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# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

**Stepping into the River**

*Reflections on the Vows*

**JOHN B. FOLEY, S.J.**

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## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the studies, 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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STEPPING INTO THE RIVER

*Reflections on the Vows*

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*John B. Foley, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

26/4: September 1994

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### *For your information . . .*

Just a year ago, the September 1993 issue of *STUDIES* by Thomas Stahel, S.J., bore the title "Toward General Congregation 34." In the year since then, the Institute of Jesuit Sources has published two new books that are relevant to the congregation.

The first of those books is called *For Matters of Greater Moment*, a phrase taken from the Jesuit Constitutions and referring to the circumstances in which a congregation should be convoked. It contains both a brief history of the first thirty congregations and, for the very first time, a translation into English of all the decrees of those congregations. Because nowhere does a detailed, scholarly history of the general congregations exist, *STUDIES* published a brief, popular history of them in its issue of January-March 1974 in preparation for the Thirty-second Congregation. That history has been revised and rewritten for this book; it still remains probably the only overall history of the congregations in any language. As to the decrees, for the last three congregations we have vernacular translations in many languages, but this is the first time that the original Latin documents from the First Congregation in 1558 to the Thirtieth in 1957 are available in a modern language. Because a general congregation is the supreme legislative body in the Society, it is surprising that up to the present a printed list of all the members of those gatherings has never existed in Latin or any other language. This new book provides two such lists, one including the participants in each congregation and the other an inclusive, alphabetical listing of all participants in general congregations. Among the more useful features of the book, too, is a detailed index by subject and person that may tell you even more than you want to know; for instance, the names of all the "inclusores" and the congregations they served. In case you are unfamiliar with the term, it refers to those worthies whose task it was to lock up the congregation members until they had elected a general! Finally, the book is "adorned" with portraits of all the generals who presided at those thirty gatherings. They form an interesting gallery. [*For Matters of Greater Moment*. xii + 788 pages, portraits, and index. \$47.95 plus postage. (Jesuits may purchase individual personal copies at a 15 percent discount.)]

Some of our readers may be sharp-eyed enough to note that an earlier advertisement gave a slightly lower price for the book. Those who have already ordered and paid for it will receive it at that price. Why the increase? The book turned out to be longer than foreseen and the cover is no longer plastic but rather the more durable clothbound hard cover.

The second book, *Faith beyond Justice: Widening the Perspective*, is by Martin R. Tripole, S.J., a member of the theology faculty at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. It is a contemporary examination of the "faith and justice" motif which concludes that while the criteria for ministries proposed by the decree are noble and challenging, they

are, nonetheless, too narrow to carry the burden that many of their advocates would have them carry. The book, both sympathetic and critical, suggests an alternative criterion for the Jesuit apostolates in the twentieth century and beyond. A most interesting feature of the book is the account of the results of some fifteen interviews dealing with the decree on "faith and justice" that the author conducted with participants at the Thirty-second Congregation, the source of that decree. [*Faith beyond Justice: Widening the Perspective*. vii + 153 pages. \$14.95 plus postage.]

As in every year, this year, too, the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality bids farewell to former members and welcomes newcomers to its ranks. To the departing members mentioned in the previous issue of *STUDIES*, May 1994, we must add Ned Mattimoe of the Detroit Province. Ned is the founding editor of *Company*, that excellent magazine over which he so successfully presided for more than a decade. He is now enjoying a well-merited sabbatical; because he will be out of the country for some time, however, and thus miss our meetings, he thought it better not to remain on the Seminar. He takes with him the gratitude of the Seminar for his contributions and that of the United States Assistancy for *Company*.

Our new members come, as is regularly the case, from a variety of backgrounds and provinces. Peter Byrne of the Oregon Province is the rector and president of St. Michael's Institute of Philosophy and Letters at Spokane, one of the post-novitiate formation houses in the United States. Frank Clooney of the New York Province works in the New England Province at Boston College, teaching comparative theology with a special emphasis on Hinduism. Ernest Ferlita of the New Orleans Province teaches theater at Loyola University in New Orleans and brings his talent as a dramatist to the Seminar. Dennis Hamm of the Wisconsin Province, a Scripture scholar, teaches in the Theology Department at Creighton University in Omaha. All four of these new members bring to the Seminar both their own individual backgrounds and expertise and, in common, the experience of writing and publication in a variety of books and journals.

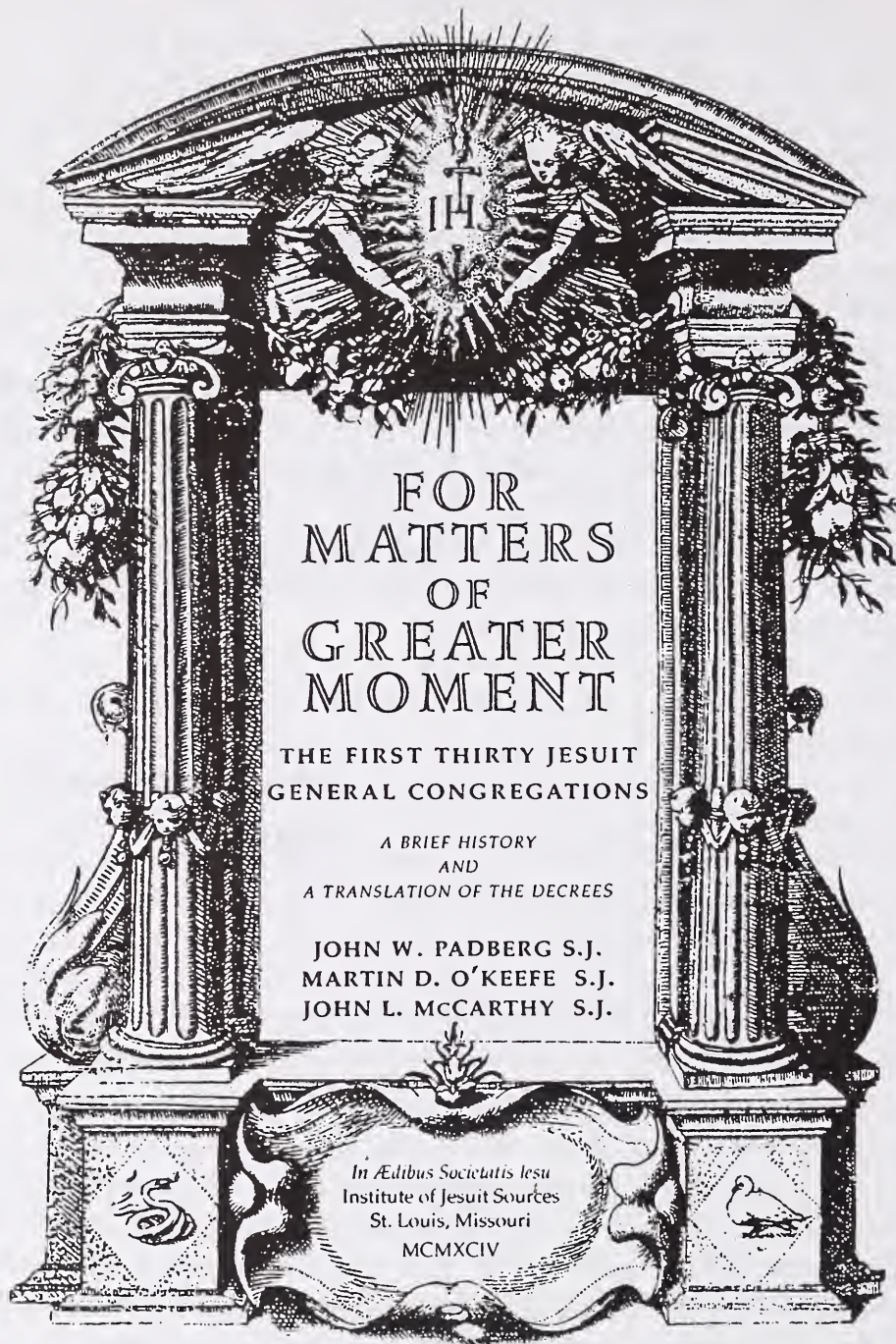
In addition to the two new books published by the IJS, you may also find of interest the following works. *Communicating Christ to the World* has as its author Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, S.J., archbishop of Milan in Italy. The Society in many of its documents has much to say about the importance of the work of communications. Cardinal Martini is a master at it, both orally and in writing. His homilies and addresses at the Milan cathedral draw thousands of auditors, young and old. This book, ably translated by Thomas Lucas, S.J., of the California Province, will show you why that is so. [Carlo Maria Martini, S.J. *Communicating Christ to the World*. Translated by Thomas M. Lucas, S.J. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994. 192 pp. \$14.95.] For all too many centuries, too many Christians, including clergy, have engaged in the "teachings of contempt" for Jews and Judaism. Vatican II officially repudiated that shame on Christianity's history, but much remains yet to be done in understanding the phenomenon and eradicating it. *Mature Christianity in the Twentieth Century* is a book in the "recognition and repudiation of the anti-Jewish polemics in the New Testament." It is well worth considering. [Norman A. Beck. *Mature Christianity in the Twentieth Century*. Volume 5 in

