

**Varieties of Ignatian Lifestyle**

**Women Religious in the Ignatian Tradition**

**'In the Footsteps  
of Our Lord Jesus Christ ...'**

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## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

The basic remit for this evening's session was to talk, under the general umbrella of 'Varieties of Ignatian Lifestyle', about 'Women Religious in the Ignatian Tradition - in general and/or with special reference to the Faithful Companions of Jesus'.

I was then asked for a title.

As I pondered the remit, a quotation from our foundress, Marie Madeleine d'Houet kept coming to mind and would not be banished – 'It is not in the footsteps of St. Ignatius that we walk, but in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ ...' and there, it seemed to me, I had my title as a Faithful Companion of Jesus.

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There are many Congregations of Women Religious who in varying ways and in varying degrees walk in the footsteps of St. Ignatius, for there are - four aspects of his spirituality which have proved helpful to apostolic women: the practice of discernment as a way of proceeding, emphasis on the greater glory of God and service to others, the *magis*, and indifference/availability.

There is in this country what is known as the 'Ignatian Family' which includes among others, the Society of Marie Reparatrice and the

Sisters of La Retraite both of whose foundresses were particularly influenced by St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises; indeed for the foundress of the Society of Marie Reparatrice, although she was to be influenced by the spirit of the Jesuit Constitutions it was the book of the Spiritual Exercises that was to be 'her book' ... 'so your life will be entirely for God and his glory' and her Society is devoted to the giving of the Exercises. Other members of the Ignatian family are the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus and the Society of the Sacred Heart, both of whose foundresses had close links with the Society of Jesus through their Jesuit directors and both constantly sought God through and within their day-to-day experience, finding Christ at the heart of their world. Marie Aikenhead and Marie Madeleine d'Houet, bequeathed to their Foundations the Constitutions of St. Ignatius.

(It may be as well to acknowledge, that I tend to use the words 'Constitutions and Rule' synonymously, and I believe, with all sincerity that I am not misleading anyone here by doing so, though for Religious, 'Constitutions' are much more than the word 'Rule' may imply.)

In the Foreword to our own Constitutions, the then Superior General wrote: 'These Constitutions remain an expression of our vision for all time'. For the word 'vision,' one might read 'charism'; for the word 'vision' St. Ignatius would have read 'profession' ... for Constitutions

are a detailed explanation of what a Society is about - they lead to the attainment of the end proposed - and that end, that charism, that vision is itself enshrined in the Formula of the Institute, which stands at the head of the Constitutions.

The letter which serves as Preface to the first Latin edition of the Jesuit Constitutions speaks of them as the 'Order's solid foundation', as the ties which hold the whole body closely together for the service of God ... the pattern ... the path ... the mirror ... in which to examine our way of proceeding.

Jerome Nadal who was appointed by St. Ignatius to explain and promulgate the Constitutions maintained that they were to be read, not simply as a technical, legalistic document but 'with the spirit ... with the heart ... with a view towards practice.' It was important for Nadal that the Constitutions be seen as informed and animated by the spirit which gave them their meaning and significance; that they be read with openness and sensitivity, savouring the invitations made to the individual through them. One must be prepared to put them into practice, willing as Aldama says, to be transformed into the gospel image of Jesus Christ which Saint Ignatius contemplates in the Spiritual Exercises (so that truly the Society of Jesus too is walking in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ ...) willing to be 'transformed into the Gospel image of Jesus Christ which Ignatius contemplates in the

Spiritual Exercises as the ideal of his life, which he was able to communicate through the Exercises to his companions - and which he left to us in the form of the Constitutions that it might also be the supreme ideal of our consecrated life.' The Constitutions are for the body corporate what the Spiritual Exercises are for individuals - they embody the dynamism of the Principle and Foundation, of the *agere contra, the magis*, the what have I done for Christ, what am I doing for Christ, what more can I do- for him? freeing us and impelling us to evangelize with Jesus.

The Constitutions therefore can be seen as the fruit of experience, leading to experience; they are more than a collection of norms, they are an aid to discernment, offering criteria for discernment, pointing to the way in which we ought to proceed.

Marie Madeleine d'Houet, whose dates are 1781- 1858, was one of three women who bequeathed to their Societies the Constitutions of St. Ignatius.

