

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A MEMBER OF THE NEXT GENERAL CONGREGATION?

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The question in the title needs a bit of explanation before it can be understood and responded to in the proper context. The impersonal form “*is expected*” refers not to a faceless, anonymous group lacking any personal subjectivity, but rather to a determined group of concrete persons, namely the 19,565 Jesuits in the world, as well of course, at least to some degree, other persons near to them for various reasons, but principally by reason of spiritual affinity and cooperation in the progress of the mission. In this sense, the question might be better translated (or understood) as “What do Jesuits expect—as well as persons closely involved with them—of a member of the next General Congregation?” A thorough reply to this question would require asking each of them what they expect or hope for and collecting the responses, then trying to homogenize them, as much as possible, since, although it can be presumed that there would be ample areas of coincidence, there could also well be a great diversity in the responses, due to the not small range of cultures, sensibilities, situations, apostolic works, and ways of living out the same Jesuit vocation, within a deep sense of identity and common belonging, throughout the length and breath of the world. Without a doubt it would be interesting—and surely useful—to carry out this vision, as a type of photograph of the hopes and expectations that Jesuits do in fact have or say they have in regard to their up-coming

General Congregation. This present work is not going to follow this road, but rather will propose some reasonable presumptions of what Jesuits can normally expect of participants in a Congregation, in light of its proper nature and finality and its specific way of proceeding, as will be explained later.

The “*what*” of the question of the title also requires some clarification, because it can be understood in several different ways: either as contributions that the members of the Congregation can make to the Congregation, or to the objective result of the same (officers that need to be elected, decisions to be made,) or to the experience of the body united in vocation and mission that lives in it and can be participated in afterwards by the entire Society, or as the process by which its diverse activities and tasks unfold. What follows will not opt for but one of these meanings, excluding the rest or even other possibilities, but rather will address all of them. The context will make clear which meaning is intended.

The following work will try to be an answer to the question formulated in the title. A response, because there can be others. A *personal* response, that of the author, who does not aim to be *subjective*—at least not overly so—since there could be many such responses. A response that *is offered* as a suggestion and is in no way meant to be imposed on anyone.

These reflections are based upon the following: the experience of having participated in General Congregations 32, 33 and 34, and an in-depth study of the history and results of General Congregation 31; the resonance of the Constitutions and Decrees of previous General Congregations, collected now in their substance in the Complementary Norms and a certain familiarity with some of them; and the most pleasurable recent reading of the conferences or meditation points given by Fathers General Arrupe and Kolvenbach to the members of Congregations 31, 32, and 34, to help the members orient themselves as they began their respective tasks and to make them aware of their role in them.¹

1. The General Congregation: what it is, what its aims are, how it functions

Service to unity and government

If we leaf through the text of the Constitutions of most any religious institute, we will always find a treatment of the General Chapter—

corresponding to our General Congregation—in the part that treats government, describing it as the supreme organ of the same; even though, especially in the texts of constitutions edited since the Second Vatican Council, these have been enriched by including references to the chapter as a channel of participation and representation of all the religious in the life of the institute and as a “true sign of its unity in love.”² The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, on the contrary, locate the General Congregation in its Eighth Part, which, as its title says, treats of what helps toward uniting the members dispersed on mission with their head (the superiors) and among themselves. Under this

general title of helps towards union, the first to be taken up is what will help the *union of hearts*—which is to arise in and from the interior of the members in dispersion, even when they do not find themselves physically in

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the same place, as would happen frequently already in the first years of the Society and would also happen throughout history, in conformity with the specific character of its vocation. The text goes on to speak of what would help promote *personal union*, that is, by means of physical encounters of persons, which take place “in Congregations or Chapters” (Const. 655,677). In agreement with this basic conception, the General Congregation, being a physical encounter, a gathering in a particular place, ideally of all the Society dispersed on mission, on determinate occasions, is seen primordially as a help in fomenting the union of the same.

It is certain—and more evident in the Ignatian text than in other constitutional texts that generally establish the regularly scheduled periodic meetings of the general chapter—that the Society only gets together, as seemed most useful “for the present” (Const. 677) when decisions must be made of great significance, such as the election of the superior general or other long-lasting or important matters (“long-lasting and important matters...or with other very difficult matters pertaining to the whole body of the Society or its manner of proceeding (680). In this sense, the General Congregation contributes to the union of the Society not only by uniting its members physically, but also by making, as a united body and a visible

expression of the entire Society, the momentous decisions that vitally affect its being and working. That is to say, it is also an organ—and a qualified one of government. But union and government in the Society are not, in the mind of Ignatius, separate categories which function independently: for without union, the Society cannot “be preserved *nor governed* or consequently attain the aim it seeks for the greater glory of God” (Const.655). In other words, without union, government in the Society is not possible. And, without government, the ordinary form proper to the superior general and what is entrusted specifically to a General Congregation as an expression and action of the entire Society, for the decisions of greater importance, it is not possible to guarantee and promote its union. Both things are strictly united, as are also fraternal charity and obedience in the creation and fostering of the union of hearts.

