

## GC35. Decree 1

### “WITH RENEWED VIGOR AND ZEAL”

#### THE SOCIETY OF JESUS RESPONDS TO THE INVITATION OF THE HOLY FATHER

### I. A spiritual experience of consolation in the Lord

1. The 35th General Congregation experienced the deep affection of the Holy Father on two occasions, in his letter of January 10, 2008 and at the audience on February 21, 2008. Following in the footsteps of St. Ignatius and his companions, we gathered, the 225 delegates led by our Father General Adolfo Nicolás, as the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, to be hosted by the Vicar of Christ and to listen, with open hearts to what he would say about our mission. It was a powerful moment and a moving spiritual experience.

In his address, Pope Benedict XVI openly revealed his confidence in the Society of Jesus, as well as his spiritual closeness and deep esteem, in words that touched our hearts, stirring and inspiring our desire to serve the Church in this contemporary world marked “by many complex social, cultural and religious challenges.”<sup>1</sup>

2. These two events gave new clarity to the challenging task of the General Congregation. After the election of our Superior General, the largest part of our work was actually devoted to issues concerning our identity, our religious life, and our mission. As is its duty, the General Congregation attentively scrutinized the situation of our apostolic body in order to provide guidance that will enhance and increase the spiritual and evangelical quality of our way of being and proceeding. First in importance is our intimate union with Christ, “the secret of the authentic success of every Christian’s apostolic and missionary commitment, and especially of those who are called to a more direct service of the Gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Our effort to be completely honest with ourselves and with the Lord included much of the dynamic of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises: it helped us discover and recognize our weaknesses and inconsistencies but also the depth of our desire to serve. This required that we reexamine our attitudes and our way of living.

4. However, this experience could not lose sight of the perspective that grounds it: our mission. Indeed, the transition from the First to the Second Week of the Exercises is a change in perspective: the retreatant experiences how his entire life has been embraced with mercy and forgiveness, ceases to concentrate on himself, and starts to “gaze upon Christ our Lord, the eternal King, and all the world assembled before him. He calls to them all and to each person in particular.”<sup>3</sup> Truly we are sinners and “yet called to be companions of Jesus as Ignatius was.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to Very Reverend Father Peter Hans-Kolvenbach (10 January 2008)*, §3

<sup>2</sup> *Letter*, §2

<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> GC 32, D. 2, n. 1, (11).

5. For the delegates this was the spiritual effect of the allocution of the Holy Father at the audience on February 21<sup>st</sup>. In presenting to us with deep affection a dynamic vision of our mission and our service to the Church, he seemed to say: Turn your gaze to the future "in order to respond to the expectations the Church has of you."<sup>5</sup>

## II. Confirmed and sent on mission

6. With such powerful words, the Holy Father definitively placed the future of our mission before us, a mission expressed with complete clarity and firmness: the defense and proclamation of the faith, which leads us to discover new horizons and to reach new social, cultural and religious frontiers. As Fr Adolfo Nicolás noted in his words to the Holy Father, these frontiers can be places of conflict and tension that threaten our reputation, our peace, and our security. That is why we were so moved by the Pope's evocation of the memory of Fr. Arrupe. The Holy Father referred to his proposal that Jesuits be in service to refugees as "one of his last farsighted intuitions"<sup>6</sup>.

The service of faith and the promotion of justice must be kept united. Pope Benedict reminded us that the injustice that breeds poverty has "structural causes,"<sup>7</sup> which must be opposed, and that the source of this commitment can be found in the faith itself: "the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8.9)."<sup>8</sup>

By sending us to "those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching,"<sup>9</sup> the Pope entrusts to us the task to "build bridges of understanding and dialogue,"<sup>10</sup> according to the best tradition of the Society, in the diversity of its ministries: "In its history the Society of Jesus has lived extraordinary experiences of proclamation and encounter between the Gospel and world cultures - it suffices to think of Matteo Ricci in China, Roberto De Nobili in India or of the "Reductions" in Latin America. And you are rightly proud of them. I feel it is my duty today to urge you to set out once again in the tracks of your predecessors with the same courage and intelligence, but also with an equally profound motivation of faith and enthusiasm to serve the Lord and his Church."<sup>11</sup> In a decisive manner Benedict XVI confirmed what our previous General Congregations have said of our specific mission of service to the Church.

