

MISSION, IDENTITY, AND CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIETY OF JESUS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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The most uphill phase of a General Congregation is its communication to the entire Society of Jesus, its members, works and persons who share the apostolic work. Then follows perhaps the most complex phase, that is, its assimilation by each one of the persons committed to the mission, so that the General Congregation can become a source of personal conversion and institutional transformation and so come alive in the Society.

The 35th General Congregation has entered into this latter stage. Its long preparation, the initial curiosity to follow the events live, listening to the personal experience of the delegates upon their return to their provinces and the first acquaintance with the results through an initial reading of the documents that were produced—all have past. The responsibility of making a reality the conclusions and mandates of the General Congregation belongs not only to the new General Superior and his team or of provincial superiors. The 35th General Congregation is a call to each one of the members of the apostolic body of the Society of Jesus, to all those persons, Jesuits or not, who find meaning for their lives in the struggle for the justice of the Gospel and the dialogue of cultures as their way of contributing to a more human world.

Discerning the mission requires conversion

In order to fruitfully receive GC35, one must open oneself to an interior process of spiritual conversion, and so experience an “epistemological break” which makes way for a new vision of the reality in which human beings live today to whom the Church is sent to announce the Good News. In better words, in order that GC35 might produce fruit, one must enter, *with great spirit and generosity*, into a process of discernment through which the Society of Jesus, as a universal apostolic body, chooses what better leads (*magis*) to following the impulses of the Holy Spirit to make present the loving face of God, the Father of Jesus Christ, at the dawn of a new epoch of humanity.

GC35 partakes in an Ignatian examen¹ proposed for the entire apostolic and religious body of the Society of Jesus, moved interiorly by a renewed consciousness of its own fragility. The Society of Jesus knows itself to be *less* than ever, full of personal and institutional limitations, but nevertheless, explicitly called by the vicar of Christ on earth to place itself on the frontiers² of this world to help make possible this other more human world to which the hopes of the poor of the earth are clinging.

In an ecclesial moment very distinct from the period after Vatican Council II; fifty years after the renewal movements of 1968 and the decade of the 70's of the 20th century, GC35 recognizes the existence of a new opportunity for evangelization to convert to Jesus Christ on the way towards a new humanity.

It is for this reason that GC35 never, or almost never, refers to the ministries, apostolates, works, or actions in which Jesuits are engaged. It situates itself on another plane, that of understanding what it is that the Lord and his Church are asking for in this change of epoch of humanity. GC35 places itself in readiness to be sent to new situations of humanity, sets out to create the conditions to review, to examine, with an open and generous spirit, what the Society of Jesus is doing in this moment and how it does it. GC35, in the light of the new challenges for evangelization and of the Society of Jesus' being sent out to the frontiers by the Church, boldly

decided to prepare a long term apostolic plan³ as the necessary and proper instrument to respond as an international organization to the global situations which characterize the world of the 21st century.

CG 35 was convened to elect the successor of Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach as Superior General.⁴ Also on this occasion, hundreds of postulates were sent in from throughout the Society which offered the GC an enormous array of themes and issues to take up. In spite of this, the Congregation chose to take another route. There was no doubt that Jesuits and the Society of Jesus have their hands full with many “issues” and complex apostolic responsibilities to attend to. GC35 felt, however, that the treatment of these issues is the function of the ordinary governance of the Society and the daily tasks of Jesuits and

the awareness that it is the world-human society, the people, most especially the poor—that is the locus of life and action of the Society of Jesus

those responsible for the different ministries. In contrast, the responsibility of the General Congregation, after electing the new head of the ordinary governance, was to dedicate itself to discernment on identity and mission, which would serve as a bond for the *union of minds and hearts* of a universal apostolic body of the Catholic Church, at the service of the mission of Christ in the world of today and of the future.

In this sense, an attentive reading of the documents leads to the following interpretative hypothesis: GC35 touched upon one theme alone: the identity and mission of the Society of Jesus, a universal apostolic body at the service of the church, called to evangelize in this new epoch of human history. By first setting down the fundamentals necessary for accomplishing the review of its entire religious and apostolic life, and putting its confidence in God and in him only its hope, the Society might then formulate the apostolic plan most suitable and efficacious way to serve Christ, the church and the world.

CG 35 renewed the awareness that it is *the world*—human society, the people, most especially the poor—that is the locus of life and action of the Society of Jesus. The awareness that led it to appreciate the depth of the transformation which today’s world is experiencing, coinciding with the most lucid analyses that declare that humanity is living through an historic

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change of epoch, which signifies the opening of entirely new opportunities for the humanization of history, in which the announcement of the Gospel has new possibilities of being the yeast of life which God desires and places at the disposition of all human beings.

We still find ourselves barely able to even stutter about what this new change of epoch will turn out to be. We are more successful in perceiving the limitations of the epoch which is coming to an end. We recognize what the industrial era and modernity have signified in their contribution to the humanization of history. At the same time, however, it is becoming easier to see their structural inability to achieve social justice, the overcoming of poverty, the recognition of the dignity of all cultures, the guarantee of protection of human rights for everyone, and the preservation of the natural environment necessary for life to flourish.

