the ministry of reconciliation, noting that a companion in the Society should show himself “ready to reconcile the estranged” as well as to “strive . . . for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of . . . the spiritual consolation of Christ’s faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> FI 1550, no. 1; ed. Padberg, 4. Father General Nicolás observes that “such reconciliation, with its roots in the Gospels, affects the whole person and all persons. This is what Saint Ignatius . . . wanted for all who experience the Exercises. Accordingly, the *Formula of the Institute* of 1550 presented reconciliation as a ministry proper to the Society” (*ActRSJ* 25:1033).

Such a call to reconciliation does not appear explicitly in the first Formula, though after a decade of apostolic engagements and prayerful discernment together, the early Jesuits placed considerable importance on the ministry of reconciliation.

Indeed, such a decision to emphasize the charism to reconcile the estranged reflects the centrality of this ministry to Jesuit self-understanding in the earliest days of the Society. Even before the founding of the Society of Jesus, the early companions gained renown as agents of reconciliation who would engage those “who wander off the beaten path”—a reputation that highlights their desire to accompany the wayward despite the rumors that might follow such associations.<sup>27</sup> Early associations with the wayward—with social outcasts, prostitutes, and prisoners—undoubtedly influenced the discernment of the early Jesuits in identifying reconciliation as a ministry of the Society. The insight of these Jesuits, prayerfully reflecting and discerning the foundational documents of the Society, underscores the centrality of reconciliation to the Society’s charism, to its various works, and to its very existence.

While a comprehensive account of the early Society’s engagement in the ministry of reconciliation would go beyond the scope of this article, the following discussion of apostolic options will show the diversity and range of this ministry while providing historical context to assess the Society’s work in this area.

Among the variety of spiritual, social, and academic works in the early Society, sacramental reconciliation held a place of preeminence. Ignatius’s own conversion story and his guidance to others stressed the regularity of confession as an essential practice for progress in the spiritual life. Throughout the “Autobiography,” he makes numerous references to confession and its importance to his own journey, noting in particular the “general confession” during his time at Montserrat and

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<sup>27</sup> A fellow student at the University of Paris and former companion of Ignatius, Miguel Landívar, describes the earliest companions as those who “work to help others, and to walk with those who wander off the beaten path [*trabajan de ayudar y caminar a los descaminados*].” See Barton T. Geger, SJ, “The First First Companions: The Continuing Impact of the Men Who Left Ignatius,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 18.

alluding to his regular practice of Sunday confession from his account at Manresa.<sup>28</sup> He would later go on to recommend such practices “to all who sought his advice.”<sup>29</sup> So vital to Ignatius’s spirituality was the regular reception of the sacrament, that he incorporated a general confession into both the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions*, not to mention the much more frequent practice of the examination of conscience.<sup>30</sup> Ignatius even sought to institutionalize the practice, exhorting the Jesuits working in the colleges that they should “be very careful to have the students form good habits,” and that all students “should confess once a month.”<sup>31</sup>

Given the centrality of sacramental reconciliation to the Jesuits’ own spirituality and ministry, it comes as little surprise that the sacrament emerged as an apostolic priority for the Society from its earliest days.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Jesuits quickly gained renown for hearing confessions everywhere from prisons to palaces. Faithful to the outline provided by *Exposcit Debitum*, Jesuits “reconciled the estranged” by “the spiritual consolation of Christ’s faithful through the hearing of confessions”—a work that emphasizes the consoling effect of God’s merciful love and the penitent’s conversion rather than condemnation for sin and the failings of the past. In other words, the mercy of God rather than the sins of the penitent took center stage in the sacrament.

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<sup>28</sup> For his discussion of general confession, see *Auto.* 17. On the regular practice of Sunday confession, see *Auto.* 21.

<sup>29</sup> See notes to *Auto.* 21 in *A Pilgrim’s Journey* (p. 68), which indicate that the weekly reception of the sacrament “had probably been recommended to him by his confessor . . . at Montserrat, and he, in turn, recommended it to all who sought his advice.” See also *Faber Mem.* 6–13.

<sup>30</sup> *SpEx* 44, and *Constitutions* 98.

<sup>31</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, “Letter to Father Jean Pelletier, 13 June 1551,” in *Counsels for Jesuits: Selected Letters and Instructions of Saint Ignatius Loyola*, ed. Joseph N. Tylenda, SJ (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 51.

<sup>32</sup> John O’Malley describes the hearing of confessions as “in some ways the centerpiece of Jesuit ministry,” noting the “consolatory aspect” of that sacrament for Jesuit confessors. See John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 20.

As a result, Jesuits earned a reputation as approachable, kind, and compassionate confessors. It gave rise to the seventeenth-century joke that one should seek out Jesuits for confession, “since they put cushions under your knees—and under your elbows.”<sup>33</sup> While Jansenist adversaries intended by this quip to criticize laxity in the confessional, it nonetheless speaks to the reputation that Jesuits earned for their demeanor as consoling confessors, which motivated many to seek them out.

Beyond his dedication to regular confession, Ignatius himself placed a high premium on reconciliation in his personal life. In the “Autobiography,” he recounts a story of his time in Paris during which a Spaniard “who had squandered [Ignatius’s] money without repaying it” had fallen gravely ill.<sup>34</sup> Upon hearing the news, Ignatius embarked on a pilgrimage from Paris to Rouen to comfort the man. Despite their previous falling out, Ignatius proceeded to walk more than seventy miles, barefoot and fasting, over three days to meet his former friend. Upon arrival, “he consoled the sick man and helped him board a ship going to Spain,” which suggests that Ignatius himself secured passage and may even have paid the cost of the journey.<sup>35</sup> Even more surprisingly, despite his own history of unsavory encounters with the Inquisition while at Alcalá and Salamanca, Ignatius would accompany the wayward in Paris, persuading them “to return to their first faith, and, when he achieved that, he went with them to the inquisitor . . . to get them reconciled.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jansenist apologist Blaise Pascal adopted a critical position of the Society, accusing the Jesuits of laxity—“putting cushions under the elbows of sinners”—and criticized their casuistry in hearing confessions. See J. Derek Holmes and Bernard W. Bickers, *A Short History of the Catholic Church* (London: Continuum, 2002), 185–86. Pascal’s satirical *Provincial Letters* attack at length Jesuit moral teachings and their celebration of sacramental reconciliation. Letters 9 and 10, specifically, detail what Pascal considered the laxity of Jesuit penitential practices and show his disdain for the moral theology that the Jesuits espoused. See Blaise Pascal, *Les Provinciales, Pensées et autres opuscules philosophiques*, ed. Philippe Sellier and Gérard Ferreyrolles (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> *Auto.* 79; *A Pilgrim’s Journey*, 143.