As an organ of government and of fostering union in the Society, the General Congregation has the specific function of making decisions of special importance for maintaining the Society in good working order and orienting it in the accomplishment of its mission at any moment. The General Congregation is a body or organ which makes decisions; its specific function is to decide. Not to speculate, nor to make purely doctrinal declarations,³ brilliant and illuminating as they might be, nor to produce documents that are merely inspirational or exhortational, unless and to the extent that these lead towards operative resolutions that serve to configure the real life of the Society and help it in its apostolic service or may be necessary to support them or explain them.⁴ But neither does just any decision beneficial to the well being and good working of the Society fall under the specific function of the General Congregation—one should not expect it to do everything—but only those which refer to “other matters which require consideration beyond that of the general and those who are with him” (Const.689), that is, to matters which go beyond the competence or the real possibilities of the so-called ordinary governance, “for the superior general, through the communication which he has with the whole Society and through the help he gets from those near him, will spare the Society as a whole from that work and distraction as far as possible” Const.677). It seems clear that, from the reading of the texts (The Formula of the Institute and Constitutions) one can conclude that the habitual governance of the Society in all its aspects (not only, at the executive level, but also legislative) is confided to the general, while the General Congregation acts only upon specific and determinate matters and only on singular—although not precisely

exceptional—occasions.⁵ In agreement with this, it is essential to respect the respective areas of government and to adhere to them; one should not expect a General Congregation to do everything.

“Calling the Society together”

According to the idiom of the Constitutions, as has been said implicitly previously, it is the Society itself which calls the General Congregation together. Some of its formulations (“summoning the Society” [687] “he shall not summon the Society” (689), “to which the Society will be summoned” (690) express this more clearly. It is important to understand it in this way: according to St. Ignatius, when all it said and done, it is the entire Society which meets or comes together in the General Congregation. This is an ideal, which could not come to pass, both because of the growth in the number of members, as well as for other reasons, such as, because some of its members would be occupied in things of greater importance in their apostolic activity or might be greatly burdened by the journey. Already in the Formula of the Institute (n. 2) it is said that the Council or General Congregation “should be understood (according to the explanation in our Constitutions) to be the greater part of the entire professed Society: that can be assembled without grave inconvenience by the superior general.” And the Constitutions say that “those who should assemble in a general congregation are not all the subjects but the professed and some coadjutors if it seems opportune in our Lord to summon them; and even from among all these, those who can come conveniently”⁶ (Const. 682). Only, “by way of norm”—the Constitutions continue—“three will come from each province,...the provincial and two others chosen by the rest in a province congregation” [ibid.]. “These will be the persons who are most fit to take part in the congregation and whose absence will cause less harm” (Const.692). But what is important for Ignatius is that all be aware, those who come and those who do not come—because they are not designated or cannot come or it is not convenient for them to come—that it is the Society itself that, by means of those who come, meets not only by virtue of the representation of some by others, but rather in a living sense, that is, an expression of the union of all in one single body, so that, from this point of view, it does not much matter who actually meet. Those who come and

those who do not come and so “will leave things” (Const.682) to the others, are the same Society that is found and is present in the General Congregation.

For this same reason, if what gets together is the Society as such, and those who in fact come are its visible expression, the General Congregation is not a meeting of representatives or delegates⁷ of the provinces (or regions) as such, but of members of the body of the Society, which is what really comes together in it, without intermediate representations, although “by way of norm,” the concrete determination of who should come is made, as a practical means for deciding, by designation of their provinces and regions. But these are not the ones that get together, rather the Society itself, nor are concerns related directly to them to be aired in the General Congregation, rather “matters pertaining to the whole body of the Society or its manner of proceeding, for greater service to God our Lord” (Const.680).

It is necessary to place oneself in this perspective and in this sense of the entire Society, if one wants to truly enter into the correct being and meaning of the General Congregation and in its consequent dynamic of functioning. Those who form part of it will have to make the necessary effort and purification, perhaps now more than in other times, in order to integrate the particular interests of provinces, regions, areas and continents into the general interest of the good of the universal Society and to reinterpret them through this view of the universal good, “since it is a universal good, it ought to be preferred to the good of a single individual by one who is sincerely seeking the divine service” (Const.212), for as good, “the more universal the good is, the more it is divine” (Const.680). In times such as ours, in which, in spite of the massive universalizing force of globalization, one feels paradoxically drawn towards the near and the personal. Thus, it may not be easy and will constitute an authentic challenge to become sensitive to the wider—even universal—dimensions, integrating them, by transcending more particular and immediate interests. But this is necessary, in order that these immediate interests not become an obstacle to applying what the General Congregation might decide for the entire Society, and for legitimate procedures and the strictly Ignatian way of proceeding to occur, according to the requirements and peculiarities of the times, persons, and places, in accord with the spirit and the letter of our Constitutions and Complementary Norms.

In the General Congregation the varied opinions, mentalities and sensibilities that may exist in any given moment in the Society will be present

and freely expressed, as well as the aspirations and impulses of the diverse apostolic sectors and special interest groups in it; and it is very good that it be this way. The General Congregation is the institutionalized setting wherein all these elements can come to light, are clarified and contrasted among themselves and integrate themselves in unity, as something that pertains to the life of the entire Society that gets together, and not privately in isolated groups within it. In this sense, it would not fit in with the Ignatian model of the General Congregation if these groups were to function, even with good intention, like *lobbies* which promote each one its own interests or causes. If it is the Society itself, as it is, that gets together in General Congregation, it is the general interest of the Society in its totality that is aired in it, and other particular and fragmentary interests have no place in it, unless as integral to the general interest and in fact integrated in it. It is the entire Society, as a single body, which gets together, not the groups which may exist within it.

