

STUDIES

in the Spirituality of Jesuits



Some Reflections
on the
Jesuit Commitment

Vincent J. O'Flaherty, S.J.

Published by the American Assistency Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality,
especially for American Jesuits working out their *aggiornamento*
in the spirit of Vatican Council II

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THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

consists of a group of Jesuits from various provinces who are listed below. The members were appointed by the Fathers Provincial of the United States in their meeting of October 3-9, 1968. The purpose of the Seminar is to study topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and to communicate the results to the members of the Assistancy. The hope is that this will lead to further discussion among all American Jesuits -- in private, or in small groups, or in community meetings. All this is done in the spirit of Vatican Council II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original charismatic inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the changed circumstances of modern times. The members of the Seminar welcome reactions or comments in regard to the topics they publish.

To achieve these purposes, especially amid today's pluralistic cultures, the Seminar must focus its direct attention sharply, frankly, and specifically on the problems, interests, and opportunities of the Jesuits of the United States. However, many of these interests are common also to Jesuits of other regions, or to other priests, religious men or women, or lay men or women. Hence the studies of the Seminar, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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by

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Some Reflections on the Jesuit Commitment

by

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Master of Novices

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A painful fact of life in the Society of Jesus in our day is, to quote Father Arrupe, that "In general one can say that in all parts of the world the number of those leaving the Society is increasing. The phenomenon should bring us to reflect on the cause of this increase..."¹ Certainly, this fact would indicate that a number of Jesuits are experiencing something of a crisis, or are at least asking some searching questions, about the commitment they have made to the Society. Crises and searching questions, even though they entail anxiety, suffering, and risk, are not necessarily unhealthy. They bring one back to the fundamentals of his vocation, which can tend to get lost in the fast pace of contemporary Jesuit life and work, and also in the confusion of the age.

This paper will be an attempt to offer some reflections on the subject of Jesuit commitment which it is hoped will serve other Jesuits in their reflections on their own commitment.

In the following pages the many challenges which confront Jesuit commitment in our day will be surveyed. Some reasons for a Jesuit's never having committed himself in the first place will be discussed. The question whether commitment to the Society, as this was envisioned by the first Jesuits, is possible or justifiable in our day will be approached from the standpoint of young men who are entering the Society today. Finally, some reflections will be offered on the inevitability of crisis in the Jesuit commitment, and also on the light which the experience of Christ in facing the consequences of his own commitment can throw on the problem.

A saying of Jesus Christ will serve as the reference point for the reflections to be made. For the Jesuit, the words are crucial in their

significance, simply because he professes to undertake the Christian life seriously. "For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34).

I. For Christ and his Kingdom? - the challenge

When Ignatius of Loyola and his first companions formulated their conception of the Jesuit commitment, they drew upon a common understanding of the sort of faith-experience which was meant to underlie the commitment. They had arrived at agreement concerning the nature of their Society and its goals. And they were convinced that a man can arrive at a moment in his life when he can commit himself definitively to the service of God in a religious order within the Church such as the Society of Jesus.

However, more than four hundred years have passed since the early Jesuits' formulation of this conception. In fact, most of the four hundred years seem to have been leapt over in the past decade. For within that time serious challenges have arisen concerning nearly every aspect of the traditional vision of commitment to the Society. Of course, the vision had always been challenged. But the challenger today is no longer the to-be-expected, predictable adversary. He may be the sort of person with whom the Jesuit deals daily, a Catholic, a fellow Jesuit. He is good-willed, learned, sometimes prestigious, gracious, concerned for the world, committed to it. Sometimes, the Jesuit finds that he himself is the challenger.

A. The challenge to the traditional faith-experience

Jesuits may be finding that the sort of faith-experience which, so they were taught, should underlie the Jesuit commitment is being challenged. Of course, the Christian, the Jesuit, knows that faith is never something to be taken for granted, knows that he is never, once for all, established in the serene, static possession of some unassailable absolute called "faith." As Karl Rahner has said, "Atheism is a perpetual temptation of the theist, a 'situation' of our faith."² Even the believ-

ing Christian knows that he must, with the man in the Gospel, pray, "I have faith; help me where faith falls short" (Mark 9:24). He knows that faith is a gift from God incessantly rescuing man from his doubts, darkness, and inclination toward chaos and meaninglessness.

But there is much "in the air" today to cause many Christians -- and therefore, perhaps, some Jesuits -- to feel that what they understood by their faith is extraordinarily threatened. And in the milieu in which the contemporary Jesuit moves he may, with unsettling frequency, be brought up against challenges to his faith. He hears tell of, or is himself directly confronted with, the remark reputedly made in a seminar by some well-known theologian or Scripture scholar, the question from the floor at a lecture, the book review in a periodical, the conversation at some party, the written apologia of a recently-departed Jesuit. Everywhere he turns, it seems, questions are being raised which may deeply trouble the individual Jesuit both because of their source and their thrust.

Did a man named Jesus of Nazareth really rise from the dead, at least in a sense at all resembling the traditional notion of the Resurrection? Is not, perhaps, any such thing as an "intimate personal relationship" between the believer and Christ actually an adult version of a child's tendency to make up an imaginary playmate, a sort of Elwood Dowd-Harvey arrangement which a man uses to escape the painful realities of the real world and responsible involvement in the world with and for real men?

Do the Gospels truly put us in touch with a real man, with an actual life, with actual words and deeds? Or do they, instead, present us with a myth, a beautiful myth, a myth which casts incomparably bright light on some of the basic truths about man, but with very questionable claim to historicity? Is there actually such a reality as personal salvation, as "the life of the world to come," as heaven, not to mention hell?

Is Christianity all that unique and privileged among the great world religions? And can the Roman Catholic Church rightfully arrogate to itself the title of "one true Church" in contrast to other Christian Churches? And are the office and authority of the papacy really of di-

vine institution?

Further, the very words and concepts, including that of God, which have traditionally been used in the expression of the Catholic faith -- are they any longer relevant, meaningful, possible in the world today?

These questions certainly strike at the heart of the Jesuit commitment as Ignatius envisioned it and as it has historically been presented to Jesuits. For such assertions as, for example, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, that there is an essential continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, that a living, personal relationship is possible between Christ and his follower, that man is called to authentic life beyond and after this life, that the Roman Catholic Church uniquely possesses the "fulness of grace and truth,"³ that the pope is the vicar of Christ on earth -- such assertions are fundamental to the traditional concept of the faith-experience on which commitment to the Society has been grounded. And an individual Jesuit who finds his faith severely tested by the challenges being directed at it will find his commitment to the Society called equally in question.

A more subtle threat to the faith on which a Jesuit's commitment to the Society is grounded is the powerful force of secularism abroad in the world, and even among Christians, in our day. Father René Voillaume has given this interpretation of the problem:

Nothing could be more characteristic of the present world, owing to the conditions under which it lives, than the way it is turning toward the building of a new world, and a new world with a purely earthly horizon and outlook. Faiths and beliefs of many descriptions are now centered upon man. The atmosphere generated by the various sorts of atheistic materialism is becoming more and more penetrating. I think there are few instances in history where man has lost the sense of God - or rather the sense of a personal, living God transcendent to everything created - to such a point. They seem to be seeking the absolute, not where it is, that is in the divinity, but through and in man, or through and in the evolution of the world - except where they are content with reducing it to the world's mere forward movement in time.