<sup>35</sup> See notes to *Auto.* 79 in *A Pilgrim’s Journey* (p. 144).

<sup>36</sup> Philippe Lécrivain, SJ, *Paris in the Time of Ignatius of Loyola (1528–1535)*, trans. Ralph C. Renner, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2011), 92. For Ignatius’s own experience and imprisonment at the hands of the Inquisition, see *Auto.* 58–63 (Alcalá) and *Auto.* 65–71 (Salamanca).



In addition to more personal encounters or sacramental ministry, the early Jesuits also brought about reconciliation through social outreach and institutions aimed at serving the poor. Specifically, Jesuits sought out the “lost sheep” and cared for those “for whom,” in the words of Nadal, “either there is nobody to care or, if somebody ought to care, the care is negligent.”<sup>37</sup> Notable among such ministries include engagement with prisoners, as well as Ignatius’s own efforts to care for prostitutes, orphans, and the children of prostitutes by offering the opportunity for a better and different way of life. Such reconciliation—to oneself in the face of lingering shame, to God through sacramental forgiveness and spiritual healing, with others for past offenses and hurt, and with society for infringements upon the social order—all played a role in the Jesuit ministry among these groups.

On that note, the early Jesuits sought out prostitutes and prisoners—outcast and abhorred by the wider social and cultural order—with special urgency. Although many people and sectors of society, including the church, eschewed these people as sinners, the Jesuits never considered them beyond redemption or unworthy of catechesis. Perhaps most strikingly, the Jesuits labored practically to liberate both prostitutes and prisoners. For instance, Ignatius famously set up the Casa Santa Marta for prostitutes in Rome as early as 1542 to offer a “concrete alternative to their way of life” by admitting women “on a temporary basis and provid[ing] them with the situation and resources to make a choice about their future.”<sup>38</sup>

Regarding prisoners, most of whom fell into their lot for failure or inability to pay debts rather than for having committed violent crimes, the Jesuits regularly collected alms to settle these accounts with creditors and to obtain their release. But Jesuits also and notably intervened to suspend the death penalty in the case of a woman condemned for

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<sup>37</sup> Nadal further observes that, “this is the reason for the founding of the Society . . . this is its dignity in the Church.” See Jerónimo Nadal, *Orationis observationes* 316; ed. Miguel Nicolau (Rome: IHSI, 1964), 126.

<sup>38</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 182–83. See also Juan Alfonso de Polanco, letters from the year 1544, in *Year by Year with the Early Jesuits: Selections from the Chronicon of Juan de Polanco, SJ*, trans. John Patrick Donnelly, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 27–28.

adultery in 1551—a striking parallel to the well-known biblical account in which Jesus defends an adulterous woman before the Pharisees from execution.<sup>39</sup>

In sum, whether through sacramental, personal, or social efforts, the early Society clearly understood the ministry of reconciliation as an apostolic priority. And while the context and demands of the world have changed significantly over the past five centuries, the Society's commitment to reconciliation continues in earnest in the contemporary period.

### Contemporary Endeavors

The contemporary Society similarly recognizes and reaffirms the centrality of reconciliation as a ministry central to the Jesuit charism, a fact that recent general congregations have reiterated with renewed passion and urgency. Inviting the whole Society to reflect and pray over the themes of reconciliation and working for peace, Fr. Nicolás has written on this theme that “reconciliation remains an urgent matter, as General Congregation 35 already grasped,” and that “the theme of reconciliation and working for peace is closely connected to our Ignatian spirituality.”<sup>40</sup> Such an invitation came to fruition quite recently, as Father General Arturo Sosa promulgated the decrees of General Congregation 36. The congregation's first decree emphasizes the centrality of our mission of reconciliation and justice to our Jesuit identity, with particular attention to the ways in which Jesuits can facilitate reconciliation with God, among members of the human community, and with creation.<sup>41</sup>

Such an imperative and the desire to engage in the ministry of reconciliation find renewed energy in ministries of the Society today. Jesuits help individual penitents to find solace in being reconciled with God, alleviate the symptoms and penetrate the root causes of structural sin and social injustice, reach out to disaffected Catholics marginalized to the point of exclusion or condemnation, promote ecumenical dia-

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<sup>39</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 174. John 8:1–11 recounts the intervention of Jesus to spare a woman accused of adultery.

<sup>40</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1032–35.

<sup>41</sup> GC 36, d. 1, nos. 22–30.

logue and inter-faith cooperation, engage in addiction and rehabilitation ministries, and address the pressing need for reconciliation with the environment and God’s gift of creation.<sup>42</sup> In these and other ways, the various efforts of the early Jesuits for reconciliation in the spiritual, sacramental, and social spheres continue to the present day, displaying great apostolic creativity on the part of the contemporary Society.

Specifically, Ignatius’s heritage of working with the incarcerated and socially estranged continues in New York City through the *THRIVE for Life* prison project at the Manhattan Detention Center. Working with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations, the program offers social services, counseling, therapy, housing placement, and life-skills training, all to facilitate reintegration with society. Beyond the social aspect of this ministry, *THRIVE for Life* also incorporates numerous prayer and spirituality programs, thus reconciling the incarcerated not only with society at large but also locally and with God.<sup>43</sup>

Having considered some of the spiritual, sacramental, and social aspects of reconciliation ministry in the Society of Jesus, one might consider the less obvious yet no less potent means of reconciliation that the educational and intellectual apostolates offer. The Society of Jesus has a long and distinguished record in education and the intellectual apostolate; and, except for giving the Spiritual Exercises, these are the ministries for which Jesuits are perhaps the best known and with which they have the greatest popular association. With an impressive international network of schools, colleges, universities, and research institu-

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<sup>42</sup> GC 35, d. 3, nos. 19–36, “Challenges to Our Mission Today: A Call to Establish Right Relationships.” The theme of reconciliation between humans and the created order, not treated in the present article, merits its own proper study. Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* takes up the topic, as does Adolfo Nicolás’s letter to the Society concerning ecology (*ActRSJ* 25:128–30). GC 36 also addresses the issue of reconciliation with the environment and creation (d. 1, nos. 2–3, 29–30).

