

## Decree 2: JESUITS TODAY

*A response of the 32nd General Congregation to requests for a description of Jesuit identity in our time.*

1. What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was: Ignatius, who begged the Blessed Virgin to "place him with her Son,"<sup>1</sup> and who then saw the Father himself ask Jesus, carrying his Cross, to take this pilgrim into his company.<sup>2</sup>
2. What is it to be a companion of Jesus today? It is to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it includes.
3. The Society of Jesus, gathered together in its 32nd General Congregation, considering the end for which it was founded, namely, the greater glory of God and the service of men,<sup>3</sup> acknowledging with repentance its own failures in keeping faith and upholding justice, and asking itself before Christ crucified what it has done for him, what it is doing for him, and what it is going to do for him,<sup>4</sup> choose participation in this struggle as the focus that identifies in our time what Jesuits are and do.<sup>5</sup>

### A. WHENCE THIS DECISION

4. We arrive at this decisive choice from several different points of departure. The postulata received from the provinces, the panorama of the state of the Society presented at the Congregation, and the instructions given us by the Pope, all direct our attention to the vast expanse and circuit of this globe and the great multitude and diversity of peoples therein.<sup>6</sup>
5. Two-thirds of mankind have not yet had God's salvation in Jesus Christ proclaimed to them in a manner that wins belief, while in societies anciently Christian a dominant secularism is closing men's minds and hearts to the divine dimensions of all reality, blinding them to the fact that while all things on the face of the earth are, indeed, created for man's sake, it is only that he might attain to the end for which he himself

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<sup>1</sup> Ignatius Loyola, MI, *Fontes Narrativi* I, "Autobiografia," n.96.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., II, 133.

<sup>3</sup> FI [3] (1); Cons. 136, 156, 307, 603, 813.

[Reference numbers to the *Formula of the Institute* present a special problem, since several ways of numbering them have arisen through the centuries. The numbers used here are those employed in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Translated, with an Introduction and a Commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. The Institute of Jesuit Sources: St. Louis, 1970. This is the only practically accessible English translation of the *Formula of the Constitutions* themselves, and so it is the one to which English-language readers will refer in pursuing their further study of the documents of the Congregation. In addition, it makes clear (page 66, fn.9) the reason for and inter-relation of the two differing sets of reference numbers, either of which might be employed in the Latin or other language versions of these documents.]

<sup>4</sup> *SpEx*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> GC 32, "Our Mission Today."

<sup>6</sup> *SpEx*, 103.

was created: the praise, reverence, and service of God.<sup>7</sup>

6. Ignorance of the Gospel on the part of some, and rejection of it by others, are intimately related to the many grave injustices prevalent in the world today. Yet it is in the light of the Gospel that men will most clearly see that injustice springs from sin, personal and collective, and that it is made all the more oppressive by being built into economic, social, political, and cultural institutions of world-wide scope and overwhelming power.<sup>8</sup>

7. Conversely, the prevalence of injustice in a world where the very survival of the human race depends on men caring for and sharing with one another is one of the principal obstacles to belief: belief in a God who is justice because he is love.

8. Thus, the way to faith and the way to justice are inseparable ways. It is up this undivided road, this steep road, that the pilgrim Church must travel and toil. Faith and justice are undivided in the Gospel which teaches that "faith makes its power felt through love"<sup>9</sup>. They cannot therefore be divided in our purpose, our action, our life.<sup>10</sup>

9. Moreover, the service of faith and the promotion of justice cannot be for us simply one ministry among others. It must be the integrating factor of all our ministries; and not only of our ministries but of our inner life as individuals, as communities, and as a world-wide brotherhood. This is what our Congregation means by a decisive choice. It is the choice that underlies and determines all the other choices embodied in its declarations and directives.

## **B. ORIGINAL INSPIRATION OF THE SOCIETY**

10. We are confirmed in this basic choice by being led to it from another point of departure, namely, the original inspiration of the Society as set forth in the Formula of the Institute and the Constitutions.

11. Our Society was founded principally for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the rendering of any service in the Church that may be for the glory of God and the common good.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the grace of Christ that enables and impels us to seek "the salvation and perfection of souls" — or what might be called, in contemporary terms, the total and integral liberation of man, leading to participation in the life of God himself — is the same grace by which we are enabled and impelled to seek "our own salvation and perfection."<sup>12</sup>

12. Not only does the insight of Ignatius justify our basic choice, it specifies it. It enables us to determine what must be our specifically Jesuit contribution to the defense and propagation of the faith and the promotion of justice in charity.