She grew up, married and was widowed in France during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. That is a brief sentence but it covers a happy family life, a time in hiding when her Royalist father was imprisoned, a deep piety imbibed from him and from her mother, teenage years which included social engagements and voluntary work in the local hospice, her marriage to Joseph, Viscount de Bonnault d'Houet, who shared her interests and whose practice of visiting the sick

cost him his life within a year of their marriage since he caught fever and died. Three months after his death their son, Eugene, was born. September 1805.

In her widowhood she knew a degree of independence and authority unusual in a woman of that time. She administered the vineyards which were her own dowry and her husband's estates which were held in trust for their son. During those years she encountered the Fathers of the Faith and sponsored them whilst they preached a mission in 'her' village. When the Society of Jesus was restored in 1813, the Fathers of the Faith sought entry into it, so when the time came for Eugene to go to school in the following year, she chose to place him at the Jesuit College which was being opened at St. Acheul, on the outskirts of Amiens. There she met Père Varin, a man whose name crops up and evokes wry smiles in at least four Congregations of Ignatian Women - RSCJ, SND, Holy Family and ourselves. This Royalist man of action had paradoxically, as de Charry says, great difficulty in committing himself and both St. Julie Billiart and Marie Madeleine had much to suffer on account of his procrastination and sudden changes of views. Nonetheless, he was a deeply spiritual man whose spiritual life can be summed up as 'a continual search for the will of God, peace and abandonment in the certainty of accomplishing it ... surrender of himself to the guidance of the Lord who made him the instrument of his work in spite of weakness.'

During the Hundred Days in 1815, Marie Madeleine offered the proscribed Father Varin safe hiding in her country home - and there she enjoyed long conversations with him which, she says, 'turned less on the Society to which he belonged than on the inner spirit that should animate its members.'

During the five months of his stay with her, Père Varin was instrumental in drawing Madame d'Houet to a deep spiritual awakening. He discerned in her a call to religious life but it would seem that his mission to her went no further. He went to great lengths to persuade her to join the RSCJ which, with Saint Sophie Barat, he had begun in 1802 but finally in 1820 he gave her permission to begin a foundation, though admitting that he could see neither its nature nor its character. No wonder that Marie Madeleine always believed that the Society was entirely God's work.

So 1815: time listening to Père Varin

1816: in response to an inner prompting which she experienced as coming from the tabernacle, asking her to ask for whatever she wanted, she replied 'I desire only the fulfilment of your holy will.' This was confirmed the following Spring when Father Varin gave her the same prayer but added the significant words 'with fidelity'.

1817 was indeed an *Annus Mirabilis* for her.

Having previously refused to make a vow of chastity at the suggestion of a retreat director, she tells us that on Trinity Sunday 1817, 'whilst praying before Mass, quite suddenly and unexpectedly it was made known to me that God wished me to make the vow of chastity there and then, in his presence .... I readily and joyfully made the vow.'

It was as though the flood gates opened and revelation followed revelation, grace followed grace.

She had come to love the Jesuits deeply and indeed 'felt convinced that God positively wished me to a Jesuit, and yet I saw no reasonable way whereby this might come to be' one unreasonable way which suggested itself was that she might change her dress, go into a distant country and offer herself as a lay brother ....

Now on June 5th 1817, during the Corpus Christi procession, from the Crucifix, came the words 'See - the first Jesuit and Master of them all' - the Lord was teaching her a great lesson in detachment. She was to belong to him alone - to him who was the source and fountain head of all that she loved and admired in the Jesuits.

The following Friday, June 13th, was the feast of the Sacred Heart. Again, she was waiting for Mass, reflecting, she says on the happiness

of the enclosed life (it is interesting that Ignatius considered becoming a Carthusian, Marie Madeleine a Carmelite) when from the Crucifix over the tabernacle she was aware of the words: 'I THIRST.' These words so penetrated her whole being that she 'knelt in adoration and offered myself to God with my whole heart for all that he asked of me.'

Significantly she did not know what was asked, but since God was God she was ready for whatever it might be.

Ten days later a further illumination made known that she was '*etre jesuite*' and to found a Society which would seek to alleviate the thirst of Jesus in the contemporary world. Up to this point, she has seen 'Jesuit' as a noun - now she saw it as an adjective - not in the sense of 'jesuitical' but meaning that she was to be a companion of Jesus - Jesus himself and Jesus in his people.

