

OBEDIENCE

IN THE LIFE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

Introduction

1. Obedience is central to the mission and union of the Society of Jesus and a special bond of obedience links the Society to the Holy Father, “the successor of St. Peter and vicar of Christ on earth” as St. Ignatius was accustomed to call him. Therefore, the Society must constantly deepen and renew its life of obedience. The last four General Congregations of the Society have not been silent on this theme, and the Thirty-Fifth General Congregation confirms their directives and norms.¹ In addition, we feel the need to add a word of encouragement and guidance adapted to our present circumstances and to respond to the request of Pope Benedict XVI that we reflect on the fourth vow.² To do so, we will begin, as the Second Vatican Council instructs us,³ with a reflection on the Sacred Scriptures and the charisma of our founder.

The Experience of St. Ignatius and the First Companions

2. We find the origins of the mysticism of service of St. Ignatius and his First Companions in their experience of the Spiritual Exercises. In the meditations of the First Week,⁴ they came into contact with the merciful love of God extended to them in Christ. Through the contemplations of the Second Week and especially the invitation of the Eternal King,⁵ they felt called “to make offerings of greater moment...offering their whole selves for this labor”.⁶ In the Meditation on the Two Standards,⁷ they asked to be placed under Christ’s standard in order to “put into practice their union with Christ and his power as a grace of the Spirit of the Lord”.⁸ Each of them wanted to feel “that he thinks with Christ’s thoughts, wills with Christ’s will, and remembers with Christ’s memory; that he is and lives and acts no longer as himself but completely in Christ”.⁹

3. The First Companions’ desire to accompany Christ and to wear themselves out in his service so that all men and women might be saved and freed from their suffering and slavery took on concrete form in the vow they took at Montmartre in 1534. If their plan to travel to the Holy Land did not come to fruition, they promised to place themselves at the disposal of

¹ See *Complementary Norms [NC]* 149-156, 252-262; GC 31, D. 17; GC 32, D. 11; GC 34, D. 11.

² Cf. Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH, *The Holy Father’s response (21 February 2007)*, Letter to all Major Superiors and electors of GC 35, 2007/03.

³ Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, 45-47.

⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, 91-100.

⁶ *Spiritual Exercises*, 97, 96.

⁷ *Spiritual Exercises*, 136.

⁸ Jeronimo NADAL, *Orationis Observationes*, § 308, Michael Nicolau (edit.), Roma, IHSI, 1964, p. 122.

⁹ Jeronimo NADAL, *Orationis Observationes*, § 308, Michael Nicolau (edit.), Roma, IHSI, 1964, p. 122.

the pope so that he might use their help as he thought would be for God's glory and the salvation of souls.¹⁰ This offering of the First Companions was confirmed in the vision at La Storta where, through St. Ignatius, the Eternal Father gave them to his Son as his companions and promised to be propitious to them in Rome.¹¹ In this way, God responded to their unceasing prayer, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, to be placed with the Son.

4. When the pope decided to send the First Companions on various missions that would involve their separation from each other, they asked whether they should unite themselves as a body. According to the *Deliberation of the First Fathers*, they unanimously decided, after prayerful discernment, to become a body in which each would care for the others, strengthening their bond of union through mutual knowledge and sharing in each others' lives.¹²

5. Before their priestly ordination in 1537, the First Companions had taken vows of poverty and chastity. In 1539 they asked whether or not to take a vow of obedience to one of the group at the same time that they dedicated their entire will, understanding, and strength to carrying out the missions they received from the pope. Their answer to this question was also affirmative. After prayerful discernment, they concluded that vowing obedience to one of them would allow them "to follow the will of God in all things with greater certainty and with greater praise and merit".¹³

6. The papal bull *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* is the Church's confirmation of this foundational experience. That is why the only way the Society can be true to the historical and mystical experience of the First Companions is "to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth".¹⁴