the series *Shared Ground among Jews and Christians*. New York: Crossroad, 1994. 372 pp. \$26.95.] *Corrective Vision* is an excellent collection of essays by Richard A. McCormick, S.J. Its subtitle is *Explorations in Moral Theology*. Father McCormick expresses his opinion that "the major contribution of moral-theological reflection [is] opening people's eyes to dimensions of reality they may have missed. If moral theology does not do this, it is utterly dispensable." These essays, previously published in quite diverse journals and books, will help open people's eyes to such dimensions. [Richard A. McCormick, S.J. *Corrective Vision*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994. viii + 256 pp. \$15.95.] Last, but by no means least, *Does God Have a Big Toe?* is worthy of mention. This is a small, utterly charming, beautifully illustrated, and very wise book of "stories about stories in the bible . . . modern midrashin." It is ostensibly written for children, and they will surely enjoy the stories; but it will provide as much enjoyment and even matter for reflection for adults. The author, a rabbi, says that each of the twenty stories, all of them from the Hebrew Bible, "is a way of trying to answer some questions about that story in the Bible, but I never really tell you what question I am trying to answer. That would be too much like an explanation." [Marc Gellman. *Does God Have a Big Toe?* New York: Harper Collins, 1989. 88 pp. \$7.95.]

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*

*Editor*





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## STEPPING INTO THE RIVER

### *Reflections on the Vows*

#### Introductory Remarks

**L**ike many others in this time of great change, I have found it necessary to dig deep, to ask myself what life is about. What is the heartbeat of human life? I have wondered. What would flawed human existence look like if it were lived to its potential? To put it another way, what would life be if one said yes to it instead of no? This "essence of humanity" could lead to a discussion of such human events as love, death, marriage, and even loneliness. It could undergird specifically Christian phenomena (Christian marriage, death, guilt, responsibility, maturity, virtue, and so on). It could shed some light on the vows.

Obviously, the question is too big. How many great philosophers have searched for the core of human life? I have read a number of them and have been helped. My breakthrough came from poetry, however, rather than philosophy: I came upon a meandering metaphor that contained what felt like insight. By stepping into the metaphor, I gradually found a depth of spirituality similar to what I had already come to know in Ignatius. I discovered applications to human commitments, and specifically to religious vows. In this paper I want to begin with the metaphor, unpack it, and then in Part 2 draw out some implications for the vows.

It is important to stress the *ideal* nature of this discussion. The goal I want to propose cannot be clicked into one's life all at once, full and complete. It is a condition toward which men and women progress throughout their lives. None of us can always live up to ideals in our daily lives. We do not say yes all the time; we say no and say it quite often. When we feel the invitation to unselfish love, often we do not follow through. Sometimes we do not even feel

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the invitation! Quite often the actual goal of our lives could be described as survival rather than service. Nothing wrong with that. After all, we do need to survive, to feel good about ourselves even when we do not live up to our potential. We must be forgiving of ourselves and careful, proceeding one step at a time.

## Part 1: The River of Life

### What Does a River Do?

I ask the reader to sit back for a moment and ponder the course of a river—or, to put it differently, to step with me into the river.

Often a river begins as a human being does, as a tiny stream brimming over the edge of a high lake or pond. I remember walking across the Mississippi River in upper Minnesota with an urchin named Peter on my shoulders. We strolled the few steps across this fledgling stream just a yard from its unimpressive start. Like Peter, the brook was full of innocence and desire, glad to be alive, streaming heedlessly down its first slopes.

Beyond Peter's and my vision, though, things change. The rains come, the snows melt. Other streams, formerly just playmates, now join forces with the widened brook. It becomes a full stream, no longer walkable, at least with ease. Fish make it their home and it acquires a certain lovely force. All at once it can be called a young river, with a real river shape, complete with curves.

Curves are the rule in a river, not the exception, and the river's own vigorous young life is the reason. A tough shore comes along, too high to go over, too strong to go through. Because the river is flowing so well, it continues to flow by changing direction. Instead of south it swings southwest. Its force then carries it west and even northwest. Once freed of the obstruction, the river's life force responds to the land's downward slope and curls the river back. Finally it gradually flows back toward the south. As the river widens and matures, its curves become severe, serpentine. We have all seen such arduous river twists from the window of a plane. Sometimes a mature river abandons one section of itself altogether. A stranded curve then exists by itself, a sort of enflashed memory, never reaching the sea.