The whole deeper mentality of the younger generation of Christians in certain countries is influenced by this moral climate, and the tendency that prevails in their Christianity is for it to accomplish itself solely in a new awareness of the laws of a total human brotherhood . . . It is through man that they prefer to go to Christ, be-

cause they wish above all to realize, and fulfill to the utmost, the aspirations of the modern world for unity and peace.⁴

Without realizing that it has happened, a Jesuit in our time may have become quite secularistic in his outlook. That is to say, he may have become so preoccupied with the world (or with his professional academic world), with the tremendous problems facing contemporary mankind, with the infinity of things to be done here and now, with man's aspirations this side of death, that God has, in fact, simply ceased to matter much or to be of much interest in His own right. Other results soon follow. For example, prayer seems to be a waste of valuable time, or "eternal life" seems a distant mirage compared to life on this earth to be shared with the human brotherhood, to be made more livable, more human, to be enjoyed and experienced to the full.

But the Jesuit commitment has traditionally been based upon a faith-experience. This positively affirms man's radical responsibility to and for the world; and it further insists that man also has a radical responsibility to a personal, living God who is to be praised, revered, and served, that a man is to be united with God even in his activity, and that salvation transcends well-being on this earth.

Any stance, therefore, which would restrict a man's horizon to this life and to strictly secular concerns would render impossible the sort of faith response on which Ignatius and the first Jesuits intended the Jesuit commitment to be founded.

B. The challenge concerning the original goal and nature of the Society

Because of prevalent contemporary ideas concerning man, current discussion, thinking, and writing about religious life, and the problems and opportunities present to the Society of Jesus in our times, certain basic questions are confronting Jesuits with respect to the goal and nature of the Society as these were understood by the Society's founders.

Is the Society of Jesus evolving into something Ignatius and his first followers never intended it to be? Is the contemporary Society the kind of force and movement in the world and the Church which Ignatius founded

it to be, or has it betrayed his original vision? Is the Society, such as Ignatius conceived it, capable of responding to the needs, the aspirations, the nature of modern man?

It is possible that a Jesuit may find himself thinking that the Society is rapidly becoming an entity essentially different from the one he joined and which he had considered to be the faithful continuation of the Ignatian conception.

Certainly, obedience loomed large in Ignatius' vision of the Society, obedience of the will and understanding, even "blind obedience." Now, the Jesuit may find himself thinking, permissiveness is the order of the day. Jesuit priests are asked what jobs they want. Apostolates must sink or swim according to a principle of attraction. Scholastics tell superiors what careers they wish to embark upon, where they want to take studies. Superiors often seem to have relinquished their authority, usually into the hands of the young.

The Jesuit troubled by the fear that the Society is no longer what Ignatius founded and he committed himself to may be disturbed by the revolution in life-style taking place in Jesuit communities. Structure is gone. Jesuits come, go, eat, sleep, recreate, pray when and as and if they please. Just about any sort of dress seems allowed, along with beards and mustaches of various sorts. Scholastics have money at their disposal and spend it at theatres and pizza parlors. They live in small communities with little, if any, supervision. They hitchhike all over the country on vacations. Not even the novitiate is safe.

If the Jesuit is told that none of these challenges the Society's essence, he counters, at least in the privacy of his own thoughts, that a long and venerable tradition is being abandoned, a tradition out of which came great men, great works, a tradition markedly, uniquely "Jesuit." And the question persists in his mind and causes him painful uncertainty about his own position in the Society. Is this rapidly evolving Society at all recognizably the community to which he committed himself, or have all these "non-essential" changes actually added up to an essential mutation which has made the Society something other than the religious order to which he

gave his allegiance?

Another Jesuit may feel that the Society has lost the sense of companionship which was given such emphasis by the first fathers. He feels he has simply not experienced love, concern, support from his fellow Jesuits. He has suffered deeply from what seems to him to be the brutal loneliness, the impersonality of contemporary Jesuit community life, the seeming impossibility of forming relationships with other Jesuits except on the superficial level which one might expect of bachelors who board together in the same club and share the paper, while otherwise each goes about minding his own business. The early Society seemed to be a close-knit band of companions. Must today's Jesuit turn elsewhere for the sort of companionship a truly human life demands?

Another Jesuit may feel that the Society of today is not at all the force and movement in the world and within the Church that the first Jesuits meant it to be and that it once was. He knows that individual Jesuits are leading heroic lives and doing great work, almost in spite of the Society. But, for the most part, the Society in which he finds himself living seems to him to be mired in a collective mediocrity, serving the middle and upper-middle classes, clinging to its schools and retreat houses and parishes, each province jealous for its own institutions and traditions. He does not find in the Society of today the mobility which Ignatius called for, which would enable its men to move out from behind their protective ghettos and go "anywhere in the world," even down into the slums of their own cities, to seek out and serve the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, the deprived, those who really urgently need Christ, or at least resolutely to apply its spiritual, intellectual, and material resources to the burning problems of the day. This Jesuit, too, asks whether the Society has remained true to its original spirit, whether what he committed himself to may be irretrievably lost.

The problem for still another Jesuit may be the Society's reluctance to face the fact that, if it is to function effectively in today's world, it must courageously, resolutely let go of Ignatius' conception of what the Society should be, or at least some of the elements of that conception.

That conception, after all, was formulated in another age and in another world.

This Jesuit may have been exposed to various attitudes toward the religious life which are, again, "in the air" today and which often have their source in contemporary notions concerning man.

"If the founders of apostolic religious orders were founding their communities today," it is sometimes said, "they would found secular institutes." The term "secular institute" may not always be clear to the one using it in this context. But the statement probably means that apostolic religious today must have the right and freedom to decide for themselves what work they shall engage in, that in secular institutes there are no community commitments to consider in deciding upon one's career. It is said that the individual's personality must develop according to his own personal charism, and that the community within the Church to which he belongs must help a member to do this with all the means at its disposal.

But irrespective of what a secular institute is, and of whether the Society is becoming or should become a secular institute, a number of opinions are current in the milieu in which a Jesuit may move. If correct, these viewpoints would seem to call for some radical departures from the original Ignatian conception of the Society. Human dignity and the democratic character of our age, a Jesuit may hear, demand that religious superiors be only the interpreters and coordinators of their communities' wills. A religious, if he is to live in a manner consonant with true maturity, must have the free disposal of what he earns. Even for a religious, a woman's love -- yes, an intimate, even exclusive relationship with a woman, with certain external manifestations -- is necessary for the unfolding of the personality.