<sup>43</sup> The mission statement of the THRIVE Program identifies reconciliation as a principal aim of its ministry: “rooted in Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit tradition, the mission of THRIVE is to build bridges of trust, healing and reconciliation between incarcerated/formerly incarcerated individuals and the community through spiritual, therapeutic and educational programs.” I am grateful to Zachariah Presutti (UNE), founder of the THRIVE program, for the many conversations we have had on this theme of reconciliation in the social ministries apostolate. For more information and programs offered, go to [www.ThriveforLife.org](http://www.ThriveforLife.org).

tions, Jesuit schools and research endeavors have immense potential to reconcile the estranged on a massive global scale and could perhaps do even more.

Through educational institutions, Jesuits have a direct hand in forming future generations. This effect, although it may not bear immediate results, will magnify in influence for years to come. In the academic context, teachers and professors can equip students with an understanding of the causes of conflicts and instill in them the tools to think critically about such problems. Father Nicolás has noted the need to “integrate reconciliation as a theme and a central task in the challenge of building up social life,” and that we should “develop in our educational curriculum . . . an understanding of how conflicts are transformed.”<sup>44</sup> Preparing students for the twenty-first century will require formation to help them understand and address the underlying causes of perennial conflicts.

Beyond providing intellectual skills and understanding, spiritual and social formation can also cultivate a disposition of reconciliation in our students, opening their horizons to global injustices and bringing them into direct contact with others of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Jesuit educational institutions also foster encounters and exchanges as students not only learn together, but also often live together. In this way, the schools enable encounters with diverse populations that might otherwise remain more homogenous or isolated. Such encounters effectively undercut an unfounded xenophobia or the unwarranted demonization of “the other” — two tragic social realities that sustain structural injustices and discrimination. In promoting interactions and encounters over isolation and fear, the broad network of academic institutions thus provides fertile ground in which to inculcate the values of forgiveness, justice, peace, and reconciliation in hundreds of thousands of students worldwide.

To this end, Jesuit schools historically have fostered reconciliation among marginalized groups that exist in oppressive social, economic, and cultural orders. In fact, one of the primary purposes in founding

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<sup>44</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1037.

Jesuit institutions of higher education, particularly in New England and New York, was to educate burgeoning Catholic immigrant populations that faced discrimination or exclusion from other educational opportunities. These initiatives offered “major channels for social advancement” and an ability to reshape, over time, prevailing cultural attitudes and prejudices.<sup>45</sup> Today, these same institutions can offer similar opportunities for education and social advancement.

Several other initiatives continue this legacy of long-term reconciliation, through social advancement, outreach to marginalized groups, and advocacy for social justice. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by undocumented immigrants, as well as longstanding institutional outreach to a marginalized and often vilified group, Saint Peter’s University in Jersey City, New Jersey opened, in November 2014, the Center for Undocumented Students. Since its founding in 1872, Saint Peter’s has maintained a strong commitment to educate largely immigrant populations that face discrimination or a lack of educational opportunities. And while the demographic identity of that group has shifted over time, the mission to provide education and opportunities remains intact. Other American Jesuits and Jesuit institutions recently have undertaken similar efforts, through different models and at various educational levels. These initiatives, which include the Cristo Rey high school network and Arrupe College, both in Chicago, hold great promise for the long-term prospects of reconciliation more broadly conceived.

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*The need to hold together the tenderness of mercy with a respect for justice can of course create a tension, the resolution of which may not always appear clearly in practice.*

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The intellectual apostolate likewise operates on several fronts to further the ministry of reconciliation. Two key areas stand out in this regard: providing an integral vision to help resolve global conflicts, and helping to facilitate dialogue among factions. In this way, Jesuits can work to bring about reconciliation of the estranged on a much larger scale, and the intellectual apostolate offers an indispensable though of-

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<sup>45</sup> GC 34, d. 17, n. 2; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 629.

ten overlooked means for reconciliation. Undoubtedly, an increasingly globalized, interdependent, and instantaneously-communicating world presents unique challenges and opportunities “that come with differences of lifestyle, values, and religion.”<sup>46</sup> As Father Nicolás has observed, “the Society, which was born during times of constant wars between nations, was gifted with men who saw beyond the differences. Called by God and his Spirit, the Society now has the dramatic challenge of being a pioneer on the frontier of this new reality.”<sup>47</sup> Jesuits need sound preparation, depth of understanding, an ability to dialogue, and patience if they are to make a substantial and influential contribution to the cause of reconciliation on a global scale.

Furthermore, Father Nicolás repeatedly has called the Society away from superficiality toward a genuine appreciation at depth for the intricacies underlying the divisions in our world.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, he states that the work of reconciliation must “not neglect any aspect of life that might contribute to a better understanding of present conflicts and of the social processes in which we offer service.”<sup>49</sup> From this perspective, Jesuits need what Father Nicolás calls an “integral” vision, with a broad and profound understanding of the many conflicts that await reconciliation.<sup>50</sup> On this point, while global strife reveals the need for realistic solutions to complex and pressing social realities, such solutions cannot be achieved instantaneously or without profound, insightful reflection. For this reason, agents of reconciliation require a depth of understanding, an appreciation for complexity, and an ability to engage others in a respectful and informed way.

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<sup>46</sup> Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, Letter to the Whole Society, “Response to *Ex Officio* Letters 2015,” 2015/11:3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today,” Remarks for “Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping the Future for a Humane, Just, Sustainable Globe,” Mexico City, 23 April 2010.

<sup>49</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1033.

<sup>50</sup> “Interdisciplinary study will help us to see things in depth, with broad perspectives, and with a sense of history. This enables us to propose a sustainable form of reconciliation that is well grounded and holistic” (*ActRSJ* 25:1036).