In its midcourse, the river runs full and strong, receiving new runoff from melting snows, receiving more and more influx from brooks and creeks, and, of course, from the abundant water already poured forth by its own self. It gives nourishment: rows of trees and foliage slake their thirst from it. The very landscape seems to order itself around the flowing water: boats and even tugs have plenty of room for maneuver; towns and cities cluster by its side. The river is now "great," at least in size and impact, and it pours steadily on.



Upon occasion a river will meet and merge with another great river, as the Mississippi does with the Missouri just upstream from St. Louis. The result is truly magnificent, with barges and river boats and long spans of bridges for crossing. The tiny brook-beginning was just a tease. Now it is mature and businesslike, flowing swiftly, making its important progress. In late maturity, the river lumbers, making its placid way to the great sea, water-heaven. It worries no longer about its direction, its curves, its current, its flow. These are long ago settled, and the river conforms to a wide, slow path to the sea—the ocean which it more and more resembles.

Then it arrives.

Manrique said our lives were rivers  
going down to the sea which is death  
but the death they flow down to is life.

This is how Ernesto Cardenal's poem "Death of Thomas Merton" begins.<sup>1</sup> The sea is death because river flow is ended, banks and curves forever behind it. The sea is life because it fulfills everything contained in the strongest currents of river flourish and flow, making river life real in a new, broader, deeper, more profound, and most thoroughly transformed way. Flow turns into tide. Ripples become vast swells and waves. Fish that formerly dashed downstream now find deep home. Like it or not, the water bounds toward this consummation, where it will be taken up into a kind of motion never dreamt of in the river's wildest roaming. Here is the great, broad mouth; here is the last of land; here is a headlong rush into new life which is death, which is life. The river has "run its course."

What makes this long river run possible? What is the nature of a river? The answer can be given in one word: flow. The river continually lets go of each wave, streaming into itself, ever flowing. Every single instant of the river is reception and release. Never does the water solidify and become "something," like a mountain or a house.<sup>2</sup> It always *receives* its very self, the water flowing into it, and then gladly *releases* that self downstream. Susanne Langer says that a river has "dynamic form," unlike that of a statue, because a river's very identity is motion. I cannot step in the same river twice if river means "the same" water as last time. But I can if the river is its dynamic flow.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Marilyn Monroe and Other Poems*, trans. Robert Pring-Mill (London: Search Press Limited, 1975), 119–34.

<sup>2</sup> Except when it freezes, of course. But it is still a river, since it will unfreeze soon.

<sup>3</sup> In Susanne "Langer's words, "Heracleitos was struck by the fact that you cannot step twice into the same river at the same place—at least, if the river means the water, not its dynamic form, the flow" (*The Philosophy of Art* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957], 18).

Thus there are two conditions of river life. The first rule is that the river must receive its very self from others: from the high lake source, the rains and snows, the relative and friend streams that become one with it, the wave right before this wave. Cut the sources and you dry up the river. Second, a river must at every moment and in every way continuously *release* absolutely everything that it is. A wave must pass its very substance on. It can hold on to nothing at all. If a river could panic, as the apostle Peter did when he found himself walking on water, it might search frantically for something to hang on to. It might try to preserve what it already has, just in case its sources become unreliable. In short, it might become a stagnant pool, relinquishing its dynamic identity as flow. But then it would no longer be a river at all, no longer dynamically alive. If a river first must receive itself from others, the second rule of river life is to let go, to hold on to nothing. By these two conditions the river has its self.

### Human Life as Flow

Some of the applications to human life are obvious. My life has different stages: youth, midlife, maturity, postmaturity, flow to the sea. I am different at each stage. I may have reversed my course a few times, maybe often, and I know or at least suspect that my present steady direction will meet obstacles and changes to which I must adjust and around which I must curve. During my course I have nourished others and taken nourishment, to some degree at least. If I am near the sea, I know that either my whole meaning will cease, or else it will reach a fullness that I could not have imagined. I rush toward the sea, which is death, which is life.

Where am I in my river-flow? Am I the young trickle just begun? Am I coursing through valleys and fields, friend to flocks and foliage that receive from me? Or am I wide and deep, somewhat sure of my course, dreaming of the vast ocean I ambition and fear? Am I tumbling over rocks and stones, my quiet life torn into rapids? Or is mine a dreary pace, forward bound but not sure why? Wherever I am—good! I am alive, and no matter how many the reversals and curves, I am seeking the sea I was born for.

Unless I give up. If human life is meant to be like a river, it should not become a pool or a rock or a barn. Do you and I cling to solidity, hoarding things up, pretending to be solid-state? Human life is, to our surprise, to our consternation, and to our blessing, like a river. Human life consists of flow.

How does “flow” work in a human being? Some implications can be stated here, to be expanded in Part 2. Like the river, a human being needs first to receive always. Instead of reacting to an uninvited gift as if it were an embarrassment or a threat, one needs to let it in, to let down one’s defenses. Second, instead of hanging on for dear life to everything I “have,” I need to let

my possessions rest lightly, allowing them to be themselves while they are with me, but then letting them go whenever there is reason or need. Often many of us regard our own lives and talents as possessions, things we have “taken” rather than accepted, and “have” rather than give away. We seek to achieve, to secure our position, to eliminate insecurity, to “make something of ourselves.” We might even cling to God or to another person, anything to stop the dangerous and undependable flow. Understandable as they are, these attempts represent the opposite of what human life really is. My life really does consist of “flow.” I need not hope to find happiness by becoming solid, whether that means becoming a solid citizen, a solid success, a solid, fixed personality. When I find myself I will find someone in a relative state of flux, someone with a dynamic identity, someone not fixed or frozen.

The act of “being myself” can often seem a private matter, but in fact it is intrinsically relational. The self I am is a flow to which others have clear and healthy entrance, and in which no created thing sticks like glue. When I find myself, I will also find a dynamic interchange with others. So there are three moments in human “river-reality,” not just two: receiving, letting go, and becoming the relating self that is composed of the two.

Faith adds another dimension to all this, specifically, the relation to God. An ability to relate to others would foster also a relation to God. But much more needs to be said about that connection to God. Let us seek counsel from the wise man, Ignatius.

Wise? During my long retreat at the novitiate, when I first came upon the Contemplation to Obtain Divine Love at the end of the Exercises, I was elated. I needed to feel some of God’s love at that point, and I thought I was going to be told how to obtain it. But instead I found myself instructed to look at God’s labor for me and draw an obligatory conclusion about myself, namely, that I ought to hand over everything I have. In other words, I thought guiltily, I should not possess my own life; I should instead be stripped of everything—my understanding, my entire will, my liberty itself—because God has done and is doing so much for me. What decent son could resist? I was to consider “according to all reason and justice, what I *ought* to offer the Divine Majesty, that is, all I possess and myself with it.” I felt an internal movement, but it was stomach pain.