The Jesuit who subscribes to assertions such as these is aware that they are not reconcilable with traditional notions concerning the life of the vows in the Society. He may be convinced that these outmoded notions must be abandoned if the Society is to survive and serve today's world. He may find himself exceedingly frustrated at the Society's stubborn re-

fusal to face up to reality. If he decides to remain in the Society -- for instance, because of his adherence to its apostolic goals -- it will have to be on terms in which he believes, according to his own charism, and with the hope that the Society will finally catch up with the contemporary world and with him and others who think as he does.

C. The challenge to the Ignatian understanding of religious commitment

According to St. Ignatius and traditional thinking within the Society, commitment to the Society should be a response to a specific call from God, a call to the Society of Jesus; and the commitment, formalized in the taking of vows at the completion of the novitiate, should be definitive, permanent. But this viewpoint is also being challenged in circles in which the American Jesuit moves.

God, it is being said, does not call a man to this or that specific state or way of life. This would be to limit man's freedom. And God wants man, above all, to be free, wants man to choose, without the encumbrances that a specific call from God would involve, what he shall make of his life, what he shall become. God offers all the possible ways in which man could live a good human life and says to the man, "Assume the responsibility of taking your pick." Then he leaves the man quite free to make his own choice. He does not interfere by "calling" a man in one particular direction. Any other state of affairs would be unworthy both of God and man.

The possibility of permanence and definitiveness of commitment is also being challenged today, and it is being challenged within Christianity and Catholicism.

First of all, it can be pointed out that even Ignatius foresaw that a man might, with all honor, decide to leave the Society, after vows, and embark upon a different way of life, that of the Carthusians.⁵ In our time new ways of living the Christian life, such as secular institutes and paracanonical communities, are possible which the Jesuit may simply have not been aware of when he took vows in the Society. No commitment can be so permanent and definitive as to inhibit God's sovereign freedom to confront man with the completely unexpected, utterly new possibility.

But, in addition, the very possibility of commitment is being questioned. How can any man know what he will have become in, say, ten years' time, what he will have learned about the world and himself, whom he may have met, what circumstances may have completely altered his life? Commitments can at best be provisional. Otherwise, the man tied to the commitment may not be at all the man who originally made it or the world in which the man would have to keep the commitment not at all the world in which he first embraced it.

If all of this is so, then the Ignatian notion of commitment falls. If God calls man not to this or that way of life, but simply to the responsibility and exercise of freedom, then there can be no such thing as a "vocation" to the Society, a response to a particular call from God. And if man, as he goes through life, cannot be bound by promises made in the past, particularly promises made in the innocence and ignorance with regard to the future and with the inexperience of youth, then such definitive commitments as that of perpetual vows cannot stand.

II. The need of a life to lose

Their commitment to the Society is a problem, a matter of confusion, doubt, questioning, anxiety for a number of Jesuits at the present time. Certainly, the possibility, the relevancy, the underlying assumptions, and the terms of such a commitment are being challenged on all sides.

But irrespective of these challenges, an individual Jesuit may find himself, perhaps after a number of years in the Society, questioning whether he ever really made a commitment in the first place. And the answer to the question may, in some cases, be no.

Father Arrupe states a stark, painful fact when he says that "When studying the reasons why people leave the Society, one finds only too often that they should never have been admitted."⁶ About such cases he remarks, in another context,

They are facts which, even if we have a serious obligation in charity to prevent them with the means that are within our reach, it still does not seem humanly possible to avoid completely.⁷

Later in this letter, after having discussed some reasons for vocation crisis, he goes on to say,

More often I think I can discern, in not a few of the uncertainties and discouragements about one's vocation, another, a more profound cause. It is simply that (strange as it may seem) a real choice for life has not been made - a fully conscious and responsible election, capable of committing us definitively.⁸

If a step in life taken by a man is to be a "real choice," it must be a fully human act, therefore an act for which the man is truly responsible, an act which has its "root in the spiritual center of the person, in insight and freedom."⁹ And a Jesuit, after some years in the Society, may have reason to doubt whether at the time of his formal commitment to the Society in the taking of first vows, or at any time since, he has actually chosen the Society with the requisite insight and freedom.

Depth psychology has made us aware that men can act out of motives of which they are really consciously unaware, that is, out of psychic coercion. And it is possible that a man can have committed himself to the Society apparently (to others and to himself) because, in response to a genuine faith-experience, he decided freely to give himself over to God's service, but really, basically, for some quite different motive.

He may, for instance, have been actually engaged in a flight from woman, in a flight from his own sexuality and attendant guilt feelings. He may, without realizing it, have been seeking security with honor from the responsibilities of ordinary adult life to which he did not feel equal. He may have been attempting to run from apparently insoluble basic conflicts in the life he is attempting to leave behind, looking for a means to end his troubles once and for all, in which case religious life symbolically represented emotional suicide. Now, in adult life, he may have, with great pain, to admit to himself, "This is really why I came to the Jesuits; this is why I have stayed."

Or, the Jesuit may come to realize in adult life that, at the time of taking first vows, he was simply not mature enough to make a definitive commitment of his life. Somewhere along the line in the intervening years, having attained the requisite degree of maturity, he may have made the commitment. Or, he may have to face the fact that he has been drifting, from one year to the next, without ever having finally said to himself, "Yes, I choose the Society for life." And it may be that he drifted pre-

cisely because he never actually grew up sufficiently in certain vital areas of life to be able to make the definitive commitment with "insight and freedom."

He may have come to the Society filled with generosity, captivated by the ideal of serving Christ and full of enthusiasm for doing this in the Society. But more than generosity and enthusiasm is called for. To cite Father Arrupe again:

The candidate who is admitted to the novitiate should be sufficiently mature to make the full Spiritual Exercises profitably and the responsible election for his whole life . . . It is important, therefore, to examine carefully the candidate's psychological and spiritual maturity . . . Many generous young men with talent and experience might seem fit for the Society without careful testing, but there is evidence to the contrary. Quite a few are enthusiastic about our spiritual teaching when they hear the theory of it, often very finely explained, and are fired by the nobility of our mission to the whole world, but all this may be abstract idealism and they may fail to perceive the more splendid but difficult underlying realities. With the impetuosity of the young they may accept everything the Master of Novices says but "they have no roots." Similar experiences confirm the common opinion that psychological maturity comes later now than it did in previous generations.¹⁰

Father Arrupe is speaking here of young men of today. But the point he is making has validity for all Jesuits. For such a commitment as that to the Society a certain degree of spiritual and psychological maturity is essential. And it is possible that a Jesuit who is now thirty or forty or fifty did not, when he committed himself to the Society, have the psychological maturity to make a real choice. In fact, he may come to see that this commitment cut him off from the possibility of ever becoming a really mature man.

Father René Voillaume, himself a religious superior, has observed:

The religious life . . . can only be undertaken by a fully adult person. That is the great difficulty, perhaps the greatest of all. For what is salutary renouncement for an adult can be harmful frustration for an adolescent. There are certain things, such as the need for affection, the security of a home, certain enjoyments and above all an affirmed need for independence which a person cannot renounce too soon without doing himself harm.¹¹

Christ calls us to lose our lives for his sake. But this presupposes that a man has a life to lose, that he has a sufficient sense of his own

self-worth and of his manhood that he perceives his offering of himself to God as something of real value.

