

STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

TO BE CHANGED AS DEEPLY AS WE
WOULD HOPE:
REVISITING THE NOVITIATE

JÁNOS LUKÁCS, SJ

51/3 AUTUMN 2019

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The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is composed of Jesuits appointed from their provinces. The seminar identifies and studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially US and Canadian Jesuits, and gathers current scholarly studies pertaining to the history and ministries of Jesuits throughout the world. It then disseminates the results through this journal.

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a word from the editor. . .

“If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.”

So said US Navy Admiral William H. McRaven at the University of Texas in 2014, in a speech that quickly went viral on social media. He continued:

If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that the little things in life matter.

If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made—that you made—and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.¹

Whether he knew it or not, Admiral McRaven articulated a basic principle of the spiritual life that saints and spiritual writers have reiterated throughout the centuries: *Great desires are not enough*. Every baseball player wants to hit the home run in the bottom of the ninth inning, with the bases loaded and the crowd screaming his name. But if he has not spent countless mind-numbing hours in the batting cage, swinging at pitch after pitch, with no one around to watch him, then he will fail. It really is as simple as that.

A Jesuit wants to be chaste when the big moment of temptation comes, but if he has not practiced chastity in little mundane ways throughout his daily life—in his thoughts, in his

¹ Admiral William H. McRaven, *Make Your Bed: Little Things that Can Change Your Life . . . And Maybe the World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2017), 111–12.

words, in where he directs his gaze—then he will fail. And if a Jesuit wants to succeed in his fight for social justice, he can start by doing his share of the house chores.

St. Ignatius reiterated this basic wisdom in countless ways throughout his writings, including the *Spiritual Exercises*, his letters, his oft neglected “Rules for Personal Comportment,” and of course the Jesuit *Constitutions*.² I think, for example, of Ignatius’s instruction in the General Examen that the cook should occasionally tell his helper to do something instead of asking him politely.³ Ignatius explained: “For if he should not [obey the cook], neither, it seems, would he show obedience to any other superior, since genuine obedience considers, not the person to whom it is offered, but Him for whose sake it is offered.”⁴ A Jesuit needs frequent little experiences of having his ego bruised and his daily plans upended, if he ever hopes to obey a command from a provincial that upends everything he thought he knew about his future.

When Ignatius asked his companions for feedback on the General Examen, Fr. Alfonso Salmerón (1515–1585) made an intriguing critique:

Where it says that the cook should not ask, because he will seem more to be speaking “as man to man,” consider whether it would not be better to drop that part. Because God and the apostles, although they are authorities, nonetheless *ask* us to do things in the Scriptures, and more love is shown by asking than by commanding.⁵

In response, Ignatius added the following declaration to the General Examen:

² For an English translation of these rules, also known as the “Rules of Modesty,” see Thomas H. Clancy, SJ, *The Conversational Word of God* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1978), 70–71.

³ *Constitutions* 85, hereafter *Const.*

⁴ *Const.* 84; *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their Complementary Norms*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 1996), 41.

⁵ In *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* [hereafter MHSI]; *Constitutiones et Regulae Societatis Iesu*, 4 vols. (Rome, 1934–1948), I: 392, n13. My translation and emphasis.

To request and to command, each is good. Nevertheless, at the beginning one is aided more by being commanded than by being requested.⁶

Ignatius's response captures in a nutshell his rationale behind the structure of the *Constitutions* as a whole. He agreed with Salmerón that one shows more love by asking than ordering, which is why both he and Fr. Jerome Nadal (1507–1580) described Jesuit obedience as a prompt response to the mildest expressed desire of superiors.⁷ In a perfect Society, where every man demonstrated such generosity and humility, there would be no need for commands at all.

But a Jesuit must begin with training wheels on his bicycle if he hopes ever to slalom down a mountain. Precisely for that reason, Ignatius structured the *Constitutions* according to an order of execution. That is, novices and scholastics will enjoy (if that is the right word) certain helps and routines at the beginning of the *Constitutions*—for example, structured prayer periods, protracted silence in the house, shabby clothing, ascetic practices, and relative seclusion from the outside world. Yet they will leave all of these “training wheels” behind later in the *Constitutions*—or at least modify them—where Ignatius describes the apostolic life of formed Jesuits.⁸

Why is all this important? In the present issue of *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, Fr. János Lukács (HUN), former novice master, provincial, and delegate to General Congregation 35, endeavors to re-

⁶ *Const.* 86; ed. Padberg, 42.

⁷ See, for example, Ignatius's letter to Fr. Andrés de Oviedo, written in 1548 on commission by his secretary Fr. Juan Polanco; trans. Martin E. Palmer, SJ, John W. Padberg, SJ, and John L. McCarthy, SJ, *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions* (St. Louis: IJS, 1997), 240–45, esp. nos. 32–34.

⁸ One might be surprised how often tensions on this point resurface in the formation of both Jesuits and lay students. Ignatius resisted pressure from scholastics who wanted to dedicate their time to spiritual and corporal works of mercy instead of to dry studies that seemed far-removed from the pressing needs of real people. Even today, some teachers are heard to lament that “we are just using the poor” if Jesuit schools send students on service trips—by which they seem to mean that any charitable work that is not an end in itself, insofar as the purpose of the trips is the formation of students, is exploitative. On this point, see Barton T. Geger, SJ, “What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters,” in *Jesuit Higher Education* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16–31, esp. 22–25.

spond to the question of GC 36 regarding “why the Exercises do not change us as deeply as we would hope.”⁹ His answer is provocative. The problem is not the Exercises, which still cultivate great desires and interior freedom. But if Jesuits do not sustain those graces by the manner in which they live afterward, then those graces will be frittered away by numerous tiny acts of indulgence and lack of intentionality.

Fr. Lukács suggests that Jesuits will find a prayerful template for discerning a nourishing lifestyle in Ignatius’s description of the novitiate experience in the *Constitutions*. There, Ignatius wishes to inculcate habits and ways of thinking about the spiritual life that last a lifetime. To be sure, Fr. Lukács does not mean that the practices of the novitiate—which, apart from the apostolic experiments, are deliberately monastic in tone—should be applied whole cloth to formed Jesuits. For example, Ignatius did not want formed Jesuits to be secluded from the world. Far from it.

But Ignatius did want novices *to learn*, just as he wanted formed Jesuits *to practice*, for the rest of their lives, the basic truth that small things matter.¹⁰ Of course, how Jesuits apply that truth can look different at different stages of a Jesuit’s life. And Fr. Lukács argues that one can say the same for basic truths about asceticism, transparency, cultivation of virtue, fraternal correction and dialogue, acting with intentionality, and so on.

⁹ GC 36, d. 1, n. 18; in *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation* (Boston College: IJS, 2017), 21.

¹⁰ A frequent mistake in the spiritual life is to dismiss, in an effort to avoid scrupulosity, the importance of small things. Ignatius refers to this temptation in *Const.* 559; see also *Const.* 602. Scrupulosity properly so-called does not mean attention to details—which is necessary—but rather a nagging uncertainty as to whether or not one has sinned in a particular situation—a malady that is more common in persons who are attentive to details (*Spiritual Exercises* 345–49). The challenge is to remain attentive to details without becoming self-absorbed or losing sight of God’s own love and mercy or of our greater service to God. Ignatius was reputed to do this well, which seems to have prompted a Belgian Jesuit to write of him in 1640, *Non coerceri a maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est*. Liberally translated, it means, “Not to be daunted by the greatest of challenges or desires in the service of God, while still being attentive to the smallest of details: this is divine” (in the *Imago Primi Saeculi Societatis Iesu* [Antwerp: Balthasar Moreti, 1640], 280).

Consequently, Fr. Lukács does not so much provide specific answers to the question of how to apply these truths to formed apostolic life as he invites prayerful reflection over these questions, using as a guide Ignatius's description of the Jesuit novitiate. What time-honored truths does that pivotal first stage of Jesuit formation continue to hold for all Jesuits?

Barton T. Geger, SJ
General Editor

Post Scriptum. Normally, what we publish in the Letters to the Editor section are a response to the STUDIES issue immediately preceding. At the end of this particular issue, however, readers will find a thoughtful query from a lay colleague with regard to Fr. Brian McDermott's essay *Spiritual Consolation and Its Role in the Second Time of Election* (Winter 2018).

On that note, I frequently receive feedback from readers praising an issue, but it usually takes the form of brief comments via e-mail, and as such they do not constitute something suitable for publication. I mention this because the absence of letters after a particular issue should not be construed as an indication that the issue in question did not resonate with readers.

The last issue, *How We Were: Life in a Jesuit Novitiate, 1946–1948* (Summer 2019), by Fr. John O'Malley (UMI), elicited an unusually large number of warm responses, as did the earlier essay by Fr. Richard J. Baumann (UMI), *Our Jesuit Constitutions: Cooperation as Union* (Winter 2017). With regard to the first, younger readers expressed wonder and fascination about novitiate life "in the old days," while older readers expressed their gratitude for a trip down memory lane.

On behalf of them all: thank you, Fr. O'Malley.

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To Be Changed as Deeply as We Would Hope: Revisiting the Novitiate

János Lukács, SJ

Responding to the delegates of General Congregation 36, who asked why the Spiritual Exercises do not change us as deeply as we would hope, the author suggests that the problem lies not in the long retreat but in the manner in which Jesuits live afterward. In the Jesuit Constitutions, in his description of the novitiate period, St. Ignatius provides many time-honored principles for the preservation and increase of the graces of the Exercises.

Introduction

Our small community of three Jesuits serves the Manréza spiritual center in the picturesque hills just outside Budapest, Hungary. Again and again, our daily involvement with the Spiritual Exercises fills us with awe and gratitude for God's work in human hearts and minds. It is thus no wonder that we reacted quite strongly to a passage in Decree 1 of the 36th General Congregation on the effectiveness of the Exercises:

The question that confronts the Society today is why the Exercises do not change us as deeply as we would hope. What elements in our lives, works, or lifestyles hinder our ability to let God's gracious mercy transform us? This Congregation is deeply convinced that God is calling the entire Society to a profound spiritual renewal.¹

¹ GC 36, d. 1, n. 18; in *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], Boston College, 2017), 21.

I myself was especially intrigued, having worked twelve years as a formator, first as socius to the novice master, and then as novice master. GC 36's concern about transformation in Jesuit life raises questions about Jesuit formation. When should God's mercy deeply transform us if not during the years of formation?

How was I to make sense of GC 36's provocative yet rather vague statement?

To my wonder, Jesuits in my community and elsewhere had varied reactions. Some expressed their joy that GC 36 had highlighted a concern that they shared. Others related to me, their voices thick with emotion, how deeply the Exercises had transformed both them and other companions, and they distanced themselves from GC 36's statement. Many were unimpressed with the statement because they considered it impossible to quantify how deeply exercitants are changed. Others said that Jesuits should be satisfied with how they are doing, because they are still faring better than many other religious congregations. More than one companion suggested that taking the statement seriously would stir an unwarranted sense of guilt that would not be fruitful for Jesuits and for their ministries.

The contrast between GC 36's call for renewal and the less-than-enthusiastic responses from Jesuits raises questions. How can the Society of Jesus respond to the challenge identified by GC 36? How does the Society avoid overly-simplistic or hopelessly-complicated analyses of these feelings of dissatisfaction? How can or should the recognition of God's clearly-felt call for conversion translate into practice? And where should Jesuits find the criteria for sifting through "the elements of our lives, works, or lifestyles" that get in the way of our being changed more satisfactorily? Finally, are there steps that Jesuits can take to interpret in a more helpful manner the challenge presented in Decree 1?