7. In this light we can better understand why the Pope stresses so much - in his letter and in his allocution - that "The Church's evangelizing work therefore relies heavily on the Society's responsibility for formation in the fields of theology, spirituality and mission."<sup>12</sup> In an era of complex social, cultural and religious challenges, the Pope asks us to faithfully help the Church. This fidelity demands serious and rigorous research in the theological field and in dialogue with the contemporary world, cultures and religions. What the Church expects from us is sincere collaboration in the search for the full truth to which the Spirit leads us, in full adherence to the faith and the teaching of the Church. This help and this service are not confined to our theologians; they extend to all Jesuits, called to act with great pastoral

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<sup>5</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Allocution to the 35<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (21 February 2008)*, §1.

<sup>6</sup> *Allocution*, §8.

<sup>7</sup> *Allocution*, §8.

<sup>8</sup> *Allocution*, §8.

<sup>9</sup> *Allocution*, §2.

<sup>10</sup> *Allocution*, §5.

<sup>11</sup> *Allocution*, §5.

<sup>12</sup> *Letter*, §6.

sensitivity in the variety of our missions and apostolic work. They are manifest also in the institutions of the Society as a characteristic of their identity.

### III. The response of the Society to the call of the Holy Father

8. It is obvious that the Society can not let this historic moment pass without giving a response at the same high level as the ecclesial charism of St. Ignatius. The Successor of Peter told us of the confidence he has in us; for our part, we sincerely want to respond to him, as an apostolic body, with the same warmth and same affection he has shown us, and to affirm in a resolute way our specific availability to the "Vicar of Christ on earth."<sup>13</sup> The 35th General Congregation expresses its full adherence to the faith and the teaching of the Church, as they are presented to us in the intimate relationship that unites Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium.<sup>14</sup>

9. The 35th General Congregation calls all Jesuits to live with the great spirit and generosity that is at the center of our vocation: "to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the Cross... and to serve the Lord alone and the Church his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth."<sup>15</sup>

10. From the beginning of our formation and throughout our lives, we must be and remain men familiar with the things of God. Our desire is to grow now and in the future in the "interior knowledge of Our Lord, who became human for me, that I may love him more intensely and follow him more closely,"<sup>16</sup> especially in prayer and in community life and in apostolic work. As Nadal said, "La Compañía es fervor."<sup>17</sup>

11. As we know, "mediocrity has no place in Ignatius' world view."<sup>18</sup> It is therefore essential to give young Jesuits a human, spiritual, intellectual, and ecclesial formation as deep, strong, and vibrant as possible to allow each of them to achieve our mission in the world with "a proper attitude of service in the Church."<sup>19</sup>

12. To be authentically "contemplatives in action", seeking and finding God in all things, we must continually return to the spiritual experience of the Spiritual Exercises. Aware that they are "a gift which the Spirit of the Lord has made to the entire Church," we should, as we are called by the Holy Father, "focus special attention on that ministry of the Spiritual Exercises."<sup>20</sup>

13. We are aware of the importance of the intellectual apostolate for the life and mission of the Church today, as Pope Benedict XVI has told us on several occasions since the beginning of his pontificate. We have heard his appeal and want to respond fully. In this context, we encourage our theologians to carry out their task with courage and intelligence; as we have heard the Holy Father say: "This is not of course a simple task, especially when one is called

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<sup>13</sup> Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit debitum* (15 July 1550), §3 (MHSI 63, 375).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 7-10 and the instruction *Donum Veritatis*, 6, 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit debitum* (15 July 1550), §3 (MHSI 63, 375).

<sup>16</sup> *Spiritual Exercise*, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jerónimo NADAL, *Plática 3ª en Alcalá* (1561), §60 (MHSI 90, 296).

<sup>18</sup> Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., *To Friends and Colleagues of the Society of Jesus*, AR 20 (1991) 606.