Father Voillaume speaks of "a need for independence" and of "certain enjoyments" which cannot be renounced prematurely in a man's psychological growth without the individual being harmed. For a particular man ever to be able to experience himself as a man, and to call himself a man, it is necessary that he have proved to himself his ability to go it alone in the world for awhile, to get a job and hold it, to earn his keep, pay his bills, make many independent decisions and accept the consequences of them. If such a man has come to the Society without having successfully coped with this sort of independence, a sort of independence a religious is ordinarily called upon to renounce, he may, even in his middle years, still be unsure and unaccepting of himself as a grown man, still caught up in a sort of infantile rebelliousness which makes true obedience impossible, still unable to commit himself to anything because of an unresolved question about himself which leaves him with no real inner peace and resentful that he has somehow been cheated out of his manhood.

To give another illustration of the problem, an individual Jesuit may also experience restlessness and wondering which make a firm commitment such as that to the Society impossible if he has not experienced certain sorts of human love. For instance, one need not subscribe to the theory that in the course of adult life "a woman's love of an exclusive and externally manifested nature is necessary for the unfolding of the personality" to accept the fact that at least an individual man, in order to experience himself as a man, must, in his youth or somewhere a long the line, have seen himself as a man through the eyes of a girl or a woman who loved him. If this has not happened, the man in question may never have felt secure enough in his manhood to have been able to offer it, with "insight and freedom," to the service of Christ and his Kingdom.

All of this is not to say that such experiences are universally necessary; that a man cannot, though quite young, have made a "real choice" in committing himself to the Society without having had such experiences. But in the case of some men, such experiences will have been essential to

psychological maturity, and their absence in his life may have made a firm and serene commitment to the Society impossible.

A caution is useful here, too. In this whole area hitherto treated there is also a danger of self-deception. That is, some Jesuit may say, "I didn't know what I was doing," when the truth of the matter is that he has simply grown weary of the life of the vows in the Society. He is looking for a rationalization to justify the giving up of his Jesuit commitment.

III. For the sake of Christ and the Gospel

In view of the formidable challenges being advanced against religious commitment and the problems that have come up in regard to it, the central issue would seem to be found in this question: In this day and age, is the kind of commitment to the Society which St. Ignatius and the early Jesuits called for, and which has been traditionally lived out in the Society, possible today? Or is it even justifiable?

To answer this question it may help to look at the Ignatian conception of the Jesuit commitment as it is being encountered and examined by young Americans who are entering the Society at the present time. In doing so the writer will be drawing on his experience over the past years with a number of young Jesuits as spiritual counselor and director of novices.

The young man who has been entering the Society in recent years faces the same issues discussed earlier in this paper; in fact, he brings them with him when he comes. Product that he is of a secularistic, post-Christian culture, he has been exposed to the challenges directed at Christian faith and concerning the relevancy of Christianity in our day. His attitude toward the Church, toward its role in the world, toward the problems of freedom, authority, and dissent within the Church is anything but unquestioning. He can be quite critical of the Society as he sees it, of what he terms its hypocritical attitude toward poverty, of its ministries or the carrying out of them, of the present state of Jesuit formation, of Jesuit community life as he has observed it whether from within or without. He is well aware of the turmoil in the Church surrounding the matter of priestly celibacy. He may have known Jesuits who have left the Society and married, he has heard celibacy

pronounced to be psychologically unhealthy. He tends to be quite wary of committing himself to anything at all permanently in this unsettled age. He wonders about his motives, questions his maturity. He fears turning out to be like Jesuits he has known who seem to him to be unhappy, restless, inoperative, bitter.

Then why does he come? Why does he take vows? What does he understand by the commitment he is making?

In treating of these questions the author does not claim to speak for all young Jesuits; the vaguely inclusive "they" will not be used. Neither is a composite being constructed here of various young Jesuits with whom the writer has worked. Rather, his experience is simply that what is to be said here holds true for, let us say, a number, indefinite, of young Jesuits with whom he has dealt in recent years.

A. The faith experience

At some moment before the taking of first vows the young man in question decides: I freely choose to live the rest of my life for God as a member of the Society of Jesus, because my deepest inner experiences of God and myself convince me that to take this concrete step, this and no other, is, for me, to make the complete surrender of myself to Jesus Christ, his person, his word, his service that he seems to be inviting me to make and that I want to make.

The "moment" of "good choice" which Ignatius of Loyola uncovered and bequeathed to Christian spirituality is that of the Election made in the course of going through the Spiritual Exercises. And it is significant that Ignatius gave these Exercises primacy of place among the various experiments to be undergone by Jesuit novices. So it is typically in the making of the Exercises that a young man will have the faith experience which will lead up to and result in his free choice to give his life to God through membership in the Society of Jesus.*

*It is true that a man may choose to commit himself definitively to the Society outside the time of the Exercises. A young man may have made such a choice before coming to the novitiate. Or he may arrive at this choice some months after having made the Exercises. But the choice to commit himself definitively to the Society, or the confirmation of a choice earlier made, comes typically during the making of the Exercises.

In the making of the Spiritual Exercises one experience, above all, seems to take hold of the young man, an awesome, often overwhelming realization of God's love for him. He appears to be very deeply moved, and not merely in the emotional sense of that word, by an "intimate knowledge" of "how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me . . ." ¹² But the love of God for him which the young man making the Exercises today experiences is a "love he showed to us in sending his Son as a remedy for the defilement of our sins" (1 John 4:10). For the point of departure of the Exercises proper is "the consideration and contemplation of sin." During the first week the young man begs God to grant him the gifts of "contrition, sorrow, and tears for sin," ¹³ of "a deep knowledge of my sins," of "an understanding of the disorder of my actions." ¹⁴ He faces the fact of sin in his life, of the possibility of eternal separation from God. He experiences himself intimately as in need of redemption, as, in fact, redeemed through God's merciful love. Consequently, far from succumbing to despair because of his sin, he finds himself "extolling the mercy of God our Lord, pouring out my thoughts to Him, and giving thanks to Him that up to this very moment He has granted me life." ¹⁵

This young man making the Exercises today encounters the traditional Christian teaching that God's faithful and merciful love for the individual -- or, as Ignatius frequently puts it, "for me," ¹⁶ -- has been manifested to men definitively in the person of Jesus Christ.

Christ dominates the Spiritual Exercises. It is in contemplating the mysteries of Christ's Incarnation, his life on earth, his passion and death, his resurrection, always reflecting upon himself and his own situation, that, according to Ignatius, the man making the Exercises will arrive at the moment when, open to the influence of God's grace he can make a "good choice" concerning the disposition of his life.