Such are the questions that I aim to address here. I will develop my argument in four stages. First, I will examine how to discuss long-term transformation in Jesuit life within the framework of Ignatian spirituality. I will argue that Ignatian spirituality can foster long-term change to the extent that Jesuits give as

much attention to those parts of the *Constitutions* that deal with the progress of individuals—that is, to parts III to VI—as they do to the relevant sections in the Exercises.

Second, I will examine Ignatius' treatment of the novitiate in the *Constitutions* to show how it reveals an ambitious but realistic vision of transformation.

Third, I will offer examples of how to understand and put into practice the spirituality of the Constitutions today in a way that fosters change.

Finally, I will return to the initial question of Decree 1 in light of the above, and suggest some ideas for spiritual renewal as discerned and demanded by GC 36. I believe that these suggestions will be authentically Ignatian, collaborative, practical, and capable of opening a new space of creativity and fidelity where the Exercises can change Jesuits as deeply as they would hope.

1. Long-Term Transformation and Ignatian Spirituality

Concern for the transformative power of the Exercises is almost as old as the Society of Jesus. A remarkable passage in the *Official Directory to the Spiritual Exercises* of 1599 provides ample clues about early Jesuits' views on the issue. Apparently, some were not content during the final days of a retreat to offer spiritual considerations—such as those contained in the Contemplation for Attaining Love—for returning to ordinary life, but rather candidly acknowledged their doubts about the long-term effectiveness of the Exercises. The *Directory* insists that the giver of the Exercises should warn the retreatant not to hope for a straightforward continuation of the spiritual transformation once the Exercises are over. On the contrary, retreatants could end up being worse off than before the retreat: “Upon moving from a warm to a cold room, a person can easily catch a sudden chill unless he takes care to preserve his heat.”²

² *The Official Directory of 1599*, 280, hereafter *OffDir*; in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Direc-*

As this passage makes clear, the early Jesuits who contributed to the *Directory* did not think that the Exercises would automatically result in permanent changes to one's life, however intense the spiritual consolations that one might have received. Instead, they wanted those finishing the Exercises to be convinced of two things: first, that something

From this perspective, the Exercises are not so much a transformative process as the groundwork for one—a time for “preparing and disposing our soul.”

important had happened, and second, that almost nothing had happened. That is, the person returning to daily life should “realize the great importance of this beginning and foundation of a good and spiritual life which by God's grace he has laid in the Exercises”³; but at the same time, “he should realize that what he has achieved up till now only amounts to the good seed being sown in his soul by God, with the result that, unless he tends and cultivates this seed and brings it to maturity so that it will ‘give its fruit in due season’ (Matt. 21:41), what has been done is of itself little or nothing.”⁴

The rationale is simple. “Whatever good [the person finishing the Exercises] may have received has not yet been solidified into a habit, but is still a kind of impulse which can easily slacken or even die out altogether. When this happens, the entire fruit and the entire labor of the Exercises vanishes.”⁵

From this perspective, the Exercises are not so much a transformative process as the groundwork for one—a time for “preparing and disposing our soul.”⁶ During the Exercises, God spreads seeds in the soul, but the fruits are yet to grow. Holy impulses easily can wither and die, since spiritual experiences are not yet

tory of 1599, trans. and ed. Martin E. Palmer, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 1996), 348.

³ *OffDir* 281; trans. and ed. Palmer, 348.

⁴ *OffDir* 282; trans. and ed. Palmer, 348–49.

⁵ *OffDir* 280; trans. and ed. Palmer, 348.

⁶ *Spiritual Exercises 1*, hereafter *SpEx*; *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. and ed., George E. Ganss, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 1992), 21.

in harmony with entrenched habits that remain to be transformed. The transformative power of the Exercises can therefore not be gauged without considering actual change in the subsequent months and years. Retreatants often express that they are aware of the difference between graces received and actual transformation. As a layman recently said to me upon finishing the Exercises, “I cannot tell right now how it has been. My wife will be able to evaluate it in a few months’ time.” (Since the wife was present for another retreat later that year, I concluded that she was satisfied.)

Once the Exercises are over, Ignatian spirituality can nourish a lasting transformation—a change of thought-patterns and habits—in two ways. First, the retreatant can continue to use the Examen and various ways of praying, rely on a deeper sense of God so as to live more contemplatively and in the spirit of discernment, choose to do the Exercises over and over again, and so on. These spiritual means are available to all. Yet they remain generic in the sense that they are not fine-tuned to the particular conditions of the person wishing to be transformed.

Ignatian spirituality’s second way of promoting lasting transformation beyond the experience of the Exercises is Jesuit formation as described in the *Constitutions*. Here Ignatius can directly address the issue of how the graces and insights received in the Exercises can take root through a transformation of habits. Accordingly, Part III of the *Constitutions* presents the novitiate as a time for “progress both in spirit and in virtues.”⁷ The Ignatian means of support that apply here are specific to novices, and can be fine-tuned to their particular needs.

In a nutshell, transformation in Ignatian spirituality should be seen as an organic unity of two closely-related processes of transformation. The first one, a spiritual process that cultivates considerable self-awareness, can be experienced within an unfolding one-to-one relationship with God. The second process cannot develop in similar seclusion, since it implies engagement in interpersonal relationships and

⁷ *Constitutions* 243, hereafter *Const.*; *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 1996), 108.

integration into the body of the Society. Thus, while the first process takes about thirty days to accomplish, the second—Jesuit formation—can take as many as ten or more years.

Consequently, formators seeking to respond to the question of GC 36 need to address two separate, closely-related queries. First, are they satisfied with what happens within the context of the Spiritual Exercises proper? And second, are they content with how deeply Jesuits in formation are transformed in the subsequent years?

In theory, Jesuits enjoy an abundance of resources with which to study both questions. For the first, they have a wealth of recorded experience both in giving the Exercises and in forming Jesuits. They can look to the Exercises' vision of helping persons that continues from the Principle and Foundation to a dynamic that extends four Weeks. For the second question, Jesuits have Parts I to VI of the *Constitutions* that describe in detail how to help candidates to the Society move from admittance through the novitiate up to tertianship, and into apostolic life before and after final vows.

In practice however, formators with whom I have spoken in recent years tend to find it much easier to evaluate the Exercises than other phases of Jesuit formation. With regard to the Exercises, the vague term *change* can be easily made more specific. In which Week is the person? How deeply has the person received the graces of that Week? What resistances have appeared? When needed, questions of clarification can apply even to particular prayer exercises. Has the person done the Preparatory Prayer? Is a particular exercise to be repeated? To the extent that such questions are clarified, possible means of support can be considered, based on our understanding of how the Spiritual Exercises work. Givers of the Exercises can find support in a range of commentaries and other secondary literature. One can attend training courses, consult other experienced retreat masters, or receive supervision when needed. All these means of support help formators—on a regular basis and not just when a general congregation raises the issue—to facilitate change by means of the Exercises.

The evaluation of subsequent Jesuit formation tends to be more difficult, and the *Constitutions* at first glance do not seem to provide

much help for clarifying the vague word *change*. Moreover, I would agree with Fr. Richard Baumann (UMI) that “the *Constitutions* remains for many Jesuits a respected but generally unread text.”⁸ If my impressions are correct, then this is also true for formators in the sense that they know much *about* this text but they are not so familiar with *using* it. Consequently, it is easier to say how many experiments a novice has accomplished than to get a sense of what graces he has received. Likewise, it is easy to say whether a Jesuit has done tertianship, but more difficult to say whether and how that experience has changed him in a lasting way. The nature of the desired transformation remains blurrier, God’s activity less obvious, and His ways of helping less clear. Unlike evaluating how we do the Exercises, examining what prevents God’s gracious mercy from transforming us over the long run is much more difficult.

The question I would like to address is whether we can find a way to let Ignatius inspire more directly our understanding of and support for long-term change during Jesuit formation. In other words, can the *Constitutions* provide us with insights that enable us to respond practically and insightfully to the question of how deeply we are changed over the long run? I will limit the scope of my investigation to the novitiate, which is the period of formation in which I have direct experience, and to that part of the *Constitutions* (III) which deals with this initial period of formation. I will begin by reading and interpreting the text as regards the big picture and asking: what does change mean, and what are the smaller and more manageable issues that make this notion concrete? I will then offer several examples of how to use this text to foster actual change.

2. An Ignatian Vision of How Novices Change

A. A Supposedly Complete, Brief, and Clear Text

Ignatius did not write the *Constitutions* for experts on Ignatian spirituality, but for ordinary Jesuits. Because of this, he was aware that unless

⁸ Richard J. Baumann, SJ, “Our Jesuit Constitutions: Cooperation as Union,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* [SSJ] 49, no. 4 (Winter 2017).

the text was concise and clear, it would fall short of helping those for whom he intended it. As he explains:

The purpose of the Constitutions is to aid the body of the Society as a whole and its individual members toward their preservation and increase for the divine glory and the good of the universal Church; they ought therefore, besides being singly and as a whole conducive to the purpose just stated, to possess three characteristics:

First, they should be complete, to provide for all cases as far as possible.

Second, they should be clear, to give less occasion for scruples.

Third, they should be brief, as far as the completeness and clarity allow, to make it possible to retain them in the memory.⁹

Despite Ignatius's intention, reading part III of the *Constitutions* with the objective of discerning his vision of (trans)formation is no easy task, since the novitiate period is described in sixty-four dense paragraphs, some of which are lengthy and complex.¹⁰

We can start by noting that Part III is divided into two chapters, the first entitled "the preservation pertaining to the soul and to progress in virtues," which consists of forty eight paragraphs. The second, on "the preservation of the body," consists of fourteen paragraphs.¹¹ The titles give the impression that chapter 1 treats of the essential elements of the novitiate, and chapter 2 of matters pertaining to physical health. This is only partly true. Both chapters address physical ailments, and chapter 2 contains an important passage about how to talk to the superior about one's personal needs.¹² And so, while the division of part III into two chapters helps one's analysis, one cannot analyze the chapters independently of each other.

⁹ *Const.* 136; ed. Padberg, 58.

¹⁰ *Const.* 243–306.

¹¹ *Const.* 243–91; 292–306.

¹² *Const.* 292.

A more helpful starting point is the “Preamble to the Declarations and Observations about the Constitutions,” which distinguishes for the purpose of readability between *constitutions* and *declarations*.¹³ For a comprehensive, clear, and brief understanding, “the more universal and summary Constitutions will be presented in a handier form,” while the declarations “can give more detailed instruction [...] about some matters which the brevity and universality of the other Constitutions left less clear.”¹⁴ In other words, for a general overview, one can focus on the constitutions proper, since they describe the essential elements of the Ignatian vision; and leave the declarations to function as footnotes. In terms of part III, we find there thirty-five constitutions and twenty-nine declarations. By dealing with constitutions only, one can cut the number of relevant paragraphs for our study almost by half—already a more reasonable number.