The objective of the General Congregation

Part of this has already been said: to unite and to govern the Society, without separating unity and government. As to what refers to the latter, that is, the government, the overarching idea of government which Ignatius presents in the Constitutions may be fittingly applied to the General Congregation, except for differences in ways of realizing it. In agreement with this idea, governing the Society means attending to its “preservation and growth” (Const. 719) “in such a manner that its well-being and proper functioning may through the divine grace be preserved and increased for the glory of God our Lord” (Const. 789). Recognizing that this involves “the preservation and growth not only of the body or exterior of the Society but also of its spirit, and for the attainment of the objective it seeks, which is to aid souls to reach their ultimate and supernatural end” (Const. 813). That is, it is a matter of putting into play all the appropriate and convenient means, natural and supernatural, according to the due hierarchy among them, so that, responding to and cooperating with the design of God in giving life to the Society, it be maintained, strengthened, grow in vitality, and if possible, in number, to fully accomplish this design. The General Congregation will do this, following the example of the same Constitutions, providing the

Society orientations and norms which will help it better realize its end, in accordance with the proper needs of each moment.

Thus, the needs of the Society—of its persons and of its apostolic activities—, its plans, the interior and exterior challenges that it confronts, the requirements of the greater and better service that it may lend to humanity and the Church in any given moment, in accordance with its proper finality, are what constitutes the proper object of what the General Congregation ought to occupy itself with. Or, as the Formula of the Institute (n. 2) says in respect to the government of the superior general, what leads to the attainment of the end that the Society proposes. All this and only this. The rest, no matter how brilliant, attractive, and useful it might be in itself, ought only to be the legitimate object of attention of the General Congregation to the extent that it affects the being itself of the Society and its apostolic service; nothing beyond that.⁸

Its way of functioning

From a hurried or less attentive reading of the chapters of the Constitutions which treat of the way of proceeding of the General Congregation, and, beyond that, of its Formula, as well as from a superficial

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familiarity with the history of the General Congregations, one might draw the impression that it all boils down merely to the presentation of the issues that need to be treated, their discussion by the gathered fathers and their resolution by means of conclusive votes, in which the decision is made by a simple majority of votes. It would seem, besides, that the way of functioning

of the General Congregation was copied from that of legislative parliaments in which the aim is simply to arrive at a numerical majority of votes in favor of one of the options in play. Are things really like this? Decidedly, no. In the General Congregation of the Society, resolution of issues is not sought by the imposition of the will of a majority over a minority. It is the entire Society that is searching for a resolution together and not a fractured one: in

what uniquely refers to the election of the General, what would be “conducive to the greater service of God and the good governance of the Society” (Const.694); and in the treatment and resolution of other issues, “the light to perceive what decisions should be taken must come down from the First and Supreme Wisdom ” (Const.711). On this profound level, in the Congregation there are no majorities and minorities but rather a basic unanimity of shared purpose, because all are absolutely looking for the same thing: “what is conducive.” Without this fundamental unanimity, there is no true Congregation. In the parlance of the Exercises, it would need to be said that the conditions were not present to make a “good” or “sound and good” election (SpEx 169, 175).

This basic unanimity in respect to “what is conducive,” if it is authentic, would generate by itself a common essential docility, without prejudices nor preconceived positions, in respect to their possible practical concretions, and out of this, a common and shared search for these concretions. This search is not based or concretized primordially on discourses or human elements (although, in their place, neither are they to be excluded,⁹ rather, as has been said previously, in the light which descends from the First and Supreme Wisdom (Const.711). For this reason, in the election of the General, the Electors, in the context of the election, will take four days “to commend themselves to God and reflect better upon who in the whole Society might be most suitable for that office” (694); and on the day of the election itself, “the Mass of the Holy Spirit should be said, and all should attend and receive Communion (697), as a prayerful and sacramental expression of the unity of the Congregation in the same body and the same spirit; and “after all together have recited the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, they should be locked inside the place of the congregation ... until they have elected a general” (Const.698).⁼ The possibility is expressly mentioned, although it has never actually happened—that “all by a common inspiration should choose someone” (Const.700), which would be the maximum tangible expression of the underlying unanimity upon which all else depends.¹⁰ In the treatment and resolution of other matters, it is commanded to say masses and offer prayers in the place of the Congregation and in other parts of the Society, “in order to obtain grace to decide these matters as may be for the greater glory to God our Lord” (Const.711). “Later the congregation will meet in one or several sessions. The superior general first and after him the provincials, rectors, and other persons summoned to the congregation will, in the presence of all, propose the matters which they

think should be discussed, briefly giving the reasons for their opinions; and after they have seriously pondered all this and commended it to God our Lord, each one ought to put it in writing. After he has spoken his opinion he may place his written text in the center, so that those who wish to see it may state what they think in the following session" (Const.712). What is desired is that, by means of this procedure, resolution is obtained on a matter "from all or nearly all" (715). If this does not come about, four definitors will be elected who, "will meet with the superior general as often as needed and conclude whatever matters are to be treated. Should they not all agree, the side to which the majority inclines will prevail and the whole congregation will accept it as from the hand of God our Lord." [Ibid] This is a new expression of the preference for the consensus of all and a resort to the majority only when this consensus is lacking, emphasizing that the option proposed by the majority must be accepted by the entire Congregation, thus concluding the process once more in the same initial unanimity.

