

**TAKE, LORD, AND RECEIVE:
THE POVERTY, CHASTITY
AND OBEDIENCE
OF JESUITS**

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A FEW WORDS OF INTRODUCTION:

This reflection has its source in a homily given at the 2004 first vow ceremony at the Jesuit novitiate in St. Paul MN, and in circular letters I have written as provincial superior of the Jesuits in English Canada on each of the three vows, in 2006 and 2007. While my reflection may well have some pertinence to other forms of religious life, its perspective is deliberately Jesuit.

I will begin with a prologue, mainly relying on my homily. And then I will offer a revision of my three circular letters, removing repetitive materials and merely contextual remarks. As one might expect, the letter on poverty was the one most bound up in a particular context, that of our own Jesuit province.

I hope you will find this reflection useful and inspiring.

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PROLOGUE: LAYING DOWN OUR LIVES

To take the vows of religion is to lay down one's life, following the example of Jesus. Those who take them no longer belong to themselves. Henceforth they will dance to the tune of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They will join the multitude of those down through the centuries who have made a similar commitment, and, in particular, the company of those who have made this commitment inspired by the charism of Ignatius Loyola.

What does it mean to lay down our lives for one another following the example of Jesus? This question applies not just to those who take vows, but to all Christians. So let us closely examine what Jesus did. Did he deliberately and intentionally bring about his own death, in effect committing suicide? No. He did not lay down his life in that sense. He knew that he had a mission to accomplish, that he could not in any way blunt or blur the message his Father gave him to deliver. The poor and the marginalized and those set aside by the political and religious establishment of his day would find comfort in his words, but others at the top of the heap would not want to hear what he had to say and would react violently to his challenge. At a certain point in his public ministry, he set his face resolutely upon Jerusalem, as Luke tells us, and from that point on his life was at risk. He did not choose death as such. He chose to fulfill without compromise the will of His Father to preach the kingdom, knowing that death, given the power structures of his day, was the natural consequence of his choice.

What is worthy of imitation in Jesus' attitude is not that we should seek death for the sake of death. What is absolutely essential is to be willing to lay down our life, to put ourselves at risk because of the supreme value of preaching the message of Christ in our words and our actions. Some who have taken that risk have like Christ been put to death, as evidenced by a wonderful array of martyrs down through the ages and in every part of the world. Most of us who seek to imitate the attitude of Christ will not die as martyrs. But still we are to value our witness to Christ more highly than our own bodily life. We will be led to hold our lives as a gift of God, allowing God to dispose of them at will. We will be invited to let go, to stop clinging to our life as if it were the most precious thing we owned. This means taking on the attitude of those who out of love put themselves in harm's way that someone else might be spared: a soldier who protects a companion in battle, a bystander who intervenes when someone is about to be hurt or killed, a volunteer who goes to an impoverished region of

the world knowing that he or she might be caught up in violence, whether random or intentional.

The vows as a letting go: *Kenosis*:

In sum, to lay down one's life is to unclench the grasp by which we dearly hold on to it as if it were our own possession, and come to the point of holding it with open hands, putting it at the disposal of God and of those who need our love and our care. That basic attitude characterized Christ Jesus, who did not consider his equality with God something to be clung to, but emptied himself out, taking the form of the slave (Phil 2:6-8).¹ His was not a gesture of throwing away or giving up his equality with God, but of letting go of it, taking on the form of the slave while remaining Who He is. He allows himself to be vulnerable, caught up in the struggles of our human nature, and in this way He fashions our salvation. He came not to magnify himself but to save us. This pattern of *kenosis* gives the counter-example to Adam's grasping for a higher status which he was to receive anyway, but as God's free gift. Adam's anxious death-dealing pattern is overcome by the generous life-giving pattern set by Christ, who holds His divinity with open hands, takes on human vulnerability that our wounds might be healed. His obedience was unto death, death on the cross. In this he did lay down his life for us.

When we take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience we profess our intention to radically let go of our life as Jesus did, to hold it as gift of God to be used by God in whatever way God wants, putting it at risk whenever love calls. To take vows is to profess a life of *kenosis*. Indeed the attitude of the vowed Jesuit is to hold absolutely everything as gift of God, not clinging to it as his own possession:

- Poverty means that he fully uses the good things of this world but having renounced the right to ultimately control or own them.
- Chastity means that he fully lives profound relationships with men and women but without exclusivity, always inviting others into the circle.
- Obedience means that he fully utilizes his talents, his holy desires to achieve a noble goal, but in such a way that God might through the voice

¹The Greek noun corresponding to the gesture of emptying out is *kenosis*.

of the superior make use of them in accord with the apostolic plans of the community.

The vowed person knows that all these good things are already gift of God, that his act of returning them to God to dispose of them as He wills is simply recognizing reality as it is. Whether or not we return God's gift to Him in gratitude, the gifts we have received from God are God's and in the end God will dispose of them according to his will. The "Take and Receive" prayer from Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises is not a pious frill, a secondary option, but the bread and butter of every human life. Vows are a radical and wholehearted yes to this truth.

Vows and Virtues:

We are all invited to take on the pattern of Christ's emptying out. Those of us who are religious do this in a more explicit and deliberate way: while not more perfect than others in following Christ and the pattern of his life, we publicly profess through our vows our commitment to strive for that perfection through a disciplined way of life. The constraints of the vows provide a structure; observance of the vows in a multitude of acts, many against the grain, little by little leads to an inner transformation: being poor, chaste, and obedient becomes second nature to us. At first acts of poverty, chastity, and obedience may be acts of our naked will buttressed by the grace of God; more and more they become acts of our total self, spirit, psyche (soul), and body, transformed by the grace of God.² Thus the vows become virtues. We make the choices they suggest with ease, eagerness, promptitude. And with these three virtues there comes a panoply of companion virtues, as we will see when we reflect on each vow: poverty is accompanied by generosity, hospitality, sharing, compassion, solidarity with the poor; chastity by intimacy, hospitality, community building, generativity, psychic integration; obedience by openness, availability, trust in God, and companionship. The vows express our commitment to a minimal obligation, but they lead to the virtuous enrichment

²One can think of many examples of this progression. To use a couple of images, rather than being stuck in the drudgery of the finger exercises of one learning to play the piano, one is effortlessly given over to the graceful and spirited playing of a Mozart sonata, or rather than being caught up in the awkwardness and self-consciousness of one's first weeks with a computer, the production of complex documents with graphics and charts has become second nature.

of the total fabric of our lives. That enrichment is unique to each person, varies with each religious congregation.

Vows for some; virtues for all:

The vows are not meant to create a barrier between those who belong to religious communities and those who do not. They create a distinction, to be sure, but one designed to unite all more closely in taking on the basic attitude of Christ. Those without vows are called to be more like us, and we more like them.

They are called to be more like us: while not all Christians take the vows of religion, all, in accord with their state of life and the promptings of grace, are called to acquire the virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience and their companion virtues. While in some particulars these virtues differ because the state of life differs, they have the same ultimate goal.

How many people in our world live in radical insecurity not knowing where the next meal is to come from, and where they will find shelter? And even in our affluent society, how many will find themselves in circumstances where they do not know where to turn: unexpected medical expenses, pension plans that turn out to be inadequate, the effects of corporate downsizing, and so on? They are called upon to practice the virtue of poverty without taking the vow of poverty.

While many human beings have chosen marriage instead of celibacy, still at the heart of any good relationship is respect of the other as a temple of God's presence, letting the other be, holding the other as gift rather than as possession, the very attitudes which the vow of chastity seeks to foster. They are called upon to live the virtue of chastity as befits their state of life without taking the vow of chastity.

And then while they are not obedient to a superior, the very changing circumstances of their lives invite them to let go of their desires, wishes, and to go with the flow of their lives as they unfold: new challenges and opportunities, yes, but also sharp disappointments that force them to radically shift direction, such as illness, the death of loved ones, events of random violence that can shake them profoundly, the suffering of loved ones to which they must respond, well-made plans that turn into scrambling for dear life: all of this

means practising the virtue of obedience to God's will without taking the vow of obedience.

Thus let us not too rapidly put those of us who take vows of religion on a pedestal, as if we are holier than everyone else. The invitation to hold all as gift and to lay down our lives is universal, and many without vows have responded to it in an outstanding way which will leave most religious far behind. The difference is that we religious make a public profession that we intend to do what all humans are invited to do, and we choose a form of life which at times gently and at times firmly, but always consistently urges us to walk in the path of radical commitment to Jesus. The vows we profess are reminders, prods, signposts which we have chosen as helps to follow the way Jesus has pointed out for all of us. They are a sign not of perfection but of striving for perfection.

We are called to be more like them: In one sense those with vows live their lives as everyone else does, preparing for a life of competent and compassionate service in our technologically dizzying age, celebrating, sorrowing, having good days and bad days, preparing supper, playing or following sports, going to movies and concerts, having meals with friends, working competently and professionally, eventually getting to the stage of sans eyes, sans teeth, sans everything, and trying find God's hand in all of this. But at the heart of their busy lives is their commitment to be gift of God for others, not as isolated individuals but as companions of Jesus and of each other.

Jesuit religious are not vowing to escape from this world: they are vowing to live in this world with their non-vowed brothers and sisters even more intensely, with eyes open to the reality around them: the mystery of evil, the fragility of who we are as God's creation, the changeableness of human affairs. They are choosing to be where the battles are raging, to take risks, to open themselves to whatever path the Lord lays before them, no matter how complex or simple, how direct or circuitous. In this they fully take on the human condition, but knowing that all that is good and holy and worthwhile comes from God and returns to God.

Thus the ceremony in which someone takes vows of religion, rather than creating a further distance between him and his parents, siblings, relatives, friends, binds him even more closely to them. He continues to live in the same world as they do, and joins them in recognizing its fragility and beauty. Because he knows in a specially graced way that he comes from God and is

destined to return to God, he professes in a public way his desire for detachment from this world. But this detachment will enable him to join all those for whom he cares at the very centre of the world and taste its joys and sorrows with even fuller intensity.

POVERTY: LETTING GO OF OUR POSSESSIONS

Down through the centuries religious have struggled with the meaning and implications of their vow of poverty. At times this struggle has surfaced in a more urgent and controversial way, requiring careful and discerning attention. This is the case today as evolving economic structures are rapidly changing the context of our lives. How can we in our day hold with open unclenched hands the good things and resources that we need for our lives and for our ministry?

Religious poverty became a pressing concern in the post Vatican II years, marked by renewal within religious communities. Like my confreres, I wondered what the phrase “family of slender means” found in GC 32 (Decree 12, #7) might signify in our first-world Canadian context. How might we balance the various factors entailed in living poverty: apostolic effectiveness, symbolic value, frugality, solidarity with the poor? We grappled with these questions with their national and global repercussions, uncomfortably at first, but over the years since the ‘60's our groping in this relatively uncharted territory has begun to pay off. The statutes on poverty, promulgated in 1976 by Fr. General Arrupe and revised in 2003 by Fr. General Kolvenbach, have given us excellent guidance. We are indeed moving towards a more balanced approach to the practice of poverty. But we have a long way to go. As Fr. Kolvenbach tells us, our witness as Jesuits to a Lord who has chosen poverty to redeem humanity still lacks credibility (letter 2003/10 accompanying the statutes on poverty.)

How can we better shape our thinking on consecrated poverty in our own context as we begin the 21st century, proclaim that renewed understanding and take steps to have it implemented in our provinces? This question is especially timely for three reasons:

- As I have already mentioned, Father General has recently issued an updated set of *Statutes on Poverty*, which include a letter of promulgation and a set of general principles. This was followed by a clear and inspiring letter on poverty and a revised version of the *Instruction on the Administration of Goods*, which translates the principles of the statutes on poverty, especially as regards communities and apostolates, into the nuts and bolts of Jesuit administrative practice.