And before these wonderful six weeks were over, on the 2nd July, feast of the Visitation, she was walking down the road to Mass reflecting, she tells us on what she had heard about the feast, the night before ... from what follows, one can assume that something had been said of Mary's journey to Elizabeth in the company of Jesus ... for suddenly she was aware that she was to have three companions from whom she was never to be separated ... she waited for the names of these three persons and was told 'Poverty, Humility and Obedience ...' when she asked, as she so often did, for a fourth, she was given Gentleness.

Four companions 'for this companion of Jesus, but four companions who are in effect only One, for they reflect the description of Jesus in Philippians – 'he emptied himself ... was humbler yet ... even to accepting death, death on a Cross' (which is where Marie Madeleine was to place her Society) - poverty, humility, obedience unto death - and gentleness, the only lesson Jesus asked us all to learn of him, gentleness the external expression of the other three.'

So by July 1817 it might be said that the 'vision' was in place - the following year, Père Folloppe, rector of St. Acheul, brought her the Rules of the Society of Jesus saying: 'I am sure that God wishes you to embrace this Rule and wishes me to give it to you, although it is something that is usually forbidden. Copy it; do not speak about it; when the time comes you will have it at hand.'

So she had a Rule - the entire Ten Parts of the Ignatian Constitutions, which she copied out in ten exercise books ... before ever she had a Society. An extraordinary happening, perhaps, but one which clearly accords with all that had gone before and one which provided Marie Madeleine with a framework a body in which to incorporate the spirit she had imbibed and with which she was penetrated. (Interestingly enough, Père Folloppe was shortly afterwards transferred to Bordeaux and died four years later).

'Women religious in the Ignatian tradition' - this story is to be more than the story of one woman and the final piece of the jigsaw falls into place in the summer of 1818.

In the experience at La Storta, St. Ignatius had seen himself and his companions 'placed with the Son' carrying his Cross, and it was at the foot of the Cross that Marie Madeleine believed her Society would find its rallying point. Why? because she saw herself and us walking with her namesake and the other women of the Gospel, with Mary Magdalen who, Madame d'Houet said, 'loved Jesus her master so truly as to accompany him even to the foot of the Cross with the other holy women, who did not, like the apostles, abandon him but proved to be faithful companions .... I want to be associated with religious who will be called Faithful Companions of Jesus .... The foot of the Cross will be our rallying point.'

These words were stored in the memory of the boy to whom she spoke them - Ferdinand Jeantier, a friend of her son. Ferdinand was about to enter the Society of Jesus and he came upon her, he says, 'with tears in her eyes but her expression was radiant. Seeing her in this state I did not know what to say. Was she in great sorrow or were her tears, the tears of consolation? This I wanted to know. "What is the matter?" I said, "Why are you crying?" "I am jealous," she replied, "Jealous of what?" "I am jealous of your happiness. You have vowed to enter the Society of Jesus; you will be enrolled under its standard, but I cannot be

a Jesuit. Oh! if only I were a man, how happy I would be to take the same step! I am unable to satisfy my heart's desire.... But no, I will not be outdone. Wait a while; my name is Magdalen.... I will follow my patron saint ....”

That conversation is significant both for its main content and for her awareness that her name is Madeleine/Magdalen ... up to that point Marie Madeleine Victoire had, in the French manner been known not by her first name but by the name closest to the surname ... henceforth Victoire was Marie Madeleine.

She realised that her name was Magdalen ... that Jesus had called women as well as men ... to be with him, throughout his ministry, hearing his teaching, seeing his miracles, sharing his passion and witnessing to his resurrection.

Time and again the evangelists stress that the women of the gospel were ‘accompanying Jesus’, ‘serving Jesus’, ‘following Jesus’ nowhere is it said that they are following the apostles; they are following Jesus and it is he who was central to their lives. They were there in their own right, followers, companions of Jesus and it is in this spirit that Marie Madeleine was to reflect later that the Superior General of the Society of Jesus should not be opposed to the name given to her Society for ‘it is not in his footsteps that we are to follow but in those of Jesus Christ, the first Jesuit and the leader of them all. This Divine Saviour had among

his close followers women who accompanied him faithfully to the end ....’