The Christ of the Exercises is the "Eternal King, before whom is assembled the whole world." ¹⁷ For Ignatius the risen Christ is a living reality; in fact, he is the supreme reality confronting men. And it is

in following Christ that the human race will save its life, that the individual man will save his life. Essential to any real understanding of the reality of Christ is, according to Ignatius, an "intimate knowledge" of the suffering of Christ, of the poverty and humiliation that he endured during the life he lived and throughout the mission of saving love that he carried out on this earth. The Christ whom the young man in question who is making the Exercises is to contemplate is the Eternal King who was "born in extreme poverty . . . that after many labors, after hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, after insults and outrages, He might die on the Cross, and all this for me."¹⁸

In the course of the second, third, and fourth weeks of the Exercises, the young man comes to accept or (to be more forthright in an attempt to describe what truly seems to happen), to experience the living reality of Christ, the risen Lord's personal love and concern for him individually and for all men, for whose sake Christ willingly suffered and died. The young man grows in an honest desire for a relationship with Christ which will be the deepest, most intimate personal relationship in his life. Christ's humanity impresses him profoundly. He comes to feel that in Christ he has someone who understands him, someone to whom he can "relate."

But he also experiences Christ as challenging him. For the Christ whom this young man prays to come to know intimately and to love calls those men who are drawn to him to join him in his perennial enterprise of salvation. The young man considers "how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons, apostles, disciples, etc., and sends them throughout the whole world to spread his sacred doctrine among all men, no matter what their state or condition."¹⁹

But this call is much more than a summons to the apostolate. It is that certainly; and the young man coming to the Society today is anxious to get going. He is impressed at the urgency of the world situation and feels he has something to give. But the call, he comes to see, is more profoundly and radically a call to the renunciation of one's "self-love and of his own will and interests,"²⁰ and of one's "sensuality and carnal and worldly love;"²¹ and still further, to a complete surrender of one's

person to Christ. And with this notion he wrestles. For it goes completely contrary to the attitude of the culture out of which he has come, and possibly with the brand of Catholicism he has brought with him. He is led to "desire," "beg," and "plead"²² for the grace to make this surrender of himself to Christ, to "leave self behind," to "take up his Cross and follow" Christ.

It may come as a surprise that the novices are these days making the Spiritual Exercises on a one to one basis much as Ignatius proposed them, that is, not to a group but with each exercitant making them under direction given individually to him by an instructor. What may be even more surprising is that the young man of today, the young Jesuit who is being considered here, will still accept the Exercises, and not only accept them, but actually enter into them and stay with them with fidelity, energy, real generosity, a growing sense of their relevancy and meaning for him, and a deep sense of discovery. He does experience -- there isn't another word for it -- not simply God's faithful, merciful love for him individually. He experiences a growing desire, coming from his exposure to Christ, to surrender the whole of himself to Christ's Person, his word, and his service. His faith experience tends to be the same that Ignatius and his fellow-founders of the Society desired a definitive commitment to the Society to be based upon.

B. The Society

The challenge is put to this young man: "If you really want to "distinguish" yourself "in whatever concerns the service of the Eternal King,"²³ why would you consider saddling yourself with the Society of Jesus, with all of its turmoil, uncertainty, threatened complacency, mediocrity, many men leaving, few coming in, and all the rest? His answer is: "This is where I think I belong, this is where, perhaps, I should serve Christ."

If he is asked what he means by "this," he will tend to bring up his understanding of the primitive vision of the Society which Ignatius and the first fathers had. Through his reading of the lives and works and words of the early Jesuits (and other Jesuits throughout the Society's history), he has come into contact with an ideal which he finds incarnated

in this maxim: "The ever greater service of Christ in his Church in companionship by going anywhere in the world to help people in need of Christ."²⁴

In his study of the Constitutions (an English translation of which has been available to him in recent years), he finds this vision institutionalized and formulated. He sees that the Society is a clerical religious order, although some of its members, including some great men he has met, are not clerics; that, whatever the Society's spread throughout the world and its administrative division into provinces, it is a single body with one head; that the individual Jesuit is called to collaborate in the service of Christ in his Church according to the mission that he receives through obedience; that it is the Society through its superiors which will finally determine the formation he is to receive as well as his apostolic activities once the formation has been completed; that the Jesuit is to have no possession that he can call his own, including money; that the Jesuit is called to an ideal of celibate chastity which is set tersely and high: "What pertains to the vow of chastity does not require explanation since it is evident how perfectly it should be preserved."²⁵

This young man who is considering committing himself to the Society, and who has considered this primitive vision, may still have questions and problems concerning, say, obedience in the Church and in the Society. Yet he says: "I could see a man buying this. I could see someone in this day and age, someone of my generation, whom I could respect, wanting to live his life according to this vision."

Father Arrupe, addressing a group of novice directors, said recently: "I think that in order to form our novices we must give them a very clear idea of vocation, that is, of the Society as an ideal; but we must also give a clear idea of the Society today, of the real Society, so that they cannot ever say they have been deceived . . . Explain the ideal Society, but also the limitations with which they will have to live."²⁶

If the young man in question has been asked, toward the end of his novitiate, whether he thinks he has a "clear idea of the Society today, of the real Society," he will probably answer that his idea is not as clear as it would be had he been living in the middle of the Society for

a number of years. But he will probably have spent some time, as a novice, living and working in one or more Jesuit communities. He will have observed the scene with sharp eyes and will have formed impressions of the Jesuits there, their life, their work. He will, as a novice, probably have had the opportunity to become acquainted with a fairly wide variety of Jesuits. He will have taken a rather deep interest in the Society's and the province's efforts at renewal and will have formed his own estimate of the depth and sincerity of these efforts.

The young Jesuit in question concludes that the Society of today, with its limitations and problems and all, is recognizably the same as that begun by Ignatius. What it is today is not irreparably removed from what the young man thinks it ought to be. What it is today would, he thinks, be worth giving oneself to as long as it were never to give up an honest struggle to be what it ought to be. And he can imagine himself as part of the effort to make it that. So, yes, the Society as he finds it looks to him to be an authentic means of giving one's life to Christ.

C. The commitment

However, as the young man of today realizes full well, committing oneself to the Society of Jesus is by no means the only way of giving oneself to God in this life. So, if the man we are speaking of has had a genuine faith-experience, and as a result of it is, as Dag Hammarskjöld put it in one of his poems,

Ready at any moment to gather everything
Into one simple sacrifice;²⁷

and if the man has encountered the Society, examined it, found it to be an authentic way of serving Christ today, and seriously considered joining it, he must sooner or later make an "election" on the matter, a "positive decision which calls for action,"²⁸ a decision made with inner freedom, freedom from "all inordinate attachments" and from all illusion, a choice understood by the man to be a response to a call from God.

The Exercises speak of three "times" for making an Election. In the most recent French edition of the text the following observation is made: Each "time" corresponds to a determinate spiritual experience . . .

The three times are presented in a decreasing order of perfection, but they can be confirmed one by the other. Their unity comes of the fact that certitude is always arrived at by the more or less immediate action of the Holy Spirit in the soul.²⁹ And, in fact, the three times for making an Election interact and all finally come into play in any "seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life."³⁰

Certainly, the prudence enlightened by faith of the "third time" is called for. The young man who would commit himself to the Society must have adequate knowledge of the Society. And he must have an adequate knowledge of himself, of who he is, of his gifts, limitations, temperament so that he can judge whether it seems "more reasonable"³¹ that he commit himself to this community of men in view of his goal, "the end for which I am created, that is, the praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul."³²

However, coming to any such decision as to join the Society of Jesus is not simply a matter of a tranquil weighing of pros and cons. A man's life is at stake. And men do not make choices affecting their destinies on the basis of detached prudential judgments. The whole of a man, and not simply his power of reasoning, is necessarily brought into play when the question is: What shall I make of my life?