7. The goal of the spiritual formation outlined in the Constitutions is to prepare Jesuits in formation for apostolic life in the Society and to deepen the apostolic life of the body of the Society on mission. The Third Part of the Constitutions introduces the novice to spiritual and apostolic discernment. It confronts him with the demands of a life lived in companionship at the service of the apostolate and offers him an opportunity to grow in faith and trust in the Lord, to understand the obstacles to human and spiritual growth, and to avail himself of the spiritual means to overcome them.¹⁵

8. The Sixth and Seventh Parts of the Constitutions address formed Jesuits and propose the fundamental virtues of apostolic life in the Society: *discreta caritas* and the *magis*.¹⁶ The Sixth Part insists that passionate love for Christ must become incarnate in obedience to the pope and superiors in the Society whose commands the formed Jesuit should obey as if they come from Christ because it is for love of Christ that he obeys.¹⁷ The whole Seventh Part is a demonstration of the foundational principle of obedience, the *magis*. Here the emphasis is on discernment, freedom, and creativity in seeking the will of God and engaging in apostolic

¹⁰ *Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, 85.

¹¹ *Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, 96; Jerónimo NADAL, *Exhortationes in Hispania (1554)*, § 16 (MHSI 66, 313); Diego LAYNEZ, *Adhortationes in librum Examinis (1559)*, § 7 (MHSI 73, 133).

¹² *Deliberatio primorum Patrum (1539)*, § 3 (MHSI 63, 3-4).

¹³ *Deliberatio primorum Patrum (1539)*, § 4 (MHSI 63, 4).

¹⁴ Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit Debitum (1550)*, § 3 (MHSI 63, 375).

¹⁵ *Constitutions*, 260; NC 45 §1; GC 32, D. 6, n. 7.

¹⁶ *Constitutions*, 582.

¹⁷ *Constitutions*, 547, 551.

activity.¹⁸ Thus, fidelity to obedience becomes the way the Jesuit incarnates the values of the Gospel and of the Spiritual Exercises: availability for being at the service of the Kingdom of God and freedom to be a “man for others”.

Theological Aspects of Obedience

9. Before all else, our obedience seeks to fulfill the will of God. Its foundation is personal love for Jesus Christ who has deigned to choose us as his companions. The Holy Spirit, who has freely poured this love into our hearts, inspires in us a desire to identify ourselves with Christ and gives us the strength to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”.¹⁹ This desire “to clothe ourselves with the same garb and uniform of the Lord”²⁰ situates us in the mysticism of the Third Degree of Humility.²¹

10. Our religious vows place us with the Lord and move us to follow him in fidelity to the mission of announcing the Kingdom conferred on him by the Father. From the first moment of his existence, Jesus’ life was oriented to the Father: “Here I am; I have come to do your will”.²² Jesus has “no other food but the will of the Father”.²³ Knowing himself sent by the Father “that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life”,²⁴ Jesus does not act of himself but only does “what he sees the Father doing”.²⁵

11. Jesus’ fidelity to his mission brought him into conflict with human sinfulness and injustice, and it led him to “death, death on a cross”.²⁶ Conquering even his resistance and weakness, “Abba, let not my will but your will be done”,²⁷ Jesus became the source of salvation for all by fulfilling the Father’s will. “Although he was Son he learned obedience through suffering and having been made perfect became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him”.²⁸

12. To be joined with Christ as his companions in obedience to the will of the Father allows us to become servants of his mission of evangelization. Obedience frees us to give ourselves exclusively to the service of the Gospel. By freeing us from our own “affections, desires and interests”,²⁹ obedience lets us dedicate ourselves totally to what God loves and to those who are the object of God’s special concern.

13. To be joined to Christ as his companions in obedience and in mission, in poverty and in chastity, makes us witnesses to the Kingdom and its values.³⁰ At the same time that we

¹⁸ Ignatius’s instruction to the Jesuit sent to be patriarch of Ethiopia breathes the atmosphere of the Seventh Part. “All this is proposed under the heading of advice. The patriarch should not consider himself obliged to comply with it. Rather, he should be guided by *discreta caritas*, taking into account the circumstances of the moment and the unction of the Holy Spirit which should be his principal guide in everything”. (MHSI 36, 689-690).