In this way, the possible diversity of opinions, if it does not resolve itself in the process of the common search, would be restored by the unanimity with which the Congregation accepts the final expression of the majority opinion. It is not, once and for all, the majority which has the power of decision making over the minority (or minorities,) rather the majority is generated from the fundamental unity and accompanied by it in the process of searching and which leads to the unanimity of the recognition of the final resolution.

With all these elements in view, it is clear that, although it is not said explicitly and in its distinctive terminology, the mode of functioning of the General Congregation which the Constitutions¹¹ depict is really that of a discernment realized in common—as anyone formed in the school of the Ignatian Exercises may easily understand¹²—that begins from the unanimity of purpose of all the congregants and leads to resolutions unanimously acceptable to all. It is not, even by far, a struggle between majorities and minorities and the victory of one over the other. Everyone is looking for the same thing, and all accept unanimously the result as their own, even more, "as from the hand of God our Lord" (Const.715), from whom has been sought the light and grace to "decide...as may be for the greater glory of God our Lord" (Const.711), which is what *all* seek. Thus the final result belongs to all, and once more, the Congregation, resolving and governing, creates and reinforces the unity of the Society.

2. The future congregants at GC 35: what is expected of them

In the light of what has been presented so far, the fundamental expectation of the members of the congregation is, obviously and in general terms, that they be capable of realizing, and that they in fact realize, the objects for which a General Congregation is designed, and that they function according to its proper and specific way of functioning. The Constitutions say this with these words, significant in both parts of the sentence: “these will be the persons who are most fit to take part in the congregation and whose absence will cause less harm” (Const. 692, 682), where are combined with Ignatian wisdom the requirements of the General Congregation and, of even greater importance, of the attention to the apostolic service which each one is lending. Both indications—also this last¹³—can serve to guide those in the Provincial Congregations who have to elect those who must come to the General Congregation. For its part, the Formula of the Provincial Congregation (current n. 62 §2), in indicating points about the possible candidates to be voted upon as Electors, about those whom it is fitting to become informed, if these are not sufficiently well known,¹⁴ and whether they possess qualities specifically required of them in this role, enumerate the following criteria: “If they have knowledge and understanding of the things of the Society. If they have interest in and zeal for the conservation of our Institute and for the promotion of its spirit. If they have the maturity of judgment, prudence in terms of what needs to be done and virtues besides which befit those who have to deliberate upon issues relative to the entire Society. If they often let themselves be drawn by disordinate affections.” The following paragraph of the same number adds: “It will be extremely useful if those who are elected for the General Congregation have a great knowledge of the persons and the matters concerning the Society.”¹⁵

With these elements in mind, then, what is expected today of the members of the upcoming General Congregation 35?

What inevitably comes to mind would be first to apply to the members the distinctive “Principle and Foundation” proposed by the Formula of the Institute (n. 1) to each Jesuit: “take care...first of all to keep before his eyes God and then the nature of this Institute which is, so to speak, a pathway to God, and then let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God.” It is expected, in effect, in a very special way, of the members of the future General Congregation, that is,

that they orient themselves and move decidedly along this horizon and let themselves be led by the requirements that derive from it, concentrating therein all their energies, without being concerned with anything else, or better, intensely concerned with seeking and finding in the General Congregation, for all the Society “that which is most conducive” (SpEx 23) in this historical moment for it.

Trying to be more concrete, it could be illuminating, by way of analogy, to recall what St. Ignatius says to superiors in the Constitutions, in regard to the fostering of the union of hearts: “Very especially helpful, among other qualities, will be his credit and prestige among his subjects, as well as his having and showing love and concern for them, in such a way that the subjects hold the opinion that their superior has the knowledge, desire, and ability to rule them well in our Lord” (667). Thus it could be said similarly that what is expected of the members of the upcoming General Congregation 35 is that they *know*, *desire* and *can* adequately accomplish all that the Congregation asks of them in calling them to it.

“That they may know”

In the broad sense, “knowing” would include, besides knowledge, convictions, sensibilities, the capacity for reading reality (of the world, the Church, the Society,) the capacity for discernment, for decision-making and for planning for the future, wisdom in the full sense (Biblical and non-Biblical) of the word.

In this area, it would be fitting to evoke, in first place, without fear of going too far a field or of belaboring something obvious, what St. Paul says to the Christians of Corinth¹⁶: “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” This is what is most fundamental, with no need for any further justifications, especially in this Society which bears the name of Jesus and aspires solely to collaborate in the realization of his mission in the world throughout history.

Moreover, given that the Society aims “to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross...and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman pontiff,” (Formula of the Institute, n. 1) it is obligatory to expect that those who take part in General Congregation 35,

really feel that we are part of the Church militant in this historical moment, so their efforts may help the Society center more and more its service to the Church in these times, as she needs and desires.

It is expected of them that they know the Society thorough and through: its spirituality, its specific way of being and proceeding along with the fundamental attitudes and the specific forms of actuation which are derived from our institute, its history as an interpretation and living realization of our entire Institute throughout time, its current reality—with its richness and its poverty, with its moments of glories and its times pettiness, its strengths and its weaknesses, its profound unity and its disconcerting dispersion and diversity—what it is that the Spirit of God is doing and awaking in it, the calls of the Spirit pointing out new roads to discover, new services which the Spirit is asking it to render. All this, in order to proclaim their vision to the Society in a convincing and credible way, with true authority more than formal, which derives from the soundness of its content, of the quality of the process of arriving at it and the way of expressing it, to strengthen the Society in its original identity as an instrument of God for the spread of his Kingdom, and to see that it progresses creatively on its road.