In order to make sense of what we are experiencing, we still fall back on epithets such as post-modernism or post-Christianity; we strain ourselves to describe the newness that we feel being born and growing beyond signaling the continued technological advancement, the growth in the speed of global communications or the importance of knowledge. The new epoch remains a challenge to our understanding and the discernment of the role that we are called to fulfill in it. In this context GC35 affirms the faith-justice-dialogue-culture mission to which the Society has committed itself in the last decades in a confirmation⁵ which, at the same time, invites the Society to deepen its current implications and to open itself to new dimensions of the same mission in a changing world.

If living in a change of epoch implies a moment of transition on the world level, the Church and the Society of Jesus must renew their capacity for apostolic discernment, beginning with a valiant personal and institutional conversion, which will open up a new opportunity for personal and apostolic discernment, the ordinary mechanism for making decisions in agreement with the *way of proceeding* of the Society.

It is Jesus Christ, through the church, who calls

GC35 was a profound ecclesial experience. Its members had the experience of becoming one in Christ, at the service of the church. An ecclesial experience which was lived out as a process of conversion,

beginning with the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI to deepen the sense of the fourth vow as a specific characteristic of the Society of Jesus and the disposition to receive the mission directly from the Vicar of Christ, as St. Ignatius so often said and captured in the Constitutions.⁶

The Pope decidedly and clearly confirmed the mission of the Society of Jesus, aware of the challenges of the present times and of the opportunity which is opening to evangelization. Benedict XVI said to the Society of Jesus: "...the Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach."⁷ The service of faith and the promotion of justice take on specific characteristics in today's world in which peoples "are far away not so much from the geographical point of view as from the cultural one,"⁸ and so "the task of facing and entering into a dialogue with very diverse social and cultural contexts and the different mentalities of today's world is one of the most difficult and demanding."⁹ The Pope does not neglect to remember where the Society is sent: ... "whoever wishes to make himself a companion of Jesus, [will] really share [his] love of the poor."¹⁰ The Pope encourages the Society to pursue and renew the mission among and with the poor, to dedicate itself to understanding and combating the structural causes of poverty, at the same time that conditions are created to change the heart of the human person itself, a task for which the Spiritual Exercises are a privileged instrument.

The Church recognizes the need for "people familiar with the things of God" from a personal experience of Christ,¹¹ solid and deep faith, of a serious culture and a genuine human and social sensitivity, of religious priests who devote their lives to stand on those frontiers"¹²...and invites the Society to guarantee the conditions for a corresponding formation of its members in virtue and science.

In receiving its mission from the Vicar of Christ, the Society of Jesus is invited to give a response coherent with its identity and charism.¹³ The companion of Jesus is part of the body of Christ which is the Church. The spirituality which animates the Society of Jesus is ecclesial, carrying with itself a *feeling with the Church* as an immediate consequence of love for Jesus Christ who endures in her. The Ignatian word *feeling* locates us at the level of the affect. The spirituality derived from the experience of the Exercises brings us beyond an acceptance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as a higher level of an organizational structure of which the Society of Jesus is

a part as an institution and the Jesuit as a member. The process of ordering the affect that is produced during the spiritual experience of the one making the Exercises, who puts his absolute in the unconditional love of God and converts him into a disciple of Christ by love, animated by his Spirit, leads to loving the Church and the one who has received the responsibility of being at its head.

In converting this spiritual experience into a characteristic of the Society of Jesus, St. Ignatius proposes a special link to the Pope through the

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specific vow by one who converts this love of the Church of Jesus Christ into a true availability to receive a mission directly from the successor of Peter, the one who has the better vision of what better leads (*magis*) to an effective service of evangelization. By means of the fourth vow, “our principle and foundation,” the entire body of the

Society of Jesus places itself at the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church through the “Petrine ministry,” in order to contribute in the most efficient way to the announcement of the Kingdom of God in human history.¹⁴

For the Jesuit, *seeking and finding* the will of God for his life unites him to religious obedience and to the Church. Religious obedience is the key to the union of the apostolic body for serving the mission of Christ and finding the will of God is an ecclesial experience, for “The Church is the mediation of the Word of God and the sacrament of our salvation in spite of the imperfections of her children.”¹⁵

This is one of the “tensions” proper to the Ignatian charism which characterize the daily life of the Society of Jesus and of its members. The Society is deeply grateful for its vocation of service to the Church and wants to respond to the mission received with all the availability of the companion of Jesus. The Church sends the Society of Jesus to the frontiers of our time, aware of the specific difficulties of evangelization in those spaces in which it is necessary to invent paths and build bridges. Jesuits accept this challenge, aware of all the risks, tensions, and the possibility of intra-ecclesial conflicts which this implicitly brings.

Fidelity to a mission which places Jesuits in situations which are not simple cannot be, therefore, mechanical but rather creative, with all the risks that this implies.¹⁶ Frequently the result is tension with the local hierarchies of the Church or with ecclesiastical bodies of different levels which generate situations of incomprehension and even conflict which tend to blow out of all proportion. “It saddens us, Holy Father –Fr. Adolfo Nicolás says¹⁷—when the inevitable deficiencies and superficialities of some among us are at times used to dramatize and represent as conflicts and clashes what are often only manifestations of limits and human imperfections, or inevitable tensions of everyday life.”