You have had occasion to study the statutes and the letter, and by now you have grasped the point that Father General wants us to move forward rather than settling into a comfortable stance, thinking that we already live our poverty well enough.

- The competitive attitudes and behaviour patterns of the world in which we live are for us a massive temptation. We are all struggling with reduced resources and the instinct is to find the extra edge that will enable us to survive in comfort. This is true of individuals and communities, sometimes concerned with protecting their own turf. At the same time the world in which we live is one of spurious abundance. To keep the economic engine chugging away at full tilt citizens must consume more than they need, wasting precious non-renewable resources on material goods designed to be thrown away or to fall apart in planned obsolescence. Advertising keeps them on track should they flag in their spending habits, and anaesthetizes them against the scary reality in which they live. We can too easily allow this mindset to permeate our lives and shape our desires, a mindset which in effect is a form of idolatry, diametrically opposed to the solidarity with the poor to which our documents call us. But the media present the other side of the coin as well and call us to conversion. The cry of those left to fend for themselves in New Orleans in the wake of Katrina haunts us still: “Is there anyone out there? Does anyone care?” And, of course, the extreme penury which Katrina and other recent natural disasters have forcefully brought to our attention envelops vast regions of the world that are systemically left behind, such as major parts of the African continent.

Provision for future generations and for those left out is far from the minds of the so-called leaders of our society as they make decisions for the short-term, decisions which too often face everything except the real issues. How can we Jesuits be a counter-cultural witness, not only in the worthy social causes we espouse but also in our response to Christ’s invitation to live authentic religious poverty?

- In recent years ecology has become a concern and an apostolic thrust in the Society. Consecrated poverty is more than a commitment to sound ecological living, but ecology does provide a valuable approach to a contextually sound poverty. The more lightly we are able to tread on this earth the more we will be able to hand on a viable home for the

generations to come. How can we give witness to ecological values, seen as more and more crucial as the effects of global warming wreak havoc with the lives of many and the economic welfare of all? Many people in our affluent world realize the disastrous consequences of the path we are on, and have made a commitment to live a simple and unencumbered life. Does our commitment as Jesuits not urge us to be counted among them? Can we afford to continue in the “nothing is too good for Father” mentality which still from time to time rears its ugly head?

Spiritual and actual poverty:

Let us begin our reflection with the spiritual roots of actual poverty as expressed by Fr. Kolvenbach: what grounds our observance is the spiritual dimension of our poverty, i.e., our openness as religious to be gifted with a virtue which goes beyond codified practice, to live in Christ who “though he was rich became poor for your sakes so that through his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)” These are dynamic words. They exhort us neither to destitution nor to the setting of a quantitative benchmark for our poverty. They advocate transparency, letting go and sharing. This passage begins with the abundance of Christ and ends with the abundance of Christ’s disciples. What makes possible the transition from one abundance to the other is Christ’s *kenosis*, his radical self-gift, and this attitude is at the heart of any religious poverty. Authentic poverty stems from the abundance of the heart and leads to even greater abundance of the heart, an abundance measured not by the world’s standards but by God’s. There is never a point at which we have achieved spiritual poverty and can rest on our laurels: no matter at what stage we are in our lives, that text invites us to an even deeper gift of ourselves in imitation of Christ.

But if we are to remain faithful to Paul’s exhortation we cannot remain with spiritual poverty. Unless our grace-inspired impulses of conformity to Christ’s *kenosis* have an impact on the way we live, they are like the seed that falls by the wayside or in the brambles. Spiritual poverty must give birth to actual poverty. The shape of this actual poverty will differ according to the apostolate to which we are missioned, the context in which we live, and we must constantly be in a state of discernment to make sure that our practice of poverty conforms not to our own will but to the Lord’s. This discernment takes place at many levels: the General and his consultors have engaged in deep

discernment in preparing guidelines for the whole Society; the Provincial and his consultants are the chief discerners at the province level, and it is there that specific decisions about actual poverty in our communities and apostolates are made in harmony with our general statutes; local superiors and communities are to engage in their own discernment of local situations; and individual Jesuits are to discern in dialogue with their superiors about their individual practice of poverty.

There are many forms of actual poverty which human beings live on this earth: the bone-crushing penury that most of us can hardly imagine, the hidden anguish of those who appear to be doing well within our affluent societies but who fall behind and suffer silently, the recklessness of those who spend way beyond their means, showing off a trashy opulence but in reality jeopardizing their own future, the sobriety of those poor people who with hard work and disciplined frugality manage to keep their heads above water and still care for others.

Where do Jesuits situate themselves within this continuum? We may play at living in dire poverty, but we will never be able to escape the fact that we are well educated, recipients of a formation that has proved itself over the centuries, such that with a modicum of discipline and intelligence we can indeed live gracious lives with relatively little, even if we naturally prefer more. Some may be called to more radical poverty, but the minimal stance for all of us is the poverty of hard work and disciplined frugality. This means a choice to live with few resources and to travel light; to be hospitable to those who have less than we, opening not just our purse strings but also ourselves and our houses to them. This stance is a powerful counter-witness to those in our world who are wasteful and reckless, and an encouraging example to those who are destitute, showing them that there may be better ways to make use of the scant resources which they do have at their disposal. We may not share their destitution, but we are in solidarity with them in their struggle. This general guideline leaves room for the workings of grace in individuals and in communities. Thus there may be some variance in how each Jesuit and each community lives actual poverty. Let us remember, however, that unless animated by spiritual poverty, which comes from our observance of the gospel and following of Christ, any form of actual poverty we may choose will be at best peripheral and at worst empty show.

Above all we need to remember that we do not have the final say in how we live actual poverty. We do make choices, but in the end the Exercises urge us to remain in God's hands regarding our practice of actual poverty. And God has chosen many individual Jesuits over the centuries for experiences of radical poverty. This applies to provinces as well, some of whom have had to deal in the last decade with a powerful wave of litigation relating to allegations of sexual abuse which has been very costly and has led to significant apostolic cutbacks. Such experiences teach us to be more confident in God's provident care for us than in our own choices. And let us also remember that remaining in God's hands, for us who have vowed poverty, implies dependence on our legitimate superiors in these matters.

I am neither ready nor competent to compose a systematic treatise on religious poverty, but I will deal with a number of pertinent issues under the following headings:

Communal and Individual Poverty:

Individual poverty is a daily concern for all of us, but communal poverty, especially in this time of anxiety about how we are going to continue living in an age of increasing scarcity, has come to the fore in our consciousness. In the old days we looked after ourselves and we presumed that superiors dealt with the hidden financial realms that ensured a steady supply of bread on the table, with an occasional first class feast, and a roof over our heads. Like children, we allowed ourselves to be cared for and took what we were given. Instead of going to the store to get our toiletries, giving us a sense of how much things cost, we went to a well-appointed common room and simply took what we wanted. We are now fewer in number, we are asked to administer our own budgets, more of us have financial responsibilities in various realms, and patterns of communal discernment have developed in many communities and apostolates, including discernment of financial matters. Dependence on superiors who care for us and give us the necessary permissions is a part of our practice of poverty, but this dependence should be that of adults rather than of children.

It has often been said that original sin affects communities more than individuals. So many people are able to lead basically good moral lives within their own private sphere, but when you put them together with other people in a community or in a common enterprise of any sort, misunderstandings and

conflicts often break out. Good intentions and good hearts are not in and of themselves able to ensure good collaborative practices. We may have a good practice of individual poverty, but when communal matters are at stake, we are tempted to be unduly anxious about the future, to seek to maintain this or that communal access to funds, sometimes in order to pursue praiseworthy goals, at other times simply wanting the extra security of easy access to money should the community need it. One of the strong features of recent documents is that communities are to live a regime of poverty which does make some provision for contingencies but by and large calls us to trust not in stocks and bonds but in God's providence for us, which works in and through the care members and superiors exercise in financial matters, and, let us not forget, through the benefaction of others.

The provincial plays a key role in this delicate area. Jesuit law entrusts to him the guardianship and administration of the funds of the province, and through these funds he is to care for those in formation or in retirement who are not able to provide financially for themselves, and to support apostolic endeavours that are in line with our priorities but without easy access to resources. The provincial does not do this on his own. He has consultors, he has a treasurer. Every year he reports to Father General and his administration is audited – periodically through the visit of a staff member from the Society's treasury office in Rome, and every year through a report sent to the General by a qualified Jesuit. Should a provincial ever begin to use those funds contrary to the purposes for which they are established, or accumulate more money than the province really needs, this matter would be addressed.

My subsequent reflections I will put under three headings. The first one, on how we are to acquire our resources, will deal with the gratuity of our ministries and with one of Ignatius' characteristic activities, begging. The second, on how we are to use our resources for ourselves, features the virtues of frugality and simplicity. The third one, on how we are to share our resources with others, features presence, hospitality, and sharing.

How we are to acquire our resources:

Four areas require attention under this heading: endowments, salaries in relation to the gratuity of our ministries, generous friends and family members, and the Ignatian practice of begging.

A) One of the basic rules of our poverty is that with the exception of formation communities and communities for the aged and infirm, communities are not allowed to own or draw from endowments to find resources to support themselves or various apostolic purposes, no matter how noble. And communities are permitted to keep a moderate contingency fund, set at a different level in different provinces in accord with the Statutes on Poverty.

B) Given the financial context in which we live, the gratuity of ministries which Ignatius advocated is not possible in its pure and unadulterated form. Usually Jesuits are expected to bring to the community appropriate compensation for their full-time occupation. Without this compensation, most communities would not be able to avoid deficits, especially those with a number of people who do not have a paid position. But let us remember that the resources we have at our disposal are not just monetary. Even more crucial are the personal resources we bring: our education, skills, experience, time, energy. The principle of gratuity applies to these resources as well. All Jesuits, including those who bring in a salary, are expected to give of themselves totally to those they serve, even beyond the levels prescribed by their work contracts, while respecting, of course, the need to maintain a healthy rhythm between prayer, leisure and work. In addition Jesuits as a rule should be willing to exercise other forms of ministry that are more directly priestly and for which no payment is asked. Finally, in certain cases the community, with the permission of the provincial, will return as contributed services to the apostolate part of the salaries it has received. This partial move towards integral gratuity of services can be of crucial importance for certain apostolates.

No matter what our work situation we do what we can to serve others gratuitously. Our preference is to simply leave it up to those whom we serve to give us what they think we are entitled to. We will often ask for those who are more well-to-do to help us in our effort to serve poorer people gratuitously – for example the provision of bursaries in our schools or larger donations by some retreatants to help cover the costs of those who can't afford to pay the suggested rate.

C) There is always some imbalance in our communities due to the fact that some members have wealthy and generous benefactors who want them to have things which others would not normally be able to get from the community. For us to depend on this source of revenue can lead to a breakdown in our poverty. But the generous impulses of friends and family members are not to be simply

turned aside and stifled. Rather they need to be channeled. Delicate discernment is called for. Luxurious gifts are inappropriate and should be discouraged. There is a pedagogy involved here as well: could those who are more generous learn to give their Jesuit friend or relative not something over and above the ordinary but something that in the course of events the Jesuit would readily enough get permission to acquire for his own use? In addition these benefactors should come to expect that any monetary gift to an individual Jesuit is to be turned over to the community. That rule applies to any money received by a Jesuit as a gift or as remuneration for work done. The money goes to the community, and the individual Jesuit needs to be totally transparent with his local superior in these matters. Failure to follow this may have legal consequences as well. (In many countries a religious who keeps revenue for himself is in danger of losing his exemption from having to pay income tax.)