As he weighs the implications, the young man in question who is considering joining the Society will experience, at the deepest level of his affectivity, various "movements." In his struggle to come to a decision he will experience moments of "interior peace, spiritual joy, hope, faith, love, tears, elevation of mind."³³

And there will be moments of "conflict instead of peace, sadness instead of spiritual joy, hope in earthly things instead of hope in the higher, earthly love instead of spiritual, dryness instead of tears . . . his mind wandering to base things rather than being lifted up."³⁴

The decision to join the Society will gradually take shape and form as the young man begins to see that authentic "peace in God our Lord"³⁵ means for him to commit himself to the Society; that only then can he turn to Christ and say, in simplicity and truth, "Lord, you know that I

love you," or perhaps more honestly, "Lord, you know that I want to love you." This interior peace is authentic if the arriving at it has involved a real surrender of oneself, of all ambitions, fears, desires, attachments, that could keep the man from simply placing himself at God's disposal. And the surrender that has led to the peace may have been exceedingly painful as the young man has seen more and more clearly, "For me, really to love Christ, to follow him, to serve him, is to enter the Society of Jesus if the Society will have me."

For, in committing oneself to the Society, one should finally be able to put hesitation, doubt, uncertainty in the matter aside, and this is the atmosphere of the "first time" for making an Election. There should ultimately be clarity that "this is what God wills me to do." St. Ignatius, describing in the Exercises a way of "making a choice of a way of life in the third time" of election, concludes by saying:

After such a choice of decision, the one who has made it must turn with great diligence to prayer in the presence of God our Lord, and offer him this choice that the Divine Majesty may deign to accept and confirm it if it is for His greater service and praise.³⁶

In thus confirming the man's decision God grants him inner joy and peace in the choice he has made, a resurrection joy and peace which are the fruit of a real, painful surrender of himself, a peace that the world cannot give, a joy that no one can take from him.

Such an Election has necessarily to be made and confirmed before the young man commits himself to the Society formally and definitively by taking vows. The vows are perpetual, for life. Their definitiveness is, however, not simply quantitative, measured by the years of a man's life. More deeply, the definitive aspect of the vows is a matter of identity.

Within the past few years, a novice on experiment wrote the following to his novice director. The young man had been struggling for some time with the problem of whether he should take vows in the Society, a problem aggravated by a lack of confidence in himself which the experiment was doing much to dispel.

So I began to feel plenty strong enough to walk. But one thing was missing -- and I recognized it the moment it came. It was here very late the Feast of the _____, after I had decided to _____,

and had gone to a late Mass, that moment of self realization came: I wanted to be a Jesuit, it was me. It was a moment of real insight and real grace. And I've known it since. And so all the causes for confusion become like obstacles in a road -- I know where I'm going so you just have to walk over them.

In taking vows the young man should be able to say: "This is myself. To be true to myself, to become who I am, really to love, to answer when God calls me by my name, is to commit myself to the Society of Jesus -- not because it is the only way, or even necessarily the noblest way, to serve Him, but because it is what he is asking of me when he says, "Do you love me?" A man should be able to apply to the taking of vows what Thomas More, in the play, A Man for All Seasons, says about the taking of an oath: "When a man takes an oath, he's holding his own self in his hands. Like water. And if he opens his fingers then -- he needn't hope to find himself again."³⁷

In deciding to take vows in the Society, the young man in question is not engaged in some masochistic seeking of suffering for its own sake. He has a normal man's desire to be happy. His experience of today's Society is that it offers real opportunities to the man who wants to do good, challenging, important work. He has observed a significant number of Jesuits who seem happy, who seem to get and to give love, support, joy within the Jesuit community, who seem to feel that being Jesuits is the best thing that could have happened to them.

But he has some realization that the road he is taking will not be easy. He can see much happening in, say, ten years' time. There is the real possibility that he may fall deeply in love, that he may come to know a woman with whom he could see himself living a rich and beautiful life. The future of the Church and of the Society seem very uncertain. Someone, perhaps a Jesuit, may tell him that in joining the Society he will be "a rat on a sinking ship." Every week seems to bring news of somebody else leaving, somebody he has known, has heard of, whose book he has read, whose work he has admired. He knows that he could betray his commitment, could substitute his own egoism for the love of Christ as the motivating force in his life, leave off prayer, lose his faith.

He hears that a man taking such a definitive step as he is doing should have the requisite maturity. He is aware of his own inexperience, of the growing up he still has to do. He submits his own motives to some anxious questioning.

Finally, he still wants to make the commitment. He wants to; and, if he can trust his deepest experiences, God calls him. Finally, he realizes that he must put his trust in his conviction that there is a God who loves him, who cares what happens to him, who is faithful to him, who will give a man the light and the strength to do what He asks him to. Another novice writing to a Jesuit in recent years said:

I have been worrying a lot lately about whether or not I can actually make a permanent commitment to Jesus Christ in the Society of Jesus. With so many others leaving, how can I have the arrogance to think that I would be able to stay on? Well, I can either wait until my deathbed to take vows. Or I can take the leap of faith and pray that God will give me the daily courage to keep up my vocation. I never realize what weak faith I do have as much as I do when I face the possibility of vows. I only hope that when the time does come, the Society will accept me in all my weakness, and give me a hand to join all you other weak people.

In spite of all the upheaval in the contemporary world, Church, and Society, the young men of whom this paper has been speaking are aware of all the challenges to what they are doing. They are very few in number compared to the years of plenty; they may like long hair, loud music, and late hours; they may have little apparent respect for hallowed traditions, insist on being dealt with as individuals and being listened to, be full of sympathy for the counter-culture that has sprung up with their own generation and everything that goes with it -- in spite of all this it is a fact that these young men are taking vows. Their basic motive seems to be a desire to serve God and their fellow-men, a desire which comes from a deep experience of God's merciful, faithful love for them individually and for all men, a desire to serve God in the Society because of their sincere conviction that it is there that God calls them. Those who deal with them can, as spectators to their experiences and struggles and decisions, only conclude that all of this cannot be simply written off as novitiate fervor, youthful naiveté, immature impetuosity,

cloudy motivation. Furthermore, they can only conclude that such young men have been moved by God; and that, if there is anything at all to authentic religious experience and its signs, the commitment these men are making is justifiable.

IV. Losing one's life

What has been said here is not intended to be a paean to young Jesuits. The all important point of the previous remarks is this: in the description above of the faith experience, of the understanding of the Society and of commitment to the Society which leads young men of today to take vows in the Society, many Jesuits with vows would recognize the motives, the understanding of the Society and of Jesuit commitment with which they themselves took vows.