Then, considering the constitutions proper, we find a few that have specific purposes not associated with the dynamic of transformation that occupies us here. For instance, the paragraph that introduces part III formally links this section to the previous parts and states the goal of the novitiate.¹⁵ Likewise, the final paragraph in chapter 1 summarizes what had been written before.¹⁶ Furthermore, some constitutions apply on certain conditions only—for example, “if someone at entrance or after he has entered under obedience should find it to his devotion to dispose of his temporal goods”; or how one should behave in the case of an illness.¹⁷

¹³ *Const.* 136. While modern editions of the *Constitutions* blend the two into a single flow of text, they generally distinguish one from the other—for instance, by casting the constitutions in normal text and the declarations in italics; or by retaining the old paragraph numbering that restarts at the beginning of each chapter, indicating constitutions by Arabic numerals and declarations by capital letters. The Padberg edition, cited in this essay, uses both methods.

¹⁴ *Const.* 136.

¹⁵ *Const.* 243.

¹⁶ *Const.* 291.

¹⁷ *Const.* 258; ed. Padberg, 114; *Const.* 272.

By applying the above criteria, one can bring down the number of paragraphs to be studied to twenty-four in chapter 1, and to nine in chapter 2.

How to deal with this still considerable amount of text? Here, one can borrow a simple but important formal criterion from the *Spiritual Exercises*. Both the *Exercises* and the *Constitutions* mix two perspectives: the first perspective is that of the person who “desires to make all the progress possible” — for instance, by means of practicing specific exercises and developing certain attitudes.¹⁸ The other perspective is that of the person who is there to help — namely, the giver of the Exercises or the director of novices. We shall begin by summarizing the paragraphs that deal with this second perspective, that of the person who is there to provide *cura personalis*.

B. A Carefully-Prepared Environment

In making the Exercises, as well as in Jesuit formation, those going through a process of transformation need two major kinds of help. The first involves having an environment that promotes growth, which implies both the elimination of what is not helpful and the provision of what is either necessary or helpful. The second has to do with receiving personal attention and accompaniment.

With regard to the first: while in the *Exercises* a single paragraph suffices to describe the importance of a secluded and peaceful environment, the *Constitutions* go on at length about delimiting the community setting.¹⁹ Of course, like retreatants, novices also need peace and quiet; but the complexity of the novitiate environment requires more flexibility. Thus, one constitution emphasizes the general importance of considering what is helpful: “while they advance along the path of the spirit, they should deal only with persons and about matters which help them toward what they were seeking when they entered the Society.”²⁰ Another constitution clarifies some matters about leaving the house and

¹⁸ *SpEx* 20; ed. Ganss, 28.

¹⁹ *SpEx* 20.

²⁰ *Const.* 244.

speaking with others.²¹ Similarly, the use of material goods is restrained: novices “must not have the use of anything as their own,” and not even lend or borrow common property without the knowledge and consent of the director.²² Limitations also apply in the intellectual realm—for example, “generally speaking, there will be no literary studies in the house.”²³ Time is structured by well-defined boundaries: “there should be a regular order, as far as possible, for the time of eating, sleeping, and rising, and it should ordinarily be observed by all.”²⁴ For reasons of health, however, this regular order should not be monotonous; mental activities are to be alternated with physical ones.²⁵

Ignatius makes clear that these directives are not to be practiced rigidly. Exceptions are possible in almost all areas, according to the discernment of the superior.²⁶ Nevertheless, the formal principles that mark out the boundaries of common life are firm. This characteristic of the Ignatian novitiate might strike the contemporary reader as “monastic” and opposed to the apostolic thrust of the Society. As we will see later, the purpose of these limitations is precisely to provide a space where growth can take place, so that the experience of interiority as lived in the Exercises can transform thought patterns, instill new habits, and develop virtues that are necessary for Jesuit life. The introductory constitution explains this succinctly: all is done in order to promote novices’ “greater spiritual progress.”²⁷

The only exception to this overall purpose is a passage that might make one smile, since it brings together a surreal set of two disparate points, their common denominator being that they are not directly helpful: “for the sake of decorum and propriety,” women should not enter the house; and for the same reason, weapons, as well as instruments

²¹ *Const.* 247.

²² *Const.* 254; ed. Padberg, 112; *Const.* 257.

²³ *Const.* 289; ed. Padberg, 124.

²⁴ *Const.* 294; ed. Padberg, 126.

²⁵ *Const.* 298.

²⁶ *Const.* 245–46; 257; 295.

²⁷ *Const.* 244; ed. Padberg, 108.

of entertainment, also are ruled out.²⁸ The question of women visitors, which the *Complementary Norms* clarify, merits special attention since it comes to bear in a special way on how externs perceive us.²⁹

Within the boundaries of this carefully-delimited formation environment, there are abundant signs of provident care. Regarding food, clothing, lodging, and other physiological needs—as a developmental psychologist would put it—“nothing be lacking that is needed.”³⁰ And the superior, who is responsible for *cura personalis*, should listen to individual needs: if novices perceive that anything is “harmful to them or that something else is necessary,” then they should pray about it and talk to the superior.³¹ A companion should be charged especially with caring for material goods; and in addition to that, someone should look after the ambiance: concern for “decorum” and “propriety” returns here for a third time.³² In addition, someone should attend to the physical health of the members, and “great care should be taken of the sick.”³³ But of course, the spiritual wellbeing of novices is just as important: common meal times should be spiritually nourishing, and older members ought to inspire the young by doing their share of the housework from time to time.³⁴ In sum, the general atmosphere should be peaceful, and there ought to be a sense of unity among the companions, bound together as they are by fraternal charity.³⁵

In addition to these general considerations, normative for all living in the house, a long paragraph elaborates on the second way of providing support to the novices, which is through individual accompaniment.³⁶ Whatever question or personal difficulty novices

²⁸ *Const.* 266; ed. Padberg, 118.

²⁹ *Complementary Norm* 147, 3; 327, 2–3; ed. Padberg, 218; 327.

³⁰ *Const.* 296; ed. Padberg, 126.

³¹ *Const.* 292; ed. Padberg, 125.

³² *Const.* 305; 271; ed. Padberg, 120; cf. *Const.* 251; 266.

³³ *Const.* 303; 304; ed. Padberg, 127.

³⁴ *Const.* 251; 276.

³⁵ *Const.* 273.

³⁶ *Const.* 263.

might have, a “faithful and competent person” should be available to assist them by offering spiritual direction or explaining whatever might be necessary for them to know.³⁷

All in all, about half of the constitutions and a good number of declarations in part III deal with the environment that welcomes novices; fewer paragraphs have to do with delimiting the novitiate from the greater world, with a greater number touching on the personal care to be provided. One could remark that the novitiate could risk becoming an overly protective place without the stimulation worthy of the energies of a healthy young man. True, the more-or-less radical separation from the outside world is certainly a challenge. But what about removing such major life challenges as earning one’s living, starting a family, and developing a professional career, that in human society would tend to foster growth?

The key to understanding how the novitiate works is that the goal toward which novices strive is, as the General Examen puts it, “to resemble and imitate in some manner our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁸ Novices understand the depth and the life-changing quality of this goal during the first “probation,” the thirty-day Exercises.³⁹ The challenge they face in the novitiate is how to keep up this goal while living in an interpersonal setting with all its strains and necessary adaptations. In order to remain focused on Christ, novices will need to develop those virtues that will progressively form something like a core personality as they grow into the apostolic body of the Society.

On this point, the *Constitutions* invite the reader to take not only the perspective of the formators, but also that of the novices themselves. As we know from the *Spiritual Exercises*, a favorable environment and personal support can only help those who sincerely and magnanimously engage in doing the exercises. Similarly in the novitiate, it is ultimately the novices themselves who are to make good use of the support provided. They form themselves, as the *Constitutions* reveal grammatically

³⁷ *Const.* 263; ed. Padberg, 118.

³⁸ *Const.* 101; ed. Padberg, 46.

³⁹ *Const.* 65.

through use of the active voice and the vocabulary of movement: the novitiate, while offering a context for being formed, enables the novices actively to “make progress [...] along the path of the divine service.”⁴⁰

C. Seeking God in All Things

A first set of exercises that novices are to engage in is to seek an ongoing attention to, and relationship with God. This primacy of God is, of course, not limited to the novitiate. In the words of the *Formula of the Institute*, all Jesuits are “first of all to keep before [their] eyes God.”⁴¹ The *Constitutions* express this attitude as “familiarity with [God]” — a primary characteristic of a formed Jesuit, which the *Contemplation to Attain Love* develops more fully.⁴²

Part III of the *Constitutions* employs a surprisingly rich variety of terms and images to sketch out this living relationship with God. The exercise involved in each case is to discern God’s presence and activity in and beyond the immediately accessible experiences. Novices are there to serve God, grow in devotion and praise the Lord, do things “with the counsels of Christ our Lord,” and for the glory of God.⁴³ They should bind themselves to God as much as possible, and accept even sickness as a gift from the hand of God.⁴⁴ All in all, novices “seek God our Lord in all things,” and consider the novitiate as a possibility to “make progress both in spirit and in virtues along the path of the divine service.”⁴⁵ Novices become companions of Jesus by imitating him first of all in the most important characteristic of his life: to have made every decision, great or small, according to the criterion of what would more glorify His Father.. This intimate living-in-God’s-presence is the in-between developmental goal that novices

⁴⁰ *Const.* 243; ed. Padberg, 108.

⁴¹ *Formula of the Institute* 1550, no. 1; *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ, 4. Also quoted in GC 36, d. 1, n. 18; in *Jesuit Life & Mission Today*, 21.

⁴² *Const.* 723; ed. Padberg, 358; *SpEx* 230–37.

⁴³ *Const.* 244; 250; 254; 251.

⁴⁴ *Const.* 282–83; 272.

⁴⁵ *Const.* 288; 243.

are called to attain once they have done the Exercises and before they move on to face the greater challenges of studies and apostolic life.

Novices need help to apply in the daily life of the novitiate what they have learned in the Exercises, and to develop personally suitable forms of prayer and spiritual reading.⁴⁶ They are to learn how to receive communion in a “good and fruitful” way, so as to experience intimacy with God in the Eucharist, where unity with God is so clearly not the result of personal effort but of God’s generous gift of self.⁴⁷

This first set of spiritual practices fosters the development of a contemplative stance in daily life. Much like the prayer exercises during the Spiritual Exercises, they engage novices in ways that are specific to the context where they are to make progress. In this case, spiritual practices answer the question, ‘How can I be more fully attentive to and united with God?’ Novices vary greatly with regard to which of these exercises transform them most profoundly and how the actual transformation happens. But the basic dynamic of the novitiate remains, in all cases, the emergence of a personality fundamentally defined by a living relationship with God: one that can be consoling to various degrees and can seem at times obvious and at other times profoundly mysterious, but one that is worth engaging fully. In short, the novitiate is the embodiment of the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises, both in the spiritual life of novices and in the life of the novitiate community.

Fraternal feedback, in spite of all the precautions foreseen by the Constitutions, remains a challenging spiritual practice, especially for those from individualistic cultures.

A subsequent series of spiritual practices fosters the integration of those areas of the personality that are not fully consistent with a contemplative self that desires to be in union with God. They answer the questions, ‘What can I do to be united more fully with God?’

⁴⁶ *Const.* 277.

⁴⁷ *Const.* 277.