The issue of imbalance often comes up in travel. The community might not be ready to pay for an individual member's trip which someone in his family has offered to finance. Such trips should not be permitted. In other cases, for example a jubilee trip, such a trip could be permitted. We must avoid dividing Jesuits into those who have wealthy friends and those who don't. Looking at the positive side, one is at times edified by how our members share their generous friends and family members with the other members of their community (not just with their special friends within the community). This breaks down the exclusivity of these relationships and their focus on their material dimension, and enhances the hospitality which is central to our poverty.

D) That brings up the topic of begging. Ignatius was a beggar throughout his life, asking various rich benefactors for the money needed for his own studies and for the studies of impecunious students he wished to support. During his term as our first superior general, he was not be afraid to ask benefactors for the help needed to found new houses and new ministries. In contemporary terms, he was a fund-raiser, a chief executive officer who, unlike some who play that role in the Society today, was not afraid of the "ask". He did his begging discreetly but effectively.

Begging is an integral part of Jesuit poverty. The contemporary pattern is for our provinces and their works to have annual appeals, special appeals, major campaigns, and wide publicity is given to our works and to their apostolic purpose so as to attract new donors and establish lists of helpful contacts. We

do not as a rule beg for our active apostolic communities, though often God provides through the spontaneous and unexpected gifts that we receive. We do beg for our apostolates, and for the support of those communities which look after men who are not yet engaged in full-time ministry and for those whose health and energy has diminished. This form of revenue does not come automatically: it involves a deep trust in divine providence and a willingness to befriend others and seek their enthusiastic support, discovering from them whether they think our work is worth supporting. This exercise can be very valuable: feedback, even if it is difficult for us to accept, enables us, if called for, to go back to the drawing board and re-shape our apostolic endeavours, or else, if it is clear that we have done all that we can in a certain situation, to reallocate our resources elsewhere, finding others to continue the apostolate we are leaving if appropriate and feasible.

We must remember that begging is not just for apostolates but also for individuals. A key contemporary form of such begging is for individuals to seek external funding to cover sabbaticals, study leaves, etc, rather than counting on the scarce resources of the community.

In some cases apostolates or Ignatian projects of very high priority which are just beginning and/or do not have the prospect of large revenues from donations will be supported by the apostolic fund of the province. But this should not be to the detriment of our readiness to enter into relationship with many people likely to support us, and to ask them for their views and their support at an appropriate moment. This is difficult, and for some people may feel humiliating, but in an era of increased lay/Jesuit collaboration it is essential.

How we are to use our resources for ourselves:

The original statement of GC 32 that our poverty is to be that of families of slender means still holds, but the experience of a few decades since then hopefully enables us to spell out more precisely what this means.

We commonly perceive considerable variation in the practice of communal and individual poverty. Some live very austere, spending very little on themselves, getting second hand clothes, etc., but others feel they need extensive vacations requiring travel, get the community to pay for trips that others would consider excessive, offer themselves the benefit of meals in nice

restaurants, or clothe themselves expensively. The same applies to the poverty of communities, and this can be ascertained through annual financial reports. Some of the variances are quite legitimate, of course, because of the cost of living in different parts of the country, availability / need of transportation, housing costs, or accounting procedures. While there is an allowable margin of variation, some of our men and communities are not, at least in certain areas, the credible witnesses to the practice of poverty they should be. Indeed most of us have areas of our lives where we hang on rather than let go.

As I reflect on these matters, I offer three guidelines for us to follow, and a final comment:

A) the hallmark of Jesuit poverty should be the quality of how we live rather than the quantity of goods we consume. We are constantly solicited by explicit and implicit messages to foster the culture of planned obsolescence which marks our first world, to throw away and spend more: “bigger, better, faster, improved”. Some advertising messages are blatant and easy to unmask, but the incessant media bombardment of false values does leave its traces, which assiduous meditation on the Two Standards will enable Jesuits to detect and uproot. Our defining characteristic should be simplicity and sparseness in our clothes and furnishings, which should be less numerous but of moderately good quality, of an unobtrusive style that enables them to be worn for a long time without drawing attention to ourselves as being in or out of style, and cared for so they last a long time. We are to be neither fashion cards nor tramps. This applies in different ways in different apostolic contexts. Our food and drink should be simple, wholesome, conducive to health and longevity. As keen apostolic persons, we tend to be especially prone to excess in technology and transport, seeking to be instantly available to anyone at practically any time, to get the jump of an extra second with the latest and most expensive computer, to use a car in cases where walking, biking, or public transport would be a good option, and so on. How are we to be a counter-cultural witness in a civil society which is increasingly built on the systematic waste of energies and resources in the pursuit of frivolous ends? That is a key question for each of us.

Does this mean that there is no room for elegance, for the enjoyment of good things? By no means. To give an example: a community whose practice is to put out an expensive and high quality wine every night is imitating the style of life of families of ample means, and eventually that enjoyment is taken for granted and becomes dull and empty. One that reserves good quality wine for

special celebrations enhances the pleasure and the gratitude of those who partake on those occasions. A suitable rhythm of having and not having the good things of this world, of desiring them and enjoying them, makes for greater appreciation and is quite in keeping with our poverty. A similar principle applies to our cultural nourishment. Poverty of slender means does not exclude going to plays, to the opera, to symphony concerts, to the movies. But then the personal budget that is allocated to this must remain modest.

B) One of the inescapable features of living the poverty of slender means is budgeting. Tough choices have to be made and implemented. If a person spends more in one area, there ought to be corresponding cut-backs in other areas. This is where dialogue between the local superior and the individual Jesuit needs to take place, within the guidelines set by the province, and with a view to how we can best prepare ourselves and carry out the mission entrusted to us. The annual budget approved by the superior ought to be not just a formality but a means of monitoring our own practice of poverty, and the money we spend ought to be accounted for whenever we ask for more. Our current system of credit cards and impressed accounts generally works well, though some may still function with the older system of asking for money when they need it. We must remember that the amount we maintain in our account is not our money but that of the Society, and that we need to include in what is reported to and radically at the disposal of the community not just that amount, but also the financial resources we have accumulated in air-mile points and reward-points on our credit cards. All is to be accounted for and spent in accord with one's approved budget.

Larger expenses ought to be authorized specifically by being included in the budget which is reviewed and approved by the superior, or else by obtaining his permission. What is a larger expense? Obviously buying a car or a computer should require specific permission, and buying a set of T-shirts or a needed pair of shoes does not: *de minimis non curat lex* (for those of us whose Latin is rusty, the law doesn't sweat the small stuff.) But ultimately the judgement as to what is significant and what is small stuff is that of the superior. That judgement may vary according to individuals and their propensities, stages in the process of formation, etc.

C) One of the major issues of our time is the depredation of our environment and our natural resources, which, if it continues at the present rate, will leave precious little for the generations that follow us on this planet. We have often

heard injunctions, now taken up by our governments, for instance in the recycling of garbage & of food waste, to live on this earth with as small a footprint as we can, making at best a modest use of the resources of this world, and most of us have begun to make an effort to move in these directions. At this stage of our life together on this planet, this is not an ecological frill but an imperative. It means choices in how we set up our houses and works, and how we get from one place to another. It means care in how we moderate our use of electricity and non-renewable resources. If we need to choose between refreshing this or that room or venue for simply esthetic reasons, and making our house more energy efficient, there should be no doubt as to our option. And again, we need to counter the insidious pressure to get us to buy the latest and the most expensive technology, some of which end up being flash-in-the-pan and rapidly discarded. When we act like a family of slender means, we wait until we are sure before making purchases which notably affect our budget.

In conclusion: Ignatius referred to himself as a pilgrim. He spent many years in travel from one place to another, and was not encumbered with possessions. He did not need to pack an abundant suitcase to prepare for all eventualities on a trip. If we are weighed down with too many possessions, moving to respond to the superior's call for a new mission becomes more difficult, and the burden of anxiety in our lives is increased. As we are finding out, to be pilgrims is the only way that we humans are going to be able to ensure our survival on our planet.

How we are to share our resources with others:

Religious who simply turn in on themselves in self-congratulation about their own modest draw on the world's resources and their own intelligent practice of frugality fall far short of the mark. Ultimately our poverty should powerfully incite us to look outward to our fellow pilgrims on this earth, especially those caught up in structurally entrenched poverty, and to do this not just with safe feelings of compassion from a distance but with genuine presence and effective action in accord with our means and our opportunities. On the whole we are able to accumulate resources because of our frugal standard of living, our friends, our apostolic skills. These resources are not just for ourselves but for others. They make possible our ministry to them and our direct assistance when required. In sum, frugality and simplicity without sharing and hospitality are

sterile, nothing more than a form of narcissism; sharing and hospitality without frugality and simplicity lack credibility and grounding.

There are many ways of ensuring this *ad extra* dimension of poverty:

A) Presence: We can make sure that some resources within the province, both financial and personnel, will be allocated to the sector of social justice, educating, advocating, and assisting in appropriate ways. But poor people are not just to be the anonymous object of our ministration, the recipients of handouts on the street, the beneficiary of bureaucratic programmes: like us they are created in the image and likeness of God and like us they crave contact, companionship, personal attention, even if these do not immediately lead to beneficence. Many of us, thank God, have a ministry which opens wide a window on the world of those who really struggle for their daily bread. But others predominantly deal with educated people, with the so-called “elite”. This is a real concern which has been brought to our attention by the Society since GC 32. Is there at least one poor family, one marginalized person with whom we have personal contact? At some point in our Jesuit career have we attended to this dimension of our vocation? Are our social contacts to be limited to people akin to ourselves, whose cultural sensitivities and educational background we share?

B) Hospitality: This is also a crucial aspect of our religious poverty. The good things of which we are careful stewards are not just for ourselves but for others as well. There should be ample room for a simple heartfelt hospitality towards both friends and strangers, a hospitality in which members welcome each other’s guests and spend time with them, in which we are our unaffected selves and not trying to impress with a show of affluence. Hospitality to others of course does not exclude moments of celebration just for ourselves to build up community. But we must always seek to break down walls and to include: better a simple and hearty meal for many than an elegant table for the chosen few.

We must remember that hospitality has implications for not only hosts but also guests: Jesuit visitors should not simply use the community as a hotel, systematically by-passing contact with the local community members. One of the dimensions of hospitality, not always feasible because of the distances we have to cover, is from time to time inviting not just one Jesuit from another

community but larger numbers to our tables, thus fostering deeper fellowship and union of minds and hearts.

C) Sharing: When we move to this topic of sharing we get into some of the more difficult and problematic areas of our religious poverty. In our own gentle way, marked by compassion and respect, we Jesuits try to live in accord with the axiom of “from each according to his ability and to each according to his need”. Indeed our poverty excludes all forms of individual ownership. What we have and use we do not radically own: we are stewards of it for the common good. (But let us not go to the excess of saying “our toothbrush” as prescribed in certain extra-fervent congregations in pre-Vatican II years). The purpose of this sharing of material goods, which is both active and passive, both a giving and a receiving, is to make us energetic, skilled, and generous in our assigned mission. But the same principle of sharing applies to our skills, our experience, our energy, our time. They are gifts the Lord bestows upon us, and gifts that we ought to put at the disposal of others without any afterthought. This recommends to us a necessary gratuity in our ministries, which we have already spoken about.

To each according to his needs: we have to make a distinction between wants and needs. I may lust after an expensive leather jacket, the latest computer with all its bells and whistles, but do I need it? Does my apostolic mission really justify it? From each according to his ability: we do what we can to support the community, but there need be no correlation between one’s ability level and what monetary compensation one brings to the community, given the lack of resources of some important apostolic works.