In fact, the Contemplation was speaking about gratitude and its companion movement, generosity. Why gratitude and generosity? Suddenly I remember the river, with its never ending reception of everything it is and its giving away everything it has received. Maybe the Exercises are meant to help us flow like a river!

If I find myself grateful, I can assume that I am accepting something as a gift instead of taking it as a possession. My attention is on the giver and on the beauty of the gift. I did not “deserve” or “achieve” the gift, but it was

offered anyway. Releasing or letting go leads to a feeling of generosity. I do not identify with things in the sense that my life depends on them. I can easily let them flow on to others, like the river carrying its cargo along on its waves, bearing it lightly, letting it flow onwards downstream in quiet generosity. The Contemplation asks me to look at God's loving gifts to me (in gratitude) and respond (in generosity).

Ignatius is describing *how I will actually feel* (without guilt inducement) if, like Jesus, I ever glimpse even for a moment all that God-the-beloved is already giving me. The Contemplation provides four different aspects of God's loving labors to meditate upon: (1) how he has provided for me the blessings of creation and redemption, together with special favors; (2) how God dwells in creatures: the elements, the plants, the animals, human beings—making “a temple of me, since I am created in the likeness and image of the Divine Majesty”; (3) how God works throughout creation, “conducting himself as one who labors”; and, finally, (4) how all my limited power comes from above, as “the rays of light descend from the sun, and as the waters flow from their fountains.” The language Ignatius uses is touching: “I will ponder with *great affection* 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.” God is, startlingly, one of the parties to a love relationship, acting just as a lover does. The first moment of the Contemplation is thus to look upon God who looks upon us and admires us, who enters the relationship without holding back. God is our beloved. God is the great mountain lake, the rain or snow source of our life, giving the godly being itself to us.

When real appreciation takes place in me, in that moment I begin to become “selfless.” To offer my liberty, memory, understanding, and entire will qualifies as too little, too mean a gift. But these are all I have and I want to let go of them into love. They are literally me, at my most free, my most selfless self. My spontaneous desire is to hold nothing back, to give everything I can to the beloved God. “Take, Lord and receive,” the prayer at the end of the Contemplation, expresses that desire.

On the other hand, instead of gratefully receiving, one can grab and take, needing no giver but only one's own strength derived from greed. Likewise, instead of generously releasing what one has, one can store it up, creating a hoard, blocking at last the frightening flow. In *The Passionate God*, a book that started me along this line of thinking, Rosemary Haughton speaks of Scripture as showing this contrast. She says that Satan's plan (beginning in Luke 4:1–14) is not to receive anything as a gift but to take it, and then, instead of letting go, to dam up the flow and to store up the gains. Satan tells Jesus to overcome hunger by making a stone become bread (“possess and show your own power”); or to rule kingdoms by worshipping evil; or to force God to save

Jesus' life. Satan was trying to enlist Jesus in the diabolic plan, which is to swell up with power and possessions like a toad, trying to become huge enough finally to compete with God. Jesus' plan is exactly the opposite: to receive "all that the Father gives me" (John 6:37) and to release everything in the passion. In the battle of battles, the cross, Satan seems to win by taking everything away from Jesus. But love really wins. Love, not a "thing" but a flow, is too much in motion for evil to grasp and destroy. Love lasts through the crucifixion and becomes the resurrection.<sup>4</sup>

Christianity proposes a number of real paradoxes that find an explanation as a result of this viewpoint. You must lose your life to find it. The last shall be first. The least shall be the greatest. These sentences make no sense at all unless human life is like the flow I have been describing. To lose your life means to let it go instead of trying to hoard it: give it over into the hands of the loved one and you will find your real self. The last shall be first means taking last place because honors and possessions do not make the person, flowing does. The least shall be the greatest because the one who is the least, who has fewer possessions, less solidity and position, than all others, is the one who is completely given over to flow, who has not grabbed anything to stabilize the flux. Become this flux and become your real self.

There is an alternate image, that of open hands. Hands must open both in the giving and in the receiving. If one clutches what one has in one's hands, not only will the knuckles turn pale, but one will not be able to receive anything new. Try offering a fist to someone who wants to give you something. The gesture itself speaks defiance (resistance); but, what is more, physical mechanics apply: I cannot take anything into a fist. I must unfold my hand to do that.

We are meant to hold life with open hands. This is why Ignatius is so opposed to inordinate attachments: not because I am "bad" if I have them, but because I am not being true to the great love relationship I have entered. I not only open the hands of my soul to receive, I use them to give my soul itself away to my beloved, out of gratitude. Ignatius cannily prescribes, not that I force myself to feel this way, but that I offer myself "as one would do who is moved by great feeling." Even if the feeling is not there, I can act as I would if it were. I can desire to desire. The movement I desire is deeply human: to let go into love.

Let us take an example. What if a Jesuit saw a career opportunity that would allow him to serve God's people more effectively? Say it is a prestigious job, such as the presidency of a university or an academic position. What if he gradually let that job infiltrate his identity, allowing power and fame gradually

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<sup>4</sup> See Rosemary Haughton, *The Passionate God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 151-53.

to define him? This Jesuit could over time forget that all is gift, since achievement becomes the stuff of his daily life. He could step by step pad his identity for the eyes of others, becoming the man of power instead of the generous giver, the man of knowledge instead of the teacher of compassion. On the other hand, this same man might well step back from this great competition, perhaps on a retreat or in an important conversation, and detect the temptation facing him. He might release, not the good he was doing in his job, but the motives behind it. He might glimpse and love within himself the stream of life. Perhaps he would return in surrender to God, releasing his work into the hands of the loving Spirit. I have seen this happen.

Any of us could find ourselves stepping out of the river of our own life, perching on the banks in splendor. By having what we “need,” reputation or power, we would be independent. By working hard enough to maintain our position, we would “keep” what we have, rather than letting it flow for the good of others. We are all tempted in this way, and the sweet Spirit within us keeps calling us to let go.

River dynamics often become apparent in married life, though of course they can also be obscured. As mates grow, they might grow out of viewing each other as “that which I cannot do without” (or “she who must be obeyed,” to quote Rumpole of the Bailey),<sup>5</sup> and begin to see the other as a wonderful person in his or her own right. Admiration then would begin to replace need; forgiveness, intolerance. Life would become stable by becoming unstable, so to speak, by becoming flow. The former furious attempt to acquire solidity turns into the pursuit of centered human life. This is what the Contemplation is about.