On the other hand, this will also require knowing how to read reality and the history of the world in which the Society lives and works and which it seeks to serve and help through the lens of salvation: to know anew and in a concrete sense, in the best way possible, experiential and com-passionate, “the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way,”¹⁷ as well as their “groaning in travail...as we wait for adoption as sons,”¹⁸ and the incessant and multiform work, more hidden than visible, of the Spirit of God helping it in its work, through much fatigue and sorrow, lights and shadows, progress and backsliding, brilliant conquests and painful and humiliating defeats. All this in order to be able to help the Society, “having the greater service of God and the more universal good before one’s eyes the guiding norm,” to discover where its apostolic service is most necessary (the “greater need,” where greater fruit is likely to be reaped, “in places where our indebtedness is greater,” where more influence is possible through the multiplication of our actions by those we serve, where there are greater difficulties to confront “especially if it is an important place” (Const.622).

All this obliges us to keep hoping that, in addition to being properly informed, they be capable of making—or at least of understanding—a competent analysis of the social, cultural and religious reality of the world, and above all, know how to discern, making use of it, what is most fitting “for the attainment of the objective it (the Society) seeks” (Const.813) in the present moment, in accordance with its proper mission.

And, as it is quite normal and acceptable that not everyone know everything and about everything, it is to be hoped that they know their limits and know how to doubt and to listen to each other, both during the preparation phase of the Congregation as well as during it, to those who can illuminate them on some matters, and to ask them for the help they need. For although it is hoped that they be competent, it would not be right to expect or ask them to be self-sufficient.¹⁹

Finally (although the enumeration of possible “knowings” could be prolonged even further,) it could be hoped that the members of the upcoming General Congregation know how to succeed in formulating their resolutions adequately—understandably, exactly and precisely, unambiguously, illuminating and stimulating while at the same time attractive, simply, and emptied of rhetorical superfluities— so that those of the Society, to whom they are destined, receive them, as much as possible, with gusto, and can understand them easily and put them into practice, with discernment and wisdom, certainly, but without hesitation nor vacillations.²⁰

This entails, as can be seen, a complex and multiple sense of “knowing,” which is hoped for in the members of the congregation; a knowing composed and seasoned with many different and complementary elements, all of them oriented towards gaining wisdom in the decisions that need to be made. In this sense, it also ought to be said, paraphrasing what the Constitutions (729) say of the superior general, that, although learning and knowledge (“doctrine”) are highly necessary, still more necessary is prudence, with the gift of deliberation and wisdom in decision-making (or “discerning charity,” according to the happy Ignatian expression) along with experience in spiritual and interior matters to be able to discern the various spirits and to give counsel and orient the Society according to the way they esteem to be the will of God for it, here and now. That is to say, a knowing which becomes “wisdom” of a higher order.

“That they may desire”

It is not difficult to hope that those who have received from the Society the responsibility of making such momentous decisions on its behalf and that of its members, as those who will take part in the General Congregation, will thoroughly commit themselves, with decision and generosity, to the task they have received and to all that goes along with its accomplishment. This would be, with various nuances, what would enter into the “desire” that is expected from them. “To desire,” as is well known, is a central verb in the parlance and spirituality of St. Ignatius, which refers to the determination of the will to choose or to accomplish something, in which is emphasized, with characteristic signs, the firmness of the determination, but above all, the integration and identification of one’s own desire in and with the desire of God for oneself.²¹

In this way of looking at things, it is hoped that the members of the congregation, above all, will desire to set out to seek and discover what God desires of and from the Society in this historical moment. This desiring, that of God, is the primordium and the rule for all human desiring; and no matter how important our decisions are, God’s desires are still more important. In order to reach this point, they must put aside, in Ignatian words, “self-love, *self-will*, and self-interests” (SpEx 189). It is hoped, therefore, that, from the start, they would leave to one side (or at least in suspension,) their own desires—their wishes, their particular preferences, their own projects and plans, no matter how well-founded and brilliant they might be—to open themselves up to the will of God, which is what the Society is truly interested in, not their own will (or the latter only to the extent to which they coincide with the former). This requires—and is expected of them—patience, forgetting of oneself, the renunciation of all grandstanding; in a word, abnegation, in order to stand aside and allow to unfold, without mixture or impurities, the desire and the plan of God, who is the true protagonist of the being and the activity of the Society. It is hoped, in consequence, that they will renounce with generosity and decision any effort to manipulate the will of God, understood in many ways, open and hidden, so that “God will come to where this person desires” (SpEx 154). Persons molded as they will be, in the heart of Ignatian spirituality, will willingly guarantee, that although it will not be easy, this is the way it will be.

It is hoped that, once the will of God has been discovered, or, at least distinguished with sufficient likelihood, by way of the signs of confirmation which the Spirit normally gives, it be received with openness of heart, with magnanimity and with decision, overcoming, if these are lacking, surprise, reservations, fears and resistances. Ignatian “desire”—as seen in the Exercises and in the Constitutions—is a firm and resolute desire, of the “third class of persons (SpEx 155) that follows through with all means necessary to make it effective. Only in this way will they be able to propose to and command the Society that these desires be acknowledged and brought to life.