However, others, seriously questioning whether they should remain in the Society, would conclude that they are not bound by the vows they took some years ago -- when they were young, inexperienced, untested, unaware of other possibilities, not yet personally touched by the deep problems -- because there was never a real commitment in the first place, or because subsequent developments have substantially altered the assumptions under which they entered the Society.

A Jesuit may have to face the fact that his reasons for coming to and staying in the Society were wrong, that to stay would be to live a lie, or would be cowardice, or would be not so much to lose his life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel as to commit a sort of suicide.

Or he may have a growing conviction that God calls him elsewhere and that not to follow this call would be to turn his back on God's will for him. In the present state of the world and the Church new ways of living the Christian life deeply and fully are possible which a man may not have been aware of at the time he took vows in the Society. It may seem to him that all of his life up to this time has, without his realizing it, been a preparation for a decisive step out of the Society and into this new way of life to which he feels he is called. Father Arrupe takes cognizance of one such situation when he writes:

If anyone believes, before God, that he has discovered in himself

a new vocation and that the way of life in a secular institute may help him to discover God better, he should consider the question responsibly and sincerely, seeking advice from those who know him well, and know the Society, and so reach his decision.³⁸

But there are several serious considerations to be faced in this matter.

First, any "new vocation" which would lead a man out of the Society will be a call not to just another worthy form of Christian life but to what is for the man a progressive renunciation of himself, to what is for this individual a closer conforming of himself to his crucified Lord.

Secondly, the word "peace" is much in use in our vocabulary of discernment these days. Characteristically, a man leaving the Society will write or say, "I have found great peace in this decision." But not every sort of "peace" is the peace which Christ wished his disciples. The feeling of relief and freedom which a man experiences when he has shaken off a heavy burden of commitment and responsibility, the sense of fulfillment a man feels when he has gained possession of something he very much wants, is not necessarily Christ's peace, even though it may mask very effectively for a time as such.

Then there is the fundamental issue of faith. Suffering, tempted faith is one thing. The death of faith is another. It may simply be that belief in the existence of God, in a life beyond this world, in the reality of a risen Christ no longer give meaning to a Jesuit's life or motivate his actions. He can no longer say, "I believe in one holy catholic apostolic Church." When this is so, the core reason for living in the Society of Jesus is gone. Among "the more obvious causes" which Father Arrupe enumerates for departures from the Society is "the individual crisis of faith which is either the result of, or brings about, the abandonment of spiritual duties (prayer, frequenting the sacraments . . .)."

But there may be Jesuits who know they did not commit themselves to the Society for wrong reasons, who do not feel a call from God to a new vocation, whose faith is not dead. Yet they experience a crisis of vocation.

A Jesuit may find that over a period of time, perhaps quite long,

preceding the moment of questioning he has gradually abandoned prayer; that he has been guilty of what he knows is compromise in his living of his vow of chastity or poverty; that he has come to rely on himself to such an extent that he has built up a real resistance to the word and the grace of Christ, particularly as mediated to him through a life of obedience to his superiors.

He may have succeeded in justifying his life to himself through some of the attitudes which he has found "in the air" around him. The traditional notion of celibacy is inhuman, destructive of the personality. The Church and the Society must come to terms with the realities of contemporary life. All this business of losing one's life, renouncing oneself, taking up the cross is unhealthy, an approach to spirituality which belongs to the past. A substantially new way of living the Christian life is taking shape. The times are changing, and an age is dawning when Christianity must give far more scope to the human, to man's thirst for freedom and fulfillment.

Yet, when he considers leaving the Society, he may experience within himself a nostalgia for the days when he felt sure of his commitment. He may experience "a desire for the desire" of the sense of vocation he once felt. Here at the moment of truth he may see that, if he is to think seriously of staying in the Society he must somehow return to God, to prayer, must find help somewhere, must take some decisive step which will entail a radical renunciation. And this way back may seem very long and beyond his strength. Here is truly a dark night.

Still another Jesuit, experiencing a deep crisis concerning his Jesuit commitment, may be conscious of no substantial infidelity on his part to his commitment and yet be deeply tempted to turn away from it. His faith may have been deeply shaken in late years. Now, when he turns to prayer, he may encounter only emptiness, a blank wall, the silence and absence of God. His work may have ceased to give him any real sense of satisfaction or achievement, of doing something worthwhile. Life may seem to be slipping away and the world passing him by as he plods along day in and month out doing the same old routine thing. He may be disillusioned with the

Church and the Society, oppressed by a fear that they are falling apart.

He may find himself lonely and longing for human love, for a sort of intimacy and security that life in an all-male community has never brought him. He may, in fact, without in the least having gone out looking but simply in the course of his work, have met a woman with whom he has fallen in love. He has fought the love. He realizes "that sexual love has the power to propel human beings into situations which can destroy not only themselves but many other people at the same time."⁴⁰ Yet the love may seem to him to be not simply sexual but one of the deeper, purer experiences of his life. And it may have reached the point at which he must make a choice between this love and the Society.

At this moment in this Jesuit's life remaining in the Society may seem only to promise him suffering, emptiness, insecurity into the indefinite future without his being able to see any way out. This, too, is truly a dark night.

Either of these two Jesuits, the man who has kept faith with his commitment or the man who has not, in attempting to cope with the crisis, may find himself with hardly a human support to lean upon. Having turned to every human help available, he may find, perhaps for the first time in his experience, he has only God to turn to, if, indeed he can do this.

The third week of the Spiritual Exercises, the week "which treats of the passion of Christ our Lord,"⁴¹ follows immediately Ignatius' treatment of Election. The Gospels tell us that when Christ, on his dark night, entered the garden, "horror and dismay came over him" (Mark 14:34); that he spoke to his companions of his heart being ready to break with grief that he could not bear the company of the men with whom he was most intimate; that he prayed that, if it were the Father's will, the cup be taken from him; that in anguish of spirit he prayed the more urgently; that his sweat became like clots of blood falling to the ground.

We are told by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews that in Christ "we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are" (Heb. 4:15). Certainly an element in Christ's agony was his realization of the imminence of physical suffering and death. And there was the heartbreak at his

people's rejection of him, at the frailty of the love and fidelity of even his closest friends.

But the temptations of the Just Man go beyond these. There is the anguish of doubt which he experiences about the direction he has taken in his life when it brings him to the moment of failure and rejection. There is the impulse to turn back while there is time, to return to the anonymous life at Nazareth, to start life fresh.

There is the fear of the Just Man that, in taking the road he has taken, he has been deceiving himself concerning God's will for him. And there is the temptation to despair, to give up hope of any meaning or any issue to his own life and mission or to life itself, to adopt a cynical stance toward life and to take what can be gotten while there is still light.

If Jesus Christ was "tempted in every way that we are" (Heb. 4:15), then -- although no darkness of sinfulness or concupiscence in him ever connived with the temptations he underwent -- it would seem that the supreme temptations that assail the Just Man in the critical moments of his life assailed Christ in that dark night of his life.

