

Identity of the Jesuit ecumenist

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Identity is the expression of what a thing distinguishing it from everything else. To speak of the identity of the Jesuit ecumenist, therefore, is to delineate those qualities which enable the Jesuit to participate in this top priority set up by his Church at Vatican II (1962-1965) to re-establish full communion among all those who profess themselves to be Christians, generally understood as belonging to mainline Christian denominations. For this reason, “sects”, which in the view of the mainline Christian denominations use elements of the Christian vision very arbitrarily while adding other elements completely foreign to Christianity itself, do not form part of our subject. Equally extraneous to our subject here is the dialogue of Christianity with other religions.

Jesuit commitment to this worldwide Church activity in favour of re-establishing full communion with all Christians raises the question from where the Jesuit draws his inspiration if it is to be considered authentically Jesuit. The spiritual resources of the Society of Jesus are multiple, drawing as they do on the life and writings of St Ignatius, the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions, as well as the subsequent history of the Society of Jesus as exemplified in its saints and leaders, the Superior Generals and especially the General Congregations, as well as writers and commentators, who by means of their works shed lustre on the riches found in this Ignatian heritage, some of whose essential aspects may run the danger of being quickly forgotten while other less significant aspects may be unduly emphasized, thereby losing the balance of that *discreta caritas*, or love characterized by the prudence that comes from discernment, so dear to St Ignatius¹. All these elements must all be considered in order to produce a balanced approach to what goes to form the identity of the Jesuit ecumenist.

It goes without saying that such an endeavour, besides the enormous amount of work it would entail and the variety of disciplines one would have to master, in practice cannot be achieved by any single author working on his own. Joseph de Guibert, SJ's (1877-1942) justly famous monograph on Jesuit spirituality, *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus: esquisse historique*², is a case in point. Though it is a mine of precious information well presented, the then Superior General Father Wlodimir Ledochowski,

¹ In *Sp Ex* nr. 328 we may identify its locus in Ignatian spiritualità, where we find the title: “Reglas para el mismo efecto con mayor discreción de espíritus...”; *Ignacio de Loyola, Ejercicios espirituales* Introducción, texto, notas por C. de Dalmases, S.I., Santander 1987, p. 172.

² It was published posthumously by the Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, Rome 1953. See J. DE GUIBERT, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice. A Historical Study*, translated by W. J. Young, SJ, St Louis 1972, p. iv.

SJ (Superior General, 1915-1942) expressed his disappointment on seeing the work, because it seemed to him one-sidedly historical, whereas he had looked forward to a more expository approach, with history reduced to a brief introduction³. And yet we cannot arrive at scientifically reliable conclusions without taking history into account.

Naturally, for the purpose of our summary presentation, such a momentous aspect of Church life and society as commitment to promote full communion among Christians, one may from the start dispense oneself with the tasks outlined above, if only for lack of space. Even then, nobody can simply ignore the fact that current structures, in their most rudimentary form, did not fall down from heaven nor were they born full-grown like Athena from the head of Zeus. The author of these lines has published a short study, *On Saving my Partner's Affirmation: Profile of the Jesuit Ecumenist*⁴, which, while it in no way pretends to fulfil the above-mentioned tasks, devotes some pages to sketch if only very rapidly the past performance of Jesuits as indicative of Jesuits' future work. That study and the present one necessarily complement one another; both are preliminary, in order to say something, rather than nothing at all.

With all this in mind, in the ambit of the following few pages, the present short presentation will try to take the last major declarations of a General Congregation as the starting point for a consideration of Jesuit ecumenical commitment today. These are, primarily, (1) the 31st General Congregation of 1965-1966 and (2) the 34th General Congregation of 1995⁵. (3) There follows a short theological reflection on the spiritual dimension of what it means for a Jesuit ecumenist to love the Church as he tries to persuade Christians to set apart their particular preferences to seek truth in communion. Part of the difficulty is that such an appeal, if coherent, implies loyal self-criticism with regards to one's own Church.