These exercises can be grouped into two categories. Those in the first category, as we will see, help one to recognize strengths and weaknesses—typical thought and behavior patterns and influences made or not made on others. These exercises of self-awareness reveal new and new layers of reality not yet fully transformed by grace and thus prepare and precede discernment. The exercises in the second category can be used once discernment has been made. They help one move toward the desired direction upon recognizing resistances to grace. Exercises in both categories are to be practiced within the contemplative stance of seeking God. They make sense to the extent that they foster greater integrity so that one can be more united with God and serve God more fully.

D. Exercises in Self-Awareness

The principal exercise of self-awareness is the daily Examen, the importance of which does need not be explained here.⁴⁸ By embedding this practice in a paragraph about confession, Ignatius links it to the sacramental expression of reconciliation with God.⁴⁹ These two practices foster a permanent First Week dynamic at the heart of Jesuit life, according to the prevalent contemporary declaration of Jesuit identity: “What is it to be a Jesuit? It is to know that one is a sinner, yet called to be a companion of Jesus as Ignatius was.”⁵⁰ Confession, inviting each novice to “keep his conscience completely open” before the confessor, is to be helpful [cf. SpEx. 326] and should not become a routine-like exercise.⁵¹ The novitiate is the time for learning “the manner of making a good and fruitful confession.”⁵²

Contemporary Jesuit spirituality often emphasizes the daily Examen as the most obvious tool to achieve greater awareness of

⁴⁸ *Const.* 261.

⁴⁹ *Const.* 261.

⁵⁰ GC 32, d. 2, no. 1; *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis, MO: IJS, 2009), 291.

⁵¹ *Const.* 261; ed. Padberg, 116; see also SpEx 22.

⁵² *Const.* 277; ed. Padberg, 121.

self and of God's gifts, but it is rarely mentioned that it has limits that cannot be overcome simply by doing it more attentively. The Johari window, a widely-known psychological model structured as a square divided into four panels, can help illustrate why. Personality traits are distributed in the four quarters according to who is (or is not) aware of their existence. The upper left is the *arena*, meaning those personality traits of which one's self is aware, and of which others are aware as well. The upper right is the *façade*, meaning qualities known to the self but not to others. The lower left pertains to *blind spots* visible to others but not to the self, while the lower right pertains to traits *unknown* to both self and others.

Both sections in the lower half of the Johari window pertain to hidden personality traits that can frustrate one's desire for greater unity with God. These traits cannot be identified by the Examen: blind spots are called so because one is not *able* to see them. For example, I might not be able to notice how cynical I become when I get insecure. Significant personality traits thus risk remaining un-integrated. The process of conversion will not extend to these areas unless a way is found to bring them to light so that they can be redeemed and transformed in God's merciful love. This is the reason why the *Constitutions* offer a number of additional spiritual practices that foster a deeper awareness of self and of God. These spiritual practices enable one to extend the scope of the Examen by bringing formerly unreachable areas of the self to consciousness.

One spiritual practice that pertains to blind spots is fraternal feedback. The way the *Constitutions* present it has little to do with the routine-like manner with which it was practiced in former times.⁵³ The only resemblance is that fraternal feedback should be among the required spiritual practices. But "[the] procedure to be followed [...] will be left to the discreet charity of the superior and of those whom he may delegate in his place, who will measure them in accord with the disposition of persons and with general and individual edification."⁵⁴ A related spiritual practice should also be in place so that the

⁵³ E.g., the "Chapter of Faults" common in pre-Vatican II Jesuit novitiates.

⁵⁴ *Const.* 269.

capacity to receive feedback fruitfully can develop: “Each one ought to accept them in a good spirit with a genuine desire of his emendation and spiritual profit.”⁵⁵

Fraternal feedback, in spite of all the precautions foreseen by the *Constitutions*, remains a challenging spiritual practice, especially for those from individualistic cultures. It can even become counter-

Obedience as a testing experience can, of course, go wrong in many ways. Discernment is an important precondition.

productive if not done freely and in the spirit of desiring to make spiritual progress. Probably this is the reason why this practice has to be explained during the admission process. The General Examen demands that prospective novices

understand how and why feedback is given, “with due love and charity, in order to help one another more in the spiritual life.”⁵⁶

As to the *unknown* region of the Johari window, it hides potentially significant elements of the personality that by definition escape both self-reflection and feedback from others. Hidden fears, distrust, lack of freedom, and biased ways of interpreting reality that are so deeply part of the personality that they cannot even be named all belong to this area. This reservoir of hidden ammunition would risk exploding later under the pressure of the heavy demands of Jesuit apostolic life. Here, the sensitive and controversial practice of religious obedience can be helpful. Obedience, when it becomes concrete, implies leaving behind familiar ways of doing and thinking. It can prompt one to step out of one’s comfort zone and to endure things “difficult and repugnant to sensitive nature.”⁵⁷ One might have to accept to seek God in unusual settings and unfamiliar emotional states. By way of the psychological and spiritual reactions it triggers, obedience allows those areas of the personality to be probed in order to discover what might otherwise have remained hidden and thus not brought into a transformative relationship with God. Obedience,

⁵⁵ See *Const.* 269.

⁵⁶ *Const.* 63; ed. Padberg, 37.

⁵⁷ *Const.* 284; ed. Padberg, 123.

when lived gracefully, can make the emerging new personality born of a relationship with God more self-aware and integrated. This is how, although, because it apparently does not require a high degree of psychological maturity, it might appear childish, obedience can efficiently foster in-depth conversion. In the words of Ignatius, “It is very helpful for making progress.”⁵⁸

Note however that for obedience to be helpful, it does not need to be spectacular. Everyday obedience consists in conforming to the demands of ordinary daily life in the community. Learning to make good use of time and developing habits that allow one to avoid idleness thus can be a truly beneficial challenge for young men of our contemporary, always-online culture.⁵⁹ For example, attempting to practice orderliness in eating can reveal the extent to which snacking or overeating can become an automatic and unhealthy stress response or a mistaken way of dealing with a feeling of emptiness. For this reason, to limit eating to contexts where “food [is] given also to the soul” can help distinguish between two profoundly rooted, fundamental desires for nourishment: hunger for food and hunger for God.⁶⁰

A more exceptional use of obedience is a purposeful “testing [of novices] for their greater spiritual progress in the manner in which God tested Abraham.”⁶¹ Obedience in such cases can stir up feelings, resistances, thoughts, and actions that surprise one by their force or novelty, or else bring back forgotten memories that still affect one’s life. A tendency for self-pity, quick-temperedness, the ease of giving in to resentment, sore childhood wounds, deep-seated insecurities, and other such elements, can now become part of the Examen. As such, a novice can contemplate them in light of his desire to love and serve the Lord more fully. But obedience also can bring forth a formerly unknown generosity, creativity, or sensitivity, or a more profound desire to serve God that can be savored and more deeply integrated and that can elicit gratitude.

⁵⁸ *Const.* 284; ed. Padberg, 123.

⁵⁹ *Const.* 253.

⁶⁰ *Const.* 251; ed. Padberg, 112.

⁶¹ *Const.* 285; ed. Padberg, 124.

Obedience as a testing experience can, of course, go wrong in many ways. Discernment is an important precondition: “the superiors should as far as possible observe the measure and proportion of what each one can bear, as discretion will dictate.”⁶² It is not limited to exceptional cases. Discernment is the basis for all obedience that is to be helpful:

After pondering the matter in our Lord, we consider it to be of great and even extraordinary importance in his Divine Majesty that the superiors should have a complete understanding of the subjects, that by means of this knowledge they may be able to direct and govern them better, and while caring for them guide them better into the paths of the Lord.⁶³

Here, possible difficulties abound. Theoretically, obedience to a particular command might conflict with a Jesuit’s conscience, so obedience only applies to things “in which no sin is seen.”⁶⁴ And although the appeal to religious obedience risks conflict with the conscience of a novice, this conflict occurs rarely enough that one need not dwell on it here. Much more likely, problems will include a fear of conformism or superficial compliance.

In this regard, a seemingly unproblematic novice might harbor difficult psychological issues that have little to do with spiritual progress. For example, instead of leading one to a new freedom in the Spirit, obedience can evoke and reinforce the self-protective mechanisms that had developed in childhood in order to cope with a cold, authoritarian father. Another novice could mistake obedience for the submission to an uninspiring regimen in the anticipation that vow day will bring about a more rewarding status in Jesuit life. Yet another might adopt an overzealous fanaticism intending to become a champion of obedience without noticing his underlying need for recognition. Experienced novice masters rightfully feel uncomfortable as they perceive such unhealthy attitudes that arise from unclear intentions, such as the need to be approved or an idealized sense of self as opposed to a contemplative self that develops

⁶² *Const.* 285; ed. Padberg, 124.

⁶³ *Const.* 91; ed. Padberg, 43.

⁶⁴ *Const.* 284; ed. Padberg, 123.

within a living relationship with God. In either case, obedience can harm rather than help, and discernment is crucial.

Keeping in mind these unhealthy ways of practicing obedience helps one to appreciate the spiritual practices that the *Constitutions* associate with obedience. For example, outward compliance, fully understandable as a remnant of childhood habit, effectively hinders graced and mature community life. Novices who practice such apparent obedience are to be called to a “bringing their wills and judgments wholly into conformity with what the superior wills and judges.”⁶⁵ The fruits of this spiritual practice will be manifold. The novice who pays attention to *how* he obeys might learn to recognize his own desires. He might learn to verbalize the gut feeling he experiences while obeying. He might learn to overcome his fears of expressing, in the spiritual conversation with the novice master, his own desires. Alternatively, he might learn to deal with opposing desires and begin to find freedom in prayer in a way he never did before. Finally, he might learn to make good use his free will whenever appropriate.

All in all, obedience is similar to fraternal correction in the sense that it is a necessary but delicate spiritual practice. Unless novices undertake it freely and in the desire to grow in freedom in the Spirit, it can do more harm than good. Accordingly, it is important to explain to candidates why obedience will be necessary “for [their] own greater spiritual progress.”⁶⁶ Their initial trust will be just as important as the initial trust with which retreatants look forward to engaging in the Spiritual Exercises.

E. Virtues as Practices

For practices of obedience to be helpful, they should be complimented by the cultivation of various virtues. These include humility, charity, devotion, and especially love: loving poverty like one’s mother, loving

⁶⁵ *Const.* 284; ed. Padberg, 123.

⁶⁶ *Const.* 90; ed. Padberg, 42. Fr. Amedeo Cencini, FdCC, develops a similar perspective in *The Sentiments of the Son: A Formative Journey in Consecrated Life* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2005).

the novice master, the superior, and “loving [God] in all creatures and all creatures in him.”⁶⁷ The practicing of such virtues is not an exercise in the everyday sense of the word because it does not require something to be accomplished. When the practice of virtues becomes tiring or burdensome, it is probably misunderstood, since the virtues in question are the practical consequences and expressions of a living relationship with God. They are much like prayer in the sense that they can be practiced consciously and deliberately while being at the same time spontaneous and graced activities. Still, they are to be fostered by ongoing attention and awareness. Practice and exercise in this area can be likened to the tuning of a musical instrument. In order to hear properly what is in tune and what is out of tune, one devotes one’s attention first of all to a reference pitch. Whatever is out of tune can then become the object of attention and a matter of conscious reflection. In the case of the above Ignatian virtues, one can notice, for example, resistances to humility. Questions can come up and be subjected to the Examen: Why am I concerned with myself to the point of losing sight of God? Why can I not love poverty like my mother? Why does it feel so difficult to love a particular companion?