This dimension of “ecclesial experience” of GC35 signifies an important realization of one of the characteristic aspects of the identity of the Society of Jesus and a conscious renewal of its availability to be sent wherever the greater and better (*magis*) service to the Church can be lent. It is an invitation to a deepening of personal and apostolic discernment of each and every Jesuit, community and work, working towards finding ever better ways of responding in creative fidelity to this aspect of the vocation of the Society of Jesus.

The Identity of the Body which is called and sent

“Inculturation” was one of the axes around which was envisioned the challenge of the renewal of religious life based upon the horizons proposed by Vatican Council II. As a result of this process, moved forward with great commitment and seriousness, the Society of Jesus is today a multicultural apostolic body in the composition of its members, in its relationships with others persons, peoples and institutions, in its Christian spiritual experience and in its focus on the situations that affect human beings, especially the poorest of the poor. The Society of Jesus sees itself enriched by this complex multicultural presence within itself and in its apostolic undertakings.

Given this new richness, these new horizons which have opened up in this historic epoch characterized by its global nature, the radical change in the role of Christianity and other religions in the conformation of societies demands a reflection on the identity of an organization with a long tradition, a presence throughout the length and breadth of the world, with a universal vocation and strong local roots in a great variety of situations.

The identity of the Society of Jesus is closely linked to its mission, which is also its reason for being. The struggle for justice which arises from faith is incarnated by this multicultural body and inspires an enormous gamut of actions of new forms of social, economic and political relations which approach ever more this “justice of the gospel.” The overcoming of modernity, while taking advantage as much as possible of its legacy, places important challenges before humanity. Some of these are: the overcoming of poverty, the reestablishment of ecological equilibrium in defense of life, the deepening of democracy¹⁸ through the production of the “common”¹⁹ by “citizens of the world.”

The explosion of communications, which characterizes the epoch which is emerging in human history, opens enormous possibilities for acting as a body in an organic and flexible way, which combines taking advantage of the individual and local differences with the capacity to identify the common, sharing the same universal horizon and acting as one flexible organization. The image of the *network of networks* best describes this type of *body* which makes it possible for religious institutions such as the Society of Jesus to accomplish what has been an intuition since its origins.²⁰

The Society of Jesus, servant of the mission of Christ, defines itself in GC35 as “collaborator.” By locating collaboration *in the heart* of the mission, GC35 establishes it as a characteristic of the identity of the Society of Jesus, formed by *persons with others*, according to the happy expression of Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, assumed by GC34, which already declared this dimension to be a central aspect of the identity of the Jesuit.²¹

CG 35 amplified this way of understanding *collaboration* as a characteristic of the identity of the Jesuit and the Society of Jesus: “We are enriched by members of our own faith, but also by peoples from other religious traditions, those women and men of goodwill from all nations and cultures, with whom we labor in seeking a more just world...”²² Jesuits are, therefore, “men of collaboration”²³, having realized that: ... “[Collaboration] is a grace given to us in this moment, one consistent with our Jesuit way of proceeding,”²⁴ from which have resulted abundant blessings.²⁵

The question of the “apostolic subject” of the mission of the Society of Jesus has been once again given center stage. The Spirit moves anew in drawing out the practical consequences of recognizing that we have received a vocation which is shared with others;²⁶ our identity is defined as servant and collaborator in a mission which is also shared. There remain, nevertheless, questions which cannot be avoided in the process of personal

and institutional discernment and conversion to which GC directs us. How ought we to enter into collaboration with others in our conception of a universal body? How ought we relate with these others in the mission? How can we advance effectively towards becoming a Society of Jesus which is more “collaborative?” Would the balance/equilibrium be better if our center of gravity were moved away from “ours” towards “others?”

In this context, GC35 addressed the theme of *Ignatian* or *Jesuit* identity of the apostolic works in which can be found as wide a range of forms of collaboration as the situations to which these apostolic works respond.²⁷ Just as the mission

is shared, within the apostolic works the management responsibilities are also shared between Jesuits and persons who belong to different spiritual or religious traditions, as well as with

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others who do not share the same faith. Fidelity to this *sign of the times* requires clarity in regard to the mission of each apostolic work and the proper role of each person, along with team work, and the capacity of discernment in making decisions and genuine evaluation.²⁸

The identity of the Society of Jesus also includes this capacity of living and sustaining the tension God-world. *Our way of proceeding* understands mission as finding the divine will in all the wrinkles of the complexity of the human reality. “This mission of attempting “to feel and to taste” (*sentir y gustar*) the presence and activity of God in all the persons and circumstances of the world places us Jesuits at the center of a tension pulling us both to God and to the world at the same time. Thus arises, for Jesuits on mission, a set of polarities, Ignatian in character, that accompanies our being firmly rooted in God at all times, while simultaneously being plunged into the heart of the world.”²⁹

The key to the identity of the Society of Jesus is the personal relationship of each one of its members with Jesus Christ, the only image of God,³⁰ responding to his call to become *companions of Jesus*. “Jesuits know who they are by looking at him.”³¹ The surprise of finding persons so different in age, culture, sensibility, thought, ways of doing things, as Jesuits are, and who are at the same time “remarkably united” can only be explained by this foundational experience of having been chosen to become a *companion of*

Jesus, as a response to the invitation each one has received. "We Jesuits, then, find our identity not alone but in companionship: in companionship with the Lord, who calls, and in companionship with others who share this call."³² The Society of Jesus lives this unity in its multicultural body as a mystery and a gift.