But there had been other decisive moments in that life: The day at the Jordan River when the Voice had called him "My Son, my Beloved;" the mission to which he had committed himself; the moment on the mountain of transfiguration, the moment of consolation, when with great clarity he had understood the "exodus" he must accomplish in Jerusalem, which enabled him, with decision and courage, to "set his face resolutely" toward that city in order to keep faith with his commitment.

The follower of Christ, and so the Jesuit, must expect to go the road that Christ went -- not simply an imitation of a commitment which Jesus made two thousand years ago, but by carrying out Christ's own commitment today, the very commitment which Christ had to the Father and to men. This commitment is created in the follower of Christ by the Spirit, it being no longer simply the Christian who lives but Christ who lives and fulfills his commitment within the Christian. Urs von Balthasar has written, "God, in his plan of salvation, makes use of faith unfelt, surren-

der without prospect, and a blind hope that seems only to grasp the void."⁴² And so the Jesuit can expect the dark night when fidelity to his commitment is put to the test, when doubt about his vocation, fear of self-deception in his commitment, loneliness, dread of the future if he is to continue along the same path, the impulse to escape to a new life, the temptation to hopelessness come over him.

If, at this point, he is to be true to his commitment, he will have to cling to the memory and the meaning of his own Jordan and transfiguration experiences. A contemporary theologian of grace has written:

There are . . . moments when an experience of faith stands out sharp and clear. For instance, the days of generosity and consolation, the times when God's Truth floods the soul with light, lends meaning and reality to all things. Such moments should be gratefully remembered and treasured up against the days of darkness and trial. The chief standby in a life of faith is the occasional experimental proofs in us of the divine reality and truth.⁴³

There will have been the privileged moments in the life of the Jesuit when his soul was "inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and, as a consequence can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all,"⁴⁴ moments of great faith and hope, when the Jesuit was sure of who and what he was through the commitment that God was calling him to and when he freely chose to go that way with his life.

With the memory of those moments in his life of clarity and consolation and with his conviction, despite all, of his Father's fidelity toward him, Christ went out from the garden to accept the consequences of the commitment he had taken upon himself. And the follower of Christ, and so the Jesuit, must expect, in keeping faith with his commitment, to lose his life, to undergo a sort of death. It may involve the renunciation of a great human love and a time of deep loneliness. It may involve a long-suffering patience with the vagaries and vicissitudes of that "least Society" to which he has committed himself. It may involve continuation at a work from which one experiences little human satisfaction. It may involve persevering in "faith unfelt" through an age of uncertainty and continual change, in faith that can only hang onto the memory of light,

to the memory of any sense of meaning and reality about the commitment made. One may be able to cling because of one's stubborn conviction that God is faithful and calls man to a fidelity which He loves and sustains, that he does not lead down blind alleys or forsake those who cling to him despite everything, even His apparent absence.

Christ went to death and rose from death. Through fidelity to his commitment he became the seed which fell into the ground and died and then bore a rich harvest. And so it must be with his follower. The Jesuit who loses his life (and those are terrible words) for the sake of Christ and his Gospel, who undergoes a death in remaining faithful to his Jesuit commitment, rises to a new life, to a peace that no man can take from him, to a poverty of spirit, a forgetfulness of self, an openness to and selfless love for other men and the world which mark the great apostle.

For God's "love is strong, his faithfulness eternal" (Ps. 117:2). He will not be outdone in generosity. He does enter into mutual commitments with men. The committed Jesuit can be sure that, in this world, his very commitment will take him to the garden and to Calvary. But once buried with Christ, he will rise with Christ. And it is, perhaps, only through this experience of losing his life through fidelity to commitment that a man learns really what it is to love and to serve, which is what life is all about.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 "The Visit of Father General to the English Province, January, 1970," Letters and Notices, Vol. 75, no. 352 (July, 1970), 142-143.
- 2 Quoted in Joseph Donceel, "Rahner's Argument for God," America.
- 3 From "The Decree on Ecumenism," section 3, in Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., The Documents of Vatican II (New York: American Press, 1966), p. 346.
- 4 René Voillaume, In the Midst of Men (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp. 9-11.
- 5 See the bull Licet debitum, [6], in Constitutiones Societatis Iesu, I (Rome, 1934), 361.
- 6 Letters and Notices, Vol. 75 (July, 1970), 143.
- 7 Very Rev. Peter Arrupe, S.J., to the scholastics of Colombia, On the Years of Formation (1968), p. 1.
- 8 Ibid., p. 2.
- 9 Bernard Haring, The Law of Christ, I (Westminster, Md., 1966), p. 189.
- 10 Very Rev. Peter Arrupe, S.J., The Spiritual Training of a Jesuit, (1967), pp. 21-22.
- 11 René Voillaume, Conferences to Religious Superiors. An unpublished manuscript, 1970.
- 12 Puhl, Louis J., S.J., The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. A New Translation Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph (Westminster, Md., 1953; Chicago, Loyola University Press Reprint, 1968), section [234]. Citations from the Exercises, (hereafter abbreviated SpEx), are from this translation.
- 13 SpEx, [4].
- 14 Ibid., [63].
- 15 Ibid., [61].

- 16 See, e.g., *ibid.*, [116].
- 17 *Ibid.*, [95].
- 18 *Ibid.*, [116].
- 19 *Ibid.*, [145].
- 20 *Ibid.*, [189].
- 21 *Ibid.*, [97].
- 22 *Ibid.*, [157].
- 23 *Ibid.*, [97].
- 24 John C. Futrell, S.J., "Ignatian Discernment," Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, II, no. 2 (April, 1970), 58.
- 25 Constitutions, [547], in St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. Translated, with an Introduction and a Commentary, by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970).
- 26 Speech of Very Reverend Father General, Pedro Arrupe, S.J., to the Masters of Novices at the beginning of their meeting, April 5, 1970, Jesuit Curia, Rome, Italy, p. 7. An unpublished manuscript.
- 27 Quoted in Sven Stolpe, Dag Hammarskjöld: A Spiritual Portrait (New York, 1966), p. 107.
- 28 Saint Ignace: Journal spirituel, Maurice Giuliani, S.J., ed. (Paris, 1959), p. 19.
- 29 Saint Ignace de Loyola: Exercices spirituels, François Courel, S.J., ed., (Paris, 1960), p. 98, fn. 1.
- 30 SpEx, [1].
- 31 *Ibid.*, [182].
- 32 *Ibid.*, [179].
- 33 Autograph Directories of St. Ignatius Loyola (Jersey City, N.J.: Program to Adapt the Spiritual Exercises, n.d.), p. 8.
- 34 *Ibid.*

- 35 SpEx, [150].
- 36 Ibid., [183]. Italics supplied.
- 37 Robert Bolt, A Man for All Seasons (New York, 1966), p. 81.
- 38 Letters and Notices, Vol. 75 (July, 1970), 154.
- 39 Ibid., 143.
- 40 Rollo May, Love and Will (New York, 1969), p. 110.
- 41 SpEx, [4]
- 42 Hans Urs von Balthasar, Prayer (New York, 1961), p. 113.
- 43 Peter Fransen, S.J., The New Life of Grace (New York, 1969), p. 294.
- 44 SpEx, [316].

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