These basic “desires” come along with others, which also require generosity and sacrifice. They imply offering and dedicating “themselves wholeheartedly for this labor” (SpEx 96), knowing that the work of a general congregation in the Society, its accomplishment and development is arduous and austere, and requires, apart from intense dedication (reading documents, reflection and prayer about them,) bringing together all that one can to the common task with the necessary openness and flexibility to perceive and evaluate other points of view, and with them in mind, revise and adjust ones own. And again, a desire at once firm and at the same time disinterested, which obliges one to put into play the abnegation of ones own desires and a constant critical reserve in respect to the same, for the common good of the Society, which is searched for in common in the Congregation.

As Ignatians, it may be hoped that the desire of the members of the upcoming General Congregation be accompanied by the “right intention” that a Jesuit is urgently called to always have, but especially in important decisions, both personal and corporate, to “aim always at serving and pleasing the Divine Goodness for its own sake,”(Const.288) holding before oneself, as the basic orientation for assuring “the greater service of God and the more universal good (Const.622) “and not for any other benefit” (Const.813).

“That they may be able”

Here it is not a matter, nor is it in the Ignatian text taken as the starting point of this development, of “being able” in the sense of “having the authority for something,” but rather of “being capable.” One would hope, therefore, of the members of the congregation that, beyond knowing and

desiring, they be effectively capable, —or, at least, would do everything possible to make themselves so—of doing that which the Society is asking of them with their appointment to the General Congregation. Much of what could be said here has already been said before from other perspectives. Some brief complementary indications, therefore, will be sufficient.

The first would make reference to interior freedom, grounded indifference in the face of diverse possible opinions, as long as one does not see which would be most convenient, and in the realm of possible disordered affections that might condition them, indispensable in the members of the congregation in order for them to be able to make, as befit and with guarantees of assurance, the decisions that are incumbent upon them. Of the general it is said that “he ought also to be free from all inordinate affections, having them tamed and mortified so that they will not disturb the judgment of his intellect” (Const.726). And, translating the same to those who may be chosen for the General Congregation, the Formula of the Provincial Congregation (n. 62 §3) asks that, among other things, as has already been said, possible candidates should be evaluated as to whether or not they usually let themselves be swayed by disordered affections. Although this alone is not sufficient, it is absolutely necessary so that the members of the congregation can accomplish what is hoped of them.

But, on top of this indispensable base, it is necessary that they be, positively, persons who are profoundly and unequivocally “lovingly attached to the genuine teaching of Christ our Lord” (SpEx 164), by a personal love of Him who has taken him to himself and in response to his impulse “to accept and desire with all possible energy whatever Christ our Lord has loved and embraced (SpEx 101), and thus their decisions for the Society may be totally in accord with it, with its style and way of being and proceeding.

Finally, that they would be persons completely committed to the good of the Society, its “conservation and increase” in its well being, so that it may lend to the Church and to humanity the “greater service.” The Constitutions ask this of the general: that he be :”quite read to accept death, when necessary, for the good of the Society in the service of Jesus Christ our God and Lord” (Const.728). The Formula of the Provincial Congregation, in the place cited recently, says the same in similar terms in relation to those who may be elected for the General Congregation: persons “committed to the conservation of our Institute and in promoting its spirit and zealous for it.”

These and other aspects that could be presented in relation to what is necessary or might help so that those called to the General Congregation “can” fulfill their task as is hoped of them, point to the necessity that they dispose themselves—in the Ignatian sense of the term—always and progressively, with all types of natural and supernatural helps, for it and to increase as much as possible this capacity.

**3. “If any of the aforementioned qualities should be wanting...”
(Const. 735)**

In referring to the candidates who will be calling at the doors of the Society asking to be admitted to it, the Constitutions have the following text: “To speak in general of those who should be admitted, the greater the number of natural and infused gifts someone has from God our Lord which are useful for what the Society aims at in his divine service, and the more assurance the Society has about these gifts, the more suitable will the candidate be to be admitted” (147). This basic principle of natural and supernatural wisdom is directly applicable, by analogy, to those who are designated to take part in the General Congregation: to the extent that they are capable of desiring, knowing and actually accomplishing what is requested of them, the more apt they will be to fulfill the hopes that the Society places in them. This is obvious, and requires no further explication than what has already been given in all that has proceeded. Besides, we have already heard St. Ignatius say, enunciating a similar principle for our case that “those who are to go to the general congregation...will be the persons who are most fit to take part” (Const. 692).

*Spiritual discernment
springs from charity*

But he was a realist, and recognized that “if someone lacks one or another of those qualifications...and if it is judged in the Lord that this lack is compensated for by his other qualities and that, when everything is taken into account, his admission would be a service to God our Lord and conducive to the end of the Society, a dispensation may be granted him by the superior general...” (Const. 162). In a similar way, after having assembled a unsurpassable and very difficult to attain picture of the qualities required

in the superior general, he finds himself obligated to conclude: "If any of the aforementioned qualities be wanting, he should at least not lack great probity and love for the Society, nor good judgment accompanied by sound learning. In other matters, the aids which he will have... will be able through God's help and favor to supply for much" (Const.735). The same may occur with those called to the general congregation (or, at least, with some of them): they may lack some of the qualities and capacities alluded to and others necessary or helpful—although some of these are really indispensable—in order to be able to respond to the hopes which the Society places in them. Even in this case, following the thought of St. Ignatius, it can be supposed that they be persons most outstanding in every virtue, most deserving in the Society, and known as such" [Ibid.], and in any case "selected persons" (657, 791, 819) who deserve the confidence being placed in them, something that cannot be lacking in order for this confidence to be sustained and effected, and which certainly goes along the lines of "*goodness* [fundamental rectitude], *love for the Society and good judgment* accompanied [as much as possible] by *sound learning*."