1. The pronouncements of GCs 31 and 34 on the ecumenical commitment of the Jesuit

At this point, one may pause for a reflection on method in order to justify the approach chosen. One may try to establish a thing's identity by investigating its origins and figure out the hopes they raise and measure what they have become in contrast to what

³ E. LAMALLE, "Preface", in J. de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice. A Historical Study*, translated by W.J. Young, SJ, St Louis 1972, pp. xvi-xvii. Fr Lamalle pointed to Fr Ledochowski that de Guibert had been commissioned to write a history of the spirituality of the Jesuits, and it was the General who over the years had come to expect something different. In effect, may it be added, the two perspectives – the historical and the systematic – are both indispensable and ultimately complementary.

⁴ It is being concurrently published, with the other papers of the 19th International Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists held at Lviv, Ukraine, by the Secretariat for Interreligious Dialogue of the Society of Jesus, Rome Prati, Italy 2007.

⁵ Decree 12 on "Ecumenism" of GC 34, *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu*, XXI, Romae 1996, pp. 568-570, gives the following texts as statements of the Society of Jesus on ecumenism: GC 31, decree 26; GC 33, decree 1, nr. 37; Complementary Norms, 253,4° and 269.2-3.

they could have become. Or one may take the finished product as the point of departure, so that we may start with the end product and make of that thing's point of arrival our own point of departure. The first approach lays bare the essence of the thing before history intervened and charted its natural course into a more concrete path, designed by the tortuousness of the way, though the subsequent historical path, by illustrating the fortune of the initial insight, manifests it in better perspective. The second approach takes the finished product as an object which precisely because it is finished can be considered as a thematic, rather than a historical, approach to the subject. Again, both approaches are indispensable and complementary.

For this purpose we must be on the look-out for a charter constitution which captures the history of the thing in a privileged moment of time, our own. This may be found in the declarations of the two of the most recent General Congregations, held after Vatican II, in order to elaborate from them guidelines in the spiritual perspectives of the Society of Jesus. Besides, this enables us to ask whether any progress was reached in the space of almost 30 years (1966-1995). As GC 34, decree 12, nr. 5 (d) confirmed GC 31, decree 26, nr.s 9-14, concerning the practice of ecumenism we may consider this part of GC 31st's pronouncements to have been underlined.

(a) GC 31st's Decree nr. 26, "De Oecumenismo"

Coming in the wake of Vatican II (1962-1965), the session of the GC meeting almost immediately after the end of the council takes stock (GC 31 nr. 1) of the two decrees which address themselves to the ecumenical problems which had found expression in the council. These were *Unitatis redintegratio* (UR) on ecumenism in general, and *Orientalium ecclesiarum* (OE) on the Eastern Catholic Churches in particular and their commitment to ecumenical relations. Both decrees were promulgated on 21 November 1964, alongside with *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the dogmatic constitution on the Church which serves as key to all Vatican II's pronouncements. Put together, these three documents of Vatican II spell out not only the principles of ecumenism, but also discuss many of the central ecumenical issues facing the Church in the contemporary world, especially at the time of their promulgation. It is a limit of GC 31st's decree nr. 26 to have failed to mention the overarching document, *Lumen Gentium*, let alone employ its conclusions to elaborate a Jesuit viewpoint on ecumenism based on a contemporary ecclesiology, as the other two are presented precisely as *decrees*, with a more practical concern in mind even if ultimately not lacking on ecclesiological reflexes. The point is not a question of detail. Ecumenism is basically a reflex of the vision of the Church, which being the mystical body of Christ in time necessarily changes its idiom from age to age. This becomes relevant when GC 34, decree 12, defines ecumenism as a *new* way of existing as a Christian. Can there be a novelty when Christ, yesterday and today, is the same for ever (Heb 13:8) and his teaching is likewise immune from that change which would disfigure it?