And so, in order to have a sound understanding of the issues at hand, Jesuits in the intellectual apostolate must uncover the intricate, complex root causes and underlying problems facing the world. Such an understanding constitutes the first step toward formulating a realistic and tenable proposal for the sake of reconciliation. Intellectual reflection on social and political issues also provides a great service to the church and wider Society by helping to establish priorities and make informed discernments. Such a clear view of the problems at hand enables Jesuits to commit their limited resources to where they might do the most good, and to propose realistic responses to an otherwise overwhelming list of conflicts.

The intellectual apostolate can also serve the cause of reconciliation by shaping the thoughts and actions of those in a position of influence or authority. From this perspective, writing and research provide a means to shape the debate and the overarching discussion on an issue, be it in the academy, in the media, in political debates, or even in popular culture. In this way, the intellectual apostolate can enable the Society to provide new and creative solutions, to apply pressure for policy changes, and to communicate directly with those who can bring about change in a substantial, credible, and effective way.

Without a doubt, unreflective social activism, a band-aid for the deeper wounds of structural injustice, cannot suffice. To this point, both General Congregation 35 and Father Nicolás have re-emphasized the pivotal role that teaching, research, and social analysis play in any effective effort at reconciliation. Jesuits can neither settle for brash yet brief bursts of activism, nor reduce complex realities to pithy hashtags and meretricious tweets. True reconciliation demands engagement with increasingly complex realities at a deeper and broader level—a task that requires insight and understanding, clarity of vision, and penetrating social analysis. Using relevant critical reflection, Jesuits in the intellectual apostolate attempt to build bridges among many different people and in so doing to provide an indispensable means to confront the pressing realities of complex global problems.

A second contribution of the intellectual apostolate lies in its ability to foster constructive dialogue. If reconciliation in the face of global conflicts is to have any hope of success, then respectful encounter

and authentic conversation must take place. Indeed, apostolic effectiveness demands that Jesuits seek assistance and collaborate with others. Through the intellectual apostolate, Jesuits thus can create the conditions for a dialogue that promises to open avenues to help reconcile the estranged.<sup>51</sup> Without a genuine conversion of hearts and minds at the center of any conflict, even the most brilliant proposals will fail.

Of course, major conflicts often involve numerous parties, each of which approaches the issue from a decidedly different or even antagonistic viewpoint. The involvement of governments and politicians, businesses and economic interests, and varying religious, ethnic, or cultural groups—not to mention personal politics and ideologies—creates a complex situation that can make dialogue difficult. Furthermore, the parties can become entrenched in their respective viewpoints or seek out their own interests to the detriment of others. Yet such dialogue can provide the key to the conversion of hearts and minds so necessary to a successful reconciliation, especially in situations marked by violence, terrorism, and war.

Lest we dismiss this perspective as overly idealistic and indefensibly vague, consider the story of the *Guestbook Project*, founded by Richard Kearney at Boston College in 2008. Kearney, a postmodern philosopher specializing in hermeneutics and the themes of alterity and hospitality, put his more theoretical pursuits creatively into practice at the service of reconciliation. In this vein, *Guestbook* attempts to transform “hostility into hospitality, enmity into empathy, [and] conflict into conversation” by the exchange of personal stories and histories.<sup>52</sup>

Through this process, former enemies have set aside hostilities and violence, having come to recognize the humanity—and even to share in the suffering—of those whom they previously had demonized. Rooted in Kearney’s own experience facilitating workshops during the troubles of Northern Ireland in the 1980s, the project now involves inter-religious

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<sup>51</sup> As Adolfo Nicolás writes, “complex processes are required, in which politicians, mass media, leaders in the cultural and social sectors are able to generate confidence and to stimulate dialogue oriented toward finding peaceful solutions to human conflicts and dispelling people’s fears and desires for vengeance” (*ActRSJ* 25:1035).

<sup>52</sup> For more information about the Guestbook Project, go to [guestbookproject.org](http://guestbookproject.org).



dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as well as the narratives of Israelis and Palestinians in engagement with one another.

Of course, considering the institutional and intellectual capital that the Society of Jesus has at its disposal, Jesuits could pursue many other creative avenues for peace and reconciliation. Institutions of higher learning could commit resources and expand support for endeavors aimed at reconciliation. Individual professors and researchers might consider how theoretical research could serve peace and justice initiatives. Jesuits and lay colleagues can discern creative uses of their intellectual capital, employing scholarly and journalistic publications to shape the tenor of a conversation, persuade hearts and minds, or provide a fresh perspective of perennial problems.

Again, indispensable to reconciliation and the conversion of hearts and minds are encounter and a dialogue with depth of understanding, genuine respect, and openness to the other. And the ability to engage constructively and respectfully with others presupposes a solid understanding not only of the problems at hand, but also of the culture and worldviews from which the interlocutors speak. Through the intellectual apostolate, Jesuits thus stand to reshape the narrative, reframe the conflict, propose creative new approaches, shape policy decisions and practices, and provide the conceptual language and resources needed to enable dialogue.

But along with such optimism and hope for the work of this apostolate, Jesuits must keep in mind that reconciliation demands patience and perseverance, especially given that the intellectual apostolate's endeavors generally do not bring the gratification of instantaneous results. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the work of research and writing is either exempt or excluded from the ministry of reconciliation. Quite the contrary, intellectual pursuits provide a privileged means of contributing to the task of reconciliation on a macroscopic level by shaping debates, informing policy decisions, enabling dialogue and encounter, and restoring a sense of dignity and place in the world to the disenfranchised.<sup>53</sup> For all of this, and despite the less-apparent contributions

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<sup>53</sup> On the intellectual apostolate as a "privileged means for the Society to respond adequately to the important intellectual contribution to which the Church calls us," as

of research and teaching to the work of reconciling the estranged, the Society cannot in the long-term abandon this patient laboring should it wish to facilitate reconciliation on a larger scale.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, while the Society perhaps has different tools, institutions, and populations by which to engage in reconciliation today, this ministry stands out as the perennial means to share in Christ's mission, be it in social, spiritual, academic, or intellectual ministries. For this reason, the Society of Jesus cannot ignore the present reality of a world marked by profound alienation, estrangement, and daily violence. Yet the demands of mercy and reconciliation impel Jesuits to ask how the mercy and love of the Father can be made tangibly and visibly manifest, and how best to facilitate genuine reconciliation. Historically, the response of the Society has taken many diverse and valuable forms, and no singular avenue or specific manifestation of this ministry can address the innumerable ways in which the people of God need reconciliation. Yet Jesuits nonetheless continue to discern and to respond to this need, sharing as servants in Christ's ministry of reconciliation by seeking out the estranged, going to the margins, and co-laboring as companions of Christ to restore right relationships.