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<sup>7</sup> *SpEx*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> GS, 10, 13, 22, 23, 37; Pope Paul VI, "Populorum progressio," 21, 56 ff; "Octogesima adveniens," 45.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. 5,6.

<sup>10</sup> Synod of Bishops (1971), "Justice in the World," Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> *Fl*, [3] (1).

<sup>12</sup> *Cons*, General Examen [3] 2.

13. At the very center of that insight is the sense of mission. No sooner was our companionship born than it placed itself at the disposal of "the Roman Pontiff, Christ's Vicar on earth,"<sup>13</sup> to be sent wherever there is hope of God's greater glory and the service of men.

14. A Jesuit, therefore, is essentially a man on a mission: a mission which he receives immediately from the Holy Father and from his own religious superiors, but ultimately from Christ himself, the one sent by the Father.<sup>14</sup> It is by being sent that the Jesuit becomes a companion of Jesus.

15. Moreover, it is in companionship that the Jesuit fulfills his mission. He belongs to a community of friends in the Lord who, like him, have asked to be received under the standard of Christ the King.<sup>15</sup>

### **C. FULFILLMENT IN COMPANIONSHIP**

16. This community is the entire body of the Society itself, no matter how widely dispersed over the face of the earth. The particular local community to which he may belong at any given moment is, for him, simply a concrete — if, here and now, a privileged — expression of this world-wide brotherhood.

17. The local Jesuit community is thus an apostolic community, not inward but outward looking, the focus of its concern being the service it is called upon to give men. It is contemplative but not monastic, for it is a *communitas ad dispersionem*. It is a community of men ready to go wherever they are sent.

18. A *communitas ad dispersionem*, but also a *koinonia*, a sharing of goods and life, with the Eucharist at its center: the sacrifice and sacrament of the Deed of Jesus, who loved his own to the end.<sup>16</sup> And each member of every Jesuit community is ever mindful of what St. Ignatius says about love, that it consists in sharing what one has, what one is, with those one loves.<sup>17</sup> When we speak of having all things in common, that is what we mean.

19. The Jesuit community is also a community of discernment. The missions on which Jesuits are sent, whether corporately or individually, do not exempt us from the need of discerning together in what manner and by what means such missions are to be accomplished. That is why we open our minds and hearts to our superiors and our superiors, in turn, take part in the discernment of our communities, always on the shared understanding that final decisions belong to those who have the burden of authority.

### **D. DISTINGUISHING MARK OF THE SOCIETY**

20. Not only our community life, but our religious vows are apostolic. If we commit

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<sup>13</sup> *Fl*, [3], (1).

<sup>14</sup> John 17,18.

<sup>15</sup> *SpEx.*, 147.

<sup>16</sup> John 13.1.

<sup>17</sup> *SpEx*, 231.

ourselves until death to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, it is that we may be totally united to Christ and share his own freedom to be at the service of all who need us. In binding us, the vows set us free:

- free, by our vow of poverty, to share the life of the poor and to use whatever resources we may have not for our own security and comfort, but for service;
- free, by our vow of chastity, to be men for others, in friendship and communion with all, but especially with those who share our mission of service;
- free, by our vow of obedience, to respond to the call of Christ as made known to us by him whom the Spirit has placed over the Church, and to follow the lead of our superiors, especially our Father General, who has all authority over us *ad aedificationem*.

21. In our Society, the call to the apostolate is one, though shared in manifold ways. We are many members, but one body, each member contributing what in him lies to the common task of continuing Christ's saving work in the world, which is to reconcile men to God, and men among themselves, so that by the gift of his love and grace they may build a peace based on justice.

22. Because this is its common task, the Society of Jesus is, in its entirety, a sacerdotal society. But it is sacerdotal not merely in the sense of the priesthood of all the faithful. For the Society began as, and continues to be, a band of ordained ministers of the Gospel which comprises in the self-same company both those willing to share the presbyteral function of being coadjutors of the episcopal order and those willing to give themselves to those aspects of our apostolic mission for which priestly orders are not required.