At any rate, GC 31 warmly recommends that all Jesuits try their best to assimilate, by prayer and study, the two documents it mentions, UR and OE. One should not ignore, for example, the role played by so many Jesuits at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in

drafting OE, whatever its limits⁶, and, most of all, that played by Cardinal Augustin Bea, SJ (d. 1968), in pushing UR to its approval, assisted in this by Jesuits from various parts of the world. Could decree 26 of GC 31 have foreseen the future, it could have added that some Jesuits, such as Walter Abbott in English, Karl Rahner (d. 1984) in German and others in their respective language, signalled themselves in propagating these decrees, alongside with the remaining fourteen documents of Vatican II, by translating and /or commenting them. Finally, one need only look at the impressive list of Jesuits who took part in official ecumenical meetings, for example: Edward Yarnold, SJ (d. 2002) with Anglicans, Jared Wicks, SJ (b. 1929) and Jos Vercruyse (b. 1931) with Lutherans and protestants generally, John Long, SJ (d. 2005) with the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, to realize how many Jesuits took to heart this recommendation of GC 31.

In retrospect, GC 31, decree 26, nr. 2 must appear prophetic in as much as it started, within the Society of Jesus and by following the council (UR 7), a tradition of acknowledging sins Jesuits have committed, in this case, against Church union. Of course, such an admission of guilt had been preceded by the ceremony, on 7 December 1965, the eve of the end of Vatican II, of committing the mutual excommunications between Humbert da Silva Candida and Patriarch Michael Cerularius in 1054 to oblivion⁷. However, decree 26 was certainly one of the first in the history of the Order to follow the lead of Vatican II. Later on, it will become not only “politically correct” but even an “ecclesial priority” for those in positions of Church authority to admit error, and that includes the Society of Jesus (see GC 34, decree 14). Next, GC 31, decree 26, nr. 3 announces some practical decisions. These are found in nr. 4, some of which are particularly weighty. For a solid ecumenical foundation, scholastics should receive a thorough training in the history and spirituality of the Churches and separated communities. Besides, theologians are entitled to have theology presented to them in an ecumenical spirit. But this particular decision falls short of suggesting that Jesuits write history in team-work with other non-Catholic Christians so as to present the course of events in a balanced ecumenical perspective.

Wherever it seems opportune, a special course on Eastern theology or on the theology of the Reformed Churches should be established. The injunction, in its first part, comes as no surprise in view of the fact that the Society of Jesus had been entrusted by Pius XI with the Pontifical Institute of Oriental Studies since September 14, 1922, with his letter *Decessor Noster*. Since the presence of Protestantism in the West cannot be ignored, it is the reference to Eastern theology which is particularly laudable. Superficially, it seems to be a matter of a minority’s rights, whereas in point of fact, it is a theology which turns out to be incomplete without the Christian East – as would the Christian East, if it sought to

⁶ For a critical appraisal of these limits, see the author’s “Re-reading *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*”, *Gregorianum* 88/2 (2007) 352-372.

⁷ One may compare the highhanded condemnation of the Patriarch of Constantinople in H. DA SILVA CANDIDA’S “Videat Deus et iudicet” (PL 143.1002) with the words of reconciliation pronounced by Paul VI at the Vatican and Athenagoras I in Istanbul on December 7, 1965 (“Tomos Agapis”, *Documenti del Vaticano II*, Bologna 1967, p. 1101). For the setting of this last mentioned text in the Dialogue of Love between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the years between 1958 and 1976 see PRO ORIENTE, *Tomos Agapis*, Innsbruck 1978.

ignore the West – which strikes a jarring note. Oft repeated in official documents, it is just as often ignored in the practice of the Church and the Society. Pastoral theology is to treat of questions where there is a conflict between the rights of various Christian denominations. Nor must ecumenical training content itself with being intellectual, but it must also be conducive to spiritual formation, “since there can be no genuine ecumenism without a change of heart” (nr. 5). Likewise, personal contacts with separated brethren are invaluable not only so as to eradicate the prejudices of centuries, but also to know at close quarters their faith, love of Christ and spiritual life and get familiarized with the difficulties they have with the Catholic Church. Jesuits should readily invite professors and ministers of other confessions to give conferences and, if there are seminaries of other confessions close to our scholastics, we should have the opportunity to exchange views (nr. 6). Ecumenical formation should also extend to the Brothers (nr. 7). Real experts should be trained for the various areas in ecumenism and the various specializations required (nr. 8).