### Part 3: The Essence of a Ministry of Reconciliation

Given so great a variety of historical and contemporary examples in this work of the Society, the question arises as to whether the term *ministry of reconciliation* is too broad to define, applicable to any type of ministry. An examination of the essential characteristics

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well as its identification as an "apostolic priority," see GC 35, d. 3, n. 39; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 753. See also Adolfo Nicolás's letter on the intellectual apostolate, in *ActRSJ* 25:989–95.

<sup>54</sup> GC 35 also points out the need for patient, long-term labor that yields less obvious or readily-reaped fruits: "following Jesus, we feel ourselves called not only to bring direct help to people in distress, but also to restore entire human persons in their integrity, reintegrating them in community and reconciling them with God. This frequently calls for an engagement that is long-term," specifically in "the education of youth" and "intellectual research" (d. 2, n. 13; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 738).

of this ministry might help save the term from relegation to the heap of vapid catch-phrases.

Such is the task of the present essay—specifically, to identify and describe the essence of the ministry of reconciliation and its concrete characteristics. This is an important question to consider, since mercy and reconciliation cannot function as mere abstractions. Furthermore, mercy is not simply an attitude or a disposition, nor does it express itself in thoughts and words alone. As Pope Francis writes in the bull of indiction for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, “mercy is a key word that indicates God’s *action* towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible.

Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and *behaviors* that are shown in daily living.”<sup>55</sup> Ignatius concludes the *Spiritual Exercises* on a very similar note, beginning the Contemplation to Attain Love with the remark that “love ought to be put more in deeds than in words.”<sup>56</sup> As regards such concreteness and definitive actions, the Society’s historical and contemporary engagements in this ministry provide a clear guide with notable examples of reconciliation. From them, five essential characteristics or marks of this ministry stand out. The ministry of reconciliation is

- mutually liberating;
- capacious and expansive in scope;
- proximate, requiring closeness and encounter;
- gently just, neither overly permissive nor ignorant of justice concerns; and
- courageous, including elements of witness and vulnerability.

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<sup>55</sup> Pope Francis, *MV* 9.

<sup>56</sup> *SpEx* 230; trans. Fleming, 174.

## Mutually Liberating

The ministry of reconciliation is mutually liberating or, perhaps more accurately, collectively liberating. In interpersonal conflicts, for both the victim and the offender, a degree of freedom and liberation come from reconciliation and the reestablishment of right relationships. The offender receives the gift of freedom from the shame of past sins or transgressions, while the victim finds the means to let go of bitter resentment, the desire for revenge, and poisonous anger, as well as receiving closure and healing. Here again the words of Pope Francis speak to the liberation brought about by reconciliation, noting that one must abandon anger so as to live joyfully, for “pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully.”<sup>57</sup> Anxiety, fear, dread, and despair—as well as anger, revenge, spite and severity—yield to joy and serenity as the estranged find reconciliation.

Yet liberation goes beyond interpersonal relationships, for it extends into both the social and the spiritual spheres, touching individual lives in need of reconciliation with society, with themselves, and with God, or even reconciling those disaffected with the church. As noted above, Ignatius’s own struggle with scruples enabled him to guide Peter Faber to a place of peace, liberating him to function as an unparalleled minister of the Exercises. In more temporal matters, the early Society’s work with prostitutes and prisoners sought to attain for the estranged the freedom of a new life, or even a literal release from captivity. These new opportunities for liberation characterize many of the contemporary Society’s engagements, notably outreach to the incarcerated, as at the THRIVE program in New York; to homeless populations, as at the McKenna Center in Washington; and to those struggling with addiction recovery, as in recovery centers and retreat work.

In this way, in any number of areas that require reconciliation—spiritual, personal, familial, social, and institutional—Jesuits strive with Christ to “proclaim release to the captives . . . to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa 61:1–2). Whether that captivity involve the guilt

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<sup>57</sup> Pope Francis, *MV* 9.

and shame of past offenses, the spite of nursed grudges, the chains of addiction, the estrangement of physical incarceration and the social stigma, the yoke of political injustice, or the burden of violence, Jesuits are called to alleviate this anguish and to help lead the suffering through reconciliation to freedom.

### Capacious and Expansive

Second, the ministry of reconciliation is both capacious and expansive in scope. It is capacious in that the work of reconciliation is not the exclusive domain of Jesuits; indeed, the Society is well-served to seek out assistance and to collaborate with others. And it is expansive in that neither is mercy is depleted or exhausted in its sharing, nor does anyone fall beyond redemption or past the possibility of forgiveness.<sup>58</sup> Quite the contrary, showing or sharing mercy expands the range of persons involved.

More radically, reconciliation demands collaboration with others, engagement in dialogue, and, where necessary, asking for help. As such, the Society recognizes that dialogue and cooperation can lead to an ever more effective and expansive quest for justice in the face of numerous global problems. From this perspective, the "promoting peace, justice, harmony, human rights, and respect for all of God's creation . . . is to be done especially through dialogue with those who are inspired by religious commitment."<sup>59</sup> Here, interfaith and ecumenical cooperation rather than competition and aversion hold the power to reshape dramatically and to expand the scope of social ministries, outreach programs, and service with the poor and the marginalized.<sup>60</sup> And General Congregation 36 makes this call explicit, decreeing that "collaboration

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<sup>58</sup> This does not mean, however, that we must ignore past wrongs or offenses. As below, justice is inseparable from forgiveness and reconciliation.

<sup>59</sup> GC 34, d. 5, n. 2; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 547.

<sup>60</sup> See also Pope Francis, *MV 23*: "I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination."



with others is the only way the Society of Jesus can fulfill the mission entrusted to her.”<sup>61</sup> For this reason, the call to reconcile the estranged is not the exclusive purview of the Society of Jesus, nor even of the Catholic Church, promising through dialogue, encounter, and cooperation sources of reconciliation and justice.<sup>62</sup>

The need for such dialogue across religious and cultural divisions presents itself with urgency today, both to facilitate explicitly Christian ministry, and to promote reconciliation and peace in general.