As a result, the identity and mission of the Society of Jesus includes the consecrated life and the companions who make up the community; "...indeed, identity, community, and mission are a kind of triptych shedding light on how our companionship is best understood."³³

Ignatius and the first companions saw in obedience what it was that was distinctive about the identity of the Society of Jesus.³⁴ It is the consequence of a mystical experience which leads to a radicality in the following of the Lord, with whom one has become identified, and from this choice a life of *companions* with the one goal of doing the will of God. This same experience continues in the Society of Jesus; its Constitutions devise a way for persons, who obtain their interior freedom by putting all their confidence in God and choose the link of obedience to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ as his *companions*, totally available for the service of the mission of evangelization.³⁵

It is not easy in the postmodern context to share the experience of finding in obedience the source of interior freedom and of personal realization. This is the heart of the spiritual experience of Jesus which chooses to live out in its fullness the style of Jesus; his giving of himself is the way of fulfilling himself as a human being.³⁶ Furthermore, it is a way of living values appreciated in the contemporary culture, such as the respect for the human person and his or her rights, the openness to profound dialogue from which will arise the conditions for creating a community of solidarity which is born from the recognition of brotherhood as the essential link between human beings.³⁷

The practice of obedience in the Society of Jesus is only possible if it is based on responsible love among its members, the full confidence in one's brothers and the companionship around the person of the Lord.³⁸ Life in the Society of Jesus requires the proper equilibrium between the care of the person (*cura personalis*) and apostolic efficiency (*cura apostolica*.) The contemplation of the gospels teaches the way in which Jesus arrived at this equilibrium in his own life and in his relationships with his disciples, his friends, who became his *companions* to the point of giving their lives as he did. Fraternal life among *companions* requires mutual understanding to

strengthen the love which binds them and to discern the way that each one can contribute in the best way possible (*magis*) to the mission to which they are committed as a group. This is the role of transparency and the *account of conscience* in the Society of Jesus.³⁹

Obedience in the Society of Jesus is lived out with personal joy, because it is an exercise of creative fidelity which is recognized as grace and a gift of God.⁴⁰ This specific way of establishing the relationship of obedience is not improvised nor is it acquired once and for all. The fundamental spiritual experience of the Spiritual Exercises is completed with a *life in the Spirit*, in which assiduous prayer, the participation in the Eucharist and the examen of conscience are essential elements. This key dimension of the life of the Jesuit requires ongoing formation, from those who are beginning in *our way of proceeding*, for those already mature and for those who are called upon to act as superiors.⁴¹

The vows of poverty and chastity, lived out in community, together with obedience, give shape to an apostolic religious institute of persons molded in the Church to the image of the same Jesus, at the service of the announcement of the kingship of God, to all the ends of the earth, throughout all human cultures.⁴² In confirming the mission of faith-justice-culture-dialogue, GC35 emphasizes how it found in it the full meaning of “our religious apostolic life in the Church.”⁴³—a necessary emphasis, given that some in ecclesiastical environments have doubted the validity of the religious-apostolic charism proper to the Society of Jesus and of the many other religious congregations, male and female, which have enriched the life and action of the Church for centuries, within the variety of forms of consecrated life which the Spirit has raised up at the service of the People of God and the mission of evangelization of the Church.

The community in the Society of Jesus is the place of synthesis of identity and mission. It is not limited to living together, sharing the same roof. In the community, those who have chosen to follow the personal call of Jesus Christ have become brothers among themselves and with others; they share life with others, and open their doors to hospitality and solidarity. “Our mission is not limited to our works. Our personal and community relationship with the Lord, our relationship to one another as friends in the

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Lord, our solidarity with the poor and marginalized, and a life style responsible to creation are all important aspects of our lives as Jesuits. They authenticate what we proclaim and what we do in fulfilling our mission. The privileged place of this collective witness is our life in community. Thus, Jesuit community is not just for mission: it is itself mission.⁴⁴ Within this community *companions of Jesus* are being formed, in true fraternal solidarity, nourishing mutual love and becoming a witness to the possibility of transcending cultural frontiers in order to create relationships of brotherhood, in the midst of an individualistic environment and a fragmented world.