Next come n.r.s 9-14, later re-confirmed by GC 34. The divine liturgy is more effective in eradicating prejudices than learned dispute, and so, wherever ordinaries allow it, public ecumenical prayer should be held (nr. 9). The study of Sacred Scriptures should be encouraged as a way to foster unity (nr. 10). Besides, the Society of Jesus should be willing to accept the help of those capable of promoting ecumenism or need our help to do so (nr. 11). Nor are we to neglect ecumenical contacts, whether indirectly through books and periodicals, or directly through personal contacts. Those in education should instil their students with an ecumenical spirit by their teaching and through example; those in the social apostolate should cooperate with international organizations to give witness in faith and justice; those in pastoral work, in parishes or who give Spiritual Exercises, ought to cooperate with their colleagues in other denominations, for example on mixed marriages. Particularly negative is the witness we give in mission stations because of the scandal of division, which we should counteract by cooperation. Nr 13 warns against imprudent zeal in promoting ecumenism, since nothing is more detrimental to it as *irenicism*, which downplays the importance of differences but without resolving the underlying difficulties. The last number, nr. 14, comes up with a series of recommendations to Fr General: to establish an international advisory group of experts in ecumenism; to set up, if necessary, houses or centres to promote ecumenism; and to remove from the Society’s official texts ecumenically unacceptable phrases.

In brief, the first time the Society pronounced itself in the immediate aftermath of the Council on ecumenism, it gave wholehearted support to the search for unity as agreed upon in the Council’s documents on the pertinent issues and tried to implement this search concretely in terms of significant guidelines, which are valid to this day and which practically all aspects of the Jesuit life and commitment.

(b) GC 34th ‘s Decree nr. 12, “Ecumenism”

After the lapse of nearly a generation the decree of GC 34, decree 12 on “Ecumenism” strikes a different tone. The keynote to this document is “*faith doing justice*”, a note already struck in nr. 1 of the document. GC 31 had indeed expressed itself on poverty,

primarily in Decree 18, but primarily in its importance as a vow for the Society rather than in its social significance as priority for the poor⁸. For this we have to wait for decree 4 of CG 32 (1974-1975), which was to unleash a huge debate within the Society as a whole⁹. There had been good precedents of Jesuits cooperating with structures of social engagement in the World Council of Churches. Thus, George Dunne, SJ (1905-1998) was chosen the first Secretary of SODEPAX, for which office John Lucal, SJ was later chosen, too. Obviously under the influence of GC 32's decree 4, GC 34 now pairs dialogue with co-operation with other Christian denominations in promoting justice as an expression of a common faith-stance; wherever such dialogue and cooperation in a given field, this usually leads to situations of injustice. On the contrary, an appeal to pardon endorsed by both sides to a conflict can help ease, if not always resolve, situations of tension, "often fuelled by historic confessional hostilities"; of this, the hatred engendered by the historic divisions within Christianity serves as a flagrant counter-witness to the Gospel (nr. 1). GC 34 thus feels the need not only to re-affirm in the strongest of terms the Society's commitment to ecumenism, but also its being called to step into such a role on account of its worldwide outreach (nr. 2). Rather than being the special work of an elite, ecumenism is now described as "a new way of being a Christian" (nr. 3).