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*The breadth not only of institutions and communities but also of audiences and people with whom they have contact puts the Society in a unique position to build bridges between divided or alienated groups.*

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While the world may be growing smaller and more connected in many ways, one cannot fail to see the outbreak

of enmity and violence when cultures, ideologies, and religions clash. Granted, some groups have shown a level of pathology and barbarism that seems to preclude the possibility of genuine dialogue.<sup>63</sup> Their horrific acts of depravity and terror must not, however, prevent genuine dialogue with whole classes of people.<sup>64</sup> Such dialogue, carried out in the name of reconciliation, must resist facile categorizations and circumstantial complexities.

As mentioned above, the intellectual apostolate has the potential to play a key role in the ministry of reconciling the estranged, by building bridges of mutual respect and authentic dialogue, especially among

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<sup>61</sup> GC 36, d. 1, n. 36.

<sup>62</sup> GC 35, d. 2, n. 15: “as followers of Jesus today, we reach out also to persons who differ from us in culture and religion, aware that dialogue with them is integral also to our service of Christ’s mission” (*Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 547). Note, however, that all such dialogue must be carried out from a place of respect, with sufficient knowledge and preparation. On the prospect of fruitful dialogue with Islam when approached with respect, preparation, and knowledge, see GC 34, d. 5, n. 13.

<sup>63</sup> These include, notably, such radical terror groups as al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and the so-called Islamic State or Da’esh, which have hijacked Islam for their own destructive purposes.

<sup>64</sup> Such a result would, moreover, amount to victory for these radical terror groups.



religions and at the intersection of faith and contemporary culture. In some of his concrete suggestions for how Jesuits might serve more authentically reconciliation in the world, Adolfo Nicolás directs the Society not to shy away from rigorous academic dialogue across religious, cultural, and historical boundaries.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the diversity of “rich ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism that characterizes God’s world today” carries implications for our mission of evangelization, especially in how we respond “to the racism, cultural prejudice, religious fundamentalism, and intolerance” that mars God’s world, the victims of which await reconciliation and justice.<sup>66</sup> Pope Francis similarly calls for the church to “pattern her behavior after the Son of God, who went out to everyone without exception.”<sup>67</sup> The breakdown in mutual understanding, the aversion to authentic dialogue, and the absence of respectful encounter create the conditions for hatred and perpetuate cycles of violence, discrimination, and isolation.

Furthermore, the expansiveness of reconciliation’s scope enables even the humblest servants—small in the church and small in the world—to magnify the effects of mercy and reconciliation. Gospel parables point out in dramatic fashion the expectation of the one who receives mercy: that he or she is, in turn, now expected to announce and to share the mercy of God with others. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant makes this point directly: “should not you have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?” (Matt 18:33). GC 34 put this positively and in terms of empowerment rather than imposition, decreeing that “the mission of the reconciled sinner is the mission of reconciliation: the work of faith doing justice. A Jesuit freely gives what he has freely received: the gift of Christ’s redeeming love.”<sup>68</sup>

The minister of reconciliation must also recall that, although religious and cultural norms forbade Jesus from engaging such people as

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<sup>65</sup> “Dialogue with all kinds of persons, without exception. The communion of dialogue is a bridge on the frontiers of violence to which the Society sends us, a place where we can learn what our often well-protected lives cannot teach us” (*ActRSJ* 25:1036).

<sup>66</sup> GC 34, d. 5, n. 1; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 547.

<sup>67</sup> MV 12. See also *Gaudium et spes*, 27.

<sup>68</sup> GC 34, d. 26, n. 4; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 659.

tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers, and the ritually unclean, none of them fell beyond the scope of his mercy and healing. While we can find it difficult to see the world through the eyes of Christ, in which no one is deemed irredeemable, God calls us to do so. Putting on the mind and the heart of Christ then impels Jesuits outward to seek those at the fringes and to be like Christ, who went out to everyone. Reconciliation thus becomes in a way infectious: an epidemic spread far beyond one's individual actions, impelling the agents of reconciliation outward into a hurting and broken world.

### Proximate

If a ministry of reconciliation necessarily directs one toward others, then by definition it cannot be accomplished in isolation or at a distance. To that end, the work of reconciliation necessitates an encounter on some level and demands that, in the words of Pope Francis, its ministers "smell like the sheep."<sup>69</sup> In this way, proximity with the estranged marks the ministry of reconciliation.

Indeed, Jesuits are to seek out the lost sheep and the disaffected, the marginalized and the poor, the victimizers as well as the victims. Mercy and reconciliation do not operate in abstractions or as mere ideas. Likewise, in the Ignatian meditation on the Incarnation, God does not simply ruminant upon the dire situation of the world and yet remain above the fray, happily ensconced in the lofty transcendence of his divine perfection. Quite the contrary, he enters directly into the world in its brokenness and sin, declaring, "let us work the redemption of the whole human race."<sup>70</sup> General Congregation 36 reaffirms this need for proximity and encounter, especially with the marginalized and the poor, as an indispensable dimension of the ministry of reconciliation. Emphasizing the "real closeness" of the first companions with the poor, the congregation highlights the need to learn from personal encounter with

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<sup>69</sup> Pope Francis, *Chrism Mass Homily*, Saint Peter's Basilica, 28 March 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130328\\_messa-crismale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale.html).

<sup>70</sup> *SpEx* 107; trans. Fleming, 92.

the marginalized rather than rest content with abstract speculation.<sup>71</sup> The ministry of reconciliation thus requires a care marked by proximity and recognition, summarized by the Incarnation of Christ in which God seeks out the lost sheep, holds them close with mercy, and in so doing reconciles all things to himself.

For an ideal portrait of proximate mercy as requisite to reconciliation, consider the Parable of the Loving Father/Prodigal Son. For “while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). Where the son planned to beg in shame, his father rushes out to meet him and holds him close: an apt image for ministers of reconciliation, who meet the sinner beyond the confines of the house, or for the church, who goes out into the world to offer welcome with tenderness and mercy.