The application of the above principles to sharing between members of one community is difficult enough. But in many Jesuit provinces, including our own, sharing at the level of the communities themselves is a keen concern. There are significant discrepancies between their financial resources.

The principal apostolate of some communities has provided generous salaries, but others number many retired people and/or people who work in apostolic sectors which cannot afford to pay real salaries. The Society provides for equalization through its rule that the community surplus, beyond a certain amount kept back for various contingencies, is put at the disposal of the province. The basic principle at work here is one of integral sharing, which aims to bring greater evenness in access by communities and apostolates to

Jesuit resources. We will never achieve a mathematical formula which ensures perfect equality, but we will continue to struggle with the challenges posed by this. We must be a band of brothers in which we support one another with what we have in abundance, in some cases our financial resources, in others, for instance, our direct experience of serving the poor. The principle also applies to the society as a whole. Some provinces are wealthy and do not need all the endowment revenues they are able to gather. Other poorer provinces will receive their help gratefully. The Society's Charitable and Apostolic Fund (FACSI) to which every community contributes is a vehicle to achieve this equalization. In addition there are many projects, especially in the third world, which Fr. General brings to the attention of better off provinces, and from my experience they respond generously.

Conclusion:

Two final points, the first about the theme of dependence. As religious we have renounced ownership and control over the good things of this world. We make use of them in accord with the constitutions of our order and the statutes which implement them. We do so with the permission of our superiors, which at an earlier stage of our religious lives was detailed and explicit. That dependence in formed religious ought to be characterized by discernment with the superior – his is the last word – on matters of greater moment, and by accountability in how we set up our budget and spend the money allotted to us. The purpose of this is to promote not infantilism but the mature relationship of companions in the Lord's service.

Bringing this reflection on poverty to a close, the second point reminds us once again that actual poverty is rooted in spiritual poverty. The practice of poverty in a world of mammoth financial institutions running amok, of ecological degeneration, of widening disparities between the rich and poor, is a challenging one. The context of our actual practice of poverty is ever changing. But the basic principles at the heart of our poverty will always remain. Let us walk as pilgrims, with our hands open, ready to receive, but also ready to give of what we have received. Without a sense of self-righteousness, let us simply allow the Lord to use us as prophets, as examples, so that others might follow a similar path in their own lives. Well-lived poverty is not simply a luxury for spiritually enlightened people: it will increasingly become the very condition which will enable all of us to thrive on this beautiful planet the Lord has provided for us and to care for future generations.

CHASTITY: LETTING GO OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Chastity is a sensitive topic. As Jesuits we can take refuge in the brief paragraph of the Constitutions which tells us that chastity “requires no interpretation, since it is evident how perfectly it should be preserved, by endeavouring to imitate the purity of the angels in cleanness of body and mind.”³ But we live in times where sexual behaviour is a constant subject of scrutiny and discussion, and we must probe this topic far beyond the brief allusion provided by St. Ignatius. This the Society has been doing in its more recent documents, and in the formation it offers to its younger members. The basic question is this: how are we to model Christ’s *kenosis* in our relationships and sexual energies, holding them up to the Lord as gift, but not clinging to them as our own exclusive possession over which we seek control?

The Current Context of Chastity:

Our discussion of chastity will be coloured by the context in which we find ourselves today:

- The most obvious element is the massive growth in public awareness of sexual abuse as a problem, which has led to deep soul-searching on the part of many institutions, including religious communities, and to steps taken to heal victims and to weed out predators as well as behaviours conducive to predation. This awareness highlights for us the connection between disordered sexual activity and the violence it does to the integrity and the well-ordered psychic development of human beings.
- This is coupled with today’s tendency, both positive and negative, to speak openly about sexual matters. The earlier attitude to sexual abuse was not to talk about it, but to sweep it under the rug. Indeed there was reluctance to speak about any sexual matter. Now we have no choice but to deal with sexual abuse, and nothing about the sexual proclivities and

³(Constitutions, Part VI, 547). We might think that Ignatius is asking us to take on the androgynous and ethereal state of angels as popularly depicted today. Remember that in the classical tradition angels as pure spirits are much more focussed, determined, passionate, able to love faithfully than the en fleshed spirits that we humans are. Chastity in this Ignatian perspective is not a deadening but a heightening of our human potential.

practices of our age remains hidden: all is the subject of detailed conversation and graphic illustration on the internet. There are incessant workshops on sexual integration, a plethora of sex gurus dispensing advice on television. Matters that used to remain within the realm of the intimate and the private, such as one's sexual orientation, are commonly brought into open discussion in various group contexts.

- Our culture has a fixation on sexual fulfilment as an object of clinical competence and immediate gratification. Permissiveness is the order of the day. We are bombarded with all kinds of sexual stimuli, both subtle and blatant. Nothing is left to the imagination.
- Our culture favours individual autonomy. Thus the long-term fidelity and personal relations which sexual activity is meant to cement and celebrate no longer hold pride of place. This leads to abundant promiscuity and the breakdown of marriage.
- We live a contradiction: on the one hand our culture is sexually very permissive, as we have said, but on the other, because of the incidence of sexual abuse, a pervasive pattern of blame and litigation has grown around sex. This has spawned a climate of fear around sexuality, and we have returned to a certain prudishness, especially in pastoral and professional relationships, often bridling the spontaneous expression of affection lest we might be misunderstood and accusations brought against us. In any event those of us who advocate traditional standards for sexual behaviour are scrutinized and at times vilified unjustly.

As disciples of Jesus Jesuits are to swim against the stream, and in this area of sexuality the stream is powerful and treacherous. But our counter-cultural role is ultimately a simple one, to be witnesses to the fidelity which sexual activity in God's plan is meant to foster, and to healthy pastoral and human relationships in a time when so many people have been violated in their deepest selves.

We will develop our theme under the following headings: the vow and the virtue of chastity; sexual activity, sexual thoughts, images, and feelings; orientation and life-style; relationships and community; and self-integration.

The Vow and the Virtue of Chastity:

Both celibate and married commitments begin with a vow which establishes a structure meant to foster life-long progress towards the virtue of chastity, in other words an integrated love of God and neighbour suitable for either marriage or celibacy.⁴ No matter how much we have progressed, we will never control that virtue as if it were our own: it is a gift of grace bestowed on us by God, it remains imperfect and fragile in our present earthly state.

In what does this integrated love of God and neighbour consist? Not only are human beings to love God, but they are to love as God loves, i.e., to love each human being undividedly and uniquely, but all of them universally and inclusively. Of course we cannot actually know and love every human being – that is a fulfilment reserved for eternal life – but at least we are to love those who actually cross our path. Love of God and love of neighbour are essentially intertwined, as we see when Jesus answers the question of the scribe (Mk 12:28 ff.).

In contrast to those who choose celibacy, married persons vow an exclusive, life-long, and intimate relationship with one specific person, in which sexual activity normally plays a role. As they progress in their state of life, they are urged to reach out to their children, relatives, friends, neighbours, and broader community, thus learning how to mirror not only the undivided and unique aspect of God's love with their spouse but also the universal and inclusive aspect with all others who form part of their life.

The vow of chastity obliges those who take it to observe the evangelical counsel of chastity (Canon 654), which means perfect continence observed in celibacy (Canon 599). There are two elements to this: perfect continence, i.e., abstinence from all sexual activity, which is the same rule to be followed by any unmarried person, and perpetual celibacy, which is a commitment never to get married, and which leaves no place ever for the exclusive or sexual love of one person.

As states of life both celibacy and marriage foster *kenosis*, though they do so differently. Marriage is a school of charity, as Augustine once put it, a school in which one learns to serve, to be present, to forget self, according to the kenotic

⁴To the extent that single persons come to a point in their lives that they are ready to settle in their unmarried state, what is stated here about celibacy relates to their situation.

pattern of Christ's life on earth. The marriage relationship in its moments of unitive ecstasy fosters the total self-forgetfulness of love as one is joined with the beloved, a self-forgetfulness which is the foundation for genuine community with others yet to come into their lives.

Vowed celibates enter into the path of *kenosis* without this natural human foundation. Their commitment to the love of God and neighbour is direct, without intermediary, and out of it they are invited to develop profound and intimate relations with significant human others, but without clinging to any of the persons whom they love, or seeking from them the exclusive commitment of married partners. Their relations are from the very start seen as gifts held at God's pleasure, not tightly but with open hands.

The vow of chastity establishes a structure and a discipline which enable the person who takes it gradually to journey towards the fulness of the virtue of chastity. The vow entails right choices to be made time and time again, even if those choices are a struggle against the obstacles and hesitations of a psyche not yet attuned to the direction chosen by the spirit. Through repetition comes habit, and habit gradually engenders promptitude, regularity, and joy. At some point one begins to act not so much out of steely determination, by great travail resisting every temptation, but out of love.⁵ The commitment has spread from the inmost heart to the psyche integrated and shaped by the love of God, alive in the companionship of Jesus, and able to reach out in total generosity to others.

Can those of us who are vowed to celibacy – the same applies in their context to married persons – achieve a fully integrated chastity? No, even if we are faithful to our promise of containing (the word “continence” has the same root) ourselves in accord with our vow of chastity. A good measure of peaceful sexual integration usually takes years to reach and remains fragile. As vowed celibates the only choice for us is to plunge ourselves into a search for the height, the breadth, the length, and the depth of a sexual energy fully shaped by love of God and neighbour. Will we as vowed celibates move seamlessly and without interruption in our struggle towards that virtuous state? No. We are marked by the inherent limitations of being human, and the process of incarnating our purposes and intentions in the fabric of our lives is a difficult

⁵Remember the examples presented in footnote 2.

and lengthy one, most often marked by set-backs and blind alleys. But the grace of God is at work, and that grace is powerful especially when we experience our own inadequacy and weakness. The goal of total integration of our sexual selves is elusive, but when we look back at the terrain we have covered during our human journey, we will see how God has led us and is still leading us in the path set by our vow. In this struggle we all need patience, a sense of perspective, and the ability to laugh at ourselves.

The rest of this reflection will begin with the clear and obvious obligations of the vow of chastity and will gradually lead us to the ways in which the virtue of chastity is totally to shape our incarnate selves.

Sexual Activity:

There is a sexual dimension to all human activity, because humans are sexual beings through and through, even though at times we might want to deny this fact and relegate sexuality to a corner of our being which we can conveniently repress and ignore. But in this section we will concentrate upon activity in which the sexual dimension is explicit. Most fundamentally the continence demanded of the unmarried and of vowed celibates means not voluntarily bringing about or consenting to genital pleasure, whether full or partial. Sexual sin is not in the physiological dimension of sexual arousal or release, which can take place without our having brought it about or consenting to it. What counts is the stance of our spiritual selves towards this pleasure. We cannot avoid experiencing spontaneous sexual feelings and their bodily repercussions. But, to use the classical terminology, do we consent to them? That is the issue, and we will discuss it in greater detail in the next section.

The traditional adage of moral theology has been that there is no parvity of matter in relation to sexual sins. This means that any sexual offense can under the right conditions be the vehicle of a serious turning away from God. However there are grades of seriousness, and, more importantly, we are dealing with an area of one's psyche which is complex, developmental, fraught with impulses over which we have little or no control, which means there is ample room for nuanced moral judgement. This is a delicate area in which frank conversation with a confessor and/or a spiritual director will help us avoid the opposite extremes of rigorism and of laxism.

