

## Companions in Mission: Pluralism in Action\*

**Mission Day Keynote Address  
Loyola Marymount University  
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It is a great pleasure for me to be present here at Loyola Marymount University as you devote a day of reflection to your shared mission. As this university stands poised, in two year's time, to celebrate its centenary, your history and current commitments exhibit a long list of distinguished lay colleagues, Catholic and non-Catholic, who have served you well as faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and students. No real history of your institution would do justice without their conspicuous inclusion. And for over thirty-five years now, since Marymount College merged with Loyola University to form Loyola Marymount, you have learned to meld the complementary Catholic charisms of the Jesuits, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange.

Located in the midst of an important global city on the Pacific rim, you have imbibed Los Angeles' striking cultural and religious diversity. Your curriculum includes not only, as might be expected, a concentration in Catholic Studies but also one in Jewish Studies. A few years ago you hosted one of the largest gatherings for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in history. I note also, with approbation, the work of the Center for Ignatian Spirituality in nurturing, among your faculty and staff, participation in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and, more broadly, in its continuing attention to spirituality.

It is, thus, easy for me in this setting to broach today a topic—Jesuits and their companions in mission—which is not exactly new in Jesuit discourse. Already in 1976, Father Pedro Arrupe, then the Superior General of the Jesuits, in his address at Philadelphia's Saint Joseph's University entitled "Pioneers of the Spirit: Jesuit-Lay Collaboration," suggested that such companionship in mission depends crucially on relationships based on mutual trust, nurtured by frequent exchanges, structured in flexible

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\* This version of Father Nicolas' Keynote Address includes several paragraphs omitted in delivery from his prepared text as well as impromptu remarks added during delivery, indicated here in a separate font.

ways and forming a community of service.<sup>1</sup>

abundant but the laborers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send many workers into the vineyard” (Luke 10:2).

That image of Jesuits as co-workers in the vineyard resonated in the first deliberation of Ignatius and his companions on whether, indeed, to establish the Jesuits as an approved order in the church. It gets taken up as a central metaphor in the crucial chapter 7 of the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, redacted under the aegis of Saint Ignatius. Chapter 7 deals with how Jesuits are to choose what missions to engage. The norms found there for choice of mission are these: (1) helping souls, that is, helping people; (2) the greater glory of God; (3) going where there is greatest need; (4) searching for the *magis*, that is, for what exceeds mediocrity and moves toward excellence, going beyond what has already been achieved; (5) taking on works, also, where no other workers are present or available; (6) moving sometimes to controversial frontiers of action or knowledge, even breaking settled boundaries; (7) undertaking works that promise a more universal good and a deeper reach of contact; and (8) creating or joining communities of solidarity in seeking justice. These norms continue in force to this day as the Jesuits consider establishing or continuing a work under their own sponsorship or joining, as co-workers, in someone else’s mission and work.

You will notice that I speak not only of Jesuit-sponsored works but of Jesuits becoming companions and co-workers in someone else’s work – for example, in secularly incorporated works of civic betterment, social advocacy and justice; or even in someone else’s university. From the beginning, Jesuits saw being co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard as something other than always being in simple command or control of the mission. Yet even when they are co-workers in someone else’s mission, Jesuits (alone or in groups) choose it because of its resonance with their own deepest sense of mission.

One virtue of this rich metaphor of being co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard is that it signals clearly that Jesuits never thought they controlled the deepest fruit of any ministry or could fully shape it on their own. They were sent into the Lord’s (not their own) vineyard and longed for co-workers.

The early Jesuits spawned numerous autonomous lay confraternities for spiritual formation and social service. A notable example is the early House of St. Martha, a pioneering halfway house for prostitute and battered women in Rome, with its accompanying confraternity, the Company of Grace. Similarly, early itinerant Jesuit

missionaries created lay confraternities to continue the work in the missionary's absence. In several notable cases (as in Togagawa, Japan, and, much later, in China after the Communist Revolution), thes

### Mission

To be sure, for some the term ‘mission’ is suspect since it may smack of proselytism or, for some former colonial countries, of the imposition of western values. Yet the term also has a wider meaning, used even in secular settings, to mean clarity about goals and the strategies to achieve them that drive a corporation or a non-profit entity, like this university. Historically, Jesuits have run schools (for example, in Islamic lands) where they explicitly promised they would not try to convert anyone. They did so because of the work’s resonance with their mission goals of helping people, of reaching toward the greater or more universal good, and of cultivating a faith that does justice. In a similar way, contemporary Jesuits have established the Jesuit Refugee Service because it is a work of great need and one where not many others are available to carry it out. It is a work where Jesuits are few, indeed, but where co-workers of other faiths and cultures are many—and where the harvest has been very great!

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find God present and laboring in all things, might also try to find that same God working in and present to all persons, whatever their identities, traditions, cultures or religions.

A story from one of our schools in Japan illustrates this point. A Buddhist wanted to join us because, as he said, Buddhism doesn't have an explicit and developed philosophy of education, as do the Jesuits, who have been at it for 450 years. He was very happy to be accepted on the faculty but disappointed when the principal told him just to teach his classes—the Jesuits would do the rest. That, of course, was an old mentality—not very collegial. But fortunately the minds of Jesuits have changed. The Buddhist is now vice principal of that school and very likely will be principal before long.