In this regard, the ministry of reconciliation is both active and immersive, much like the incarnate Lord or the loving Father who is “present, close, provident, holy, and merciful.”<sup>72</sup> And so too does the efficacy and authenticity of the ministry of reconciliation hinge upon this proximity and closeness. As Father Nicolás notes, “closeness to people and insertion into their lives, so that we can feel—and not simply know about—the injustice, the prejudice, and the harm they suffer,” will make us true ministers of reconciliation.<sup>73</sup> More recently, Pope Francis exhorted priests in similar language: “mercy gets its hands dirty. It touches, it gets involved. It gets caught up with others, it gets personal, it does not approach ‘cases’ but persons and their pain.”<sup>74</sup>

Recent popes, general congregations, and Fathers General reiterate this sentiment in their call for the Society to “go to the margins” and the “fringes”: the need to “open our hearts to those living on the outer-

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<sup>71</sup> GC 36, d. 1, n. 15.

<sup>72</sup> MV 6.

<sup>73</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1036.

<sup>74</sup> Pope Francis, First Meditation, “On the Occasion of the Jubilee for Priests,” Basilica of Saint John Lateran, 2 June 2016, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/june/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160602\\_giubileo-sacerdoti-prima-meditazione.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/june/documents/papa-francesco_20160602_giubileo-sacerdoti-prima-meditazione.html).

most fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. . . . May we reach out to them and support them . . . may their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism."<sup>75</sup> Jesuits thus face the call to engage the estranged, be they the poor and the homeless on the physical fringes of the social order, be they the disaffected of the church, including the LBGT community and abuse victims. And this engagement extends even to the burgeoning movements of atheism and fundamentalism, which have become rather disturbingly more mainstream than fringe to contemporary Western culture. Each of these groups speaks from a place of hurt, anger, or marginalization that requires direct engagement with compassion, care, and depth of insight.

### Gently Just

While the charism of reconciling the estranged would have Jesuits err on the side of mercy, this does not, however, mean that they surrender all principles and truths in order to accommodate what is unquestionably wrong or evil. In other words, mercy and forgiveness neither oppose nor want for justice. Indeed, as agents of reconciliation, Jesuits strive for the dawning of God's kingdom, when true peace and justice will be realized. Adolfo Nicolás sums up the corporate desire of the Society for both forgiveness and justice, noting that "we seek most deeply a new creation in which there will be space for forgiveness, which is the royal road to freedom, and for the building up of a future in which justice, truth, and peace reign."<sup>76</sup>

But rather than opt for strict rigidity and harsh severity, the minister of reconciliation prefers tenderness and gentleness. At the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII declared the desire of the church "to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of se-

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<sup>75</sup> MV 15. Pope Benedict XVI addressed the Jesuits in this vein, exhorting them that "the Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach." See "Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus," in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 822.

<sup>76</sup> *ActRSJ* 25:1035.

verity” —an exhortation from which Pope Francis draws in his own *Misericordiae vultus*.<sup>77</sup> Such a sentiment echoes the request of Francis Xavier (1506–1552), writing back to Rome from India to request that Jesuits sent to the missions not be “rigid, wanting to control others by instilling a servile fear,” but rather knowing how to deal with others in a “tender fashion.”<sup>78</sup>

The need to hold together the tenderness of mercy with a respect for justice can of course create a tension, the resolution of which may not always appear clearly in practice. Yet the restoration of justice is inseparable from forgiveness, and both are necessary for true and lasting reconciliation. Jesuit Avery Cardinal Dulles (1918–2008) wrote specifically on this topic, examining the gospel story of Zacchaeus’s conversion to demonstrate the inseparability of justice from forgiveness. While forgiveness includes elements of consolation, comfort, and tenderness, he writes that “the idea that Christianity enthrones forgiveness in place of justice and teaches universal forgiveness is a gross misunderstanding. Jesus, like John the Baptist, in fact warns his hearers to take measures to escape the punishment they deserve.”<sup>79</sup>

Noting the need not only to pray for pardon, but also to make recompense for wrongs committed, Cardinal Dulles points to Zacchaeus, who changes his way of life, repaying his extortion “four times over.”<sup>80</sup> In this illustration, the tenderness of Christ’s mercy does not oppose the restoration of justice. Rather, such mercy elicits the justice required and does so perhaps more effectively than could have a stern rebuke or condemnation. Indeed, justice and the restoration of right relationships occur in response to being shown mercy and forgiveness. Mercy, as Pope Francis writes, “is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God’s way of reaching out to the sinner, offering him a new chance to look at him-

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<sup>77</sup> MV 4.

<sup>78</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 81.

<sup>79</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, “When to Forgive?” in *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988–2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 377–78.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

self, convert, and believe.”<sup>81</sup> In sum, forgiveness and mercy elicit justice, and true reconciliation demands that justice be restored.

### Courageous

Finally, Jesuits must accept that the message of reconciliation they bear will not always be warmly and enthusiastically embraced. At times, the ministry of reconciliation can, and undoubtedly will, meet rejection, mockery, and even violence. The modern worldview and certain strains of postmodernity seem not to allow for mercy, or at the very least seem to have lost interest in the topic. In *Dives in misericordia*, Pope Saint John Paul II notes, rather dismally, that the “present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy,” and that the theme of mercy has been forgotten in today’s cultural milieu as humankind increasingly places its faith in technological and scientific capabilities.<sup>82</sup> In other words, modernity’s illusion of human mastery over the world and the relentless pursuit of power can effectively relegate to the background any mission of mercy and reconciliation, if it receives any credence at all.

For the ambassador of Christ, preaching a counter-cultural message that challenges the status quo and confronts injustice will elicit scorn from some. A minister of reconciliation, active and immersed in a broken and sinful world, will meet resistance and perhaps more—a reality to which Jesuits in El Salvador, along with their companions, testified in 1989. Similarly, Jesuit agent of reconciliation Frans van der Lugt, who sheltered both Muslim and Christian families, was beaten and shot dead outside his church in Homs, Syria in April 2014. And, even more recently, Fr. Jacques Hamel, a man who had sought the peaceful and prayerful coexistence of Muslims and Catholics by donating church land for the construction of a mosque in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, was murdered while celebrating Mass in July 2016.

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<sup>81</sup> MV 21.

<sup>82</sup> *Dives in misericordia (DM) 2; The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michael Miller, CSB (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 1996), 112.



Countless other, unrecognized stories of this sort testify to the courage that the ministry of reconciliation demands. Yet this path, free of violence and paved with compassion, offers to a hostile world a prophetic and vulnerable way to freedom and unity.