<sup>19</sup> GC 34, D. 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Allocution*, §9.

to proclaim the Gospel in very different social and cultural contexts and is obliged to address different mindsets."<sup>21</sup> Given the difficulties inherent in the task of evangelization in our time, it is important that they are disposed "in the most genuine Ignatian spirit of 'feeling with the Church and in the Church' – 'to love and serve' the Vicar of Christ on earth with an 'effective and affective devotion' which must make them his invaluable and irreplaceable collaborators in his service for the universal Church."<sup>22</sup> To be missioned to this work at the new frontiers of our times always requires that we also be rooted at the very heart of the Church. This tension, specific to the Ignatian charism, opens the way to true creative fidelity.

14. In the light of Decree 11 of the 34th General Congregation and the final speech of Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach to the Congregation of Procurators in September 2003, we call each Jesuit to consider "the proper attitude of service in the Church", which should be ours. This means recognizing, with honesty to ourselves and before God, that some of our reactions and our attitudes have not always been expressed as our Institute demands of us: to be "men humble and prudent in Christ."<sup>23</sup> We regret, this, conscious of our common responsibility as an apostolic body. Therefore, we call on each Jesuit, with a resolutely constructive attitude, to strive with the Holy Father, to create a spirit of "communion" so that the Church can bring the Gospel of Christ to a world as complex and troubled as ours.

15. Recalling the Examen<sup>24</sup> and asking the Lord for the grace of conversion, we ask each of our companions to examine his own way of living and working at "the new frontiers of our time." This examination will include the following: the demands of our mission "among the poor and with the poor;" our commitment to the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises; our concern for the human and Christian formation of a complete cross section of individuals; "that harmony with the Magisterium which avoids causing confusion and dismay among the People of God"<sup>25</sup> about the "themes, continuously discussed and called into question today, of the salvation of all humanity in Christ, of sexual morality, of marriage and the family."<sup>26</sup> Each Jesuit is invited to acknowledge humbly his mistakes and faults, to ask the Lord's grace to help him live his mission and, if necessary, the grace of forgiveness.

16. The letter and the allocution of the Holy Father open for us a new epoch. The General Congregation gives us the opportunity to live "with renewed vigor and zeal the mission for which the Spirit willed it [the Society] in the Church."<sup>27</sup> Conscious of our responsibility, in, with, and for the Church, we desire to love it more and help others love it more, , for it leads the world to Christ humble and poor and announces to every person that "Deus Caritas Est."<sup>28</sup> We can not separate the love of Christ from this "sense of the Church,"<sup>29</sup> which leads "the entire Society to seek to integrate itself more and more vigorously and creatively in the life of the Church so that we may experience and live its mystery within ourselves."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Letter, §5.

<sup>22</sup> Allocution, §7.

<sup>23</sup> Formula of the Institute, *Exposcit debitum* (15 July 1550), §6 (MHSI 63, 381).

<sup>24</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 32-43.

<sup>25</sup> Allocution, §6.

<sup>26</sup> Allocution, §6.

<sup>27</sup> Allocution, §2.

<sup>28</sup> BENEDICT XVI, encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*.

<sup>29</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 352-370.

<sup>30</sup> GC 33, D. 1, n. 8.

17. We acknowledge what the Lord calls us to be and to live with greater intensity, through the letter of the Holy Father on January 10<sup>th</sup> and his address at the audience on February 21<sup>st</sup>. "In the spirit of the fourth vow *in regard to missions* that so distinctively unites us with the Holy Father,"<sup>31</sup> we want to express our willingness to achieve what he invites us to put into practice and what he encourages us to continue or to initiate. We express our renewed availability to be sent into the Lord's vineyard, for the greater service of the Church and the greater glory of God. In asking the Lord for the power of his Spirit to do his will, all of us unite our voices to that of the Successor of Peter in praying with him:

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
My memory, my understanding and my entire will,  
All I have and possess; you have given me, I now give it back to you,  
O Lord; all is yours, dispose of it according to your will;  
Give me only your love and your grace; that is enough for me."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> GC 34, D. 11, n. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 234.