The practice of virtues helps novices to remain grounded in reality rather than “spin” around particular issues. For example, it can happen that the relationship with the novice master is put to the test. A novice might project onto the novice master some hidden emotions rooted in distressing past experiences with parents and other authority figures. Minor incidents in the novitiate can thus trigger disproportionate fears and avoidance, mistrust and suspicion, anger, and even hatred. Such transference distorts the novice’s perceptions, and turns the novice master into a live Rorschach test as the relationship elicits and reveals difficult inner realities.

In such cases, novices having made some progress in the practice of the virtues of “interior reverence and love,”⁶⁸ will be able to remain in respectful conversation with the novice master even in the midst of great inner turmoil. Progressively, they can learn to distinguish the present

⁶⁷ *Const.* 288; ed. Padberg, 124. See also *Const.* 263; 282; 284; 287; 288.

⁶⁸ *Const.* 284; ed. Padberg 123.

uncomfortable reality from painful past experiences. Their attention can move to areas of growth. Prayer can become a place of interiority where the Lord can heal. A slowly emerging new, graced freedom allows them to break with the repetition of past patterns that developed understandably but now hinder further growth. Self-awareness can increase and grace can thus transform formerly hidden areas of the personality.

All of the above direct or indirect means of self-awareness—the Examen, confession, fraternal feedback and corrections, obedience, and the practice of the attitudes of the heart—serve the purpose of exposing areas of the personality not yet fully integrated into a graced new self. Novices may discover these things about themselves by speaking at length, since complex stories need sometimes be told in order to expose something that presents an obstacle to God’s grace. At other times, it is less clear what is revealed—something that for the moment cannot be analyzed any further and simply needs to be named and endured as a wound, a disordered tendency, or a human deficiency. A variety of metaphors can express what is at stake: something needs to heal, to grow, to die, to be integrated, or to be saved.

In spite of all the close links to the *Spiritual Exercises* that we have seen, the practice of virtues constitutes the most obvious example of how the spirituality of the *Constitutions* extends beyond that of the *Exercises*. As novices engage in “applying themselves to the pursuit of the true and solid virtues,” they consider the long-term effects of their actions from the perspective of weeks, months, or years, which exceeds greatly the ordinary time frame of the thirty-day Exercises.⁶⁹ To the question of how prayers and other spiritual exercises transform a Jesuit, an Ignatian answer is hardly conceivable without reference to the virtues. The term appears at key passages of the *Constitutions*.⁷⁰ Furthermore, it defines the goal of the novitiate not only in the first explanatory paragraph but also as the title of Chapter 1, the goal of the novitiate being “the preservation pertaining to the soul and to progress in virtues.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Const.* 260; ed. Padberg, 116.

⁷⁰ János Lukács SJ, *Ignatian Formation: The Inspiration of the Constitutions* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2016), 61–66.

⁷¹ *Const.* 243; ed. Padberg, 108.

This attention to virtues is profoundly rooted in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Virtues are at play whether contemplating the life of Jesus or praying to be more like Jesus, whether developing character strength that provides resistance against the workings of the evil spirit or growing out of capital sins.⁷² Spiritual growth in the Exercises can be recognized by the graces received. Human growth in the novitiate can be recognized by the more durable human qualities acquired, as a result of sustained exercises of collaboration with grace. This is why virtues are to be a regular theme between novice and novice master, as well as a recurrent topic of novices' preaching in the house, and objects of occasional testing.⁷³ Since studies can begin on the condition that "a foundation of humility and virtue" has been laid, the growth in virtues also serves as a criterion for passing to the next stage of Jesuit formation.⁷⁴ All in all, progress in virtues—that is, the development of the deeper qualities of mind and heart—is among the most tangible and most significant expressions of novices' desire to know, love, and serve the Lord more closely.

F. Practices for Taking Action

What can one do when inner realities are not in tune with the desire for a more profound unity with God? A rich variety of exercises is there to help further the integration of the personality. They are partly from the *Spiritual Exercises* and partly from the *Constitutions*.

Novices' first spiritual practice of furthering integration is to strive to keep their intention pure. Ignatius is consistent here with the monastic insistence on "purity of heart" [*puritas cordis*], even though his own term in Spanish, *intención pura*, was probably inspired by one of his favorite books, *The Imitation of Christ*. Pure intention means for him that a Jesuit should make every decision, big or small, on the basis of what will give God greater glory. The exercise is familiar from the *Spiritual Exercises* as the first preparatory prayer and from a preparatory note for

⁷² *SpEx* 122–24; 199; 245; 257; 327.

⁷³ *Const.* 263; 280; 285; 289.

⁷⁴ *Const.* 289; ed. Padberg, 125.

the Election: “In every good election, insofar as it depends on us, the eye of our intention ought to be single.”⁷⁵ Since pure intention means doing something for the love of God alone, and not for any personal self-interest, it is a basic learning exercise in discernment. In the novitiate, this spiritual practice is to be applied extensively, “not only in regard to [novices’] state of life but also in all particular details.”⁷⁶

The importance of this spiritual practice grows proportionally as one becomes exposed to multiple attractions and the love of God is to be recognized as distinct from the love of creatures.⁷⁷ Lack of right intention is a sign of a possibly hidden lack of freedom in loving and serving God. The exercise of keeping the intention right expresses and cultivates inner freedom. It nourishes gratitude to God, engages the desire for God, invigorates the spiritual motives of entering the novitiate, and lends meaning to the other exercises. In short, it is the personal response to God’s initiation of the dynamic of progress on the Ignatian pathway to God. And in fact, keeping the intention right is an exercise that one can practice even in a state of desolation. Moreover, this practice makes it possible to recognize desolation as a sign of an emerging issue awaiting integration.

In the novitiate, such illusions often arise in the realm of interpersonal relationships, e.g., naïve admiration of another novice, or fixation on the perceived shortcomings of a companion, or attributing too much or too little weight to what other novices say.

Another exercise concerns guarding oneself against the “illusions” of the devil.⁷⁸ This exercise demands the application of the rules for the discernment of spirits, especially those that explain how to reject whatever does not come from God.⁷⁹ The exercise is about acquiring proficiency in discernment: about remaining grounded in reality rather than

⁷⁵ *SpEx* 169; ed. Ganss, 74; see also *SpEx* 46.

⁷⁶ *Const.* 288; ed. Padberg, 124.

⁷⁷ *Const.* 288.

⁷⁸ *Const.* 260; ed. Padberg, 116.

⁷⁹ *SpEx* 319; 385.

giving in to mere initial impressions. In psychological terms, the ability to move from the apparently good to what is good in reality is Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) decisive criterion for growing up: while immaturity embraces the “pleasure principle” of instant gratification, a mature person who follows the “reality principle” can appropriately assess the world and act accordingly.⁸⁰

In the novitiate, such illusions often arise in the realm of interpersonal relationships, e.g., naïve admiration of another novice, or fixation on the perceived shortcomings of a companion, or attributing too much or too little weight to what other novices say. Illusions often take the form of general sentences: “I am no good.” “They are idiots.” “Nobody understands me.” “He always gets what he wants.” Recognizing such sentences as sources of desolation is the first step towards guarding oneself from the illusions of the devil.

Illusions are but one kind among many other temptations, and novices are to learn to “defend themselves from all temptations.”⁸¹ Note here that this subject can be problematic in several ways. On the one hand, it might degenerate into a preoccupation with petty issues, a rule-based morality, or sexual matters. Likewise, focusing on temptations might be counter-productive: the more that one focuses on them, the more that one obsesses over them. Also, *temptation* can become such a powerful label for unwanted phenomena that it can effectively stop novices from looking at what and why has such a powerful negative effect on them. Consequently, novices and novice directors alike might find it more appropriate and liberating to replace the talk of “defending oneself from temptations” with more neutral, psychologically literate ways of talking. For example, instead of recognizing the temptation of improper attraction to someone, one might find it more fruitful to understand how such attractions are recurring patterns in one's life, due to a deprived childhood or particular experiences of being abandoned. Such alternatives to talking about temptations might raise the question of whether and how the Ignatian terminology is at all pertinent today.

⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Dover Publications, 2015).

⁸¹ *Const.* 260.

When the *Constitutions* ask novices to guard themselves from temptations, it does not imply any of the problematic interpretations we just mentioned and does not hinder a deeper understanding of complex phenomena. On the contrary, this piece of traditional Christian terminology offers substantial advantages. The word *temptation* places a complex psychological challenge into a context where it can be seen to be a spiritual challenge at the same time. Part of one is in opposition to, and not compatible with, the desire to progress toward God.⁸² There is a sense of powerlessness but there is also a sense of responsibility. The deeper relationship with God at stake gets blurred; but there remains a desire for consistency of character and longing for harmony among the fragmented aspects of human life.

Merely to talk about feelings, stress factors, psychological issues, or bad thoughts, would risk leaving such issues poorly related to the Ignatian pathway to God. Such a predominantly psychological terminology could reinforce an ultimately unproductive blaming of oneself or tough past experiences for all difficulties. On the contrary, a theological understanding implies awareness of the workings of the evil spirit, orients one toward discernment, and encourages one to lean on God for help. To speak about temptations is thus to acknowledge un-integrated and vulnerable parts of the personality as relevant to the quest for God. It is also to acknowledge the need to discern and to stand firm while waiting for a new, graced personality to grow.

The *Constitutions* does not address in detail the various ways of responding to temptations, probably because the *Spiritual Exercises* cover this extensively, as for example in the passages related to the Examen and the rules for the discernment of spirits, as well as the notes concerning scruples.⁸³ The Meditation on the Two Standards presents the three areas where all human beings are vulnerable to temptation: the use of material things (riches), the opinion of others (vainglory) and one's own perception of what is right and good (pride).⁸⁴ The rules

⁸² Fr. Cencini develops this theme in *The Sentiments of a Son*.

⁸³ See *SpEx* 24–31; 32–43; 313–36; 345–51.

⁸⁴ *SpEx*. 136–48.

for eating cover another key area.⁸⁵ In the *Exercises*, one can learn how experiences of temptations can be brought into an intimate personal colloquy with the Lord.⁸⁶ One also remembers that being tempted is an experience shared by Jesus.⁸⁷ And one even learns how the very exercises by means of which progress can be made become objects of temptation: in desolation, “the enemy” makes it difficult to persist in a full prayer time.⁸⁸ In any case, the giver of the Exercises will have to stand by and offer support, which is very necessary at times of significant temptations.⁸⁹

Without repeating what the *Exercises* contain, the *Constitutions* simply place the issue of dealing with temptations into the larger context of the novitiate. Here too, the idiom of spiritual combat joins with a tone sympathetic to human fragility. The unique aspect of facing temptations in the normal ordo of the novitiate is the absence of the daily support and protection that a retreat environment affords, such as the daily conferences with the spiritual director and the radical limitation of interpersonal interactions. Novices’ responsibility increases and they need to collaborate closely with the novice master in order to identify relevant issues.⁹⁰

On this note, injudiciously identified temptations can bog down one’s attention and turn one away from God, rather than reveal those decisive areas which promote that relationship. Some novices begin by seeing temptations everywhere, while other novices can be blind to even the most obvious ones. Accordingly, methods of counter-acting temptations should be discussed by the novice master.⁹¹ Here, novices must discover techniques suitable to them in order to make the best possible use of their freedom and in so doing neutralize impulses not coming from God.