And again: ‘The Rule we have chosen is that of St. Ignatius not to walk in his footsteps but in those of Our Lord Jesus Christ and because this Rule seems to us to be the best adapted (to that purpose). Interestingly enough in the latest edition of Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, a Jesuit writing from Hong Kong says ‘I have been thinking that we are members not of the Society of St. Ignatius but of the Society of Jesus.’

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In seeking to alleviate the ongoing thirst of Jesus, Marie Madeleine had appreciatively made her own the Rule so providentially given her by Father Folloppe with certain modifications as she says, so that it ‘is that lived by those amongst the Jesuits who are not priests’ but ‘faithful to the great principles of apostolic companionship in discernment for mission, of service for the greater glory of God, of unity and diversity, of excelling in the obedience which sends us on our mission, of formation to interior freedom and maturity of spirit.’ This way of life wrote our former Superior General Breda O’Farrell, is an essential condition our identifying with Jesus sent; with Mary and the Holy Women, we confront the mystery of the cross and witness by our lives that the self-emptying of the crucified - risen Christ has conquered.’

In a *cri de coeur* which echoes down the years, Marie Madeleine commented that 'one would wish the Reverend Jesuit Fathers to be less possessive of this holy Rule ....' St. Ignatius in his own time had been an innovator, had ruled out monastic-style community and stability as incompatible with his apostolic ideal and now, like Mary Ward before her, Marie Madeleine recognised that if women were to be active in the service of the Church, they too could not be confined by cloister nor restricted to one diocese. The Rule of St. Ignatius offered a central organisation, essential for world-wide apostolic work, freedom of movement, direction by its own superior general (independent of the local ordinary), and equally important, it contained a formation programme which would hone the apostolic instrument.

In what follows it is easy to recognise one of those false images, one of those hostile satires that were mentioned last week, the archetypal ecclesial chauvinist ... but we must remember that criticisms and comments directed at Madame d'Houet, reflect not only the accepted clerical attitude towards women at the beginning of the nineteenth century but also the historical situation of the Jesuits. Having been so recently restored after their suppression, they were naturally concerned, and even nervous, lest anything happen which might threaten their existence for a second time. Indeed Father General Roothan in 1824 declared that the times were like the times of suppression and he was so anxious to be Ignatian that it is said of him that he was more faithful than

Ignatius himself; indeed he re-wrote the Spiritual Exercises as he thought they should be written, adjusted them to ensure the authentic Ignatian spirit!

Leo XII in 1826, approved of Madame d'Houët's having taken the Ignatian Rule and confirmed the name of the Society of Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus - the double gift was too much and immediately the Society of Jesus swung into action. Père Godinet, the French Provincial, threatened her saying 'We are all powerful in Rome and we shall let you see it!' and he wrote to the Pope suggesting other names which might be given to the new Society. Similarly Padre Zecchinelli S.J. who had a place on the Commission appointed in Rome to examine the matter, insisted that the name must be changed to remove any allusion to the Company of Jesus - they could call themselves 'Sisters of Jesus and Mary' or 'Society of the Most Holy Saviour'... and Père Rozaven, Assistant to the General, maintained that the name was in fact identical to that St. Ignatius gave his men: 'He gave them the title "Companions of Jesus" and if he did not add the adjective FAITHFUL he certainly meant them to merit it!' So much for their non-acceptance of our name.

But Marie Madeleine desired only the faithful accomplishment of God's will and she believed that that will required her to found a Society of Sisters who would be in name as well as, hopefully, in fact, Faithful Companions of Jesus and she stood her ground.



The Rule, Padre Zecchinelli maintained was unsuitable for women - and interestingly enough he lists the same points that I have already quoted from our former Superior General but whereas she listed them as 'essential conditions of our identity' he proclaimed them to be 'quite incompatible with the nature of the weaker sex.' In particular, he mentions the apostolic nature of the Rule, the ministries, 'specifically the Spiritual Exercises, catechetics in public, mission in distant regions' and the formation programme. These women, he writes, 'must moderate their aims lest it appear that an Institute of women undertake responsibilities beyond their possibilities.' 'One notes', he goes on, 'that the educational programme appears to be quite satisfactory but perhaps too vast, including the teaching even of the advanced sciences, the least suited to the average capability of women.'