¹⁹ Philippians 2:5.

²⁰ *Constitutions*, 101.

²¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, 167.

²² Hebrews 10:7.

²³ John 4:34.

²⁴ John 6:40.

²⁵ John 5:19.

²⁶ Philippians 2: 8.

²⁷ Mark 14: 36.

²⁸ Hebrews 5: 9.

²⁹ *Spiritual Exercises*, 189.

³⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 44.

work for the growth of the Kingdom in this world, we await its fullness as a gift God alone can give. Renouncing the use of this world's goods as if they were our own, and putting our affections and our entire freedom at the service of the Kingdom, we contribute to making the Kingdom we long for a reality here and now.

14. The incarnation of the Son of God in human history invites us to see God in all things and leads us to understand that he can make use of all things in carrying out his saving work. This is why our discernment must take into account our historical, social, and personal circumstances; it is in the midst of them that God calls us to fulfill his will.

15. When created realities have been distorted by sin and injustice, however, they can cease to express the goodness of God and can become impediments to our response to the Lord's call. This is why some degree of participation in Jesus' *kenosis*³¹ will never be absent from our lives. Like Jesus, we spend ourselves day after day, trustfully handing ourselves over to the will of God who has shown us so many proofs of his love, even though at times he may seem far from us³² or hidden from us by the effects of sin.³³

16. By his resurrection, the Lord continues to be present in the Church through the Spirit, and through the Church he continues to make his voice heard. "Whoever hears you hears me and whoever rejects you rejects me".³⁴ The Church is the mediation of the Word of God and the sacrament of our salvation in spite of the imperfections of her children. It is through the Church that the Christian finds God, and we profess obedience in the Church in order to serve God. Within the Church, the Society is a privileged place where the will of God is manifested to us; it becomes our "pathway to God".³⁵

17. We will only be able to live our vow of obedience as freedom and true self-realization if the mystical experience of passionate love for Christ, the one who is sent by the Father and who is obedient to the Father's will, remains alive in us and if we daily renew our unconditional commitment to be his companions. It is precisely our love for Jesus Christ that will make our work in service to his mission fruitful, because "the means which unite the instrument with God and so dispose it that it may be wielded well by his divine hand are more effective than those that equip it in relation to human beings".³⁶

Our Contemporary Context and Its Challenges

18. Many positive values prized by our contemporaries are essential to living religious obedience according to our Jesuit way of proceeding: respect for the human person and for human rights, willingness to engage in dialogue marked by freedom of expression, openness to creative alternatives, the desire to build community, and the longing to live for something greater than oneself. But our culture is also marked by a tendency to exaggerated self-sufficiency and individualism that create difficulties for the practice of religious obedience.

³¹ Philippians 2: 5-8.

³² Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

³³ *Spiritual Exercises*, 196.

³⁴ Luke 10:16.

³⁵ Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit Debitum* (1550), §3 (MHSI 63, 376).

³⁶ *Constitutions*, 813.

19. Faith in Jesus Christ teaches us that self-realization comes from self-giving and that freedom is not so much the power to choose as the power to order our choices toward love. At the same time, love for Jesus Christ and the desire to follow him call us to trusting commitment. Commitment to the Word Incarnate cannot be separated from commitment to the concrete mediations of the Word that are at the center of our lives, the Church and the Society which exists to serve the Church. At times, however, our desire to commit ourselves to the Lord in personal trust is not matched by our desire to commit ourselves to the Church or to the body of the Society and its way of proceeding.