To this ought to be added the helps they will have; among them, the help of the other members of the congregation and, most especially the assiduous prayers that the entire Society will offer for them and has already begun to do since the convocation of the congregation (Const.693).

Translated by: Robert E. Hurd, S.J.

¹ Fr. Arrupe gave the members of GC 31 the opportunity to freely participate in a triduum of preparation for the second portion of the same, three conferences-meditations with the titles: "*On Making a Good and Sound Election*," "*An Instrument United with God*," and "*Complete Union in the Lord' for the Society*." (The original Latin text is found in *Documenta varia* (GC 31, ARSI, pp. 458-479; Spanish translation in *The Documents of GC XXXI*, Zaragoza 1966, pp. 361-380.) Similarly, during the first days of GC 32 he also gave the members three conferences-meditations with the titles: "*The Challenge of the World and the Mission of the Society*," "*Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit*" "and *In Him Only Placing our Hope*." (Spanish text in General Congregation XXXII of the Society of Jesus, Madrid 1975, pp.. 285-336.) The conferences-meditations of Fr. Kolvenbach, pronounced during the first days of GC 34 were entitled "*On the Call or Vocation of this Congregation*," "*On the Mission and Body of the Society*," and "*On our Law and Our Life*." (English text in *Acta Romana Societatis Jesu XXI*. [1994-95], pp. 646-667). All these, although given in different moments, show, despite the differences of style in their formulations,

a noticeable basic consistency in the perception of what was in play and the best procedures to succeed in it. Their reading may be very profitable also today for the members of the upcoming GC 35.

² As is stated literally in Canon 631 §1 of the Code of Canon Law. For what refers to the participation of the members see the conciliar decree *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 14 and canon 631, §3.

³ Fr. Arrupe reminded the General Congregation of this in his discourse, opening the second part of GC 31, on September 8, 1966: "There are some of NN who think that the General Congregation must give solutions, even doctrinal ones, to every problem which exists in the Society. They forget that the General Congregation is a legislative body which enacts practical norms and criteria without daring to proclaim doctrinal solutions [(Spanish text in *General Congregation XXXI*, p. 385.)

⁴ The most recent General Congregations, especially the last two, may have given a distorted image of the General Congregation in some of their decrees, favoring declarations more doctrinal or inspirational—or even meditative—in nature decisive.. Without needing to revert to the plain and dry normativity of previous times, it might be good to try to find a proper balance more in conformity with the proper role of the General Congregation.

⁵ The Formula of the Institute (no. 2) requires the convening of the GC only to establish and change the Constitutions, resolving doubts about the Formula itself, and for other matters of greater importance, leaving to the superior general, helped as much as he sees fit by the counsel of his brothers, the faculty of missioning and arranging other matters by himself which do not appear of such importance, as he judges in the Lord for the glory of God and the common good, according to the Constitutions. These Constitutions, along these lines attribute to the superior general "for the good government of the Society...complete authority over it, in order to build it up" (736). According to this conception, it would have to be said that it is a matter of two separate areas of government of the Society, that of the General Congregation and that of the superior general, without establishing that the latter be subordinate to the former in his proper area. The general is not merely an executor of the decisions of the Congregation; rather he has a particular area of authority, that of the ordinary life of the Society. Also in this regard it should not escape our attention how much Ignatius desired and even insisted upon limiting to the minimum the convening of the General Congregation, considering the "work and distraction of the whole Society" that it entails" (Const. 677, 680-81, 719, 722).

⁶ Insisting that "thus it is clear that those who are physically ill are not included, nor those who are in places very distant, for example, in the Indies, nor those who have in hand undertakings of major importance which cannot be forsaken without serious harm" (682).

⁷ It is important to note that the term "delegate," which circulates freely in current parlance, especially in some geographic-linguistic areas, is not an official term of our Institute to designate the members of the General (or Provincial) Congregation

and can lead to the error of thinking that those elected by the provinces (or regions) come to the General Congregation as true delegates of them, which is not the case. For this reason, the term ought not to be used. The official documents (Formulas of the Provincial Congregation and of the General Congregation) never use this term, rather the term “Electors” to refer to the members of the General Congregation sent by the provinces or regions. (It appears for the first time in the official editions of the decrees of General Congregation 34, in giving the list of the Congregants under the title of *List of Delegates*. This was an error which ought to be corrected on the first occasion and so return to the traditional usage up until General Congregation 33, unless there be changes in the official texts on this point.)

⁸ In the earlier history of the General Congregations, which considered almost exclusively matters internal to the Society or its legislation, this way of conceiving things had been very clear. More recently, when the Congregations have also had to occupy themselves, and with more intensity, with external concerns of its apostolic activities, analyzing the objective implications of this, some have come to believe that the GC can treat any issue at all of interest to the Society, even if it has no special relation to its life and mission. In reality, if the situation is examined well, one can see it has not been so, nor could it be.

⁹ As can be seen by the information which must be sought for the election of the General (694) and by the interchange of opinions in the handling of issues (Const. 694,712).