Marie Madeleine, thirsting to alleviate the thirst of Christ, valued availability and mobility, but the Church had nothing in its Codex to offer religious women other than the traditional monastic framework. 'They must decide under which ancient Rule they choose to live; for example, the Rule of St. Benedict which is applicable to men and women.' P. Zechinelli clearly chose to forget that St. Ignatius had taken from other religious Rules only to the extent that the charism proper to his new Society allowed. As for Government, Père Rozaven wrote: 'it scarcely seems appropriate to give a woman, independently of all ecclesiastical authority, a power like to and equal to that which the General

of the Company exercises.... The exercise of such an authority demands such judgment, integrity, breadth of knowledge, prudence, discretion, strength of mind, which doubtless can be found in a woman, but which generally speaking occurs with greater difficulty and much more rarely than in men ....'

(It is interesting - even significant - that extant in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation and the Archives of our own Society are Manuscript documents containing all these judgments and opinions - but the Archives of the Society of Jesus have nothing other than copies of a letter of Leo XII to the Bishop of Amiens and of Gregory XVI's decree in 1837; one letter from a Cardinal to Madame d'Houet and two letters from the Bishop of Nice dated 1837... the French Provincial archives have only an undated statement from an otherwise unknown Jesuit in favour of Madame d'Houet's beatification! Clearly the Society of Jesus believed that her Society would have no future!)

Back to P. Rozaven.

'This is my advice ... that she give up those too lofty designs, fruit of a zeal which I believe to be pure, but which is not in accord with science; that ... she seek approbation for an Institute which has for its main end the instruction of poor young girls in France .... They could adapt that

manner of government to the proposed end, profiting if they wish, with wisdom and discretion from the Constitutions of St. Ignatius as have other Orders.'

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This adaptation would have meant the end of the Society as Marie Madeleine and the first generation of Sisters had come to know and love it and this recognition that the Rule, far from being simply a Rule, contains and reflects precisely a religious Institute's own self-image, was passed down through subsequent generations so that in the years ahead one general superior after another would, in her own way, restate that 'we say and we shall always say ... that our rules are what they are or they are not at all.'

The story of how Marie Madeleine's successors presented the same Rule is not integral to this paper ... suffice it to say that we lived on Leo XII's approval of the Society but without formal approval of the Constitutions until 1922. After the Revision of Canon Law, promulgated in 1918, women religious were obliged to adopt the canons and norms of the Code, not only as regards meaning but even literally - so that individuality, charism, distinctive spirituality were not catered for and one set of Constitutions looked very much like another - and clericalism extended further its hold on women religious.

Some fifty years later when the original documents had played little or no direct part in the formation of those then alive, Vatican II urged a return

to the sources, to the founding experiences and called Institutes to revise their particular law accordingly. From 1966-1979 the Society worked at that task ... and humanly speaking it seemed that we were just about getting there when it occurred to the Superior General, more than once, that what we should be doing was not revising the Rule of 1922, albeit with some reference to Marie Madeleine's original handwritten document (which had been found under the stairs in the house in Brussels, in the early 1970's,) but going back to that Rule as presented in 1826. One can imagine the emotional confusion such an idea must have produced in her but she, like Marie Madeleine before her, wanted only what God wanted, and confirmation came in several ways - not least when one of Fr. Arrupe's Assistants himself raised the matter in private conversation saying 'Have you ever thought of taking back your original Constitutions? I would help you all I can.' Fr. Arrupe in his turn, wrote: 'I have no objection whatever. Indeed I welcome the suggestion,' and with that the final stage of the saga had been reached. On October 29th 1985, the formal decree of approval of the Constitutions first presented in 1826, was granted the realisation of the foundress' dream.

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The classic objection that Jesuit Constitutions are 'masculine', even 'military', written by a man for men, has been around for a long time, but ironically in the 1970's and '80's the argument was being raised, not

primarily by men but by women! In our own Society, Commission members working on the revision of the Rule, initially heard comments such as ‘these speak to the head, not the heart’, ‘they’re cold, clinical,’ ‘they’re not inspirational’. But St. Ignatius more than twenty times incorporates in the Constitutions, the principle of adaptation to the ‘person’, to ‘times and circumstances.’