All of us should be very careful and caring toward ourselves when we discover our daily reasons for ingratitude and hoarding. We are not only human in the sense of flow, but also human in that we are fault filled. Most often we do not see the gifts at all. We have too much to do; each of us is lacking too many gifts and can hardly be grateful for that. One person has been hurt too badly and too often by depending on others—from now on she will depend only on herself. Another has been piercingly alone too much to sit around waiting for some gift from somebody who never remembers—from now on he will fend for himself. And so on. We have a million reasons, deep and not so deep, why we do not advert to the gifts of life that are after all quite obvious. Not the least reason, of course, is that if we acknowledge the gifts we will have to give them up. So says the Contemplation. I want to keep my memory, my understanding, my liberty, and my entire will; I want health and long life and riches. Who would not? Therefore I must not admit any suggestion that I will

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<sup>5</sup> The “hero” of Public Television’s program of the same name and of the books from which the program takes its origin.

be dispossessed. Besides, I am an ordinary person, not some great saint, and these terrific insights are not available for me.

If we find our spiritual life “standing still” in this way, we must bestow great kindness upon ourselves, waiting for the breakthrough that is bound to come. God came to earth just because of men and women like ourselves, people who do say no to their very center, even as they are trying to say yes. The poet Tagore speaks with great economy of this kind of human ambivalence:

That I want thee, only thee—let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night, are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry—“I want thee, only thee.”

As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is—“I want thee, only thee.”<sup>6</sup>

Hidden deep within our resistance and refusal is the desire for what is already our substance: the gifting love of God, the free receiving of that gift.

A final comment about truly human life will complete this section. Clearly, the Exercises are not solipsistic. That is, they do not concern the mere inner state of a human being as unrelated to anyone or anything else. The Exercises and the vows are concerned with relation, beginning with a love relation to God. But perhaps they stand open to a “me and Jesus” interpretation. Do the Exercises have to do exclusively with the exercitant’s connection to Jesus and to God? I do not think so. Rahner made “the unity of the love of neighbor and the love of God” a theological principle. He said that, in principle, Jesus and all other human beings love God *by loving other human beings*. This does not by any means exclude prayer or liturgy, but Rahner saw these as based, in a mature human being, on love of neighbor.<sup>7</sup>

My own way of saying this would be that love opens, it does not close. Real love opens out to all reality rather than exclusively to this or that copartner. Therefore, love of God cannot constrain itself just to a closed relationship to God. The same two moments of love—gratefully receiving everything and generously letting it go out to others—once they are present, open a human being to all other people. If this fact is not thematically present in the Exercises (and the vows), it is there in principle. John Staudenmaier notes, in his recent STUDIES article, that certain Exercises do in fact send the exercitant into the

<sup>6</sup> Poem XXXVIII from “Gitanjali,” published in *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 17f.

<sup>7</sup> See his “Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God,” in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969) 6:231–49.

world: the contemplation of the peoples of the earth, for instance, or the sending out of the meditator from the low place as a member of the leader's army.<sup>8</sup> In any case, no one can contemplate the life of Jesus without wanting to share in Jesus' mission of love on earth, in the power of the Spirit.

This is the metaphor and some first applications. Let us proceed now to the vows.

## Part 2: The Vows

First, a background statement. Many religious people say, "I am someone who is called to give always." In the ascetic mode of the pre-Vatican II Church, this meant discipline and self-denial: one gives much by giving much up. In the ministerial mode of current religious life, this attitude has been transformed into another kind of selflessness, regarding one's own needs as of less significance than the more important needs of those to whom we minister. The religious practice of daily prayer has become distorted, one's work assuming the place of one's prayer. God is present to us mainly or only in the act of loving service, rather than in contemplative prayer.

These positions are open to question when they are made into the dominant or sole outlook. As such they represent a "giving till it hurts," the main hurt being to the health and integrity of the person and the order. I am saying in these pages that the vows are not primarily or adequately a way of relinquishing something, of giving *instead of* receiving. Giving is not opposed to receiving: the two depend on each other. *The vows spring forth from and build upon a robust and healthy receiving.* Without this they cannot be understood or practiced well. A wave receives its whole substance from the preceding wave. The question is not whether to receive but how to receive well.

### Poverty

Some Jesuits want poverty to be an individual affair, along the lines of a spirituality that one privately practices and contemplates but does not impose on others. At the other end of the spectrum are those who desire poverty as a visible solidarity with the poor. Not everyone has sympathy for this latter way of living, and so its adherents sometimes retire to a dedicated smaller house in a deprived neighborhood. These and other Jesuits object to the seeming luxury adopted in various Jesuit houses. They admit that this more ample living was adopted in order to compensate for the difficult jobs of teaching or scholarship,

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<sup>8</sup> John Staudenmaier, S.J., "To Fall in Love with the World: Individualism and Self-Transcendence in American Life," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 26, no. 3 (May 1994).



for instance; but they aver that in reality enjoying such abundance drains the vow of realistic meaning. Most of us do not have a settled opinion about the vow of poverty, at least one shared by most others. Rarely in our discussions do we come together around an underlying understanding of this vow.

The situation does not get better when one thinks of Ignatius's attitude on the matter. He required, for instance, that the professed never change the Society's rule of poverty except to make it more strict. The contrast is made more acute by the trend of religious orders today to adopt values from the culture around them. What could be wrong with the small or even large compensations of comfort and ease for a religious? Do not lay colleagues have these? Why did Ignatius think so highly of poverty? Do we need to banish this remnant from a former age? Or do we instead need to legislate stricter, more encompassing laws? Legal prescriptions, however, only exist to make firm what is already in place: the practice of a group or community. My task here is to extend the first part of this paper into a few foundational statements about poverty that might foster conversation.

The logic of Part 1 says that the vow of poverty is an attitude and action founded on love. It is not in the first instance an external garment but an internal disposition. Like love, vowed poverty does indeed try to dispossess itself, to hold nothing back from the beloved. But even here the paradox occurs. The very first duty of poverty is not to give everything away. It is to receive. As the First Letter of John has it, "In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us" (4:10). Or as the scholastic philosophers put it, "One cannot give what one does not have." *The first dynamic of the vow of poverty is not to dispossess but to possess gratefully.* In other words, poverty, in its inception, is exactly the opposite of what we usually conceive.

Receive what? A thrill of red orange on the winged bird. Ragtag butterflies—yellow garnish for an open field. Tawny fat bees, frankly servicing ground-cover plants. Trembling chipmunk, shying at every sound, upright but ready to run, hands begging.

The call of poverty is to let such sights reach us at our core. Cardenal notes that

[i]t is only when we are not being practical  
and concentrate on useless things that we  
move out and find the world is opening out.<sup>9</sup>

What about the rows of daffodils or jonquils in bloom? What about the steps with grass peeping out between them?

We move among things with the air

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<sup>9</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, "Death of Thomas Merton," in *Marilyn Monroe and Other Poems*, trans. Robert Pring-Mill (London: Search Press Limited, 1975), 120.

of having mislaid a most important  
briefcase.