The community is the suitable place for putting into practice one of the characteristics proper to the charism of the Society of Jesus: apostolic discernment: "The community is also a privileged place for the practice of apostolic discernment, whether through formally structured communal discernment or through informal conversation that has the more effective pursuit of the mission as its goal. Such discernment will help us not only accept our personal missions but also rejoice in and support the missions received by our brothers. In this way, our common mission is strengthened and the union of minds and hearts confirmed and deepened."⁴⁵

Sent to cross frontiers

"Fundamental for the life and mission of every Jesuit is an experience that places him, quite simply, with Christ at the heart of the world."⁴⁶ It is indeed the goodness of God which founded and makes possible the mission of the Society of Jesus. The meeting with God who is entirely good, who *makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*,⁴⁷ makes possible seeing the world with new eyes, free of disordered affections, being able to find God in all things. "From this experience of God laboring in the heart of life, our identity as "servants of Christ's mission" rises up ever anew."⁴⁸

"To find divine life at the depths of reality is a mission of hope given to us Jesuits,"⁴⁹ which is only possible from a contemplative position on the reality of the world and of human beings. "It is the grace—also the creative challenge—of our apostolic religious life that it must live this tension between prayer and action, between mysticism and service."⁵⁰ The contemplation of the world reveals the *grief and anguish, joy and hope* of

human beings with whom Jesuits share this time in history. They are sent there as missionaries of the *living water*, from which they also have drunk, to assuage the thirst which is born of the structures of injustice which determine relations between human beings, which threaten ecological equilibrium⁵¹ and deform the image of God. "Working for his Kingdom will often mean meeting material needs, but it will always mean much more, because human beings thirst at many levels; and Christ's mission is directed to human beings. Faith *and* justice; it is never one without the other. Human beings need food, shelter, love, relationship, truth, meaning promise, hope. Human beings need a future in which they can take hold of their full dignity; indeed they need an absolute future, a "great hope" that exceeds every particular hope. All of these things are already present in the *heart* of Christ's mission, which, as was particularly evident in his healing ministry, was always more than physical. In healing the leper, Jesus restored him to the community, gave him a sense of belonging. Our mission finds its inspiration in this ministry of Jesus. Following Jesus, we feel ourselves called not only to bring direct help to people in distress, but also to restore entire human persons in their integrity, reintegrating them in community and reconciling them with God. This frequently calls for an engagement that is long-term"⁵²

GC35, in confirming what had been decreed by previous general congregations (numbers 31 to 34), affirmed that "the service of faith and the promotion of justice, indissolubly united, remain at the heart of our mission. This option changed the face of the Society."⁵³ We look with this face at the new context, the change of epoch in which humanity is living today, to which we are sent⁵⁴ to transcend frontiers, to build bridges. In confirming the mission, GC35 is inviting the entire Society of Jesus to continue drinking from the sources which have given birth to the process of renewal of the Church and religious life in Vatican Council II and the specific form in which the same Society has come to discern its missionary presence in a world in change.⁵⁵

In confirming the mission, GC35 affirms the will of the Society of Jesus to deepen the understanding of the call it has received, holding on to Jesus, rooted in the tradition of the prophets, as the model to follow, accepting that, as was He, we are sent by the Father to discover and transcend the frontiers of the world of today, proclaiming the message of love and compassion.⁵⁶

GC35 was aware of the complexity of this new epoch of humanity. A good part of the topics on governance and the ordinary life of the Society

of Jesus, studied by different groups and presented to all the members of the congregation, refers to the different dimensions which characterize the world of today—themes, situations and issues which affect and challenge the mission of the Church and of the Society. GC35 proposes to deepen the understanding of the call to serve faith, promote justice and dialogue with culture and other religions, aware that the change of epoch is producing sharp conflicts in all levels of human life. GC35 insists on the possibility of making a choice of living this moment as a new opportunity of making present the love of God in the midst of history through the hopeful announcer of his Kingdom.⁵⁷ The global context accentuates the tension experienced within the universal body incarnated in the diversity of situations, suffering with and in collaboration with others.⁵⁸

“ ‘Nations’ beyond geographical definitions await us, ‘nations’ that today include those who are poor and displaced, those who are profoundly lonely, those who ignore God’s existence and those who use God as an instrument for political purposes. There are new ‘nations,’ and we have been sent to them.”⁵⁹

Included here is the importance of the *ministry of reconciliation*, present in the way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus from its very *Formula Instituti*. We are sent to build bridges which will permit the overcoming of frontiers, given that the ministry of reconciliation does not recognize frontiers.

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GC understands by this mission that Jesuits and those who choose to share in this mission of the Society of Jesus will become bridges, place their energies, their formation, dedication, their life at the service of creating, nourishing and sustaining these human bonds, social relations, political and economic structures which will make possible solidarity

between all human beings and point towards a fraternal and just world: “This tradition of Jesuits building bridges across barriers becomes crucial in the context of today’s world. We become able to bridge the divisions of a fragmented world only if we are united by the love of Christ our Lord, by personal bonds like those that linked Francis Xavier and Ignatius across the seas, and by the obedience that sends each one of us in mission to any part of this world.”⁶⁰

GC35 discovers three great sources for the Society of Jesus to use to produce the fruits hoped for in responding to its mission, confirmed and understood in the new context of humanity: "As servants of Christ's mission we are invited to assist him as he sets right our relationships with God, with other human beings, and with creation."⁶¹ All of the apostolic forms through which the Society of Jesus has come to fulfill its mission are called to be examined and evaluated in the light of these challenges of the new epoch that put to the test the real availability of the Jesuits and their works, the flexibility of its structures to match the height of the times that in which they live and the role that they have chosen to fulfill in it.