Ignatius, the soldier, we have all discovered, has been overplayed - and Hugo Rahner S.J. with his *ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA: LETTERS TO WOMEN* (1960) has led the way in revealing Ignatius ‘the friend, who with the most disparate kinds of men and women forged bonds that lasted across decades and beyond continents, the man of a love moved to tears, the man of mystical favours almost too deep for words, the Ignatius who was a teacher of the highest graces of prayer and the recipient of such graces beyond measure.’ (Padberg) His letters show him as ‘a warm, affective, communicative and stimulating personality, afire with the love of God and the human persons with whom he conversed;’ we discover ‘his human warmth, his interest in men and women with their joys and hopes, plans and frustrations.’ Rahner says that much of Ignatius’ correspondence with women was quickly ‘destroyed as being of no historical importance’ but women, he adds, ‘forgot the human kindness of Ignatius less quickly than the men who wrote his biographies.’ The power of his writing comes not from his style, but in part at least from ‘the further discoveries which he encourages

readers to make for themselves.’ As Monika Hellwig expresses it Ignatius teaches us to ‘recognise and expect our own empowerment by grace.’

Marie Madeleine maintained that Ignatius supported the idea of an apostolic order of women. She clearly had in mind a letter of 1546 when he seems to envisage an order not confined to cloister but dedicated to good works. ‘I am convinced that ... to win more souls and to serve God our Lord better and more comprehensively in the cause of spiritual advancement, it would be a good and holy means to found a company of women, which others, too, having been found suitable in our Lord, could then join.’

Fathers Zechinelli and Rosaven opposed Madame d’Houet on this. ‘The Institute of St. Ignatius cannot be suited to women ... the saint did not work for them and he did not cut his coat according to their cloth.’ Marie Madeleine was patient. ‘It is not a question of cloth nor coat and it is not certain that St. Ignatius tried, as do the Reverend Fathers, to prevent women from following his Institute. I believe on the contrary, that he would have been very pleased to see it produce the same benefits for them as for men .... I do not know of a Rule better suited to women ... not only would it be helpful to allow its use, but I dare say it would be absolutely essential and I see in it the best means of infusing fervour into religious life ....’

Marie Madeleine wanted a company of women Jesuits - not copies of the men but formed as they were to be faithful to the following of Jesus, faithful to his mission. We have our own way of living the Constitutions, living them with the insights and sensitivity of women. Discernment is key, as Frank Turner pointed out last week - as is availability for mission; no specific mission but occasions and ways of serving reached by discernment. That emphasis, the emphasis on sensitivity for persons, times and places, the primacy of love, the readiness to serve - all these are womanly qualities which is why Marie Madeleine was able to claim that the Ignatian Constitutions are as much for women as for men.

Reclaiming the deep desires, the energies of the foundress has empowered us in the last fifteen years to move from maintenance to mission - large institutions have given way before the call to look afresh at God's will for us TODAY - and from Igloolik in the Arctic to Clodomira in Argentina, from Kitimat in B.C. to Kupang in Indonesia there are small groups of Sisters trying to alleviate what the Constitutions call 'the misery and weakness both spiritual and material of the people there. '(242)

Availability in faith for apostolic mission is the response of love. The Constitutions may not use the word 'thirst' but the reality is there in the desires they elicit ....

We must consider attentively how important it is for us, Faithful Companions of Jesus, to accept and desire with all our strength that which Jesus Christ our Lord loved and embraced and in another place the Rule speaks of means to procure a continuous increase of intense desires ... to give great service in this Society to his Divine Majesty. (127)

From this availability in faith and the constant search for the will of God TODAY spring the Rule 's ongoing vitality and contemporary value, for the great founding insights will always be freshly embodied in each new time and place.

Earlier this year the main document issuing from our General Chapter begins:

We, as Faithful Companions of Jesus, stand challenged by Jesus and by one another: to live our name, Faithful Companions of Jesus, to see our corporate mission springing from our identity.... challenges which might be said to paraphrase Marie Madeleine's own vision – but though I believe she would applaud other parts of the document, their literal content would have been foreign to her.

We as Faithful Companions of Jesus challenged by Jesus and by one another

to thirst with Jesus for justice,  
crying enough in the face of consumerism,  
sharing our resources,  
standing powerless with the marginalised,  
opening our eyes to our hidden racism.  
savouring the beauty in all cultures  
announcing by our lives the freeing redemption of Jesus.