Take escalators up and take them down.  
Enter the supermarket or the store,  
like anyone else, seeking the transcendental  
product.<sup>10</sup>

Do we ever admire the rosy color of the drapes we close? And what about the rain? Or the simple kindness of a person who steps back to let me through a doorway with my packages? Or the intrinsic beauty of the God-loved human being who is my conversation partner of an evening? Or the sunset?

When we are not being practical, we can see the beauty of practical things. The chair that the author of this essay is sitting on is the result of centuries of innovation by craftspeople and inventors who poured their solutions into the common pool of human knowledge. My chair has five legs fanning out from a center post; if there were only four, the chair would too easily tip over. At a single touch of a lever positioned so that my hand can conveniently reach it, its back moves forward to support my back. It has no arms (a late invention anyway) because these would get in the way when I type. When do I ever think of these marvels? When am I grateful for them?<sup>11</sup>

And what about surroundings? It is thought that poverty dictates inattention to the room or house in which one lives, the dining room in which one eats. But recent studies have emphasized the effect that light, color, style, and so forth have on human beings.<sup>12</sup> Surroundings do not have to be rich in order to create a home for those within; they simply have to be acknowledged and arranged with care. Surroundings will influence us whether we want them to or not. If poverty's first rule is to receive well, we should agree to "let in" our surroundings, so to speak, to fashion them so that their presence in our lives will be welcome.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>11</sup> In chapter 4 of *The Evolution of Useful Things* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), Henry Petroski details the way in which many of our taken-for-granted necessities came to be. The lowly paper clip began as a pin used to fasten papers together. It was first utilized this way soon after the invention of paper in the first century (pins themselves were used as long ago as 3000 B.C. by the Sumerians to gather clothes into a bunch). After enough sorting fingers had been accidentally pricked, in the mid nineteenth century to be more exact, springlike "fasteners" were designed as paper holders. Finally, around the turn of the century the first bent-wire paper clips came into being, the present form being reached only somewhere in the 1930s. And so on, from silverware, bottles, and hammers, to bridges and nuclear power plants.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Winifred Gallagher, *The Power of Place* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993).

Such things are rudimentary, to be sure. But they trace their way back to the giver of all gifts. To open to small things (to the “dearest freshness deep down things”)<sup>13</sup> is to open to the one who is gift and giver. Even the “Take, Lord, and receive,” in which we offer to release everything to God, itself contains a revealing request. One asks boldly for God’s love and grace. Give me only this and I will ask for nothing more. Thus, even in the greatest prayer of poverty, the “Take, Lord,” the first rule still applies—a robust and healthy receiving.

What stops us from receiving? The Ignatian term “inordinate attachments” gives a clue. To give “ordinate” entrance of the world into my self means to value things insofar as they are valuable and to value God above all because God is most valuable of all. Many Jesuits use the daily examens to review the gifts of the day, to thank God for them, and to make a loving offering in return. An inordinate love of anything will disorder a person’s ability to receive. If I love riches more than anything, I may not look at the things of life that are not wealth making. Or I will see them only with price tags attached. My soul’s filters become clogged.

To give the world true entrance, I have to leave open the doorway to my deep soul, not an easy task. It is a two-way door. Not only are gifts free to come in through it but fierce things hidden in my darkness can come out. The wound from childhood, the irrational anger, the great failure. Because these memories do not dwell in conscious light, we prefer to live on a daily and even humdrum basis that we can pursue without the utter unpredictability of the lurking darkness inside.

Another way to put this, unfortunately, is to say that many of us live without loving ourselves. The reversals and not-enoughs of our inner selves languish because we keep the door closed to them, and so we cannot love them to life. We achieve safety this way, but at a high price. I suspect sometimes that Ignatius included the exercises of the First Week for this very reason, to let us have loving commerce with the sins inside us, inside all humanity. We are to receive our entire selves, even the parts we fear or dislike, so that we may leave the humble doorway open. This is the “intimate knowledge” that Ignatius calls for in the Contemplation. We must love ourselves in order to receive our own selves and therefore leave the door open to others. If the first rule of poverty is to receive gratefully and healthily, there is a corollary: *The vow of poverty is an attitude and action founded on healthy love of oneself*. Gifts cannot come in through locked doors.

Of course, the vow of poverty is not only about receiving. It also has to do with letting go of what one receives. Hold these gifts lightly. They are

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<sup>13</sup> “God’s Grandeur,” in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. Mackenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 139.

not to attach to you, even though you love them. Ignatius's Third Class of Men describes persons desiring to use a sum of money according to the love relationship with God. Their offer is that God dispose of their gifts in any way he wants to. "It is yours now," they say to God. This desire is driven by the same, deeply human response we saw in Part 1: the grateful wish to give the best gift possible to the beloved. Such release does not mean becoming a hollow tube, a chute through which gifts quickly slide without leaving a mark. The kind of gifts of which the Contemplation speaks, including one's very self, are meant to be received and relished, and then to be released.

The second great dynamic of poverty, then, is a pivotal human act: *a grateful response of love, a letting go into the hands of love*. It is the river reality raised to human and godly proportions. Haughton makes a crucial distinction in this regard. There is a big difference between releasing and being deprived. The wonderful exchange of gifts in the love relationship will sour if it is perceived as a ripping away of what is mine. A child that is too quickly taken from its mother longs forever for what it did not get enough of. This is deprivation. On the other hand, a child naturally puts aside things it has enjoyed long enough. Human beings, whatever their age, are meant to get their fill and only then move on. The vow of poverty can be a guise for deprivation: dank, uncomfortable surroundings; a mateless existence when one has come to crave just the presence of a beloved; and so on. Poverty means just the opposite: it means a warm and satisfied relation of love, in which one can never release enough to the loved one. Instead of a "giving-up," as in "I gave up ice cream for Lent," poverty represents a "giving to," as in "I desire to give this to my beloved."

People in a religious order could well ask themselves about this aspect of their own practice of poverty. Have they let in the gifts of life, the gifts from God, well enough to enable them to let go? Or have they subscribed to the *rule* of poverty without its interior meaning? In other words, have they let themselves be deprived of what they still have a need for? Deprivation lingers in the soul, coloring the desires and creating aversions in a person. Sometimes it is not the real vow of poverty but the background deprivations in a specific person's life that make this vow difficult or even repugnant.

The vow of poverty represents a collaboration and solidarity with the layperson's project, which is the same thing done in a different manner. A husband and a wife must pour out their lives, centrally to each other, by the same token to their children and parents, and thereby to all peoples with whom their lives connect, and to God. Property in this family realization serves the purpose of building the kingdom. If one or the other person begins to cling to a possession or interest or opinion, the flow of love is blocked and the disintegration begins—or better, the freezing of loving unity. Just as is the case with religious orders, the family's flowing love depends for its source upon the grace of Christ, which is to say, the Spirit. Like the lake upstream, God's Spirit is source of all true human river-life. Seen in this way, religious vows and (Chris-

tian) marriage vows have the same wellspring, and neither is somehow “better” than the other.