⁸⁵ *SpEx* 210–17.

⁸⁶ *SpEx* 199.

⁸⁷ *SpEx* 274.

⁸⁸ *SpEx* 13.

⁸⁹ *SpEx* 9–10.

⁹⁰ *Const.* 263.

⁹¹ *Const.* 265.

In this vein, the terms *abstinence* and *mortification* refer to spiritual practices that directly foster inner freedom, which is among the most valued characteristics of a mature Jesuit: “He ought also to be free from all inordinate affections, having them tamed and mortified.”⁹² Given the emphasis on discernment in GC 36, there is a contemporary relevance, since inordinate affections, unless mortified, “disturb the judgment of [the] intellect” and impinge on discernment in ways that often remain concealed.⁹³ The novitiate thus plays a crucial role in developing that inner freedom without which discernment may be reduced to a series of spiritual techniques rather than an act of a Jesuit deeply united to God.

In the past, mortification was often understood in spiritually and psychologically unhealthy ways, so that it resulted in the repression of emotions and affective immaturity. The term is now so charged with negative connotations that it might be better to avoid it altogether. Since mortification develops strength of character—that is, “strength” in the sense of human maturity—then one might replace the term with something more congruent with contemporary sensibilities. I think for example of the English word *grit*, in the sense of perseverance, stamina, focus on long-term goals, the ability to manage strong impulses and feelings, and the capacity to maintain integrity in stressful environments. All these describe well, in contemporary language, what it means to be a mortified person.

Nevertheless, such terminology does not articulate the spiritual quality of abnegation and mortification that makes these practices valuable in the eyes of Ignatius. Abnegation and mortification facilitate progress on the way to God. For Ignatius this was so obvious that he declared that even the time allotted for prayer can be reduced, “presupposing, of course, abnegation and mortification, which makes it easier for a mortified man to accomplish more in fifteen minutes of prayer than an unmortified man in two hours.”⁹⁴ In this sense, healthy mortification

⁹² *Const.* 726; ed. Padberg, 358.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Luís Gonçalves da Câmara, SJ, *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. Alexander Eaglestone and Joseph A. Munitiz, SJ (Leominster,

does not coincide with voluntarism but rather with an amplified sense of God and an increased ease of serving while remaining united with God. This crucial spiritual quality itself suggests a reason for eventually recovering the traditional biblical notion of the old self. By means of mortification, the old self can lose its vitality and new life in Christ can be more fully enjoyed: “for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”⁹⁵ In any case, without an appropriate and current idiom, formators can miss opportunities to promote lasting inner freedom in their men.

Novices are free to suggest to their superiors what they believe to be the right kinds of mortification for themselves.⁹⁶ To find help in the matter of abnegations and mortifications is so important that

While transparent communication between a novice and novice master is crucial, it is not to become a pretext for avoiding obedience.

it is among the few reasons that justify studies in the novitiate, and it is to be a preferred topic when novices preach in the house.⁹⁷ Although abnegation concerning basic physical needs is to be tested occasionally, the primary area where

growth is required is the abnegation of novices’ own wills and judgments.⁹⁸ As we have seen, this makes sense because the developmental challenge in the novitiate is not so much about the ability to figure out what to do—which is the everyday meaning of maturity—but about figuring out how to do it with God, for the glory of God, with the counsels of our Lord, and, eventually, united with God.

The exercise of open communication belongs to a somewhat special set of spiritual practices related to obedience. Obedience, like all other practices in the novitiate, fits into a context of communication with the novice master: “when they perceive that something is

Herefordshire: Gracewing; 2005), 149n255.

⁹⁵ Rom. 8:13 (NABRE); see also Gal. 5:24 and Col. 3:5.

⁹⁶ *Const.* 263.

⁹⁷ *Const.* 280; 289.

⁹⁸ *Const.* 284; 296.

harmful to them or that something else is necessary in regard to their diet, clothing, living quarters, office, or occupation, and similarly of other matters, all ought to give notice of this to the superior or to the one whom he appoints."⁹⁹ Although strict authoritative structures—at least in contemporary Western society—belong to the past, and there is probably more communication between novices and novice masters than ever before, obstacles are to be expected. As I noted earlier, affective obstacles due to dysfunctional communication patterns between novices and their superiors are often at work.

In this sense, the very conversations between novices and their superiors can become a practice to promote spiritual growth. Novices overcome psychological and practical barriers of communicating and “open themselves with confidence, hoping to receive from him in our Lord counsel and aid in everything.”¹⁰⁰ This characteristically Ignatian practice of representation indicates the extent to which communication goes hand-in-hand with obedience. That is, obedience on the part of novices does not mean that they should not continue to be transparent about their thoughts; rather, they should “represent the matter to him who is in charge.”¹⁰¹ Such representation is an area where novices are to practice discernment: “they should recollect themselves to pray, and after this, if they feel that they ought to represent the matter . . . they should do so.”¹⁰²

While transparent communication between a novice and novice master is crucial, it is not to become a pretext for avoiding obedience. When novices dodge obedience for seemingly rational reasons, obedience can lose its very capacity of moving the person to places where he would not like to go for fear of confronting unpleasant inner realities. Communication is part of obedience but not a synonym for it. In the novitiate, obedience should be understood as a spiritual practice and novices should not reframe it as a “childish” or “medieval” practice that harms human maturity. Such reactions demand discernment since

⁹⁹ *Const.* 292; ed. Padberg, 125.

¹⁰⁰ *Const.* 263; ed. Padberg, 118.

¹⁰¹ *Const.* 292; ed. Padberg, 125.

¹⁰² *Const.* 292; ed. Padberg, 125.

they can reveal ideologically masked flights from the challenge of obedience. Potentially unsettling confrontations with one's reality can thus be avoided as well as deeply transforming experiences of grace. Novices are therefore called fully to enter the affectively and cognitively testing experience of obedience "by striving interiorly to have genuine resignation and abnegation of their own wills and judgments."¹⁰³

While the last word belongs to the superior, the relationship with God comes into play: "what the superior decides after being informed is more suitable for the divine service and the subject's own greater good in our Lord."¹⁰⁴ In other words, the one who obeys is called to recognize that God's perspective is not the same as his own, to whom another decision would seem right. Of this difference, "the subject must persuade himself."¹⁰⁵ For this reason, novices are not to reduce obedience to a dynamic between them and the superior. Rather, the encounter opens a perspective where God is present.

Likewise, novices are not simply to seek affective strength in prayer when they are faced with a superior's decision with which they do not agree. Nor are they simply to maintain an awareness of God's presence. Nor should they be instructed, somewhat blandly, to "give the whole issue to God." While all of these can be important, the exercise suggested by this passage in the *Constitutions* is different. It develops the understanding that God can act through human wills other than one's own, so that "they should accustom themselves to consider, not who the person is whom they obey, but rather who he is for whose sake they obey and whom they obey in all, who is Christ our Lord."¹⁰⁶

G. The Spiritual and the Interpersonal

So far, we have covered almost all of part III of the *Constitutions*. Its directives fit into a relatively simple framework. Some pertain to the establishment of a simultaneously challenging and supportive environ-

¹⁰³ *Const.* 284; ed. Padberg, 123.

¹⁰⁴ *Const.* 292; ed. Padberg, 125–26.

¹⁰⁵ *Const.* 292; ed. Padberg, 125.

¹⁰⁶ *Const.* 286; ed. Padberg, 124.

ment that fosters novices' progress. Others directives propose spiritual practices in which novices engage, similar to the long retreat: they cultivate an ever-deeper relationship with God, develop awareness of potentially disordered tendencies, and engage novices' freedom to address disordered personality traits. It is easy to recognize behind this pattern a First Week dynamic as the dominant spiritual movement, sufficiently extended in time so that deeper transformation can take place.

There are, however, two notable differences between the First Week dynamic as lived during the Exercises and that of the novitiate. The first concerns novitiate experiments. As outlined in the General Examen, the novitiate includes six experiments, most of which do not pertain to the dynamic of the First Week.¹⁰⁷ This is perhaps one of the reasons why these characteristic and indispensable elements of the novitiate, with the exception of the Spiritual Exercises, are not mentioned in part III.¹⁰⁸ Note too that many of these experiments take place outside the house. Furthermore, apostolic experiments such as teaching catechism or preaching elicit a spiritual dynamic more in tune with the Second Week, that of joining the mission of Christ under his banner. In some cases, especially in the caring for the sick, significant Third Week experiences are to be made while novices are exposed to suffering and continue to seek God's presence. Taken together, the experiments allow novices to get a sense of what it means to be missioned and to be more autonomous after the inward-turning initial period of the novitiate, now with a new sense of the primacy of the relationship with God.

A second and largely unrecognized dynamic of the novitiate is the creation of a sense of community. While the long-form of the Exercises requires isolation for retreatants, daily life in the novitiate calls novices to engage in relationships without losing a continual awareness of God's presence. For this reason, novices will need to develop fine interpersonal skills so that no hostilities, including those that they may have repressed, induce desolation.¹⁰⁹ They are to be mindful of the effects that their behavior has on others, hence the repeated emphasis on

¹⁰⁷ *Const.* 65–70.

¹⁰⁸ *Const.* 277.

¹⁰⁹ On this point, see *Const.* 275.

edification.¹¹⁰ A long and complex paragraph in the *Constitutions*, and the only one in part III not mentioned so far, provides key insights into the interpersonal dimensions of the novitiate:

All should take special care to guard with great diligence the gates of their senses (especially the eyes, ears, and tongue) from all disorder, to preserve themselves in peace and true humility of their souls, and to show this by their silence when it should be kept and, when they must speak, by the discretion and edification of their words, the modesty of their countenance, the maturity of their walk, and all their movements, without giving any sign of impatience or pride. In all things they should try and desire to give the advantage to the others, esteeming them all in their hearts as if they were their superiors and showing outwardly, in an unassuming and simple religious manner, the respect and reverence appropriate to each one's state, so that by consideration of one another they may thus grow in devotion and praise God our Lord, whom each one should strive to recognize in the other as in his image.¹¹¹

This constitution, placed at the beginning of part III, can be interpreted as the essence of what happens in the novitiate. Only three paragraphs precede it: one describing the overall purpose of the novitiate and two defining the environment within which transformation takes place.¹¹² The above constitution describes how contemplative life in community becomes possible by means of a series of exercises where the spiritual and the interpersonal meet. In other words, it maps out the process of the transformation.

This passage can be summarized in four points—or rather, as four distinct but related Ignatian practices. First, novices should attend to their relationship with God and to its two manifestations: inner peace and humility, where the former is the most common and everyday expression of consolation, and the latter is the consequence of seeing the primacy of God's presence and activity in

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, *Const.* 247; 250; 269.

¹¹¹ *Const.* 250.