Perhaps here Jesuits can take heart realistically by meditating on Ignatius's vision at La Storta. Ignatius himself was accepted as a companion, placed with the Son to carry his cross. Jesuits may likewise be sent on mission as companions of Christ, "risen and glorified but still carrying the cross, as he labors in a world yet to experience the fullness of his reconciliation."<sup>83</sup> As such, they hear the call of the King exhorting them to labor with him, sharing in the pain as well as the glory.<sup>84</sup> And so the reality of a broken world torn by violence and injustice demands of peacemakers vulnerability, courage, and patience, along with the recognition that they may never see the fruits of their labors. For though invited to serve the mission of the risen Lord, Jesuits can never lose sight of the demands of the cross in a broken and sinful world.

## Part 4: Implications for Jesuits Today

Concluding the Year of Mercy and looking at the world around us, we become painfully aware of the continued need for reconciliation amidst the seemingly endless violence, indignities, and divisions that plague God's children. At times, the sheer magnitude of the strife may tempt us to hopelessness or cynicism, doubting that any lasting peace can be found, or that true reconciliation may even be possible. Yet it is precisely because of the dire situation of today's world—because of the temptation toward hopelessness and cynicism—that a renewal of the Jesuit charism as ministers of reconciliation is so timely today. Now more than ever, the world requires agents of reconciliation and mercy. Jesuits must accordingly prepare themselves and respond, both spiritually and apostolically, to address this dire need as faithful ambassadors of Christ.

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<sup>83</sup> GC 35, d. 3, n. 16; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 747.

<sup>84</sup> *SpEx* 95.

But beyond personal reflection as to how individual Jesuits may contribute to the ministry of reconciliation, the Society of Jesus as a body is well-positioned to respond to many of these tasks. Though the Society does not hold a monopoly on the ministry of reconciliation, it does occupy a unique and capable position to engage in such a ministry, and with means that others may not have at their disposal. From this perspective, the imperative of a generous and committed response attends the gifts and abilities with which God has blessed the Society.

First, the breadth of the network of Jesuits, communities, and apostolates lends the Society considerable resources and a global platform for cooperation across linguistic, cultural, and ethnic divides. In other words, the multicultural and multilingual make-up of the Society positions it well to build bridges where other groups may have difficulty reaching. General Congregation 35 describes the “extraordinary potential” that such a body affords, and notes that “acting consistently with this character can not only enhance the apostolic effectiveness of our work but in a fragmented and divided world it can witness to the reconciliation in solidarity of all the children of God.”<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, on a very practical level, this international network provides ease of movement, encounter, contact, and ministry over a vast area—a rare yet considerable resource not to take for granted.

Second, beyond the institutional resources and international networks available for the Society to accomplish this ministry, Jesuits can facilitate reconciliation effectively for the simple reason that they speak to such a broad range of people.<sup>86</sup> Jesuits have personal relationships, business connections, ministries, and institutions that include regular contact with both the financially stable and the materially destitute, the socio-political right and left, Republicans and Democrats, the academic elite and the unlettered, the politically powerful and the voiceless, law enforcement and minority communities, victimizers and victims.

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<sup>85</sup> GC 35, d. 3, n. 43; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 754.

<sup>86</sup> I am particularly grateful to Mark Thibodeaux (UCS) for several fruitful conversations in response to this essay, specifically on this point of dialogue.

The breadth not only of institutions and communities but also of audiences and people with whom they have contact puts the Society in a unique position to build bridges between divided or alienated groups. As such, with these resources to help them learn, appreciate, and assess multiple vantage points, Jesuits might facilitate dialogue and encounter in a way perhaps less feasible to others. For example, Jesuits might comfort the afflicted while at the same time bringing their plight before the powerful. From this perspective, the connections that Jesuits can make and the bridges that they can build, have they only the creativity and perseverance to construct them, might serve the cause of reconciliation.

Third, Jesuits can encourage creativity in apostolic engagements and prayerful reflection on how they contribute to a ministry of reconciliation in existing apostolates. Perhaps Jesuits would do well to pray over how they—as individual men, as local communities, as an international body—advance the cause of reconciliation and faithfully carry out the mission that they have received. In this regard, reconciliation might provide a helpful lens through which to consider apostolic engagements and community ministry on both personal and corporate levels.

Fourth, when discerning new or upcoming apostolic engagements, or as a source of renewal in current ministries, the charism of reconciling the estranged can help Jesuits to frame their discernment. Local communities and provinces could emphasize reconciling the estranged as a key criterion when discerning apostolic endeavors or the best use of limited resources. Individual Jesuits might likewise find renewal by regularly praying over how their particular ministry springs from their own experience of being reconciled back to God, and how they serve Christ's mission of reconciling the world to God.

On a more practical level, educators can make deliberate efforts to incorporate reconciliation into lesson plans and lectures. Researchers can direct their academic pursuits toward the building of bridges or fostering dialogue, especially where isolation and alienation prevail. And pastors can promote the sacrament of reconciliation in the parish community, seeking out opportunities for interfaith collaboration and prayer.

On this note, Jesuits must set prayer and the practice of reconciliation in community life as a cornerstone of this ministry and as a regular practice. One cannot give one what does not have, and frequent encounter with the forgiving love of God through personal prayer and sacramental confession will produce more fervent and more compassionate ministers of reconciliation. And further reflection on how the individual experience of mercy invigorates and sustains one's own ministry will lead back to the graces of one's own conversion, call, and missioning with Christ.

And so, the preceding reflections should not be taken as a definitive or exhaustive exposition on the Jesuit ministry of reconciliation, nor should they imply that Jesuits are the only ones to serve Christ's mission. Yet it would be an abdication of the Jesuit charism and a wasted opportunity for the Society not to approach this ministry with renewed apostolic fervor and creativity. Certainly, the Society will not succeed in solving all global conflicts and personal strife. But Christ has nonetheless called his companions in the Society to labor with him, to share in his struggle, and to follow in his glory as ambassadors of his mission to reconcile to God all things—individuals, families, nations, and the entire created order.

May we then ask the Father to bless our endeavors as we labor alongside his Son, "to build a new world of right relationships, a new Jubilee reaching across all divisions so that God might restore his justice for all."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> GC 35, d. 3, n. 16; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 747.

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