Here the word "new" calls for some explanation, for it can give the impression that previous generations knew nothing of ecumenism. It may even seem as if there were an unbridgeable chasm between the Society prior to Vatican II, indulging in polemics to defend the Church, and the Society after Vatican II, intent on winning back those previously criticized for their disagreement with the Church. Nothing could be more misleading. For if ecumenism is so central to the life of the Church and to the Society as it is presented here, it would seem as if past generations were neither good members of the Church nor of the Society of Jesus. In the life of each individual as of each institution – and, retracing the analogy to the prototype, in the life of Christ himself as well as in that of his Church – there are moments when a fully mature person has to rush to the defence of values he or she feel are being threatened, even if this may mean impairing peace with other individuals or / and institutions. There is no such thing as peace at any price, which, besides is irresponsible and immoral. The seeking of peace goes hand in hand with the defence of values such as life, and so has it always been. If this is so, it is superficial to represent ecumenism as if it were the discovery of our times.

What is new in it, rather, is that the contemporary conditions of living together have discredited many a caricature of the other and makes it difficult to protract polemics as shadow boxing in the name of the Church. With the shortening of distance through modern means of communication, from the airplane to television, it is no longer possible to seek an alibi in the pretext that we do not know the other, but Christians of other denominations are often next-door neighbours. Moreover, the danger of touching off a

⁸ "De paupertate", *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu*, (1961-1966), XIV, Romae 1967, pp. 912-917: see, however nr.s 8, 9, 11, also p. 1050.

⁹ The original text is in French, "Notre mission aujourd'hui: Diakonia fidei et promotion de la justice", *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu* (1973-1976), XVI, Roma 1975, pp. 332-375.

conflagration make us think twice about the cost and see that it is far less expensive to invest in peace than in re-armament, whether in the literal or in the polemical sense of the word. There have always been Jesuits who, even in the times of the wars of religion, had a pronouncedly ecumenical disposition; Bl. Peter Faber (1506-1546) at once comes to mind, but not only he. Indeed, there is a corrective to this shallow presumption that ecumenism is only a recent phenomenon, say, after the Missionaries' Meeting in Edinburgh in 1910, in the appeal to Ignatius' Preamble (*Sp Ex* 22) enjoining that those who give or make the Exercises ought to be ready to interpret what the other says or does in a positive way, obviously without straining credibility and yet allowing in general for a "benefit of the doubt" in favour of the flow of the conversation and the protraction of dialogue. Nr. 3 protracts the comparison between ecumenism and Ignatius' Preamble as follows: "t seeks to put the best interpretation on what the other says and does. In a word, ecumenism seeks what unites rather than what divides; seeks understanding rather than confrontation; seeks to know, understand, and love others as they wish to be known and understood, with full respect for their distinctiveness, through the dialogue of truth, justice and love"¹⁰. Other Jesuits may be mentioned, by way of example, as being ecumenists before their time. Thus, Giovanni-Paolo Campana, who accompanied Antonio Possevino on his visit to Ivan IV in 1581, betrays a much more understanding attitude towards the Orthodox than does his boss¹¹. Antonio de Monserrate, SJ¹² (1536-1600), who, writing from Cochin to Everard Mercurian (General, 1514-1580) on 12 Januray 1579, made a plea for more autonomy for the St Thomas Christians under an Oriental – the Chaldean – Patriarch. In his correspondence with General Claudio Aquaviva (General, 1581-1615), Louis Granger (Grangier) (c. 1575-1615) shows a surprising openness on the question of rites, especially in comparison with St Robert Bellarmine's more rigid position¹³.

We may perhaps sum it up this way: what the ecumenist and the polemicist have in common is their concern for the Church, their love for a greater goal as they see it in the concrete Church situation of their time. An ecumenist is not seldom also a polemicist, as the many controversies which ecumenism touched off go to show; so why should we assume that a polemicist is debarred from being an ecumenist? When dialogue fails, people not infrequently reach for arms; when war fails to bring the desired solution by force, they long for peace.