The medieval ladder of sexual sins was based on a rudimentary biological approach. Sexual sin is seen as a violation of the obvious purpose of the sexual faculty, which is ordered to reproductive activity with a person of the opposite sex. In this context the least grave sin was that of simple fornication with someone of the opposite sex, which is a biologically appropriate act but disordered because of its context; sexual activity with someone of the same sex would be biologically inappropriate and therefore graver; bestiality even graver; and sexual self-pleasuring an even more heinous crime because it is a sign par excellence of *natura in se curvata* (nature curved in on itself)

Our contemporary knowledge of the sexual function and its implications, which though rooted in biological fact goes much beyond it, will change this ladder of gravity. Sexuality is also relational, the vehicle of deep communion in which persons build each other up. Sexual sins are serious to the extent that they tear down the fabric of human relations, violate persons, and weaken our relation with God:

- The most serious sexual sin is the one in which sexual activity takes place with a minor. Such activity is predatory: overtly or covertly, it entails coercion and/or seduction, it always violates the person in an intimate way, at a time of great vulnerability and plasticity, and usually leaves life-long psychic scars. Our experience of the last decade has powerfully brought the gravity of sexual abuse to our attention, institutions have taken notice and are acting proactively in this matter, and civil society imposes severe penalties on those judged guilty of such activity.
- Next in seriousness is sexual activity with another in which there is an imbalance of power relationship, e.g., a professor with a student, a counsellor with a client. For those in religious or sacerdotal life, the presumption is that any sexual relationship is marked by this imbalance, because of the pastoral role played by the priest, even with people of his own age and background, and because of the trust which people have in those who have professed life-long chastity. In the secular world this form of sexual disorder is proscribed by standards of professional conduct, standards usually buttressed by civil and criminal law.
- Next to that are simple sexual relationships between persons who are equally consenting to the relationship, which in spite of mutual consent also have a potential for lasting damage to one or both of the persons

involved in the relationship, and may constitute the violation of the marriage vow of one or both of those involved.

- Finally there is solitary sex, which can take place for a variety of reasons, some of them connected with the struggles and pressures of one's psychic development, but which in and of itself entails self-violation: one treats one's body as an instrument of solipsistic pleasure rather than as the subject of self-transcending relationships with others. Respect and love of others as temples of the Holy Spirit begins with respect and love of ourselves.

Sexual Thinking and Feeling:

Already it becomes clear that the evaluation of disordered sexuality goes much deeper than assessing what takes place in our genital region. At its heart sexual order and disorder begin with one's thoughts, intentions, imagination and feelings, and are lodged in the labyrinthine ways of the human psyche.

As human beings our spirits are enfolded, and we are endowed with a psyche which mediates between our bodily environment and our spiritual selves. We are awakened to our selves by being ceaselessly bombarded with external stimuli which prod us into self-awareness and invite us to self-definition. Many of those stimuli are sexually charged. We experience attractions, pleasurable thoughts, images, feelings, often with genital repercussions. Simply to experience that which happens spontaneously, not focussing on it in guilt or pleasure or anxiety, but with the kenotic attitude of letting it be and letting it cease to be, thankful that God is providentially caring for us in the spontaneous movements of our bodies, psyches and spiritual selves, is a sign of spiritual integration.

The issue is not the psychic experience but what we do with it. The experience is of itself simple and direct, but what emerges from it can be complex, subtle and requiring constant vigilance. In classic teaching about sexual sins, the question is whether I give consent to the spontaneous movements of my psyche or not. Consent in this sense of the word implies connivance: I become aware of myself having the experience, and I seek to maintain it, prolong it, enhance it. Little by little I am led from what occurs spontaneously in me to the deliberate and disordered seeking of sexual pleasure. Consent takes over from simple consonance of the will. The patterns in which this might happen differ from one person to another, and each has to discover his own triggers and

traps. Often our vulnerabilities are based on past events over which we had no control, and we can find ourselves easily caught in warped patterns already mapped within our psyches. Integrated sexuality requires an often subtle and delicate discernment, and the ability to reflect on actions and reactions to discover as best one can what one must reject once it presents itself. To use another classical term which occurs in the area of what popularly is referred to as “bad thoughts”, we need to distinguish simple enjoyment which occurs spontaneously from *delectatio morosa*,⁶ a delectation with dallying, which puts us on the path of disorder.

This is an area in which self-deception is rife, and one which calls for honest conversation with one’s spiritual director or confessor. It also calls for a very subtle form of vigilance. We must avoid two extremes. One is to be slipshod and complacent in coming to terms with the waywardness of our own psyche, thus thwarting the progression of our maturation which will lead us to more confident and reliable self-assessment, and the other is to give in to unhealthy preoccupation with what goes on within ourselves, seeking clarity about our own consent or lack of it beyond what is accessible at that point in our human journey. The best antidote for that is to acknowledge in confession when we do not know the extent of our moral responsibility for a thought or experience, allowing God’s own clarity and compassion to make up for our own uncertainty, and God’s providence to bring us to deeper insight into ourselves in His own time and His own way.

There is a key difference between the sexual arousal that occurs spontaneously in the course of normal living with its legitimate pursuits, and that which is sought out by an individual who chooses to view certain types of images designed to heighten sexual tension. This heightening is not just a momentary phenomenon, but the images which bring it on usually linger and return. What once was a stimulus occurring in the natural course of events becomes a bent, a warp of the psyche. What begins as a choice to seek out areas that favour stimulation, often ends in deep-rooted addiction, as has become increasingly obvious to us in recent decades. I am referring to pornography, easily found in various media, and in the internet. To seek erotic content viewed out of curiosity or desire for gratification is just as much a disorder as if the depicted person were physically present to us. Indeed even if one need not go beyond

⁶Morose not in the sense of down-hearted, but in the sense of the Latin verb “moror” which means to tarry or linger, as evidenced in the noun “moratorium”.

the privacy of one's own room and there is no physical contact with another person, the persons who are viewed in this particular way are treated as objects of cheap gratification. The appetite of many for this kind of stimulation has spawned an industry built on violation for profit of human persons in their most intimate and vulnerable sphere. One begins with pornography, then one gets involved in chat room conversations, and then various ways of acting out one's fantasies, often morbid and destructive. This interest in sexual images, thoughts, and fantasies is prurient and ends up having real impact in our lives and the lives of others, sometimes, as is amply documented, contributing to the most revolting violation of other human persons, even children.

Orientation and Lifestyle:

The very idea of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual is relatively recent, from the mid-19th century, and then described as a pathology. It was talked about rarely, kept in a closely guarded closet. This is no longer the case. Those who are homosexual in our midst openly and proudly claim their identity. We readily type ourselves and others as somewhere on the heterosexual-homosexual spectrum. At the same time the age-old teaching which sees homosexual activity as a disorder still remains. It has recently surfaced in a Vatican instruction on how to deal with homosexual candidates to religious life and priesthood. The instruction, together with a number of commentaries which have come out in different circles, makes careful distinctions.⁷ The Church proscribes homosexual activity, just as heterosexual activity outside of marriage. But the issue is not just one of activity; it also pertains to one's given orientation and one's chosen lifestyle.

To be heterosexual or homosexual is simply a fact of life that one deals with. The issue of moral order or disorder comes with how one deals with that fact as we deal with other facts over which we have no control, whether they come from our innate disposition or from experiences that happened to us independently of our will and have profoundly shaped us. Indeed a community in which there are people of different sexual orientations who deal with them creatively, channeling their sexual energy in positive and life-giving ways, who reach out to and respect one another, is a blessed community, one marked by

⁷ "An instruction concerning the criteria of vocational discernment regarding persons with homosexual tendencies," was issued by the Vatican in November 2005. I commented on this instruction in a letter to the province in December 2005.

variance and complementarity as befits the body of Christ. In this the life-giving potential of chastity – both vow and virtue – comes to light in a positive and attractive way. It does not come to light in communities marked by divisive sub-groups based on disparaging judgements about others' actual or perceived sexual orientation.

We have dealt with chastity in terms of actions, thoughts, and feelings. We need also to look at it in terms of the life-styles in which people choose to live out their orientation. Indeed the Vatican instruction looks askance, as well it should, at the promotion of a sexualized life-style or culture which affirms one's own orientation and which ends up being exclusive, divisive, and a source of temptation. These life-styles can be blatant and seductive, and one might at times discern signs of a perhaps more sanitized version of these styles within the Society. And this is not just a homosexual phenomenon, though gays, less numerous on the whole, are sometimes perceived as more assertive in promoting and publicizing their particular life-style. Indeed there can be unhealthy straight life-styles in which participants more or less overtly assert their non-homosexuality. And in both cases there is a temptation for contemporary religious to become involved in the permissive social patterns of our world, to frequent places such as bars where people normally seek the opportunity for sexualized contacts.

The issue is whether or not one defines oneself essentially in terms of sexual orientation, and chooses a style of living that advertises that orientation. Is sexual orientation the predominant feature of one's self-definition and self-presentation or is it simply one characteristic among many that define the person? One who stereotypes himself as hetero- or homosexual is missing the point. He is a human being in which a multitude of characteristics converge and form an uniqueness which will never be repeated in God's creation. No one else is called to be image and likeness of God in exactly the same way, and no one else is to be treasured and appreciated in exactly the same way. Sexual orientation is part of that mix. To focus on it as defining the person is a sign of psychic weakness and defensiveness.

Of course chastity at its best invites us to make friends outside the community, of both sexes, of both orientations, and to meet them socially in various contexts. But wherever we go, we go first as Jesuits, and our basic vowed commitment to God in celibacy must guide what we do and what we say. This is what should emanate from our presence rather than our sexual orientation. In

brief we are called to live a Jesuit life-style, and our behaviour is to be respectful of appropriate boundaries yet marked by affection and empathy for others. Our communities and our apostolates should be a place where Jesuit culture, as opposed to gay or straight culture, reigns. In our personal and pastoral relationships, we should dress, act, and adopt a bodily deportment such that the first thing that comes to mind when someone meets us is not our straightness or gayness but our Jesuitness. Far from stereotypical, this Jesuitness allows for the uniqueness of each companion of Jesus to shine forth.

This form of behaviour is not just about us: we have a duty to the people of God not to cause scandal by our actions and our self-presentation, both of which are scrutinized by those who seek inspiration from us and those who would want to denigrate us.

The rules for modesty that were inculcated in older generations of Jesuits may be out of date in some details, and too dependent on the culture in which the early Jesuits were raised, but they do advocate a perennial standard for Jesuits. According to that standard, Jesuits in their demeanor should not draw attention to themselves because of a chosen form of self-presentation but rather be serene, pleasant, cordial, welcoming to people of all orientations and backgrounds, leading them to Christ and thus to their better selves. And this unobtrusive yet attractive style of living and relating is what our communities ought to foster. This helps harness our God-given sexual energy in a way which allows us to be totally present to the individuals that the Lord puts on our path yet pointing out the universal and inclusive dimension of God's love.

Relationships and Community:

The topic of lifestyles readily leads to that of relationships. As said before, marriage involves an exclusive relationship. There are certain forms of intimate behaviour between couples, a level of tenderness and commitment, that each spouse can expect of the other. If the other spouse violates that expectation, the marriage relationship is wounded, as, for example, in the coldness of non-communication or in adultery. Each spouse can have friends that are particular to him or her, but these friendships are to be open and shared rather than secret and exclusive. In more significant friendships the friend of one spouse ought to be at least to some degree a friend of the other spouse, or else the other spouse ought to know about the friendship and be at ease with it.

The same applies to persons who have vowed chastity, except that there is no human person with whom they have a privileged exclusive relationship involving the possibility of sexual activity. Their vow, as we said before, implies unhindered inclusivity in relationships. They can have friendships which are profound and unique, they will love some persons much more than others, but the hallmark of their friendships is that they liberate within themselves and their friends the ability to relate to others, thus to broaden the circle of human friendship and solidarity. This dynamic, whether it involves Jesuits or non-Jesuits, should enhance the effectiveness of their apostolic outreach and enrich their community life.