As time went on another Buddhist, a young teacher, applied for a job but



us that the most effective and productive organizations have clear mission statements and assiduously operate out of them to guide ongoing collaborative planning and work. They also allow a wide participative buy-in by co-workers. The shadow-side ingredient, however, in the laudable effort to expand the scope of Jesuit mission, to make it more ecumenically inclusive, lies in the temptation, precisely because of this expansive inclusiveness, to water down the mission into a vague and, often, quite vapid ‘secular’ sounding rhetoric. This evokes, at best, a mere notional assent and deeply moves no one. Such mission statements can be thin gruel, indeed!

Clearly, the Jesuit sense of mission flows, as I enumerated earlier, from the criteria for the Society’s choice of mission. To be sure, different Jesuit works will highlight some elements of the criteria more or less, but certain elements of the Jesuit mission remain non-negotiable. These include a commitment to excellence, flowing from the *magis*; a clear articulation and enactment of the faith that does justice; inter-religious dialogue; a profound sense of an underlying spiritual dynamism; and a careful process of discernment. For Jesuits, these norms stem from clearly Catholic-Christian premises. Others, however, (as experience has shown) can contribute to the mission and dynamic of Jesuit works from their own specific religious identities or on more secular humanistic grounds. They will never be constrained to embrace the Catholic faith or forfeit their own identity. Yet all companions in mission in a Jesuit-sponsored work will recognize that, for their Jesuit colleagues, the main rationale for mission will continue to be deeply rooted in their concern for furthering Jesus’ preaching and enactment of the Kingdom of God in its justice and right relationships.

Turning to formation, in Jesuit parlance this term implies a spiritual depth of affective bonding and a set of practices, including the Spiritual Exercises, which shape companionship into a common mission. As Father Kolvenbach articulated it in his Omaha address in 2004: “We Jesuits owe it to our partners to remain rooted in the graces of the Spiritual Exercises and to find ways to make this apostolic resource available to those with whom we cooperate in mission.”<sup>18</sup>

I would like to underline this idea that the Spiritual Exercises can be

subjected to on-going dialogue and conversation. In today's world, inexorably, we all are thrown together by forces of globalization that inter-connect us profoundly. Minimally, we must learn to tolerate our differences but, ideally, we can find a way—if we see difference and 'the other' as a rich resource and not some threat—to meld the differences into a vital shared purpose. Diversity can be seen and appreciated as an opportunity to find God actively at work in fresh, new ways. Jesuits have found their long history of involvement in many cultures, traditions and religions to be something which profoundly enhances and clarifies and, indeed, shapes their very identity.

It is useful to distinguish between mere tolerance and co-existence, as in a zoo, and the true inter-action of companionship, as in the ecology of a forest. A zoo is a place where an abundant quantity of diverse animals co-habit and reside in separate cages or enclaves but they do not, please God, too directly interact (or some of them will perish). This is difference as mere co-habitation. A forest, on the other hand, offers us a vibrant example of vital plurality in interaction. It is a place where distinguishably different kinds of organic life interact, regenerate, cross-pollinate and flourish together. Or, to recast, somewhat, St. Paul's rich metaphor, in our common mission there are many gifts, identities, cultures, religions and secular traditions but only one body.

Well, at the local level you can gage better where the conversation about becoming and being better companions and co-workers in a common mission needs to begin. You will grasp more concretely any obstacles or pitfalls to a fruitful further reciprocal dialogue about companionship. You will know already existing best practices for collaboration in mission and where the likely more promising next steps lie. As a final point, I want to remind you that Ignatius Loyola privileged, as a ministry equal to university teaching, social work or the giving of the Spiritual Exercises, the humble, down-to-earth yet exacting task of genuine spiritual conversation. He intuited that, in authentic conversation about mutual mission, God was always active, present and profoundly to be found.

I thank you for this opportunity to share these reflections and I express the hope that they will stimulate the kind of conversations that will make this a truly successful Mission Day at Loyola Marymount University.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Pioneers of the Spirit: Jesuit-Lay Collaboration in Higher Education,” St. Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, 31 July 1976.
- <sup>2</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Jesuit University in the Light of the Ignatian Charism” (¶45), Rome, 27 May 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> GC 34, d. 13.2.
- <sup>4</sup> GC 34, d. 13.4.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. GC 34, d.13.4.
- <sup>6</sup> GC 34, d.13.13.
- <sup>7</sup> CG 34, d.13.20.
- <sup>8</sup> GC 34, d.13.26.
- <sup>9</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “Cooperating with Each Other in Mission,” Creighton University, Omaha, 7 October 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. GC 34, d.14.5.
- <sup>13</sup> GC 34, d.14.16.
- <sup>14</sup> GC 35, d.6.2.
- <sup>15</sup> GC 35, d.6.3.
- <sup>16</sup> GC 35, d.6.7.
- <sup>17</sup> GC 35, d.6.24.
- <sup>18</sup> Kolvenbach, “Cooperating with Each Other in Mission.”
- <sup>19</sup> GC 35, d.6.9.