

Excerpts from Letter of Father General Arturo Sosa, S.J. to Whole Society

In 2018 I asked to be informed in the *ex officio* letters how the inseparable and complementary dimensions of *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* are being exercised in the life-mission of the Society. First of all, I would like to thank once again the Jesuits and our companions in mission for all the information they have given me through their replies¹.

We are faced with a topic that reflects a tension proper to the charism and way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus. It is one that takes on particular importance in this change of the eras and in the face of the challenges of the Universal Apostolic Preferences, cooperation, common discernment and apostolic planning. With this letter I aim to gather together the reflections made and to offer encouragement so that we may continue deepening these important dimensions of our life-mission.

The expressions *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis*, relatively recent in the tradition of the Society⁵, refer to an experience that runs through the entire life of St. Ignatius and which he refers to as "care". His entire existence is viewed from this perspective and is reflected in the *Autobiography*, in the *Exercises* and in the *Constitutions*.

The *Autobiography* is the account of the experience of being cared for that leads to caring for others. There Ignatius shows how he is led and cared for by God himself. The *Spiritual Exercises* are the mystical journey of God's care, committed to the vocation of the human being whom he cares for through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Everything is thus contemplated *ad amorem*. And the *Constitutions*, in their parts IV, VIII and IX are nothing other than the commitment of those who govern to preserve and care for the body of the Universal Society in accord with its mission.

This is the source of *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* in the life of every Jesuit and every person who chooses to follow the Lord inspired by Ignatian spirituality. It is the source of the fruitfulness of our life-mission.

Ignatius' experience shows that care, deeply rooted in his spiritual experience and his mystical journey, offers the true dimension of the unity *cura apostolica-cura personalis*, dimensions of **one single cura**, that is, care for mission. This single *cura* has as its focus persons, communities and works, which are at the service of mission. It is mission, therefore, that must be the fundamental criterion that unites *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis*. Our mission includes and implies inseparably our way

of living and relating to each other, of caring for people and communities. This care for our way of living and relating is also a mission in itself⁸.

When we consider this unity, we can affirm that the care of mission belongs to the whole body of the Society, even though this responsibility falls primarily within the competence of Major Superiors. However, Delegates, Local Superiors, members of the community, Directors of Work and other Jesuits together with their companions in mission in the works, should also assume the care of mission, according to their different levels of responsibility.

In the care of mission, the special nature of the different vocations of those who participate in it should be taken into account: lay men and women, Jesuits, non-believers, other religious men and women, diocesan priests, believers of various religions. The challenge for leaders is to create the right conditions so that all feel that they can fully develop their capacities according to their personal characteristics, their vocation and the level of responsibility they have in the apostolic work.

The intimate relationship between life and mission should not only be contemplated within the religious body of the Society and the vocation of each Jesuit, but also in the relationship with those persons who, not being Jesuits, also participate, according to their vocation, in the mission of the Society. The mission thus shared, and the growth in the participation of others, places the community-work relationship in the new and challenging perspective of cooperation.

In this sense we can recall those excellent instruments for the care of mission in which all those involved in mission ought to participate: *spiritual conversation* and *discernment in common*. Spiritual conversation, to the extent that it becomes our habitual mode of exchange in communities and apostolic works, prepares us for discernment in common as the ordinary way of reaching decisions in the life-mission of the Society. Spiritual conversation presupposes attentive listening to oneself and to others. It is a listening to the Spirit who speaks to us in the experience of sharing, opening us to a new look at reality, the fruit of this sharing.

Spiritual conversation strengthens mutual trust and leads to a deeper knowledge of ourselves, of other people and of the context in which we live out our mission. It becomes, therefore, the preparation for discernment in common, as a process for "seeking and finding" the will of God.

In this connection, I would like to take up what I already said in my letter on discernment in common: "The conviction that God is acting in history and is constantly communicating with human beings is the assumption on which our efforts to discern in common are based. For this reason, we should seek out those conditions that allow us

to hear the Holy Spirit and be guided by Him in our life-mission. The personal and group disposition to receive and follow the Spirit who communicates with us prevents a false type of discernment in common, which only seeks to clothe in correct Ignatian language decisions that were already made on the basis of the criteria of one's own group"¹⁰.

In order to care for mission, the Society of Jesus needs to care for the people who make it possible and form its apostolic body. Partnership and shared mission do not have their *raison d'être* in the fact that we Jesuits, in many places, are less numerous, nor are they a new way of serving ourselves. Their *raison d'être* is the realization that, by fostering conversation, consultation and discernment in common, we are building up the apostolic body of the Society of Jesus, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the Second Vatican Council. The role and responsibility of the laity in the life and mission of the Church is at the heart of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. To learn to work together with lay men and women, with the diocesan clergy and with other religious men and women is to work in the Society, caring and allowing oneself to be cared for, helping one another. Both Jesuits and non-Jesuits are responsible for each other's vocation, so that all vocations find their place and potential for development.

Care requires, in all, conversion and open-mindedness. It leads to "opening up processes", to continuous reflection on ourselves as a body involved in the *missio Dei*, in which we Jesuits cooperate with so many others in a new and pluralistic apostolic situation. Caring for one another frees us from the clericalism, paternalism, individualism and authoritarianism found in so many current contexts. To care and to be cared for is to grow in the universal Society and is an essential part of the culture of our apostolic body.

Living out *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* in their intimate relationship and in their tension is what guarantees care of mission. Discerning the way the mission is carried out is an imperative for the Society. We are not living through "*simply an era of change, but a change of era*"¹³, as the Holy Father recently said, and to show us the way, he confirmed the Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019-2029.