The capacity of response of the least Society of Jesus

In the school of the Spiritual Exercises we have learned that, having made the election, it is necessary to make use of the means necessary to live and act in line with what has been chosen. The election has been preceded by a humble acknowledgement of ones own limitations and the opening of oneself to the merciful love of God, the only force which will enable us to accept the invitation to become a *companion of Jesus*. GC35 undertook this process of examining the *state of the Society of Jesus* and, appealing to the mercy of the Lord, asked that, along with the call, it also be given the grace necessary to be at the service of the mission of Christ.

As in its beginnings, the Society of Jesus knows itself to be *least* in order to respond to the call of the Lord and to make present his message of salvation in the complexity of the human situation of today. It is not only the situation of the number of members of the Society, the advanced average age in some regions, the difficulty of finding the economic resources to sustain important works, the complexity of the formation of the variety of persons who are joining it, but rather the renewed awareness that human means are not sufficient to make possible the existence itself of the Society of Jesus and that only a deep confidence in God, the total abandonment into his hands, as an instrument of his desire to give life in abundance to human beings, makes this possible.

The three great sources of energy for the mission are deeply interrelated among each other. "Since Christ's death and resurrection has re-established our relationship with God, our service of faith must lead

necessarily to the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom and to the care of God's creation."⁶² GC35 offers some keys to obtain the greatest (*magis*) fruit: looking at the world from the perspective of the poor and marginalized, making ourselves responsible for our home, the earth, and approaching the frontiers of culture and religion.⁶³

Following the dynamic of the Incarnation, the commitment to contribute to the establishment of just relationships, according to the Gospel, in a globalized world dominated by unjust social structures, requires the perspective which God chose to *encamp among us* ⁶⁴, that of the poor. GC35 proposes to the Society of Jesus an "epistemological place" in line with the Christological faith acquired in the contemplation of the Incarnation and the life of Jesus, who made himself poor to enrich us with his poverty ⁶⁵, to draw us into "the complexity of the problems we face and the richness of the opportunities offered."⁶⁶

The post-modern and post-Christian context places the necessity of *thinking* ⁶⁷ at the center of the mission of evangelization and the charism of the Society. The intellectual apostolate has been one of the defining characteristics of the Society of Jesus from its earliest origins. Through long experience in this area the Society has become aware of the intrinsic difficulty of the intellectual task seriously taken to heart. Finding meaning in the historic moment in which we are living, collaborating sincerely in the search for truth and so many challenges which arise from the passion to understand the human being itself and its creating freedom form part of the heart itself of the mission given to the Society of Jesus. There is no doubt, from this perspective, about the important challenge which these present, to the educational mission and the youth ministry carried on by Jesuits in this post-modern and post-Christian context.⁶⁸

"This Congregation urges all Jesuits and all partners engaged in the same mission, particularly the universities and research centers, to promote studies and practices focusing on the causes of poverty and the question of the environment's improvement. We should find ways in which our experiences with refugees and the displaced on one hand, and people who work for the protection of the environment on the other hand, could interact with those institutions, so that research results and advocacy have effective practical benefits for society and the environment. Advocacy and research should serve the poor and those who work for the protection of the environment."⁶⁹

Responsibility towards the environment arises simultaneously from listening to the clamor of the poor of the earth, who suffer especially the consequences of the deterioration of the environment and of the experience of God, as it is expressed in the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises and in the Contemplation to Attain Love. This responsibility should be reflected in showing “ever more effective ecological solidarity in our spiritual, communal, and apostolic lives,”⁷⁰ that is, it should necessarily lead to changes in our life style, our use of resources, etc., and form an important part of the call to the *examen* and *conversion* to which the signs of the times are calling the religious and apostolic life.

In the midst of the multireligious and multicultural conditions of today’s world we are invited to listen attentively to everything, to esteem each person and each culture as an indispensable condition for building bridges and for being able to share their own spiritual experience. The Spiritual Exercises acquire, in this context, a new meaning as an efficacious instrument to promote the experience of a loving relationship with God, creating fraternal solidarity and a sense of responsibility for creation.⁷¹ These will be “for the Jesuit the means of his own spiritual maturation.”⁷²

In its decision to develop an apostolic plan for the Society of Jesus, GC35 was firm in insisting upon the need for *institutional conversion* that will derive from the examination that will be undertaken. Springing from the multicultural reality, local incarnation, universal vocation and world governance as characteristics of the Society and deciding to act effectively as an internal body demands an authentic review of what we are doing and how we are doing it in order to reorganize resources and governance in both a medium and long term strategic plan.