Reflecting on GC 34's decree 12, especially nr.s 1 and 3 but going beyond the text, one may try to develop a contemporary Jesuit approach to ecumenism as faith doing justice to the complex situation of inter-faith conflicts. Precisely faith can help us disco-

¹⁰ "Ecumenism", GC 34, decree 12, *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu*, XXI, Romae 1996, p. 568.

¹¹ See V. POGGI, "Giovanni-Paolo Campana and Ivan the Terrible", A.N. SAXAROV et al. (a cura di), *L'eredità romano-costantinopolitana nella Russia medievale: Idea del potere e pratica politica* [in Russian], Moscow 1995, pp. 272-287.

¹² J. CORREIA-AFONSO, «Monserrate, Antonio de», *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, III, Roma - Madrid 2001, p. 2725.

¹³ V. POGGI, in his article, "Granger (Grangier), Louis", *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, II, Roma - Madrid 2001, pp. 1804-1805, describes him as being both a missionary in Georgia and an ecumenist.

ver a way out of impasses which seemed to block our path from ever reaching agreement with other Christians. Understanding here is not to be understood in a primarily intellectual way, but also in the sense of mutual human comprehension at all levels as concord. In this comprehensive sense of understanding, one may interpret the ecumenical commitment from the viewpoint of the three theological virtues as they come to bear on Christians' desire to become one in Christ: faith seeking understanding, in the sense of a well-informed faith clearing the misunderstandings at the origin of conflict; hope longing for full communion by uplifting Christians when the temptation to lose heart about ever overcoming the difficulties is at its strongest; and, most of all, charity as the matrix of all togetherness, as a never failing source of inventiveness in whatever promotes communion with *discreta caritas*, by encouraging forgiving and accepting forgiveness. Ecumenism as a faith-stance thus finds justification in the words and historical context of Isaiah 7:9: "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all!"¹⁴

To go back to the text of GC 34, decree 12, nr. 4 rules out the need of new legislation but insists rather on a more effective implementation of already existing legislation, so long as we keep in mind that this calls for discerning the signs of the times as spelt out in so many appeals by the Church and preceding General Congregations.

Nr 5 enumerates five recommendations to implement ecumenism:

- (a) the need for initial and ongoing ecumenical formation in the Society, while it recalls the norms of GC 31, decree 26, nr.s 4-8, and adds *The 1993 Directory on Ecumenism*, Section II, nr.s. 55-91, especially 79;
- (b) the importance of courses in ecumenism and Eastern Catholic studies, as detailed in the guidelines of the Letter of January 6, 1987 sent out by the Congregation of Catholic Education;
- (c) the necessity to foster an ecumenical sensitivity in all our ministries;
- (d) the reaffirmation of the concrete proposals which GC 31, decree 26, nr.s 9-14 made concerning the practice of ecumenism.

Here a word is necessary on *The 1993 Directory on Ecumenism*. There had already been talk of laying down the rules for conducting ecumenism during Vatican II, which received a boost through the creation of the Secretariat for promoting Christian Unity. In effect, the first Directory, aiming at working out norms in conformity with the council, was published over two phases. The first part, published in 1967, dealt with the more urgent tasks, namely, the creation of ecumenical commissions on the level of the diocese or more comprehensive territorial levels, the validity of baptism administered by non-Catholic Churches or ecclesial communities, spiritual ecumenism mentioned in UR 8¹⁵ and the *communicatio in spiritualibus*, ranging from praying together to the possibility of receiving the sacraments of a Church other than one's own. The second part of the Directory, published in 1970, treated of the ecumenical dimension of religious and theological formation, particular norms ecumenism in formation for ecumenical

¹⁴ Quoted from *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*, Oxford 1989, p. 705.