¹¹² *Const.* 243; 244; 247.

one's life.¹¹³ For Ignatius, at the point where novices are, this requires that they are shielded from distractions coming from outside the novitiate, since these would undermine their efforts to practice contemplation in action—of remaining attentive to God's initiatives. As noted by General Congregation 35, this priority of the interior is, somewhat paradoxically, a preparation for apostolic life: "because a space of interiority is opened where God works in us, we are able to see the world as a place in which God is at work and which is full of his appeals and of his presence."¹¹⁴

Second, novices are invited to invent and practice ways of expressing this spiritual reality in ways that are visible to others. A variety of areas of communication and metacommunication can serve this purpose.¹¹⁵

Third, novices should learn to live interpersonal relationships in an attitude of esteem, reverence and respect.¹¹⁶

Fourth, God can become manifest "in the other as in his image."¹¹⁷ We see here the hard-to-define relationship between Ignatian spiritual practices and the emergence of grace familiar from the Spiritual Exercises. How can a novice recognize God in a fellow Jesuit? Certainly not as a direct consequence of the spiritual practices he is engaged in. But these tend to be of immense help for experiencing interpersonal relationship as a reality where intimacy, love, and depth in God can be found. In fact, among the many references in part III of the *Constitutions* that emphasize the need to seek God in all things, only this passage speaks to how God will actually be found. From this perspective, the novitiate is not simply a place where novices look for God and try to protect their interior peace from the tribulations of community life. As relationships become more mature and novices' perception of reality changes, these relationships begin to

¹¹³ *SpEx* 316; 165–68; *Const.* 250.

¹¹⁴ GC 35, d. 2, n. 8; *Jesuit Life & Mission Today* [2009], ed. Padberg, 736.

¹¹⁵ *Const.* 250.

¹¹⁶ *Const.* 250.

¹¹⁷ *Const.* 250; ed. Padberg, 112.

reveal God's presence in surprising new ways. This is what could be called the grace of the novitiate—a sign that transformation is coming about.

H. To Help according to the *Constitutions*

The *Constitutions* present the novitiate as a series of interrelated spiritual practices that foster spiritual and human growth. Consequently, it is not simply one more authoritative text to be explained to novices, together with the *Autobiography*, *Spiritual Diary*, and *Formula of the Institute*. It works rather like the text of the *Exercises*. When formators use the *Exercises* to help novices advance in the spiritual life, they do not focus on its history and development, but rather regard the text as a handbook of spiritual practices to be applied with discernment, and they continue to refer to the *Exercises* throughout the entirety of the novitiate experience. Likewise, to foster transformation according to the *Constitutions*, formators ought to apply its exercises deliberately, consistently, and with discernment. Instead of a cursory two-week workshop on the *Constitutions*, the text needs to be a touchstone throughout the novitiate.

I would like to give two personal examples, both pertaining to the development of graced skills for interpersonal relationships.¹¹⁸ As a novice master, I used to devote several discussions to the question of how novices are “to preserve themselves in *peace* and *true humility* of their souls.”¹¹⁹ I liked to present this exercise as a prelude to entering interpersonal relationships, not unlike the preludes to entering a prayer time during the *Spiritual Exercises*. Here, the subject of “peace” proved to be rewarding. Novices related easily to it, and the discussions were excellent. I found plenty of material for this in the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, and the biblical connotations of peace provided a great background for talking about how peace is one of the most basic signs

¹¹⁸ *Const.* 250.

¹¹⁹ *Const.* 250; ed. Padberg, 112. Emphases mine.

of a living relationship with God, how it can be distinguished from more superficial forms of calmness, and so on.¹²⁰

The subject of humility was more difficult. The commentaries that I managed to find seemed less helpful, novices did not seem to be as interested, and I had to admit to myself that humility, while important in theory, seemed to matter less as a spiritual practice in their lives. But the conversations improved when we considered the adjective *true*, and the differences between true and false forms of humility. We identified a variety of false humilities, such as enduring humiliations with repressed anger, or having low self-esteem and thus never

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saying what is on one's mind. Through these conversations, it became clear that true humility had to be distinct from all these. We then proceeded to discuss recent incidents in the community of not being heard, or taken seriously, or of being humiliated in other ways. How does one typically react to being humiliated? How does one deal with shame? What are the typical thoughts and temptations in such moments?

Our conversations contributed significantly to clarify a key Ignatian exercise in the novitiate. It became clear that, while in the midst of a contemporary flood of strange connotations the Ignatian sense of the word *humility* was not easy to find, clarity in this seemingly small detail was most helpful. The exercise in common of distinguishing among different meanings proved well-spent. Moreover, although while the topic of humility plays an important role in the Exercises, only daily life in the novitiate revealed it as a truly indispensable attitude for living consoled in community.¹²¹

Another example of a fruitful encounter between the *Constitutions* and everyday life in the novitiate occurred when discussing with

¹²⁰ On this point, see *SpEx* 316.

¹²¹ *SpEx* 165–68.

the novices that they are “to show this [peace and true humility] by their silence when it should be kept and, when they must speak, by the discretion and edification of their words, the modesty of their countenance, the maturity of their walk, and all their movements.”¹²² I tell the novices that people are always communicating through their body language, whether they realize it or not; and this body language is in many ways significantly more powerful than verbal communication. I also tell them that a Jesuit community is not composed of individuals randomly found in the same physical location, but persons who aim to live in consolation and to express that consolation in their interpersonal relationships. I thought this was straightforward enough, until a novice’s question caught me off-guard: “I like this a lot, but what am I supposed to do when I am in desolation? Am I to express it so that I am honest, or conceal it so as not to hurt others?”

Unfortunately, my halting reply (*Um. . . I’m not sure that I recall Ignatius writing anything about this . . .*) gave the impression that the Ignatian exercise sounded great in theory but was problematic in practice. But much to my wonder, another novice suddenly began to explain with a good deal of confidence what he had learned at drama school about training actors. The question there, he explained, was the same: how can I be authentic on stage when I need to perform an angry husband and do not feel angry at all? He then sketched two basic approaches. Renowned Russian actor and theatre director Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) insisted on putting himself into an angry mood by remembering past experiences of anger and reawakening them in order to ensure that what appears on stage flows from the inside. But another eminent theater director, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940), trained his actors to focus on how they moved on stage, how they interacted with one another, and how each movement could be perfected. By means of this heightened awareness of what is ‘external,’ the appropriate feelings will follow. Although their approaches seem opposed, both Stanislavski and Meyerhold enjoyed great success. To this day, they count among the greatest theoreticians of the theatrical arts. The novice concluded with the observation that expressing inner realities is never a one-way process, because the exterior also affects the interior.

¹²² *Const.* 250; ed. Padberg, 112.

This unexpected detour to the world of theater provided no direct answer to the initial question, but it transformed the attitude of the group to the Ignatian text. Indeed, it worked much better than a scholarly excursus on how repeated acts form character through habituation. It dispelled a vague suspicion among the novices that we were dealing with a medieval practice with little relevance for them. They could find new meaning in the Ignatian text, and find challenge in putting it into practice. Like the *Exercises*, the *Constitutions* awakened creativity, and by seeing more clearly how to make progress, group dynamics in the novitiate improved.

In both cases, I was trying to teach novices something that I myself had not learned as a novice. I did not turn to other novice masters for advice because their preoccupations were usually different. And the commentaries on the *Constitutions* that I found did not seem to share the specific concern of the novice master, that of helping novices to engage in spiritual practices in a way that actually help them wherever they find themselves developmentally. All I knew was that my role was not so much to give information about the *Constitutions* as to help novices appreciate how the text can be a vehicle for a graced transformation. It was not easy for me, as I was obliged to wrestle with the text while simultaneously remaining attentive to the novices' own needs and questions. Yet those moments when novices found orientation, light, and new meaning in the text brought me deep consolation.¹²³

3. Toward a Corporate Conversion

A. Rowing into the Deep

In an effort to seek answers to GC 36's question about why the Exercises do not change Jesuits the way they would like, I identified formation as a key concern, and I looked to the *Constitutions* for guidance from Ignatius himself. I used the example of the novitiate to show how the *Constitutions* work, with regard to formation, very much like

¹²³ If readers are inspired to share their own stories and reflections about using elements of the *Constitutions* fruitfully in Jesuit formation, then please write to me at lukacs@jesuits.net.

the *Spiritual Exercises*. As noted earlier, both texts relate to a process of transformation, prescribe a favorable environment and personal

Fraternal correction, asceticism, and edification, were all important components of the Ignatian vision, but Jesuits have de-emphasized these since the Second Vatican Council.

guidance and support, and presuppose that progress can be made by means of suitable exercises, or spiritual practices. Beyond, however, such structural similarities, there is an additional similarity of even greater importance: the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Constitutions* have a transformative potential

that exceeds that of the human means these texts employ. The reason is that both texts aim at bringing the human being in a personal relationship with God. All transformations happen within this relationship; hence the possibility to be transformed “deeply.”

Attention to the details of the Ignatian text is important in both cases because our ability to cooperate with the Spirit is at stake. This is obvious in the case of the Exercises. It was also obvious for Ignatius who explained that one of the main reasons for writing the *Constitutions* was to foster “cooperation” with the Lord who requires this.¹²⁴ Yet precisely this helpfulness of the *Constitutions*, its very usefulness in fostering collaboration with the Spirit, became questionable in the second half of the twentieth century when the text often appeared to Jesuits old-fashioned and hardly helpful in a modern context.

As Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach (1928–2016) explained in the Preface to the 1995 edition of the *Constitutions*, GC 34’s reason for the great project of updating this text was the need to recover its transformative power. The text was to be “purged of elements that were obsolete,” such that it would not appear anymore as “a document that was purely spiritual and doctrinal, tied to ages past, and consequently out of tune with the times.”¹²⁵ The work accomplished on the details of the

¹²⁴ *Const.* 134; ed. Padberg, 56.

¹²⁵ “Preface of Very Reverend Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Society of Jesus,” in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, ed. Padberg, xi–xiv, at xii.

text fully justified the enthusiasm of the official promulgation: "Thus it was hoped that the *Constitutions* could recover their basic and fundamental inspirational and normative force for the life of the Society."¹²⁶

As we acknowledge today that "the *Constitutions* remains for many Jesuits a respected but generally unread text," we also acknowledge that in the past 25 years the hopes expressed by Fr. Kolvenbach have not become reality.¹²⁷ We are beginning to feel the weight of his prophetic words: "without this book of challenges and reminders, our desire to go forward remains without perspectives and without energy."¹²⁸ GC 34 updated the text, but it did not have the means to update Jesuits' perception of the text. It is thus no wonder that the updated *Constitutions* has hardly enlivened formators' discussions about how the spiritual practices described there can be applied fruitfully.

Rowing into the deep was the motto of GC 36, but formators will hardly attain depth without rowing against strong counter-currents. Fraternal correction, asceticism, and edification, were all important components of the Ignatian vision, but Jesuits have de-emphasized these since the Second Vatican Council. Mortification is an example. In an earlier issue of *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, Fr. Edward Kinerk (UCS) noted that "the mortified Jesuit honestly acknowledges [conflicting desires] in himself, and he tries to let go of those desires which seem inauthentic in order that the more authentic ones may flourish."¹²⁹ Presumably, many formators are convinced of the importance of this point. Still, one finds few discussions or articles about how Jesuits in formation can fruitfully practice mortification today. The reason is, without doubt, that the very term *mortification* has become so loaded that it is widely

¹²⁶ "Preface of Very Reverend Peter-Hans Kolvenbach," in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, ed. Padberg, xi–xiv, at xii.

¹²⁷ Richard J. Baumann, SJ, see fn. 8 above.

¹²⁸ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, "Introductory Discourses of Father General: On Our Law and Our Life," 7 January 1995, in *Jesuit Life & Mission Today* [2009], 687–90, at 69.