In earlier training for the celibate state, the term used for relationships that might potentially become exclusive was “particular friendship”. At the time there could be a great deal of anxiety, even paranoia, about this, with stringent regulations, such as putting the rooms in which young religious lived off limits for other young religious and threats to postpone vows or ordination should these rules be violated. Matters are now handled in a more flexible way, with attention to the unique needs and developmental stage of each individual. Today one might refer not so much to particular friendship but to infatuation, a sudden falling in love with another person, perhaps a Jesuit companion, which for people free to marry has the earmarks of a relationship which could grow towards a permanent commitment. The persons are totally engrossed in each other, and have eyes only for each other, and others in the community may become aware of this special dynamic.

In and of itself to become infatuated is morally neutral. It is simply an experience that happens within the broad range of psychic stimuli mentioned above. Something in the “beloved” triggers this reaction, and gives a powerful focus for the deep human longing for affection and relationship which is to be totally satisfied only in God. For this to happen may be providential, because it enables the infatuated person to realize both that human relationships are essential to his development and that there is only so much that can be expected of any human relationship. The invitation is to come to one’s senses and to realize that the relationship has to be brought down to earth, to be based on what the other person really is, in which case either infatuation matures into a deep friendship and companionship which is fruitful for both community and apostolate, or else the relationship is brought to an end. In either case abstinence, keeping distance, and honest reflection with a sympathetic third party play a helpful role. Some celibates can transform a relationship which in

the eyes of others might be inappropriate, an occasion of sin, into one which is unique, profound, yet inclusive and able to be shared.

The vowed celibate is called to imitate in a special way the dynamic of love which characterizes the persons of the Trinity. Richard of St. Victor, a twelfth century theologian who was also a novice master and knew the pitfalls of relationships between religious, spoke of the Trinity in terms which are pertinent to our topic. In brief: why does it make sense for there to be more than one person of the Trinity? God is love, and there is no love without mutuality and reciprocity, the relationship of one to another, the emptying out of self towards an other of equal worth. This means at least a duality of persons in God. Why does it make sense to have three persons? Love in its perfection consists in the sharing by which I want my beloved to be equally beloved of someone else, and to surrender my love to the greater community which is thus formed. The second person is the *con-dignus*, the person equal to the first who is worthy of the first's total surrender in love. The third person is the *con-dilectus*, the one who is equally loved by the first and the second in such a way as to create genuine community:

When two beings love each other mutually and give their affection to each other in ardent aspiration, when the affection goes from this one to that one and vice-versa, there is dilection from the one side and from the other, but as yet there is no con-dilection. Real con-dilection emerges when two friends love a third harmoniously and in community, and when the loves of the first two are made one in the fire of this third love. (*On the Trinity*, 3, 19).

The experiential basis of Richard's thought here is quite clear. Two people can be in love in such a way that the self-sufficiency and narcissism which characterize self-love are not expurgated but duplicated. Gratitude and surrender are lacking. The mutual relationship becomes exclusive, and others are seen as threats to it, as potential objects of jealousy. If the mutual love is genuine, it cannot but be open to the "third", to what draws it beyond itself. Love is essentially hospitable, open to community. (Of course what is said about special twosomes can also apply to coteries which at times satellize around one individual.)

This is the touchstone of celibate personal relations. They are to be inclusive, fruitful, bringing forth community, rather than exclusive and turned in on

themselves. The language used in the Society of Jesus for relations of this type is the language of companionship. Two fellow religious can have a warm and affectionate relationship, they can share unique moments of togetherness, but their relationship should enable them to be companions of each other within a community, and it should be such as to be recognized by other companions as not an object of envy or jealousy but as something to be treasured and enjoyed by all: “See how they love one another.” The same applies to relationships of religious with persons outside their community.

Self-integration:

It is to the extent that we are integrated and secure within ourselves that we can engender inclusive personal relationships, and with our friends breathe forth genuine community. This means that we are ready for acts of *kenosis*, of letting go of ourselves as we reach out towards others. Of course this graced dynamic works in the other direction as well: a solid community context facilitates healthy relationships between individuals, and healthy relationships between individuals foster growth in personal maturity and integration.

Kenosis is possible only to the extent that the self is integrated and secure. Otherwise there will be a hidden hook in our relationships, and a note of anxiety and self-concern will impair them. Others will not be treasured in their otherness but seen as a function of our own self-fulfilment. The relationship will not be an empowering of the other but a clinging to the other, even an attempt to possess or smother the other. We are all involved in a life-long struggle as we seek the kenotic and inclusive relations which our vow of chastity urges us to develop. To begin with, this means being at ease within our own skins, our own psyches, our own personal histories with their lights and shadows. Being at ease with who we are, we can effectively move towards the full integration of all that we are.

To be at ease with one’s self is to be at ease with one’s aloneness. There is in every human being – and this reality is acute for the vowed celibate – an essential aloneness. We crave to be totally known and loved, but no other human can pierce our mystery and totally accept us as we are. Thus this aloneness is often experienced as loneliness. Preoccupation with our loneliness can lead to relations with others in which we pity ourselves and futilely seek our own fulfilment in them. Being at home with our aloneness means accepting ourselves as we are from the hand of God and recognizing that only in God are

we to be totally fulfilled. Peaceful rather than anxious, we are ready to savour the good moments with others that the Lord sends our way, not possessively clinging to them but rejoicing in them as signposts of even greater fulfilment in this life and in the next.

At root being with God in our aloneness is prayer: prayer as a disciplined exercise, yes, but prayer also and especially as a state of life. Prayer as an exercise fosters celibacy and celibacy fosters prayer as a state of life. The struggle to expand the areas of our life shaped by the virtue of celibacy is an arduous one, and without prayer, prayer to God as Father, Jesus as companion, the Spirit as inner guide, Mary as mother, prayer for wisdom and prayer for strength, that struggle will fail. But then once the virtue of chastity begins to take hold of our lives, we find our aloneness mysteriously abundant with the presence of God, and we turn towards the world with the eyes and heart of God, allowing the life of the Trinity to flow through us in service of others. The perfection of chastity is for this attitude to become rooted in us as a state of life.

Ease with one's own self in all its unique characteristics also means ease with the sexual energy which the Lord has bestowed upon each of us, and the ability to channel it constructively, to bring it to a clear and life-giving focus. The process by which we shape ourselves to be unique reflections of God is lengthy, complex, likely to tax our patience, but not the patience of the God who is the ultimate artisan working in and through us. This integration must deal with the complexities of our own history, the vagaries and detours of our own psycho-sexual development. Let us evoke the image of a piece of wood that is to be shaped into a beautiful sculpture. Each piece of wood is unique. It may be gnarled, showing the signs of various wounds or periods of stunted development, but such as it is, it contains within itself a potential beauty which only God entirely fathoms and is able to bring out. While at times we have been subject to negative influences – even abuse or violation – that have marked us deeply, warped our attitudes and behaviour, and this prior to our deliberate choices, God manages to write straight with the crooked lines of our lives, and will continue to do so. This is a reason for hope and for rejoicing.

At times our struggle with the deficiencies and wounds which have marked our lives can be dealt with through confession and spiritual direction, but when they are more severe and perhaps prompt us to the more serious forms of disordered sexuality, we may need to find appropriate therapeutic intervention

to help us on our path towards the fulness of chastity. Recourse to these means is not something to be ashamed of but something which the Lord wants for us. He has bestowed upon us the gift of sexuality, he wants us to make it fully available for our lives, our ministries, our celibate relationships, and he wants us to take responsibility for our own development in dialogue with our superiors and spiritual guides.

Sexual energy is a key material for this shaping of ourselves. That powerful energy is at the source of our being drawn to others and of others being drawn to us. It is at work even if there is no drive towards explicit sexual behaviour. It accompanies all our relationships either as underpinning or as concomitant. It needs, however, to be acknowledged, befriended, and integrated. Let us be at home with it rather than fear it and repress it. We might at times reach what appears to be peace in this area of sexuality, but it is not peace but a frozen and repressive truce in which we end up being far less than the Lord wants us to be. We must continue our journey towards fulness.

The simple and easy energy of consonance with others intersects with another energy, more complex, whose role is to enable us to face obstacles and forge our way ahead in life. That energy comes to its most explosive expression in anger, and, as we have seen, misplaced or disordered sexual energy is often coupled with feelings of violence, anger, domination, as in the various forms of sexual abuse. Full sexual integration also requires the integration of our basic anger, which sometimes comes out in direct and explosive ways, and at other times is repressed and indirect in its expression.

The cauldron of intertwined energies within our psyches offers a beautiful potential for a rich and unique pattern of human development, but things can go desperately wrong, if we are left to ourselves. Fortunately we are not the ultimate agents of our own shaping. God has a providential care for each of us, and offers us companions for our human journey, including above all the Companion par excellence who is Jesus Christ. Even more, God sends His Spirit of Love into our hearts, and that Spirit wants nothing more than gradually to transform and shape our own bundle of disparate energies into a work of art, not to repress them but focus them towards higher purposes, to sublimate them.

The vowed celibate is single not by chance but by choice. Singleness is not just a description of our civil status but is to permeate every aspect of our lives. Our hearts are to be undivided in the love of God and neighbour, in the service of

the Kingdom. Rays of light that are properly focussed, enhanced, amplified, brought to a peak, can light fires. This kind of focus is present in many saints and is at the heart of their attractiveness and effectiveness as agents for the kingdom of God. With their undivided love they are able to welcome all those who come into their lives, loving them as God loves them. They are not asexual as some traditional iconography might portray them. They are passionate in their love, and every fibre of their being, including the sexual dimension, becomes a channel of God's love poured into their hearts. Our vowed celibacy means that God is ready to give us the same gift in a measure unique to each one of us.

Celibacy is a challenge, and at times it will lead us into difficult desert spaces. The price is worth paying, the fruit worth waiting for. May the dynamic begun in our vow of celibacy continue and come to its fulfilment. That dynamic is none else than the Spirit seeking to make of us temples of His presence, not only in our inmost hearts, but also in our psyches, our bodies, our relationships, and the communities we form with our companions in Christ. It is the Spirit leading us into the mind and heart of the One who emptied himself out, even unto death, death on the Cross, that we might share in the glory of God the Father. That glory is our destiny, it is the destiny of every human being God has put on this earth. As Jesuit apostles let us be effective signposts and proclaimers of that destiny.

OBEDIENCE: LETTING GO OF OUR VERY SELVES

Obedience is intended to be the hallmark of Jesuit religious practice. It is also a focal area whenever Jesuits reflect on their faithfulness to Ignatius' charism. I will emphasize not the basic minimum of the vow of obedience, set out in Canon Law, and obligatory for all religious, but the profound transformation this vow is to foster in each of us as Jesuits. Thus I will concentrate on the virtues which the full observance of this vow entails. I will, however, not deal with the fourth vow, which requires special consideration more apt for a General Congregation.

The vow binds us to a clear obligatory minimum defined very carefully in Canon Law. Under certain conditions the superior can order any one of us to obey under holy obedience, and in virtue of my vow I must execute the command, unless I have a conviction that what he is ordering me to do is clearly sinful, putting at risk my eternal salvation. I may judge his command to be ill-advised, stupid, inappropriate, unreasonable, but in the end such a judgement is not relevant, as it would be for someone not under the vow of obedience.

Obedience entails *kenosis*. While all our energies, competencies, desires, initiatives continue to be ours, we choose as religious not to cling to them as a private domain. Rather we put them at the disposal of God through the intermediary of our superiors, becoming instruments of an action which ultimately is beyond our ken.