20. An exaggerated desire for autonomy has led some to various expressions of self-sufficiency and lack of commitment: lack of availability to our superiors, lack of prudence in the expression of our opinions, lack of a spirit of cooperation in our approach to the local Church, and even disaffection from the Church and the Society. Some have used the language of discernment to excuse a desire to determine their own mission, forgetting that discernment in the Society is a communal exercise that takes into account a multiplicity of voices but reaches its completion only in the conferral of a mission by the superior.

21. The patterns of our contemporary world have their effect on the exercise of authority as well. The way in which our world prizes productivity can lead to overwork, and this can lead to distraction and lack of attention to the human person. The exercise of authority can be reduced to an exercise of power that marginalizes others or to a demand to be heard that is not matched by sufficient willingness to listen. We know these tendencies disfigure many structures and relationships in our world; we cannot imagine we will be immune from their influence when obedience places us in positions of authority within the Society or in institutions through which the Society carries out its mission.

22. These attitudes exist around us and within us. However, many of them are far from the spirit of the gospel, far from the spirit of obedience the Society wishes to foster in its members, and far from the ideal of obedience our way of proceeding presupposes.

Some Specific Aspects of the Practice of Obedience in the Society

23. The practice of obedience in the Society has its roots in the spiritual experience of Ignatius and the first companions. Drawn together by the Spiritual Exercises, they came to have but one goal: to be sent on mission in the image of the Son and so serve the Lord in companionship. Therefore, obedience in the Society is grounded in the desire to be sent effectively,³⁷ to serve completely, and to create ever stronger bonds of union among ourselves.

24. These three strands come together in the account of conscience. For this reason, the account of conscience is essential to the practice of obedience in the Society.³⁸ A Jesuit reveals to his superior all that is happening in his soul, the graces that he has received and the temptations he has undergone, so that his superior can more prudently and confidently send him on mission. The account is repeated annually so that the Jesuit and his superior can evaluate and confirm that mission together.

³⁷ NC 149-156.

³⁸ NC 155 §1.

25. This degree of transparency is possible because our superiors are also our companions. Ignatius wanted superiors to love their companions. To love is to act responsibly. Jesuits bear the responsibility to reveal themselves completely to their superiors; superiors bear the responsibility to hear their brothers attentively and to dialogue with them honestly. This is especially true when a Jesuit humbly represents to his superior any difficulty he has with the mission he has been given, a practice Ignatius valued and encouraged.³⁹

26. The trust that marks obedience is mutual. Jesuits make an act of trust in their superiors when they obey; superiors make an act of trust in their brothers when they send them on mission. This trust is grounded in the superior's appreciation of the Jesuit he sends as someone who discerns; that is, someone who seeks familiarity with the Lord through prayer, desires freedom from disordered attachment, and thus opens himself to the guidance of the Spirit in an on-going quest to discover the divine will.

27. Because Ignatius knew and trusted the prayerful desires of the Jesuits he sent on mission, he left much to their discretion.⁴⁰ Following the example of Ignatius, the Society expects that Jesuits will exercise creativity in carrying out their mission as they see circumstances require, that they will go beyond what has been asked in the true spirit of the *magis*.⁴¹ Thus the superior's trust expresses itself in effective delegation, and the Jesuit who obeys knows he can rely on his superior's openness to creative initiatives he might propose.⁴² This is why obedience in the Society has rightly been described as an exercise of creative fidelity.⁴³ It is creative, because it calls on the individual's freedom and resourcefulness. It is fidelity because it calls for a generous response to the directives of the superior whose duty it is to make decisions "keeping in view the purpose of the Constitutions, which is the greater divine service and the good of those who live in this Institute".⁴⁴

28. A consideration of the practice of obedience would be incomplete if it were limited to the relationship between the superior and the individual Jesuit. The community has its role to play. We obey our superiors in community so that our common life can effectively support our mission and become a sign of the possibility of human communion our world so sorely needs.⁴⁵ The community is also a privileged place for the practice of apostolic discernment, whether through formally structured communal discernment⁴⁶ 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.

³⁹ *Constitutions*, 543, 627.

⁴⁰ *Constitutions*, 633-635.