¹⁵ See H. VALL, "La Spiritualità Ecumenica", *Gregorianum* 88/2 (2007) 407-420.

work, collaboration between Catholics and other Christians¹⁶. But with the promulgation of both the *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983) and of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990) the need for a revision of the Directory became acute. It was approved and published in 1993. The part indicated by GC 34 Directory 1993, nr.s 55-91, covers the theological dimension of all aspects of formation, from the formation of all the faithful (nr.s 58-69) to the formation of pastoral workers, including both ordained ministers and non-ordained ministers and collaborators (nr.s 70-86), without forgetting specialized and permanent formation (nr.s 87-90 and 91 respectively). Nr. 79 of the 1993 Directory, on which GC 34 lays particular stress, insists that it is not enough that the whole of formation have an ecumenical dimension. A special course on ecumenism, preferably at the beginning of the course of studies, is necessary to sensitise students to the organic catholicity of the Church, compromised by concrete divisions and to which current ecumenism wants to provide an answer¹⁷.

In brief, the second major decree of a GC on ecumenism since the Council, that of GC 34, manages to say something new in comparison with the first, primarily by recapitulating what was good in the previous major decree and bringing it up to date with the new influx of ideas coming through the option for the poor in Decree 4 of GC 32.

2. Ecumenism and the spirituality of the Society of Jesus

Ecumenism as it is presented in the two decrees we briefly considered brings out the keyword for ecumenism in UR 8, conversion of heart (GC 31, decree 26, nr. 5)¹⁸, by using such terms as Jesuit sins against union (GC 31, decree 26, nr. 2), the call for pardon and love (GC 34, decree 12, nr. 1), and by insisting on the need that formation in ecumenism be spiritual (GC 31, decree 26, nr. 5) and ongoing (GC 34, decree 12, 5 (a)). A bridge to the spirituality of the Society of Jesus, also based on continual formation by means of the examination of conscience and other spiritual practices, is thus established.

The question whether current ecumenism may be considered to be a new way of living one's Christianity can now be approached from the perspective of the Jesuit way of life. To stress unilaterally that ecumenism is a new way of life is to imperil the anchoring to St Ignatius and his heritage and thus to call into question the Jesuit identity of this new way of living one's Christianity. If the answer we have tried to give is correct, namely that current ecumenism represents a new way of living one's Christianity because modern-day conditions present new challenges and new possibilities which were unthinkable a relatively short while ago, a little more than a hundred years ago, but which now are inevitable, then we have the possibility of further reflecting on elements in the Ignatian heritage which would encourage us to deepen our commitment to ecumenism as Jesuits. One could then try to adopt a formula, already used by John Dewey (1859-

¹⁶ G. SEMBENI, *Direttorio ecumenico 1993: sviluppo dottrinale e disciplinare*, Roma 1997, 10f.

¹⁷ G. SEMBENI, *Direttorio ecumenico 1993: sviluppo dottrinale e disciplinare*, Roma 1997, 152-160.

¹⁸ UR 8 expressly says that, under this aspect, ecumenism should be called "spiritual ecumenism".

1952), the American philosopher. Human beings always desire freedom, but what they consider oppressive differs from age to age. And likewise, Christians have always known of Christ's desire for union in his fold, which they usually expressed in terms of John 17, but what they considered detrimental to that union differed from epoch to epoch. When stress was laid on the cohesiveness of the group and its preservation in front of threats of disruption, they felt that the way to foster unity was to remove the problem from their midst. When, on the contrary, stress was laid on widening the inner horizon of the Church, because they felt that integralism and fundamentalism no less than heresy and schism are capable of destroying the concord that should prevail among Church members, then they were willing to enquire about the possibility of laying aside disputes for the sake of the greater cause of preserving full communion with as many Christians of good will as possible. As a matter of fact, all throughout history, efforts have not been lacking to re-establish full communion, sometimes by dialogue, sometimes by means which we deplore, especially on the basis of our present-day criteria. Likewise, while committed Jesuits always sought Church union, yet what they considered a threat to that union depended on the very conception of what kind of unity was necessary for the Church. As precisely this conception changed from age to age, they could with an equally good conscience indulge either in polemical or ecumenical attitudes. As we deplore some of the past polemical attitudes, so we deplore unfortunate simplistic attitudes, which downplay factual differences and aggravate situations rather than offering a solution. GC 31, decree 26, nr. 13, did not hesitate to brand such attempts as irenicism. Even then, neither irenicism nor polemics exhaust the list of woes unwittingly brought about by a false ecumenism or an unfortunate defence of the Church. Proselytism, imposed unions, sometimes lumped together indiscriminately and therefore unjustly as "uniatism", and so forth, are to be deplored no less than indifferentism and "third confession" approaches, which do not render justice to the dogmatic differences between one Christian denomination and another, thereby factually creating a confession which is neither one of the confessions of the two partners who are conducting the dialogue¹⁹.

