

Dear Jesuit Friends of the Japanese Province,

March 3, 2008

An old Jesuit friend from Taiwan wrote to me one month after the election. He said. "By now you must know that the name of father general is not Peter-Hans Kolvenbach". He touched the exact spot where I am, still distracted. I keep wondering if it is really true.

The Election experience has been a unique experience in many ways. I went to the GC35 with a great peace of mind. I was convinced that I was out of danger, if only for my age and the many shortcomings and inadequacies I have. It was not even a question I would spend two minutes worrying about. A joke, at most. (The next two paragraphs only rephrase what I wrote to all in my first greetings last Feb. 22.)

But, then, the GC began and the time for Murmurations began as well. The first day I had to speak with many people who were asking information about "others". I was delighted to inform on how good the other fellows were; after all I was supposed to know more people than most. The second day was basically the same with slight changes in some. The third day, things changed even more and people started to ask me about my health. I have never seen so many Jesuits concerned about my health... not even in the best communities. The last day, people started to relax and visit some Ignatian places to pray for a good election, while I was still reporting about my health to new faces from new Continents. I began to worry about my health, but on a different line... But I was still hopeful. It just couldn't happen.

Then came prayer, and the Eucharist, and more prayer, and a review of the experience of four intensive days of search. It was an overwhelming experience of Jesuits praying and searching with an open heart for someone... The search was so genuine and so serious that when I heard my name called more often than I would wish, I could not say NO. You cannot say NO to a group of men looking for the Will of God with such intensity. Only surrender made sense in that context, and I had to surrender. My early resolve to decline the appointment if the impossible would ever happen, dissolved like butter on a Manila Summer day. YES was the only word that made sense when 216 people were sharing the results of four days of prayer.

Then came the friendly handshake, the warm hugs, the supportive words, the messages that my fellow Jesuits were whispering as we looked at each other searching for reassurance that this had to do with God and his Mission for us. Then followed the search for a good team to help me help the Society. And I can say that I have never experienced so much openness, so much generosity, so much detachment as the Congregation were giving me the best men they had.

This past month has been a wonderful month experiencing the best of our Jesuit life. Wonderful Jesuits saying YES without conditions to whatever tasks or requests I had for them. I have appointed Assistants, Secretary, more than 25 new Provincials. Not a single one has ventured a NO. Those who had representations have been totally honest about them, but have accepted the burden, the task, the mission. I feel strongly and deeply that I am not alone. Ignatius, following St. Paul, says that what the Lord has started, He will bring to fulfillment... My fellow Jesuits have helped me feel that this is true. They have incarnated this truth: they voted me in; they themselves are already helping and supporting. God is with us; our fellow Jesuits are

also with us. I have no reason, therefore, for sleepless nights... so far. All this has been an incredible experience of the Society as a Society of Friends in the Lord.

What am I going to do now? To tell you the truth, I do not know yet. And I am not in a hurry to surprise anybody with bold plans or daring statements. There is so much that I have to learn yet. The GC35 has kept me busy enough and concerned with each day's process. In the meantime the press people seem to be at a loss trying to figure out an individual that they do not know at all. They are speculating, comparing with the past, creating their own ghosts of who I am or am supposed to be. Often it is even amusing. I heard that there was a one hour TV discussion in Madrid about what I meant when speaking of the poor in my first public homily. Funny, because nobody asked me what I really meant. I could have answered in half a minute.


The media people seem mystified. They are wondering about my Japanese years and my theology out of this long experience in the East... They are not going to find out much or go very far in discovering who I really am. You surely know much better who I am, because you have experienced much of what I have experienced in one or another direction. You know that Japan has made me as I am today. You know that in Japan I was helped to revise most of my presuppositions about what being human means, about growth, and silence, and religiosity, and search, and mystery. You name it. But in such a profound way that I cannot explain it to the press or make it small talk for an interview. I would not be able to explain; and they would never understand what I really mean. It is too deep for easy labeling; too real for instant consumption.

What really stays with me, though, is an enormous gratitude to Japan and all of you in Japan for your part in my growth as a person and as a Jesuit. Even those of you who might feel you were not so friendly, or so cooperative, or so helpful... We are more educated by reality and its difficulties than by purposeful programs offered to us. You have all helped just being who you are and rubbing it with who I am or have been. Without Japan I would certainly be a very different person in most of the aspects and dimensions of my life. Whether this is good or bad it is not for me to judge. My feeling, though, is that Japan is the greatest blessing I have received in the Society.

And now I begin to walk the new walk. I have a wonderful team, the old (still in full function) and the new (which will be gathering as the months go by). I ask you to pray that I do not walk alone, or with only people; pray that I walk in the company of our best "senpai", from Ignatius on, and all together after our real Leader, Jesus Christ. Pray that I can keep enough silence to hear the soft inspirations of the Spirit, and that I have enough courage to follow those inspirations for the good of people, of the Church and of the Society.

Every opportunity to visit Japan and see you all will be a great joy. I can only hope that it happens soon enough... and that I have not forgotten my Japanese.

With immense gratitude for what you have been and are for me, I remain
Yours in the Lord



Adolfo Nicolas sj

Friend and Companion in the Journey