⁴¹ *Constitutions*, 622-623.

⁴² GC 31, D. 17, n. 11.

⁴³ All of this clarifies the significance of phrases like "an old man's staff" or "*perinde ac cadaver*" that can be found in the Constitutions. The context makes it clear that to obey is not to become lifeless; rather, it is to offer oneself to be carried by the mission conferred by the superior. "For in this way the obedient man ought joyfully to employ himself in any task in which the superior desires to employ him in aid of the whole body of the religious order". (*Constitutions*, 547).

⁴⁴ *Constitutions*, 746.

⁴⁵ Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., "*Sur la vie communautaire*" (12 March 1998), *AR* 22 (1996-2002) 276-289.

⁴⁶ *NC* 150-51.

29. For Ignatius and for the Jesuit, obedience is both grace and gift. It is a path to which we are called by the Lord, and it is the Lord who enables us to follow this path in his service. A personal history of generous response to the grace of obedience allows a Jesuit to serve joyfully and effectively.

The Fourth Vow of Obedience to the Pope with Regard to Missions

30. Ignatius and the First Companions offered themselves to the Vicar of Christ to be sent on mission out of a “desire to serve the Church in the most beneficial way possible”.⁴⁷ By means of the fourth vow pronounced by the professed, the whole body of the Society puts itself at the disposition of the ministry of the Successor of Peter “for distribution into the vineyard of Christ our Lord”.⁴⁸ In this way, we achieve greater availability to the divine will and offer the Church better service.

31. The fourth vow, which Ignatius himself defined as “our beginning and principal foundation”,⁴⁹ expresses what is specific to the Society: total availability to serve the Church wherever the pope sends us. The fourth vow also makes clear the place of the Society in the Church. It gives the Society structural incorporation into the life of the Church by linking its charism as an apostolic religious order to the hierarchical structure of the Church in the person of the pope. It is through this vow that the Society participates in the universal mission of the Church and that the universality of its mission, carried out through a wide range of ministries in the service of local churches, is guaranteed.

32. According to the Constitutions, “the entire purport of this fourth vow of obedience to the pope was and is with regard to missions... for having the members dispersed throughout the various parts of the world”.⁵⁰ This is the matter of the vow. But the Constitutions also invite us to distinguish ourselves in obedience “not only in the matters of obligation but also in others even though nothing else be perceived except an indication of the superior’s will without an expressed command”.⁵¹ This is thoroughly congruent with Ignatius’s ideal of obedience, which holds “that obedience is imperfect in which there does not exist, in addition to the execution, agreement in willing and judging between him who commands and him who obeys”.⁵²

33. The availability promised in the fourth vow is distinct from the Ignatian spirituality of “the proper attitude we ought to have in the Church” or “*sentire cum ecclesia*”.⁵³ However, both are rooted in the love we have for Christ our Lord, a love that extends itself to love for

⁴⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Allocation to the Members of the Society of Jesus (22 April 2006)*, AR 23,4 (2006) 677.

⁴⁸ *Constitutions*, 604.

⁴⁹ *Declarationes circa missiones (1544-1545)* (MHSI 63, 162); Peter FABER, *Memoriale*, n. 18 (MHSI 68, 498); GC 31, D. 1, n 4.

⁵⁰ *Constitutions*, 529 and 605.

⁵¹ *Constitutions*, 547. Although the reference in the *Constitutions* is to obedience to Jesuit superiors, the Thirty-First General Congregation applies the citation to obedience to the pope. “With all our force and energy we should strive to obey first the Sovereign Pontiff and then the superiors of the Society ‘not only in matters of obligation, but also in others, even at the mere hint of the superior’s will, apart from any express command.’” (GC 31, D. 17, n. 10).

⁵² *Constitutions*, 550.