What shape should vowed religious poverty take? The Three Kinds of Humility hold a clue. Let us speak about the concept of humility and then see briefly what form it might take in Ignatian poverty.

Humility may be just another word for poverty, since humility’s opposite, pride, means attachment to things (reputation, appearance, success, possessions, and so forth). Real humility has to be differentiated from a groveling, self-degrading attitude. Some say that the word instead implies truth: a truthful (and therefore nonexalted) view of one’s own self. I am “only this and not more”; “I am at least this and not less.”<sup>14</sup> If our discussion above is near the mark, then each human being, at his or her best, is meant to be “empty”; that is, to be a free-flowing center of relationship and love. Each is to receive gratefully and to release all gifts into the hands of love. Humility brings us to accept this liberating and truthful vision of our own selves.

As is well known, Ignatius describes three kinds or degrees of humility. In the first, he establishes a ground condition: One will never so wound oneself and one’s relation to God as to take an action that would sever the relation. In Ignatius’s language, this would be to “violate a commandment.” In the second he promotes the kind of release that the Principle and Foundation from the *Spiritual Exercises* describes. No attachment to anything. Receive and let go, for the service of God. Here the loving relation to God gains precision.

In the third type the relationship becomes most precise. Here the connection is not to God-in-general, but to God-as-present-to-the-world-in-Jesus. Because Jesus the Christ is the fullest realization possible of godly receiving and giving in the human world, our river-flow is from and to this Jesus, in the concrete events of his life. We ingest these specific events and their seasons in the liturgy; we become one with them. Therefore our humility and our poverty mean becoming more and more like Jesus, the greatest example of river-flow. How did Christ receive and let go? He chose poverty rather than riches, insults instead of honor, and the reputation of a worthless fool rather than of a wise and prudent person. None of this makes any sense; in fact it is crazy, except on the premise we have been describing. Riches, honor, and pride are ways of avoiding being one’s self, of substituting things for one’s flowing self. Persons who are their very selves and are therefore in ultimate right relation to things,

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<sup>14</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld notes that “humility is just as much the opposite of self-abasement as it is of self-exaltation.” He adds, “To have humility is to experience reality, not *in relation to ourselves*, but in its sacred independence. It is to see, judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves. . . . In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each man a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses” (*Markings* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964], 174).

people, and God can seek poverty, insults, and humiliation and still expect to find themselves. In fact, these are dramatic ways to let it happen. The shocking recommendation of seeking insults and worse with Christ becomes the most real way of finding ourselves in Christ, because it stands on the human foundation of being one's own relational, flowing self, instead of relying on externals for one's own identity. How does this affect religious poverty? We can each draw our own conclusions. This much is clear: Religious poverty presumes members who are on their way to this kind of freedom, in this way. To be one with Christ is to unite with him in the way he lived human life to its fullest. It is to flow like a river.

Perhaps a summary would prepare us to go on to the topic of chastity/celibacy. I said that the vow of poverty is an attitude and action founded on love. It presumes and is an outgrowth of the attitude found in the river allegory. First, it comes from a robust and healthy receiving, a savoring of all creation's gifts, from pins to paper clips, from sunsets to shared souls. I noted a certain reluctance of most people to let all this in; true and free self-possession is needed if the door is to be left open. Poverty is therefore founded on a healthy love of oneself, even of the hidden and heretofore hated aspects. This is a corollary to the first dynamic. The second great dynamic, I said, is release. Human beings are to hold very lightly all the wonderful gifts, free from attachment, working to place them out of gratitude in the hands of the other.

Then I said that poverty consists not only of freedom from inordinate attachments but of an insertion as well into the great love relation with God: receiving love and grace, desiring to give over absolutely everything out of grateful love. This kind of giving does not represent a deprivation but a fulfillment of what it means to be oneself. Finally, in any loving relation with God, I said that we come to love God revealed: Jesus, in his own free release of everything the world esteems and holds dear. This forms the interior basis for communal poverty.

## Celibacy

Sexual and affective capacities are perhaps the most intense capacities of human loving. How can their nonuse be a satisfactory expression of love? Many young laypersons look at religious life as impossible or at least ill-advised because a life without sex seems ugly and undesirable. Sex to them is a "right" that should not be taken away. Moreover, some think that fear of sex or the guilt of it stands behind the vow of chastity or celibacy. And there is the loneliness experienced by many Jesuits, at least at some time. Would not a mate solve this? My purpose here is not to rehabilitate the vow of celibacy somehow in the face of an increasingly sexualized world, but to search for the depths of celibacy's human foundation. In the face of growing popular opinion to the

contrary, what can be said about celibacy as a healthy and fully human state of life?

Since all of us are gendered beings, every action is tinged with sexuality in a broader sense. This writer cannot light a match without doing it as a male, with everything implied somehow present, from attitudes to aptitude. I can nuance my gendered response by softening it, developing opposite approaches, in short by “developing my feminine side,” but I can never erase it. Sexuality-as-gender is something no one can forgo, even though it is offered as part of a grateful gift to God.

Celibates vow to refrain from explicit genital sexuality. In this essay I would like to define celibacy as abstinence from genital sexual relations, and chastity as restriction of explicit sexuality to those relationships that are proper. Chastity moderates and regulates the sexual appetite. A married person appropriately engages in sexual relations with the partner, thus making a chaste use of the sexual capacity, because such activity is an enfleshment of the flowing relationship of love between the partners. They restrict their sexual acts to this relation, so as not to scatter the union and render it mute. They are chaste but not celibate. The source of the married relationship, of course, is the very same human one that I have been describing: the grateful, generous human identity symbolized by river flow. It is important for the partners to remember also the wider meaning of sexuality, so that the whole person is engaged in the marriage and in life.

Chastity for the celibate does not rule out the engagement of the whole person in relationships. But the commitment at the basis of celibacy somehow involves refraining from those relations that would naturally imply sexual ratification. The question of the vow we are considering, then, is more about celibacy than chastity. How is celibacy, the abstinence from explicit sexual relations, a part of the river-flow of human life? Is not celibacy a canceling of something quite necessary for an integral life?

To answer, we must discuss sexuality and its place in human existence. Life is not primarily about having sex, it is about something deeper. Sexual faculties are only one way to accomplish the far more important goal of becoming fully human. I have argued in these pages that one does this by imitating water in motion—receiving all, releasing all. In other words, one becomes oneself by becoming more and more apt for loving relations. When physical sexuality is integrated into this process, it serves as a means toward that end.

