

## Transcending Polarizations

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The Jubilee Year of Mercy could not have come at a more felicitous time to directly address a key issue raised by the Canadian Religious Conference in their Plenary Assembly 2016, namely, the issue of right relationships. At the heart of Pope Francis' challenge to the Church during this jubilee year was a call to rethink the way in which we relate to God, to one another and to the whole of creation.

In this consideration the Holy Father asked us to move beyond images of dominance and to transcend polarities in order that there might be true fruitfulness in the mission of the Church. The mercy of God is revealed in right relationships and these in turn engender fecundity in mission. These are vital truths for apostolic religious to reclaim.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, there is the injunction to realise that "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.... There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) This is a particular challenge to religious not to debate about egalitarian 'rights', or gender ideology but rather to celebrate our oneness in Christ.

***How can we best enter into such a celebration?*** Perhaps one way is to take as 'our way of proceeding' the presupposition of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola.<sup>1</sup>

### The Presupposition

Ignatius identifies a certain disposition we should have in regard to entering into an encounter or dialogue with another. Roughly paraphrased this disposition is as follows: the 'other' to whom I am speaking desires to say something that is good, so my responsibility is to be open to the good the other is trying to say. Such a disposition is clearly a very positive one. It means I come to any dialogue with an openness and an eagerness to listen closely and attentively to perceive the good the other is trying to say.

It is entirely different from the attitude of a person who comes to a relationship or an encounter or a dialogue with the presupposition "I know what Sister. X will say, because she always says the same thing, I know where she is coming from." Or "Father Y and Brother Z, I have known them for years they will never be interested in anything new." This attitude severely limits any real exchange for it sets limits to 'X,Y and Z' and does not ascribe to them the ordinary human reality, namely, of a person who, by the grace of God, grows, dialogues, changes, develops, matures, rather it conceives of a static identity.

***How often have we done the same with community members, colleagues, acquaintances and even friends?***

By contrast the Lord calls us to a disposition of openness that we might be surprised by those we encounter; that we might be amazed at the way God works in individual lives; that we might be ever open to engage in dialogue with all whom the Lord causes to journey with us on the path of life.

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<sup>1</sup> To assure better cooperation between the one who is giving the Exercises and the exercitant, and more beneficial results for both, it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false.

***Can we be really disposed in this way? What would this mean in practice?***

Well, it may include an engagement with community meetings in a way that sees them as a source of potential new engagement and learning. Such a disposition may lead to the possibility of our visioning processes becoming more enlivened, as, rather than focusing upon our problems and frailties, we consider the opportunities that may be opening up for us with smaller numbers and an increasing age profile.

***How do we harness the wisdom of our elderly members?***

Certainly Pope Francis was concerned to engage the wisdom of age with the energy of youth, such an engagement may be across religious congregations or involving those outside religious life. A disposition focused in this way may stimulate possibilities beyond our current imagining.

Relationship with Creation

How does such a presupposition then affect our relationship with creation? If we are all one in Christ, then, as Hans Urs von Balthasar states, Christ “is the unchangeably valid blueprint in every situation in the world and in history.”<sup>2</sup> Such an assertion does not deny the reality of human freedom, but recalls us to our interconnectedness in Christ.

The prologue to the Fourth Gospel makes a similar assertion, in Christ all things were created and in him there is a recapitulation of all things. This connection moves beyond human relations and focuses also our relations with the whole of creation. It underlines that there is a fundamental intelligibility to the universe and an essential connectedness of all creation.

Pope Francis has insisted in *Laudato Si'* that “everything is interconnected, interrelated”<sup>3</sup> and he also calls insistently for “a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.”<sup>4</sup>

The presupposition of the *Spiritual Exercises*, our relationships with one another and our interconnectedness with the whole of creation are grounded ultimately in the reality of the Trinity where we glimpse both a mystery and an intelligibility that transcends all polarization.

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, II*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 277.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* (138).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* (240).