⁵³ *Spiritual Exercises*, 352. Cf. GC 34, D. 11; final allocation of Father Kolvenbach to the 69th Congregation of Procurators (Loyola, 23 September 2003), AR 23,1 (2003) 431-438.

the Church and for “the one who holds the place of Christ our Lord for us”.⁵⁴ This is why we speak of being united with the pope effectively and affectively. Taken together, the fourth vow and our ecclesial spirituality move us to offer the service asked of us by the pope.⁵⁵

34. The Society is deeply grateful to God for its vocation to serve the Church and derives great consolation from the innumerable examples of generous Jesuits who offer their lives in service to the mission of Christ throughout the world, making themselves available for missions from the Holy Father and collaborating with local churches under the guidance of their pastors. In the name of the whole Society, the Thirty-Fifth General Congregation asks the Lord’s pardon for those times when its members have been lacking in love, discretion, or faithfulness in their service of the Church. At the same time, this Congregation affirms the Society’s commitment to grow daily in love for the Church and availability to the pope.

Obedience in Daily Life

35. This Congregation does not want to repeat everything set down about obedience in the Constitutions and Complementary Norms; neither does it want to repeat the directives on obedience to be found in the decrees of the most recent General Congregations. However, we do wish to offer some advice that can assist us in our present circumstances so that we can continue to distinguish ourselves in the perfection of our obedience⁵⁶ as St. Ignatius urges us.

Jesuits in Formation

36. The Thirty-Fifth General Congregation invites Jesuits in formation to live their progressive incorporation into the Society with joyful hearts, reproducing the First Companions’ fruitful experience of being friends in the Lord and committing their lives to generous service of all men and women, especially those most in need.

37. We encourage Jesuits in formation to grow throughout the stages of formation in the spirituality of obedience and in availability for placing their lives and freedom at the service of the mission of Christ. It will be good for them to take advantage of the opportunities for self-abnegation that community life, constant and rigorous dedication to studies, and other aspects of their experience will doubtless provide. Self-abnegation, “the fruit of our joy at the approach of the Kingdom and the result of a progressive identification with Christ”,⁵⁷ is a virtue Jesuits need to accept peacefully the sometimes difficult demands of obedience.

38. We encourage *formatores* to help Jesuits in formation understand and live the mystical source of obedience: an unconditional love for the Lord which will bring them to a desire to serve him in fulfilling the Father’s will. We ask *formatores* to help Jesuits in formation become progressively aware of the demands of a life of obedience: transparency with superiors, esteem for the account of conscience, the responsible exercise of personal

⁵⁴ *Constitutions*, 552.

⁵⁵ *NC* 253.

⁵⁶ “We can tolerate other religious institutes outdoing us in fasting and in other austerities that they practice according to their Rule, but it is my desire, dear brothers, that those who serve the Lord our God in this Society be outstanding in the purity and perfection of their obedience, the renunciation of their will, and the abnegation of their judgment”. *Letter to the Jesuits of Portugal* (26 March 1553) (MHSI 29, 671).

⁵⁷ *NC* 223 §4.

initiative, and a spirit of discernment which accepts the decisions of the superior with good grace.

39. The spirituality and tradition of the Society require that Jesuits be filled with a spirit of obedience to the Holy Father as an essential characteristic of our mission and identity. Jesuit spiritual and ecclesial formation should emphasize availability for mission and “the proper attitude we ought to have in the Church” as established by the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation.⁵⁸

Formed Jesuits

40. The Thirty-Fifth General Congregation invites formed Jesuits to grow in interior freedom and trust in God. In this way, their availability to go to any part of the world and undertake any ministry “of more universal scope and from which greater fruit can be expected”⁵⁹ will increase.

41. The Congregation encourages all Jesuits to strengthen their affection for the pope and their respect for the pastors of the Church and to correct any faults that might exist in this regard.

42. Similarly, the Congregation asks all Jesuits to recognize with gratitude the service local and major superiors offer the Society and to support them in their task.