The vow of obedience puts in place a structure in which, moved by the grace of God, I gradually receive as further gift a state of being in which I can act promptly, eagerly, joyfully in accordance with the will of God manifested through the superior. Thus obedience does not remain a mere external conformity but becomes inner spontaneity impelled by the Spirit. It becomes second nature to me, even if at certain times difficulties still emerge in its practice. The "no" in which as a child and an adolescent I tested my fledgling powers as an individual becomes the "yes" of an integrated and secure person fully engaged in community. In other words, the wilfulness with which I began my life becomes willingness. In classical Jesuit terms, whereas the vow obliges us to execute the command, the virtue goes further: it requires that my will and

my judgement be in harmony with that of the superior.⁸ Thus my execution of the command should be not grudging or reluctant, out of fear or mere duty, but out of the depths of a self transformed by the impulse of loving service.

The virtue of obedience has many dimensions. In this letter I will develop four of them, which themselves can be seen as companion virtues: availability, openness, companionship, and trust. While these virtues may pertain to the vowed life of a Jesuit, they ought to adorn anyone's life in a way commensurate with his or her chosen state.

Availability:

Availability has a strong resonance in Ignatian spirituality. The usual French translation of this term, *disponibilité*, helps us to retrace the roots of this term in Ignatius. We are to dispose ourselves to receive the graces and gifts of God (Sp. Exx. #20); having received all from God, we tell God "All is Thine; dispose of it wholly according to your will" (SpExx # 234). Fr. Arrupe brought availability to our attention in a famous letter on the topic in 1977. But am I totally passive in this self-disposal at the hands of God through the superior? The image of obedience "*perinde ac cadaver*" (like a lifeless body) developed in Part VI of the Constitutions⁹ and inculcated in earlier Jesuit formation may have its keen point in a culture of high-spirited people needing to be toned down,¹⁰ but it can be misleading. Obedience does not mean that I am inert, allowing myself to be moved around without any reaction on my part. To the contrary it invites me to function at the peak of my capacities, but to be guided, channeled in whatever is to God's greater glory. I become an instrument in God's hands, and I let God act in me rather than wilfully claim to be the origin

⁸ The classic Jesuit source for this doctrine is Ignatius' *Letter on Obedience to the Jesuits of Portugal*. Ignatius lays out the three degrees of obedience, starting from the minimum which is obedience of execution, to the next stage which is obedience in which I also conform my will to that of the superior, and ending with obedience in which I also conform as best I can my understanding with that of the superior.

⁹Part 6, 1,1. (Par 547, p. 222 in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms*, Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, 1996.

¹⁰One can read about the tendencies to insubordination and self-will Ignatius dealt with in the early foundational years of the Society, even among some of his early companions.

of my action. And, paradoxically, the more I give myself to the action of God in me through the superior, the more vibrant, intense, and effective will be my own efforts. Far from being a robot, I become more fully alive.

Let me continue this section with a memory of my novitiate years. We learned, in proper scholastic mode, that there were four kinds of permission obedient Jesuits needed from their superiors. Three of them need very little comment: actual, habitual, and presumed (or interpretative) permission. One of them, virtual permission, is far-reaching in its scope, and especially concerns us at this point. Basically it means that once the superior assigns a goal or mission for me to achieve, I am free, unless the superior sets limits, to choose the means necessary to obtain that goal or fulfill that mission. This means that obedience leaves plenty of scope for my own initiative, my own decisions, for using my faculties to the full.

The archetypal instance of virtual permission for Jesuits is found in the relationship between Ignatius and Xavier. Ignatius sent Xavier on a far-reaching mission, but he trusted him to find and choose the means to execute this mission. Could Ignatius have done any differently, given the distances at which Xavier was operating from Rome and the circumstances which neither Ignatius or Xavier had any sense of before Xavier set out on his journeys? Ignatius' mandate empowered Xavier rather than hemmed him in. It released in him great energy and creativity. Another instance: in his letters Ignatius sometimes gave detailed instructions, but, coming to a realization that circumstances might be other than what he could anticipate, towards the end of his letter he would give its recipient scope to modify the details of what he was asked to do. Obedience assigns us a mission, but this mission normally comes with a large space within which to manoeuvre in fulfilling it. Many outstanding apostolic Jesuits have been entrepreneurs and missionaries in the best sense of the word, men sent without resources or detailed guidelines. They assessed the situation to which they were sent, found friends and allies on the spot, and began a new apostolic outreach, but all of this stemmed from the foundational moment of acquiescence to the mission given by the superior.

Of course the fact that the superior expects us to use our own judgement and ingenuity in carrying out missions he entrusts to us should not be an excuse to limit our communication with him, telling him as little as possible as to how things are going, lest he interfere with what we henceforth consider our own sphere of activity. One of the hallmarks of Jesuit governance is good

communication. In the time of Ignatius this meant regular letter writing, and this continues today, with the addition of more rapid means of communication to which Ignatius did not have access, such as e-mail and the telephone. These means are to be used to the full. An example: while the General Superior rarely intervenes in the way a provincial governs a province, each Provincial Superior keeps him well informed in an annual report and in a report after each visitation, and communication, formal and informal, between general and provincial curia is quite extensive. In all of this the Provincial always remains ready to receive the General's comments, suggestions, and mandates.

This applies to all Jesuits: the superior might mission each one of us to a task and almost give us *carte blanche* as to how to fulfill it; but then he might set parameters, limitations, conditions, since he has broader oversight on how this particular mission relates to all others under his purview and on what resources are available to him. And it is to our advantage to constantly remain in touch with our superiors. If the superior can give no help in a particular situation facing me as I carry out my mission, at least the bonds of fraternal affection and of mutual prayer are strengthened, and I find encouragement and support.

There is a proper balance in which superior and subject are in easy contact and in which each is secure in knowing that the other trusts him. For this there needs to be generosity and openness on the part of the subject, confident in the good intentions of the superior, and on the part of the superior great willingness to entrust, to delegate, to encourage the subject to discover his own strengths and develop his own skills. At times the superior may have to intervene when something important is at stake, but at other times he will prefer to stand back, let the subject make mistakes, but at a later time of evaluation to use this experience as a teaching moment. The Society is pastorally effective if its members are strong, self-reliant, able to muster all their strengths as they tackle whatever task has been entrusted to them. This is a desired outcome of the years of formation.

Jesuit availability is rooted in the *contemplatio ad amorem*. We abandon to the Lord our freedom, our memory, our understanding, our entire will, but this is not in order in first instance that the Lord take them from us.¹¹ He wants us to use them fully, but as instruments of His will manifested through the superior.

¹¹This might come in the sunset years of our lives.

Thus there is in the virtue of availability a mixture of activity and passivity. We experience passivity in the key moment in which we receive from the superior our mission, are invited in that dialogue to conform our will to the Divine will, and let go of our own independent will. This is the “*perinde ac cadaver*” moment, akin to the crucial moment where God’s grace takes hold of us and transforms us without any prior initiative or merit on our part, akin to the moment of consolation without previous cause. We are fully active, however, as we prepare for this key moment of passivity, and we are fully active in implementing this mission once it has been received.

- Fully active before: when we approach the superior in the context of obedience, we will have already put into play all our gifts, the best of ourselves, offering to the superior the fruit of our own discernment to be included in his own. This activity might be even more intense when we represent ourselves to the superior if we think he has not properly understood us.
- Fully active after: Having received our mission as God’s will for us, we will give the best of ourselves to the implementation of this mission, involving the careful choice of means, and an energetic and consistent application of ourselves, our energy and skills, to the task at hand.

One can visualize the above in the image of a circle. The centre of the circle is the still point of passivity, of acquiescence to the divine will *perinde ac cadaver* as it manifests itself through the superior. That still moment is a moment of transformation which we receive as a grace. All around it is the bustle of activity, of initiative, of preparation, of implementation. That inner point of letting go gives focus and direction to the intensive activity that characterizes the life of a Jesuit engaged in his assigned ministry.

Indeed our human freedom is at its best when we face the challenges which God puts in our path. Our freedom is not the absolute freedom of God, but a freedom which works within the limits of given situations over which we have no control. That is the common human experience. People get sick, die, lose their jobs, are faced with new challenges which can make or break them. I am free to determine my response to someone who phones me, but I have no choice in what the other person proposes to me or brings to my attention. The mandates given to us by our superiors are one of these limits. In principle they sharpen and intensify our work as intelligent and free beings. The lazy freedom

of unlimited possibilities and choices put before us by our culture is a snare and a delusion. It leads to the wasteland in which too many people today lead their lives. Properly human freedom is situated freedom, focused freedom, and religious obedience provides a particularly challenging situation and sharp focus for that freedom. As religious we profess what every human being eventually has no choice but to practice.

Corresponding to our availability is the superior's ability to encourage us to respond fully to the call of obedience. If I feel that the superior trusts me, if he listens to me not perfunctorily but in depth when I tell my story, if I perceive that he values me as a human person and appreciates my gifts, even though he might not call on all of them in any given mission, there is a greater chance that the Spirit will be able to turn my heart towards availability and obedience when the occasion arises, that my "yes" will be whole-hearted rather than reluctant.

Trust:

Our reflection on the situatedness of human freedom offers a good transition to the virtue of trust in God, also implied in the vow of obedience. The situation in which we exercise our freedom, and the limits it imposes upon us, constitute the sway of divine providence over our lives. It is in that situation, over which ultimately we have no control, that we are invited to trust in God and His ways over us.

Ultimately the actions we carry out under obedience are not our own. Our activity is subsumed within the activity of the Triune God labouring in our world to sustain creation and to bring about the well-being of humans in this world and their salvation in the next. That labour becomes visible for us in the earthly career of Jesus, whose companion we pledge ourselves to be.¹² This should govern the way we understand our actions, and set the context within which we are to see them. When all is said and done, what we do as an individual has no importance save as incorporated in the vast project of Christ at work in our world. Whether that action conforms to our own initial desire or

¹²*Contemplatio* 3rd point (SpExx # 236). Cf. Also GC34 D 26, 7: "The God of Ignatius is the God who is at work in all things: laboring for the salvation of all as in the Contemplation to Obtain Love; working directly and immediately with the exercitant as in Annotations 15 and 16; laboring as Christ the King for the salvation of the world."

sense of what is right in the end doesn't matter. Yes, the Spirit inspires us, gives us a sense of consolation and peace to guide us. Yes, we are called upon to make known what we sense the Spirit is doing in us. But he guides not only ourselves but also all others, and the interaction of the desires of all those He guides is a subtle matter beyond the understanding of any individual. Some desires are to lead to action here and now; other desires, no matter how genuine they are, are to remain as longings which colour our lives and our activity in other domains, but which are to be realized in God's own time and way, not our own.¹³ The superior plays, again in the mystery of divine providence, a key role for vowed religious in this God-directed unfolding.

The vow of obedience is a solemn commitment to live and act within God's action in the world. The religious allows his action to be orchestrated, guided in many ways, including the commands of superiors. The boundaries and challenges provided by this providence are the only worthwhile way for him to use his freedom. The rest is wilfulness and the illusion that in the end we are our own masters. Others may fall prey to that illusion, but the religious subject at all times seeks to live in the truth.

The subject will sometimes ask "Could it be that the superior is wrong in the mission or the mandate he gives me? Can I really trust him? Does he have the vision and the intelligence to make the best decisions? Is he getting the best available advice?" If he is asking these questions from a purely human viewpoint, his perspective and that of his superior are on the same level: they are both fallible human beings. But obedience invites him to another viewpoint: to see in the action of the superior, fallible though he is, a sign of the providence of God and Christ's invitation. The levels are indeed different.