“In continuity with the recommendations made by GC34, and to respond effectively to the global challenges described above, this Congregation has emphasized the importance of structures for apostolic planning, implementation, and accountability at all levels of the Society’s governance.”⁷³

The Society of Jesus is relying upon a point of departure: the systematic efforts in recent years to be aware of global and regional situations through growing interprovincial collaboration and the establishment of *apostolic preferences* made by Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, in consultation with the Conferences of Major Superiors, following the guidelines of GC34.⁷⁴

MISSION, IDENTITY AND CHALLENGES

“We invite Fr. General to continue to discern the preferences for the Society, to review the above preferences, to update their specific content, and to develop plans and programs that can be monitored and evaluated.”⁷⁵

GC35 approved Decree 5, *Governance at the Service of Universal Mission* defining with clarity the principles, objectives, levels, and responsibilities of the process of transformation of the governance structures of the Society of Jesus to improve its capacity to respond to the missionary challenges of our days. The processes of organization transformation are always complex. The Society of Jesus is an institution with more than four and a half centuries of life. After Vatican Council II (1965) it undertook an important transformation which led it to review its life, ministries, and even its Constitutions, a process which took until GC34 (1995,) in which the revised version of the Complementary Norms was approved. Its multicultural composition, its presence in so many diverse geographical environments and so many varied levels of social life, through different apostolic works and ministries are the ingredients of an international organization with profound local roots dedicated to making itself more efficient organizationally by completing an apostolic plan. This is the dimension of the challenge that GC35 poses to the Society in the realm of its *institutional conversion*.

Three principles serve to guide in this process of organizational transformation: (a) Our governance structures and ways of proceeding should flow from a perspective of greater universality; (b) Structures of governance should be streamlined, modernized, and made more flexible; (c) Changing circumstances require a better articulation of Ignatian values and ways of proceeding in our contemporary life and work.⁷⁶

The goal of these principles is “allowing the General the opportunity to do comprehensive apostolic planning,”⁷⁷ which implies review and updating in accordance with them of all the current levels of organization, from the role of the communities-local superior and its relationship with the apostolic works,⁷⁸ the “map of the provinces,”⁷⁹ the strengthening of the Conferences of Provincials in the orientation of the mission,⁸⁰ the complete reorganization of the central government,⁸¹ the General Congregation and the Congregation of Procurators, as well as the meetings of Provincials.⁸² The style of the document leaves no room for doubt of the importance that GC35 gave to the need for this institutional conversion of the Society of Jesus and the determination to move it along without delays.

With the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the promised fulfilled of Jesus to his companions, the Society of Jesus has before itself the challenge to make its way towards God effective for those who serve the mission of Christ in the 21st century.

Translated by: Robert Hurd, SJ

¹ The presupposition of the Ignatian examen is that conversion is received as grace. GC35, in Decree D. 1, nn. 2, 4, and 15, invites us to do so and to ask for this grace, without forgetting that the examen and conversion consist in turning ones gaze towards the future, "that the world could be seen in another way; a way freed from disordered attachments and opened up for an ordered loving of God and of all things in God." (GC35, D.2, n. 4).

² This is how the Pope refers to the frontiers: "The obstacles challenging the evangelizers are not so much the seas or the long distances as the frontiers that, due to a mistaken or superficial vision of God and of man, are raised between faith and human knowledge, faith and modern science, faith and the fight for justice." (Address of Benedict XVI to CG 35, February 21, 2008).

³ D. 3, n. 37 and D. 5, n. 10.

⁴ This was an historic occasion, because for the first time in the history of the Society a Superior General completed a long period of service, in full use of his faculties, and, with the grateful recognition of all his brothers, returned to an ordinary apostolic life as a Jesuit.

⁵ D. 2, n. 15; D. 3, n. 3.

⁶ D. 2, n. 16.

⁷ Address to GC35, February 21, 2008.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ D. 2, n. 6, 10.

¹² Address.. Cf. D. 1, n. 15.

¹³ D. 1, nn. 8-9.

¹⁴ D. 4, nn. 30-34, Mt 16:13-19; Jn 21:15-22.

¹⁵ D. 4, nn. 1, 16; D. 1, n. 16.

¹⁶ D. 1, nn. 13-14; D. 4, n. 34.

¹⁷ Greeting of the Superior General Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, to the Holy Father in the audience to GC35, on February 21, 2008; Cf. D. 4, n. 34.

¹⁸ Democracy in the globalized world cannot be a simple derivation or extension of

the representative democracy of capitalistic or socialistic modernity. Cf. HARDT-NEGRI, *Multitud*, (2004,) chapter 3.

¹⁹ The future is only possible if the “public,” more than the space of the sovereignty of the States, is understood as “common,” that is, as a way of guaranteeing a life of quality to all human beings and peoples. The common is the product of the freedom of the singularities which converge in the process of permanent production, since this is always a matter of being in construction, never static nor definitively constituted.

²⁰ “In this global contest it is important to highlight the extraordinary potential we possess as an international and multicultural body. Acting consistently with this character can not only enhance the apostolic effectiveness of our work but, in a fragmented and divided world, it can witness to the reconciliation in solidarity of all the children of God.” Cf. D. 3, n. 43.

²¹ AR 20 (1991) 602. “Jesuits are both “men for others and “men with others.” This basic characteristic of our way of proceeding calls for an attitude and readiness to cooperate, to listen and to learn from others, to share our spiritual and apostolic inheritance. To be “men with others” is a central aspect of our charism and deepens our identity. (GC34, D. 13. n. 4.)