43. It is of vital importance that all Jesuits consider the account of conscience essential for the practice of obedience and that they offer it according to the guidelines set down by Father Kolvenbach in his letter to the Society of February 21, 2005. Because “the mission is conferred, confirmed, or changed”⁶⁰ in the account of conscience, it should be given in the first place to the major superior. However, what the letter says in regard to opening one’s conscience to the local superior should also be noted: “A Jesuit may always open his conscience to his local superior – and indeed the latter would be permitted to request this if need be”.⁶¹

44. We ask Jesuits to refer to the local superior all questions that lie within his competence and not take these questions directly to the major superior.

45. In our present circumstances, it is not infrequent that Jesuits find themselves serving in works of the Society under a director of the work who may or may not be a Jesuit. In either case, Jesuits owe directors of the work complete, loyal cooperation in what pertains to their office. Jesuits are to make every effort to contribute to maintaining the work’s Jesuit identity.

46. The Congregation wishes to express its profound gratitude to formed Jesuits of advanced years who have given their lives to the service of the Church. We also wish to remind them that they are as closely identified with the Lord when they serve him with reduced energies or even in sickness and suffering as they were when they went about

⁵⁸ GC 34, D. 11

⁵⁹ *Constitutions*, 622.

⁶⁰ Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., “*Le compte de conscience*” (21 February 2005), AR 23,1 (2003) 558.

⁶¹ Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., “*Le compte de conscience*” (21 February 2005), AR 23,1 (2003) 558; *Guidelines for Local Superiors*, 16, AR 22 (1996-2002) 369.

“proclaiming the kingdom in towns and villages”.⁶² Those whose primary task is to pray for the Church and the Society are truly on mission, and their contribution to the Society’s well-being and its service of the Kingdom can never be overemphasized, for they provide an example of placing oneself entirely in the hands of God, which can only inspire and console their brothers.

Superiors

47. The General Congregation encourages major superiors to exercise their roles with confidence and joy, to assign Jesuits to their mission with clarity, and to show interest and care for the Jesuits they send on mission.

48. When major superiors name non-Jesuit directors of works, they should not only take into account candidates’ professional competence but also their understanding and commitment to our mission and way of proceeding.

49. In the spirit of subsidiarity, we recommend that major superiors respect the scope for decision making that appropriately belongs to the local superior.

50. The General Congregation wants to emphasize once more the importance of the role of the local superior. Local superiors need to receive the formation and preparation necessary for their mission. In this regard, major superiors are responsible for offering regular and timely courses and programs to prepare local superiors.

51. The local superior shares with the whole community responsibility for the care and formation of Jesuits who have not yet pronounced final vows. Local superiors are asked to take special care to request the account of conscience twice a year, to provide for the renewal of vows, and to ensure a community atmosphere that encourages the Jesuit in formation to grow as a person and as a religious.

52. It is important that community life be governed by clear directives. Local superiors should collaborate with their brothers in working out and putting into practice a daily order and guidelines for common life. These practices should be evaluated at the time of the major superior’s annual visit or other appropriate times.⁶³

Conclusion

53. Along his pilgrim way from Loyola to Rome, Ignatius prayed unceasingly to Mary, Our Lady, asking her to obtain for him the grace to be received under the banner of her Son.⁶⁴ In her expression, “Behold the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word”,⁶⁵ Mary shows us how to live in total availability and to place our whole lives at the service of her Son. In her instruction to the servants at Cana, “Do whatever he tells you”,⁶⁶ Mary points out for us the basic orientation that should guide our lives. For this reason, the Society has always seen in Mary a model of obedience.

⁶² *Spiritual Exercises*, 91.

⁶³ *NC* 319, 324.

⁶⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, 147.

⁶⁵ Luke 1: 38.

⁶⁶ John 2: 5.

54. Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Lord, of St. Ignatius, and of the great company of brothers who have lived their lives of obedience with a love so profound that it has even led some to martyrdom, the Society rededicates itself to the practice of obedience “for the greater service of God and for the more universal good”.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Constitutions*, 618, 622.