Teilhard wrote that 'the generating principle of our unification is not finally to be found in the single contemplation of the same truth or in the single desire awakened by something, but in the single attraction exercised by the same Someone.' Our unity is not primarily a structural thing, nor is it for purposes of efficiency; it is more an affective sense of being with Jesus in company with others who also share his mission, for our mission is intrinsically bound up with our identity. It is a union based not on uniformity or conformity but in the close union of the members with God's 'divine and supreme goodness', with the love of God which permeates the entire body corporate. The 1993 Chapter document states that 'no programme or particular work can capture our mission.

Our corporate mission is inherent in the very persons we are, as Faithful Companions of Jesus.'

The Ignatian Constitutions, says Aldama, are not merely procedural but furnish a motive and through it a spirit with which the procedures are to be observed. Our Formula says:

Strong in companionship with Jesus and with each other we work together in the service of the Church to build the body of Christ.(5)

Like all women, the women of the Gospel were receptive, intuitive, contemplative like Mary they received the Word. Some were intermediaries, some messengers and public witnesses, some were silent, some spoke, as Martha proclaimed her faith in the divinity of Jesus and Mary anointed him for his burial. Two very different services: one a proclamation, one a prophetic act. 'Reflective living makes connections between experience, charism and scripture, the story of the Incarnation, the story of the Good News, so that they become mutually enriching.'

Marie Madeleine's dream was women religious, companions of Jesus, faithful to the following of Jesus, faithful to his mission. In claiming the Jesuit Constitutions, it was not a document as such that she was claiming – it was more the apostolic identity which is central to them that

drew her. It was their cohesiveness which she valued for she saw that in them formation, community, government, temporal administration everything is for the sake not of asceticism, or discipline, of economy or efficiency - but for mission – the mission of Jesus who came to draw all people to the Father. She was not responding to any particular need when she founded the Society; she was responding to God's impulse and inspiration ...which required an extraordinary degree of freedom, an extraordinary readiness on her part to be led wherever God chose, a readiness in faith which would make possible the fulfilment of her prayer 'nothing but the accomplishment of your will.' The Constitutions describe a missionary life-style, because 'our profession requires that we be prepared and ready for whatever is enjoined upon us in our Lord and at whatsoever time ...'(53) and this life on mission determines and conditions selection of candidates, formation, understanding of vows, government and so on.

A cursory reading of the Constitutions might lead to the claim that they are concerned solely with mission, but that is not true. The emphasis is on persons capable of mission and always in the context of discernment. 'What illuminates animates and vivifies the law is the ideal that it aims to actualize and preserve, the ideal, the vocation, the vision proper to the Institute. (Aldama adapted.)

To point out that our government is characterized by mutuality, openness, trust and love, that it empowers membership in freely chosen

goals; that experience, intuition and feeling are taken into account in our discernment, that relationships and nurturing of growth are integral to formation and community is not to claim anything new - for Ignatian Spirituality, as Rawlinson says is most certainly 'person-centred, person-adapted; a spirituality of relationship and empowerment, a spirituality which honours experience and which places a strong emphasis on communicating, on sharing that experience,' but it is to suggest that in highlighting these aspects of the Constitutions, women are rendering a service to others beyond themselves. Fr. Arrupe believed that this would be so.

In 1990 David Lonsdale wrote: 'God is revealed in human experience ... and women's experience is different from men's experience of God and of life. Consequently, women ask questions of experience which are different from those which men ask, and in response find meanings and interpretations which are also different. Women's experience of life and of God, then, together with the theology and spirituality which develop by reflection on that experience cannot ... remain unacknowledged and ignored; it has to be given its rightful place, if all of us are not to remain impoverished.' With mutual enrichment, men and women, following the Rule of St. Ignatius can move towards the wholeness which he so treasured.

But always for us, Faithful Companions of Jesus, the emphasis must be on Jesus...remembering Marie Madeleine's words that 'it is not in the footsteps of St. Ignatius that we are to follow but in those of Jesus Christ, the first Jesuit and leader of them all.'

Or as our Formula puts it:

The Father call us  
to follow his Son in faithfulness,  
to stand at the foot of the cross  
with Mary and the holy women,  
there as Faithful Companions of Jesus,  
to be one with him in his thirst  
for the coming of the kingdom ...(2)

Like Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church,  
and like the holy women, messengers of the Good News,  
we are sent to proclaim the Truth,  
Jesus who is alive and lives among us,  
who is Son of God  
and Saviour of the world.(3)