From this viewpoint, the spirituality promulgated by the Society of Jesus is thoroughly capable of discerning the needs of the Church, holding out for "thinking in and with the Church" (*Sp. Ex.*, nr.s 314-336), but always with a spirit of discretion based on the discernment of the factual possibilities, and a knack for what can be done and what had better not even be tried. In this sense, too, whereas formal ecumenism plays an indispensable part according to the priorities of the Church thus perceived, one should not forget that the normal work of the Jesuit, which is not done under the name of ecumenism, is borne out for the love of the Church in its catholicity, and not simply as a regional entity, as present in a nation or a linguistic group. Thus, there is no better way to destroy prejudices than to promote serene and objective studies and in this way one inevitably helps the cause of ecumenism.

¹⁹ See on this point K. RAHNER, "Dritte Konfession?", *Schriften zur Theologie*, XII, Zürich 1975, 568-581.

We should not, however, forget that even in the times before modern-day ecumenism so much of the activity of the Society of Jesus can be classified as “dialogue of love”. The most important form of dialogue has always been and will always remain charity, which transcends all barriers and without which any “dialogue of truth” becomes a caricature of dialogue. If we look beyond the time-conditioned elements of confessional self-defence, such activity was ultimately aimed at doing one’s non-Catholic Christian neighbour what Jesuits really felt was most needed by such a neighbour, and often in ways of immediate use for the latter. One should not forget, however, so many Jesuits who like Ignatius and Peter Faber were imbued by the love of the other as other.

Promoting a cause such as ecumenism in the past often seemed like defending a lost cause. Many Jesuits who did make a big difference on the Church’s decision to embrace wholeheartedly the cause of ecumenism had to go through dark nights of misunderstanding, opposition, justified and unjustified, and being deprived of many of those possibilities which sometimes less talented and less committed confreres had aplenty. From the viewpoint of Jesuit spirituality, St Ignatius’ “eleventh rule” on the third degree of humility goes long ways to tell us how by bearing the cross of ecumenism one attains a special degree of union with Christ, although Ignatius was quick to distinguish himself from the eccentricities of his early youth, inspired from the Eastern “fools in Christ”, by adding “without providing the cause for such treatment”. We need much of the folly in Christ extolled by Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians if we want to see that inbred prejudices give way to a deep-seated love even in front of insurmountable prejudices.

3. Conclusion

On few points has Vatican II made such a big difference, one, moreover, which is tangible, as in inculcating upon the learned as well as upon common people the importance of ecumenism not only for an elite of specialists, but even on the parish level and on all levels. This swing in mood is felt in the Society of Jesus in a beneficial way; indeed, if it was taken up so eagerly, it was because the Jesuit by his identity as a Jesuit is open to ecumenism as a top Church priority. Yet much remains to be done to create an organic programme of theology in Jesuit institutions as elsewhere, and instil a great love of the Word of God with Protestants, of the liturgy with Eastern Christians and of a critical appraisal of tradition with Catholics, without, however, falling into indifferentism. Nonetheless, looking on what has been achieved one may thank God for so much progress and ask for more.