¹²⁹ E. Edward Kinerk, SJ, "Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus," *SSJ* 16, no. 5 (1984): 22.

dismissed. Many Jesuits remember all too well how formators often insisted on mortification as the answer, regardless of what the question was. To talk about letting go of inauthentic desires is more suitable today and does not arouse heavy gut feelings.

For both good and ill, unhappy memories of past formation experiences continue to influence modern approaches to Jesuit formation. But they should not hinder a recovery of that which is legitimate in Ignatian spiritual practices. The renowned 1972 article “Consciousness Examen” is a good example of how an element of our tradition can be reclaimed in such a way that remaining faithful to the essence of the Ignatian text while updating its relevance for the present went hand in hand.¹³⁰ The outcome, a wholly renewed way of praying the Examen, has been certainly helpful to many individual Jesuits. But the reflections of Fr. George Aschenbrenner (MAR) also contributed to strengthening the corporate identity of the Society by helping Jesuits to value and embrace an important element of their core spiritual heritage. Jesuits have ceased to picture the Examen as a mechanistic and uninspiring practice. A new “story” could develop; the Society could move forward on a path of conversion.¹³¹

B. The Closest of Frontiers

I would like to finish on a practical note. We have discussed those elements of Jesuit life that GC 36 asked the Society to consider in order to respond to God’s clearly perceived call for a profound spiritual renewal.¹³² We have examined some of the causes that hinder our ability to let God’s gracious mercy transform us individually and as a collective body. We have seen how we could value and learn to practice more

¹³⁰ George A. Aschenbrenner, SJ, “Consciousness Examen,” *Review for Religious* 31 (1972): 14–21.

¹³¹ On this point, see Geoffrey (Monty) Williams, SJ, “Ignatius’ Incarnation Contemplation and the Stories We Live By,” *The Nash Memorial Lecture, The Thirty-First Lecture* (Campion College at the University of Regina, 2010): “There is a whole and long process of moving out of closed myths. It is called conversion. In that process we move from one story to another” (4–5).

¹³² GC 36, d. 1, n. 18; in *Jesuit Life & Mission Today* [2017], 21.

purposefully those means—or spiritual practices—that unite us more fully with God. And we have seen how we could appropriate more fully the gift of the *Exercises* and the *Constitutions*. Can these insights inspire coordinated action? Is there a way forward beyond responding individually to the challenge that GC 36 articulated?

I propose that two initiatives would be of help. First, it will be important that superiors retain a sense of urgency with regard to understanding Ignatius' vision of how Jesuits are transformed, especially during the years of formation. Jesuits tend to have a vivid sense of the urgencies of the various apostolic "frontiers." But as Ignatius explains in the preamble to the *Constitutions*, it is important to see formation as the first and most important response to these needs. Ignatius clarifies that, while in theory, or "in the order of consideration," corporate apostolic goals enjoy preference, in practice ("in the order of execution") those goals can be reached by tending to the formation of "the individual members."¹³³

In this sense, Ignatian formation is a key frontier *ad intra*. Jesuits serving on this frontier are called to move beyond the safe haven of the world of the Spiritual Exercises. To be sure, the revitalization of Ignatian spirituality, which has focused almost exclusively on the *Spiritual Exercises*, has brought about much joy and inspiration over the past fifty years. It has helped countless Jesuits and others to admire the mysterious depths of the divine presence in and around them. But now the Society is called to grow in wisdom with regard to how to provide more pertinent support to its members after the Exercises are over.

This is why my second suggestion is to invite novice masters and other formators to share best practices for appropriating both the small details and the greater Ignatian vision entailed in the *Constitutions*. I believe that formators would find it a rewarding exercise and a meaningful means of permanent formation. But I also believe that the Society as a whole would benefit, and the impact would be greater than the sum of particular insights. The reason I am saying this is that one finds a parallel here with the understanding of the *Exercises*. Unbelievable as it might

¹³³ *Const.* 135; ed. Padberg, 56.

seem to us today, the *Exercises* did not always enjoy its current importance in Jesuit life. Consider, for example, this report dated ca. 1587:

In some places the practice of giving the Exercises is extremely rare. Where it has been kept up, the results have diminished. This type of spiritual instrument, which did so much good at the beginning of the Society, has become less effective and less fruitful because of our own men's lack of skill in handling it. How many of our men are able to give an account of these Exercises? Most do not even have a nodding acquaintance with the rules or Annotations. [... Those not formed by the Exercises] approach the ministry with unwashed hands, so to speak.¹³⁴

The very first general congregation already noticed that Jesuits needed support in keeping Ignatius' spiritual heritage alive. The congregation therefore decided to mandate the composition of directories on the Spiritual Exercises.¹³⁵ Consequently, in the following decades, several Jesuit who were considered the best in directing the *Exercises* shared their reflections on how the Ignatian text could be used fruitfully. Their experience and skill proved to be the indispensable background for an insightful understanding of the Ignatian text. It is true that the directories they had produced did not help their contemporaries immediately, but languished in archives for centuries. But in the middle of the twentieth century, when groups of Jesuits became dissatisfied with then-ubiquitous preached retreats, the directories became real eye-openers. Encouraged by the directories and relying on their experience of helping others, Jesuits engaged in attentively reading the Ignatian text once again, and shared their insights with each other. Soon they became the pioneers of what we know today as the individually given Exercises. Their reflections on the details of the text, seemingly negligible in themselves, have added up to become something much greater. To this day, the work of these companions provides the core of the spiritual wisdom that we call today Ignatian spirituality.

¹³⁴ Palmer, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises*, 239.

¹³⁵ GC 1, d. 107; *For Matters of Greater Moment: The First Thirty General Congregations*, trans. and ed. John W. Padberg, SJ; Martin D. O'Keefe, SJ; John L. McCarthy, SJ (St. Louis: IJS, 1994), 97.

GC 34 expressed, and GC 36 repeated, that the *Constitutions* is as worthy of trust as the *Exercises*. But as Fr. Diego Laínez (1512–1565) hints, that trust is based on an ability to recognize that the text remains relevant for the spiritual lives of Jesuits: “in [the *Constitutions*], it seems to me, he [Ignatius] left us a great treasure, because it contains a very holy and prudent policy, and a quite sufficient one at that, as whoever wishes to live according to it will become a very great servant of God Our Lord.”¹³⁶ This is why I related the two stories about my experiences as novice master. They show that, with God’s grace, demonstrating the daily relevance of the *Constitutions* for Jesuits is not as difficult as one might think. Formators can help novices to apply the text to the actual practice of everyday life in community, and they themselves can develop the same fine sense for detail that they value so much when directing the Spiritual Exercises. I believe that many more similar stories will need to be shared in order to diminish a sense of alienation that many Jesuits, including formators, still experience when faced with the text of the *Constitutions*.

Good practices and insights can be shared in many ways: at formators’ meetings, through publications or by way of new means of communication. What is important is that contributions *are* shared and become accessible to others, and consequently corporate wisdom can develop. As in most other areas of research, scientific, social or technological alike, the complexity of issues is such that progress tends to depend on shared efforts rather than individual achievements. Not all formators have the time or talent to write articles, but most have stories of how the *Constitutions* were fruitful in their ministry. Prizing these stories in some attractive way would realize the *Constitutions* as the true “wisdom document” that Jesuits already know it to be.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ *MHSI Epistolae et Acta Patris Jacobi Lainii*, 8 vols. (Madrid, 1912–1917), I: 636; trans. Barton T. Geger, SJ, “Ten Things That Saint Ignatius Never Said or Did,” *SSJ* 50, no. 1 (2018): 17.

¹³⁷ Howard J. Gray, SJ, “What Kind of Document?” *The Way Supplement* 61 (1988): 22. For an example of this sort regarding the *Exercises*, see Michael Ivens, SJ, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary—A Handbook for Retreat Directors* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

Thank you for your article “Spiritual Consolation and the Second Time of Election” (Winter 2018). While it was published last winter, I have only now read, re-read, and taken time to reflect on it. I am writing in appreciation and also to ask for some clarification.

I am not a scholar of Ignatian spirituality but a practitioner. (I am a spiritual director at Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House in Colorado.) So, as I read Fr. McDermott’s article, I was imagining what it would look like for me to use his insights concretely as I sit with someone seeking to discern.

I find Fr. McDermott’s argument very clear and convincing, and all the more because it accords with Fr. Jules Toner’s reading. I find Fr. Toner to be the most articulate and authoritative commentator on discernment. But Fr. McDermott’s article raises this question in me: is he saying that for a second time of election to take place, persons cannot themselves bring the possible course of action to God, and that it can only come from God (the person has to be “spontaneously drawn” to it)

within or outside of a time of spiritual consolation? If that is what he is saying, then it puzzles me, because it seems to imply that persons have to ignore the choices before them when going to prayer, or even resist showing them to God. Such options make no sense to me, and so I doubt that this is what Fr. McDermott means.

My puzzlement sent me back to Fr. Toner, and finally to page 154 in his *Discerning God’s Will*. There, he is writing about paragraph 21 in Ignatius’s autograph directory, where Ignatius writes, concerning a time of election, about offering one side of a choice to God on one day, and the other on another day, etc. Toner then writes in a footnote, “In context, then, paragraph [21] seems to mean that the offering is to be made without regard for the discerner’s affective state with a hope that, as the day of prayer goes on, consolations with impulse toward the offered alternative will be given by God if the offered alternative is what he wills. . . . The most reasonable interpretation, therefore, is that the greater sign of God’s will can be either greater second-time experiences or stronger third-time reasons—or both, when the two modes are combined.”

Reading Toner, I would conclude that people can bring possible courses of action to God and then wait to see if they are spontaneously drawn to one of them in the experience of authentic spiritual consolation. If that is true, have they not begun the discernment process with the possibility of authentic spiritual consolation occurring afterward, what Fr. McDermott says the Group Two authors erroneously place within the category of a second-time election?

Perhaps my question boils down to this: what to Fr. McDermott's mind constitutes the point at which "a person begins to discern a possible course of action"?

I hope what I've written makes sense. Thank you once again for your article and for taking the time to read my email. I will be glad to receive Fr. McDermott's response when and if he is able to reply.

*Paula Sapienza
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Editor:

I am grateful for Ms. Sapienza's thoughtful query. Authors are always delighted when someone reads their material as well as she did.

Ms. Sapienza is spot on. It is fine if someone is considering a possible course of action and then goes to God and asks God to bring about within him or her a spontaneous impulse (a "being drawn") to that course of action, with the impulse or inclination proceeding out of authentic spiritual consolation as from a root. It can also be that God gives the spontaneous inclination and connected spiritual consolation without persons having asked for it.

This is also what someone does when he or she asks God to confirm a tentative decision by means of second-time evidence.

My issue with the authors I criticized was that they seemed to be saying that, if a person is considering a possible course of action (proposing it to himself or herself) and then spiritual consolation arises while, or after, he or she is doing the considering, then that person can take the consolation to be evidence that what he or she was considering is God's will. The aforementioned authors leave out the spontaneous impulse, or the "being drawn," that Ignatius mentions. What they suggest can happen offers no information about the connection between the inclination and the spiritual consolation, which is crucial.

For Ignatius, my actively considering something needs no discernment as to its origin: I am the origin. It is spontaneous arising volitions or inclinations that require discernment, and so need evidence as to their origin, to determine whether they are from

God, or from the evil spirit, or from me. For Ignatius, in the latter case (*viz.*, from me), there will be no spiritual evidence given.

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