¹³Karl Rahner develops this point beautifully in his disputed question *The Dynamic Element in the Church* (Herder, Freiburg, 1964). A few quotes: "One's own gift is always limited and humbled by another's gift. Sometimes it must wait until it can develop until its *kairos*, its hour has come, when that of another has passed or is fading." (p. 77) Someone's giftedness, charisma, and the desires which it generates within him are shown "by the fact that the person so endowed bears humbly and patiently the inevitable sorrow of his charismatic endowment...knows that it is the one Lord who creates a force and resistance to it, the wine of enthusiasm and the water of sobriety in his Church." (p. 78)

In the long run God's providence always achieves its purposes, even through the limited and short-sighted instruments that we Jesuits, including superiors, are. In the final analysis, what counts is not the intelligence of the superior but that of God who acts through the superior. Humanly speaking, and in the shorter term, the superior may be making a mistake, but whatever he does is incorporated into the divine plan and good can and will come of it. In the old Portuguese proverb, God writes straight through crooked lines.

In any event, my own understanding is just as fallible as that of the superior; divine providence working through my obedience protects me from the narrowness of my own understanding, and offers me a more secure way to assure, through complex circumstances and possible interactions unknown to me, a positive future not only for myself but also for those whom I serve ministerially. How can I pretend with my limited and often clouded intelligence to know what is really best for me? When I look back on my trajectory through life, for example during annual retreats, I readily grasp that many factors not under my control, including moments of obedience which I had difficulty digesting, and other events that have caught me short, have beautifully conspired to achieve something good which I would never have thought of myself or desired. As I look back, I sometimes experience that God has had a sense of humour in dealing with me. His love can be demanding, but it can also be gentle and playful. The surer path is that of divine guidance rather than that of self-will, of willingness rather than wilfulness. God's way may be slower, more circuitous, less "efficient" in the modern sense of the word than the way I would have chosen, but it is the way to transformation in depth. The mills of God grind slowly, but exceedingly fine.

When all is said and done, do I have any choice in the matter of trusting or not trusting? All of us human beings are faced with events which we do not choose: illnesses, deaths, disappointments, some of them very painful. Only some of us take a vow of obedience, but all of us, lay or religious, are called upon to live the substance of obedience.

This element of trust is to mark not only the subject but also the superior. In many cases his human decisions need to be taken without the full knowledge he would like to have but lacks, even with the help of his consultants. There is a risk involved which he cannot avoid. For the virtue of trust to achieve its purpose the superior is to trust that in any given situation he is being guided by God even though he might be painfully aware of his lack of skill and

knowledge in deciding how to mission a subject. He is shaped by trust just as subjects are: he does his best, and leaves the rest to God's providential care. If the subject becomes aware how the superior is permeated by the virtue of trust, he will himself trust more easily and readily. They will enter together into the mystery of God unfolding in their lives.

Openness:

Openness, like availability, is a key theme of Jesuit obedience. For obedience to function as it should, the obedient person needs to be transparent to his superiors. This theme is highlighted in a particular way in the Jesuit constitutions. In other religious communities subjects are encouraged to be open with their superiors, but Canon Law forbids superiors from demanding that their subjects be totally transparent to them, revealing to them the depths of their conscience. In the Society of Jesus an exemption to these norms allows Jesuit major superiors, and under certain circumstances local superiors, to demand an account of conscience known as manifestation. But in a matter of such intimacy the vow of obedience is insufficient. The juridical constraint of the vow must give way to the spontaneous willingness of the virtue. And, of course, openness is relative: we can only be open to another to the extent that we are transparent to ourselves. Areas of opaqueness within our own selves always remain.

All of this corresponds to my experience as major superior. At times I felt overwhelmed by the frankness and candour of those who entrust themselves to me, and I am most grateful because without their self-revelation directing province affairs would have been much more difficult. In other cases I needed to be very patient, in such a way that those who are apprehensive or cling to their privacy become willing to reveal themselves. Forced self-revelation is a travesty.

This transparency offers the superior an excellent tool for his own discernment of what mission to entrust to his subjects and where he can send them, because it enables him to know their feelings and deep desires, their fears and weaknesses, and thus those situations and circumstances which may be an occasion of disorder for them, or else those that are especially auspicious for their renewal or well-being or that of the apostolate to which they are sent. It also enables the superior to better guide subjects in matters relating to their personal and spiritual growth, whether as individuals with their own needs and

history, or as members of a community which needs a more collective form of guidance.

This transparency requires the subject to reveal his own discernment about his mission to the superior, putting that discernment at the disposal of the superior. Indeed the discernment of the subject is not in and of itself complete. It becomes data for the more comprehensive discernment of the superior, who, in dialogue with the subject, comes to a decision. The humorous conjugation, known to many Jesuits, of the verb “to discern” in the present indicative makes the point: “I discern, you discern, he decides.” Yes, the superior is the one who decides, but his decision requires great sensitivity, delicate attention, deep respect of the man who presents himself to him in manifestation.

This transparency points the way to a further dimension of self-revelation. If the subject feels that he has not been heard or understood, he is encouraged, in matters of moment where his prayer urges it, to make representation to his superior. If that does not offer him the resolution that he seeks, he can make representation to a higher superior. Of course there comes a point where representation must come to an end and a decision against the grain, if that is the final outcome, is to be accepted. The higher one goes in an attempt to have a decision reversed the more serious ought to be the issues that motivate this step.

A final word on the role of the superior in the achievement of this virtue. The virtue of openness on the part of the subject must be matched by the corresponding virtue of openness on the part of the superior. His openness is manifested in his delicacy, his respect of the person before him and of the confidential information entrusted to him, his ability to listen, even when he thinks that he can save time by anticipating what the subject is about to tell him, his ability to create a space of silence within which the subject feels invited to enter into dialogue. Transparency is indeed a two way street.

Companionship:

The themes developed thus far relate mostly to my experience of almost 50 years as a Jesuit. This final one comes out of my experience as provincial, which has highlighted for me dimensions of Jesuit obedience that otherwise would have remained in the penumbra, and which has brought to my attention

the importance of recent emphases in the Society's practice, especially of communal discernment.

The world in which we live is immersed in individualism. For so many people the rule is to look after number one. They have their lives to lead, their careers to pursue; do not expect them in any way to be their brother's keeper. Rather, if stepping on their brother is the way for them to improve their lot, then so be it. Jesuits breathe in this mentality whether they want to or not. Some fight it off, but others, consciously or unconsciously, at times buy into it. Even if they are able to receive with good heart the mission given by a superior, they receive it as isolated individuals. In other words, I work on my mission, my colleague on his, and each of us stays in his little corner. We are not companions but lone rangers.

Increasingly we are realizing that this needs to change. The virtue of obedience has a collective dimension. We Jesuits form an apostolic body. We are in solidarity with one another, journeying not alone but with each other, called to care for one another not only in our daily lives in community but also in our apostolic work. That reality is reflected in the name of our society, which, in the Spanish which came closest to Ignatius' inspiration, is not some kind of abstract society but a "compañía" ("compagnie" in French). This means not a company in today's business sense, but a fellowship of companions who share not only bread (the etymology of the word) but also the heat of the day. The roots of this reality can be found in the Spiritual Exercises, where we are invited to become companions-at-arms of Jesus, as the Eternal King engaged in the struggle for salvation with weapons totally other than those of traditional armies. A powerful way of expressing this companionship in our Jesuit documents is "union of minds and hearts".

How can we be companions of Jesus, which we profess to be by the very name of our Society, without also being companions of one another? This communal dimension is essential, and it profoundly affects our obedience. We are not a random collection of individual apostles, but an apostolic community in which we are called to know each other in some depth and support one another in our action. To obey is not simply to do what I have to do as an individual, with blinkers on so that my brother Jesuits do not distract me or get in the way, but to do it together with them, in the harmony of deep companionship. They appreciate what I do, I appreciate what they do, and we do it together, helping one another on our common journey. I rejoice in the mission given to me, and

in the mission given to each of my brothers. And increasingly non-Jesuit partners become in their own way part of that companionship. In addition we are to speak intelligently together about the overall pastoral situation in which we find ourselves, and, while one might not be able to offer technical assistance to an other in his specialized area of endeavour, together we seek to articulate a context in which everyone's mission comes to life and is linked with the mission of others.

The perfection of obedience implies care for this corporate dimension, which begins with care for one another. And not only must we care, but we must care in such a way that others know that we care for them. What at times emerges is not care but jealousy and resentment and criticism. As Jesuits we are taught to be critical of ourselves, but we can easily focus our critical faculties on one another. We might be ready to accept our own mission, but the mission given to another sometimes makes us uneasy, often because that person is asked to do something which we are not ourselves able to do, which appears to give him a status which we do not have, or else because we are inhabited by a spirit of cynicism and superiority. We sometimes favour the lowest common denominator, denigrating those who excel. The perfection of obedience requires not only rejoicing in what the province is asking of me, but in what the province is asking of others. We need to be cheerleaders for each other.

One instance of the lack of obedience in this particular respect can be seen through an experience which I have had more than once as a provincial. I visit with Father A and Father B. Father A tells me that he has great esteem for the work which Father B is doing, but he is convinced that Father B is not interested in the work which he himself is doing, and feels bad about that. Father B tells me the same thing, but in reverse. Each is stuck in his own space, without the communication which would enable them to realize that they are in solidarity with each other as companions, working side by side for the Kingdom of Christ. That communication would enhance their joy in doing what the Society asks of them. Obedience today asks us not only to do what we have to do, but to do it together, in solidarity with one another, beginning with the solidarity of the men who are in the same local area, and moving all the way to the solidarity of Jesuits in a province and of Jesuits working across the globe. Our communities at all levels need to come together in order to achieve this companionship.

We do have good men who carry out their mission faithfully, but some are prone to a uniformly critical attitude towards any province decision or policy. They share their criticisms within their smaller circle of friends, but do not enter into dialogue outside their special circle, nor with the provincial. Presented directly and in a positive context, their input might help the province, but as it is these men end up unintentionally being agents of disunion of minds and hearts within the province.

A contemporary way of articulating this requirement is the recent call of the Society for communal apostolic discernment. Not just the individual apostolic discernment which I spoke of under the heading of transparency, but communal apostolic discernment. What are we to do as communities, as provinces, as a world-wide Society given the needs of today? More precisely, and harking back to what I said under the heading of trust, what is Christ doing in the various places in which we serve, and how are we to enter into his plan, his toil, his saving action?

This means that we are called upon to discern not just our own individual mission, bringing our discernment to our superiors for confirmation, but also, directed by our superiors, to engage with our brothers – and here I would include the men and women who are our partners – in communal discernment, seeking to detect the ways in which Christ is at work in our world and inviting us to enter into the struggle with him.

To live out our obedience in this communal way requires superiors who have a newer set of skills which not many people have yet acquired. They are the skills of facilitation: to bring their men together, creating a climate of prayer and faith-sharing in which they are willing to speak about their apostolic commitment not perfunctorily but in depth, in which they can share their perception of what is going on in the world around them. This is a key area of challenge and growth in the life of the Society.

A final comment as I bring this chapter to a close. I have spoken of trust in God as a requisite dimension of obedience. But trust in the superior also plays a key role. Just as the superior trusts me into being the best and most apostolically effective Jesuit I can be, I trust the superior into being the best superior he can be, bringing out his qualities as a listener, a discerner of the movements of the Spirit, a man of vision and courage who can inspire not just me but all of my

brethren. If I do not let my superior be a superior for me, he cannot exercise his role except in a perfunctory and unsatisfying way.

Adorned by availability, trust, openness and companionship, Jesuit obedience offers each one of us a privileged and fulfilling way of life and enables us to integrally connect with the only action that is ultimately worthwhile, that of God caring for our world. That is the point of the obedience we have vowed and of the related virtues we seek with God's grace to deepen within our hearts.