23. Moreover, following Ignatius, we have asked Christ our Lord to let us render this service in a manner that gives us a personality of our own. We have chosen to give it in the form of a consecrated life according to the evangelical counsels, and we have placed ourselves at the service not only of the local churches but of the universal Church, by a special vow of obedience to him who presides over the universal Church, namely, the Successor of Peter.

24. This, then, is the distinguishing mark of our Society: it is a companionship that is, at one and the same time, "religious, apostolic, sacerdotal, and bound to the Roman Pontiff by a special bond of love and service."<sup>18</sup>

## **E. WHAT OUR MISSION DEMANDS OF US**

25. Because the missions on which the Holy Father and our superiors are likely to send us will demand well trained minds and dedicated spirits, we test the vocation of those whom we admit to our ranks in various ways over an extended period of time, and we try to give them, to the best of our ability, a spiritual and intellectual formation more than ordinarily exacting. But even during their period of training these young men are already our companions, in virtue of the perpetual vows they take after the noviceship.

26. Coming from many different countries, cultures, and social backgrounds, but

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<sup>18</sup> Pope Paul VI, "Address to the Members of the 32nd General Congregation," December 3, 1974, on p. 524 below.

banded together in this way, we try to focus all our efforts on the common task of radiating faith and witnessing to justice. We are deeply conscious of how often and how grievously we ourselves have sinned against the Gospel; yet it remains our ambition to proclaim it worthily: that is, in love, in poverty, and in humility.

27. *In love*: a personal love for the Person of Jesus Christ, for an ever more inward knowledge of whom we daily ask, that we may the better love him and follow him<sup>19</sup>; Jesus, whom we seek, as St. Ignatius sought, to experience; Jesus, Son of God, sent to serve, sent to set free, put to death, and risen from the dead. This love is the deepest well-spring of our action and our life. It was this personal love that engendered in Ignatius that divine discontent which kept urging him to the *magis* — the ever more and more giving — the ever greater glory of God.

28. *In poverty*: relying more on God's providence than on human resources; safeguarding the freedom of the apostle by detachment from avarice and the bondage imposed by it; following in the footsteps of Christ, who preached good news to the poor by being poor himself.

29. *In humility*: realizing that there are many enterprises of great worth and moment in the Church and in the world which we, as priests and religious inspired by one particular charism, are not in a position to undertake. And even in those enterprises which we can and should undertake, we realize that we must be willing to work with others: with Christians, men of other religious faiths, and all men of good will; willing to play a subordinate, supporting, anonymous role; and willing to learn how to serve from those we seek to serve.

30. This availability for the meanest tasks, or at least the desire to be thus available, is part of the identity of the Jesuit. When he offers to distinguish himself in the service of the Eternal King,<sup>20</sup> when he asks to be received under his standard,<sup>21</sup> when he glories with Ignatius in being placed by the Father "with the Son,"<sup>22</sup> he does so not in any spirit of prideful privilege, but in the spirit of him who "emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, even to accepting death, death on a cross."<sup>23</sup>

## F. CONCLUSION: A JESUIT TODAY

31. Thus, whether we consider the needs and aspirations of the men of our time, or reflect on the particular charism that founded our Society, or seek to learn what Jesus has in his heart for each and all of us, we are led to the identical conclusion that today the Jesuit is a man whose mission is to dedicate himself entirely to the service of faith and the promotion of justice, in a communion of life and work and sacrifice with the companions who have rallied round the same standard of the Cross and in fidelity to the Vicar of Christ, for the building up of a world at once more human and more divine.

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<sup>19</sup> *SpEx*, 104.

<sup>20</sup> *SpEx*, 97.

<sup>21</sup> *SpEx*, 147.

<sup>22</sup> Ignatius Loyola, MI, *Fontes Narrativi* I, "Diario espiritual," n.67.

<sup>23</sup> Phil, 2.7-8.

32. Deeply conscious of our utter unworthiness for so great a mission, relying only on God's love and grace, we offer together the prayer of Ignatius<sup>24</sup>:

Take, O Lord, and receive  
all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding, and my entire will.  
Whatever I have or hold,  
You have given to me;  
I restore it all to You  
and surrender it wholly  
to be governed by your will.  
Give me only your love and your grace,  
and I am rich enough  
and ask for nothing more.

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<sup>24</sup> *SpEx*, 234.