¹⁰ In agreement with this basic presumption of unanimity of intent, there is found in the Constitutions (Const.701) a surprising prevision, that, once the name of the one who has obtained more than half of all the votes is proclaimed, the one who is presiding over the election “should ask the others if they agree on the one who has been chosen by the greater part, and no matter how they reply, he will formulate the decree of election.” This practice, which has never been used nor has it been recognized in the Formula of the Congregation, aimed to have it appear that the one chosen by the majority had been chosen unanimously by all; so that, once reverence had been expressed to the one elected, all would indeed “recite together the *Te Deum laudamus*”

¹¹ The Formula of the General Congregation, under the covering of its proper nature more regimented and procedural, depicts basically a way of proceeding in the Congregation, copied from the Constitutions, as is seen in an attentive comparative reading of both texts and of the constant referral of the Formula to the text of the Constitutions.

¹² Frs. Arrupe and Kolvenbach emphasize this point in their texts which were previously cited: “*On Making a Sound and Good Election*” and “*Under the Guidance of the Holy Spirit*” (Arrupe) and “*On the Call or Vocation of this Congregation*” (Kolvenbach) It may be illustrative to reproduce synthetically some words of Arrupe at GC 32 on the way in which this spiritual discernment is in fact carried out in common in the reality of each day in the General Congregation:

“We are all convinced that our duty consists in seeking, finding and formulating what we consider is the will of God. (...). But on this point, as in all the others, we must respect reality and recognize the peculiar circumstances that necessarily are given in an assembly of such a type as ours. Because it is one thing to carry out a community discernment in a community of 10 or 12 persons, and another to do the same in a group of 236 persons. (...). There are other ways of doing the same here: through prayer, interpersonal relationships, celebration of the Eucharist, private conversations, meetings in groups (linguistic or by Assistancies.) But in the Aula, the discernment has to be limited to the interchange of opinions, to the exposition of arguments presented objectively after they have been studied and reflected upon. In this way will be created the spirit of a true body, which deliberates in common and will help each one to form his own conscience and opinion. (...) The true final discernment, for which we must prepare ourselves, is that which is realized in the plenary session of the Congregation. In it the Congregation constitutes a single body, which, united by charity and articulated by the unity of the charism, of the mission, of the end sought, of the criteria to be met, strives to interpret the will of God in its deliberations. Spiritual discernment springs from charity. If we wish to prepare our minds to accomplish the best spiritual discernment, we will need to foster the maximum of charity and the mutual union of hearts, even when holding diverse opinions, so that our General Congregation may become “a single heart and a single soul.” (*Acta Congregationis Generalis XXXVII*[ARSI], Actio 18, pp. 87-88.) The same Arrupe had addressed, on December 25, 1971, in view of the preparation for GC 32, to all the Society a letter on spiritual discernment in common (*Acta Romana XV* [1967-1972,] pp. 733-767).

¹³ In contrast with this, one may read in the letter of December 15, 1944, of Fr. John L. Swain, Vicar, to all the Provincials and Viceprovincials, on the preparation for GC 32, the following: “I beg Your Reverence, in the brief allocution which must be given at the beginning of the Provincial Congregation or in another opportune moment, to explain the cause for which it has been convened and what will be treated in it, that you address with the congregated Fathers the qualities required in the Electors and advise them of the necessity of sending to Rome the most apt, even at the risk of sacrifice to other apostolic works.” *Acta Romana XIV* (1961-1966) p. 524.

¹⁴ While at the same time understanding that what is prescribed in the current n. 9 §4 of the Formula of the Congregation must be observed: “It is forbidden to all, including those who cannot vote in the elections, by virtue of holy obedience, from the day of the convocation of the Provincial Congregation, by himself or through anyone else, directly or indirectly, to seek either the election of himself or any other or to exclude anyone from the previous election for the Provincial Congregation or in the election of Electors for the General Congregation, of Procurator or of Substitutes, and that no one may vote for himself.”

¹⁵ It is helpful to recall here that the current text of the Formula of the Provincial

Congregation comes, through numerous revisions and retouchings, from what was formally approved by GC IV (1581,) compiling not a few elements that had been already established by previous General Congregations, beginning from the second (1565). Cf. A. de Aldama/I. Echarte, *Congregación de Provincia*, in DHCJ, p. 913. The points of information collected above come from this basic text.

¹⁶ I Cor 2:1-2.

¹⁷ Vatican Council II, Constitution The Church in the Modern World, n. 1.

¹⁸ Rom 8:22-23.

¹⁹ Provisionally, the Formula of the General Congregation, n. 16 §2, says: "Having taken into account the competence of the members of the congregation themselves, the Superior (or Vicar) General will take care that there be in Rome a sufficient number of other experts, to assist the commissions in the consideration of the issues."

²⁰ The "style of the documents" has been an explicit object of debate in the recent General Congregations (a bit in the 31st and more in the three which followed.) In earlier times, when it was taken for granted and universally accepted that the product would consist uniquely of "decrees," and detailed and normative decrees at that, there was no place for such a debate. Now things have changed. In any case it would be desirable, and indeed to be hoped that the upcoming General Congregation's decrees be practically oriented, not merely expositive and exhortative, that they be sober and accessible, not rhetorical nor complicated, that they be humble and realistic, adjusted to the real possibilities of the Society, and that be precise and correct in their expressions, not approximate or hyperbolic, nor inexact.

²¹ The entire process of the Spiritual Exercises, in the midst of its enormous complexity, revolves around "preparing and disposing our soul. to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God's will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul." (SpEx 1)