²² D. 6, n. 3. “While GC34 recognized the Spirit’s moment and opened for us fresh avenues to implement our mission through more profound collaboration with the laity, the current Congregation recognizes the more diverse community of those with whom we have been called to share this common mission. The seeds sown by grace are growing in many ways and in many lands, and we wish to support this growth, while also indicating some other ways by which that growth might be fostered.” D- 6, 3.,5.,7.

²³ D. 6, n. 17.

²⁴ D. 6, n. 30.

²⁵ D. 6, n. 15.

²⁶ D. 6, n. 3.

²⁷ D. 6, nn. 9-10.

²⁸ D. 6, n. 11.

²⁹ D. 2, n. 8. “Our deep love of God and our passion for his world should set us on fire – a fire that starts other fires!” D. 2, n. 10.

³⁰ D. 2, 26.

³¹ D. 2, n. 2.

³² D. 2, n. 3.

³³ “To live this mission in our broken world, we need fraternal and joyful communities in which we nourish and express with great intensity the sole passion that can unify our differences and bring to life our creativity. This passion grows out of our ever new experience of the Lord, whose imagination and love for our world are inexhaustible.” D. 2, 19; 27.

³⁴ D. 2, n. 17 and D. 4, nn. 4-8.

³⁵ D. 4, 12.

³⁶ D. 4, nn. 17,19.

³⁷ D. 4, n. 18.

³⁸ D. 4, nn. 25-28.

³⁹ D. 4, n. 24 ; D. 5, n. 24; D. 2, n. 16.

⁴⁰ D. 4, n. 29.

⁴¹ GC 45 offers advice for living obedience, the constitutive part of the identity, for Jesuits in formation (D. 4, nn 35-39,) for formed Jesuits (D. 4, nn . 40-46,) and for superiors (D. 4, nn . 47-52.) Cf. D. 5, nn. 30-32. GC35, at the same time that it expresses its profound gratitude to Jesuits of advanced age, reminds them that praying for the Church and the Society is a way of carrying out the mission of the Society (D. 4, 46.)

⁴² D. 2, n. 18; D. 4, 13.

⁴³ D. 3, n. 3.

⁴⁴ D. 3, n. 41; Cf. D. 6, n. 13.

⁴⁵ D. 4, n. 28.

⁴⁶ D. 2, nn. 2, 23-24; D. 3, n. 18.

⁴⁷ Mt 5:45

⁴⁸ D. 2, n. 7; Cf. D. 2, nn. 4-6.

⁴⁹ D. 2, n. 8.

⁵⁰ D. 2, n. 9.

⁵¹ D. 3, n. 33.

⁵² D. 2, n. 13.

⁵³ D. 2, n. 15.

⁵⁴ Obedience has as its aim to be sent on mission (D. 4, n .23.)

⁵⁵ D. 3, nn. 1-7.

⁵⁶ D. 3, nn. 12-13,16.

⁵⁷ D. 3, nn. 8-12, 20-26 and the report on "Issues for the Ordinary Government of the Society of Jesus" published along with the decrees.

⁵⁸ "Then God in Christ suffers in and with the world, which he wants to renew. Precisely here is our mission situated. It is here that we must discern our mission according to the criteria of the magis and the more universal good. God is presenting the darkness of life intent on making all things new. God needs collaborators in this endeavor" D. 2, 22. Cf. D. 2, nn. 20-24; D. 4, nn. 14-15.

⁵⁹ D. 2, n . 22.

⁶⁰ D. 3, n . 17.

⁶¹ D. 3, n. 18.

⁶² D. 3, n .24.

⁶³ D. 3, nn. 22, 27, 31.

⁶⁴ John 1:14

⁶⁵ 2 Cor: 8:9

⁶⁶ D. 3, n. 28.

⁶⁷ Thinking is a very demanding human activity which requires "understanding" relating in all its complexity, envisioning better alternatives of living and creating

ways to put them in practice.

⁶⁸ D. 3, n. 23.

⁶⁹ D. 3, n. 35.

⁷⁰ D. 3, n. 31. Cf. D. 3, n. 33.

⁷¹ D. 3, nn. 19, 21-22. Cf. D. 1, n. 12; D. 6, n. 5.

⁷² Fr. A. Nicolás, Greeting of the Superior General to the Holy Father in the Audience of February 21, 2008.

⁷³ D. 3, n. 37.

⁷⁴ D. 3, nn. 38-39.

⁷⁵ D. 3, n. 40.

⁷⁶ D. 5, n. 1.

⁷⁷ D. 5, n. 10.

⁷⁸ D. 5, nn. 33-42.

⁷⁹ D. 5, nn. 24-29. "With a view towards better serving our universal mission, the General Congregation requests the General to commission a process of reflection on Provinces and Province structures which will lead to practical proposals for adapting this aspect of our governance to today's realities. This commission's responsibility should include a comprehensive review of the criteria for the establishment, reconfiguration, and suppression of Provinces and Regions." (D. 5, n. 26.)

⁸⁰ D. 5, nn. 17-23.

⁸¹ D. 5, nn. 7-16.

⁸² D. 5, nn. 2-6.