Sexual integration ranks as a most difficult human task. Growth is needed, development of the whole personality, increasing acceptance of delayed satisfaction, widening of one’s scope to include the other as the goal instead of just pleasure, acceptance of pleasure as referencing the other, and so on. No one comes to this in a day. It takes time, experience, patience, and maturity. A

sexuality integrated into the whole personality forms the subject of our investigations, not an unintegrated or casual entertainment.

How can such integration take place? The prerequisite to celibacy—or to married love—is self-possession, the kind I spoke of above. It includes a gentle revering of oneself in the sexual/affective aspects. How kind our Source is to provide this marvelous capacity in us. Our lives are forever blessed because of it.

To put it another way, in order to integrate so unruly a passion into myself, I must already be (or be becoming) a self. Full sexuality wants me to have access to my feelings, my specific memories, my desires. Most of all, I must have a sense of what psychologists sometimes call “my own terrain.” There has to be within me “a place to come home to,” a kind of personal territory within which I am welcomed by my own self. This is a realm I do not have to wrest away from others—be they lovers, superiors, or rules—in order to be freely myself. It is mine and it is me. It is my own love of and confidence in myself. The lack of a self for very long causes pain, anxiety, and social maladjustment. The presence of it lets me be with myself. Contained in my personal terrain is my sexually affective capacity, coloring all else. Capacity for sex will still be there if I am someone who lacks a trustworthy internal territory; but it will then become a way of searching for the home and relationality I lack, engaging in truly promiscuous sexual acts for that purpose.

Take the case of Joe. He was sexually active with a number of women, but he was still thoroughly attached to his wife, a woman named Jane. He could not imagine life without her, even though he was not faithful to her. She represented everything he was not, flexibility, softness, openness, ability to receive. The truth was, however, that he had never let himself love or accept these very same qualities within himself: they were not allowed as part of his internal terrain. Because all parts of ourselves want to be possessed by their owners, these qualities do an “end run.” They direct their owner to themselves *as they are found in someone else*. This state forced Joe to possess Jane in order to have the qualities he would not allow within himself. Joe did that particularly through sex.

When Jane finally felt too confined by Joe’s possessive love, she tried to change the relationship and finally she tried to discontinue it. Joe became angry at each stage, became even more possessive and jealous. She was ripping away part of his very self, he thought. In fact, he actually needed to widen his personal terrain by allowing these qualities as his own. Through counseling Joe began to do this, and gradually he became more able to let Jane be herself—which was not always open and flexible—instead of making her an answer to his unhealthy need. She began to relax too, and the marriage started to flower, with sexuality as a more integral way to love. Lack of internal terrain had kept them apart.



This is only one example. Loneliness too can be a result of not being at home with oneself. Sexual activity often looks like a way to escape from loneliness, in the same way that possessive relationships can seem to give self-possession. Most popular songs urge relief for loneliness by having the lover around, maybe continuously. Yet how many times have counselors heard stories firsthand of acute loneliness told by men and women who in fact *do* have mates and offspring and many social friends? It is the lack of a true relation with oneself that produces real and pervasive loneliness, not a lack of lovers, friends, and associates. Granted, sometimes only a committed, sexually affective relationship can aid a person in finding and becoming his or her own self. But this proves the point. I must find myself if I am to be healthy and sexually integral.

Once I do find myself, does this mean I will never need other people? Perhaps the operative word in this question is "need." If I need others to ward off aloneness, I will still be either lonely or else crammed full of activity at all times. *Personal terrain includes within itself, as a component part, openings to the other.* Personal territory means my own way of receiving and letting go; it does not mean "filling up" or "closing off." To the extent that I become truly and freely myself, I will engage in loving relationships not out of sheer need but out of regard for the other. I will not tend to languish alone, since my soul is at home with itself and is inviting others in. I will not tend to attach myself inappropriately to others (or things), because to do so would surrender and replace my personal terrain.

Surprisingly, religious people can become attached also to God. This is a childlike happening. They come to depend on God for every need, as they would on a parent, and they are never lonely because Jesus is always present with them. The problem is not the child-to-parent nature of this relationship. But if this is the person's only or main relationship to God, it may mask a lack of self-possession. To put it another way, though we all still harbor our immature attitudes, we are not meant to be immature adults. Mature self-possession means that one relates to God less out of empty need and more out of gratitude and surrender of a self that one already freely possesses. In a sense we have to let go even of God, so we can relate more and more freely to the real God. God can be my "helper" and my "rock," but only if that status does not replace my own self.

It is time to address the main question. I have said that the self-loving and self-possessing person is able to be freely and integrally sexual. Sexual activity becomes a way to relate lovingly to others. Would I say, therefore, that genital sexuality is the privileged and best way to relate lovingly in freedom to another person? If so, how can anyone swear off sex and hope to remain fully human? Is celibacy really repression and frigidity? Sometimes yes, and that is the bane of the vow. But at this point we encounter the mysterious manner of love. To ask how one can surrender one's very genital sexuality is to ask the same question as this: How could a loving God possibly give over his own child

Jesus to a cruel death? If life is such a gift, how can Jesus' death be a fully human act? If sexuality is such a gift, how can abstaining from sexual relations be a fully human act? The answer to both questions is suggested by the river discussion: In each case there is a free gift that is being released into the hands of love. The relationship of mutual love with God encompasses such depth that one desires to give even intellect and will, even life itself, even the affective/genital capacities in response to a love so great. Jesus did this. We must not be fooled by his language in the Gospel of John to the effect that he only does what the Father commands. These statements mean that he received everything he was from God the Source and that he "returned" everything to the Source out of grateful love. Vowed religious want to do this, even as regards sexual affectivity. Everything is gift. A deeper and more pervasive human dynamic founds celibacy, the same dynamic that makes responsible sexual actions possible.

The interesting phrase "to have sex" suggests inadvertently how far culture is from this understanding. Anything I "have," in the sense that I am attached to it, subtracts from my personal identity as a freely loving individual. For its part, the river wavelet does not reserve part of itself so that it can gain some stability. Its identity is not to have but to flow. I am to receive my sexuality as a living gift, and then release it in whatever manner is appropriate to my life and to the loving relationship I am in. This is to act chastely. Though the "Take, Lord" does not mention sexuality by name, this capacity is surely high on the list of gifts that are lovingly offered to the loving God, with no strings attached. We give the more important and significant gift to the more important and significant beloved.

A word about the connection of celibacy and community in religious orders will complete this section. I have talked of celibacy or chastity as a *relational* entity, not a solitary one. Instead of being a refusal of interaction and intimacy, celibacy thrives only when it describes people who are finding themselves as lovingly open to others and to God. Surely this is a reason for Ignatius's strict procedures in screening candidates and for the long period of training he prescribed. Is the person progressing in the self-possession and maturity that founds real relationships in charity?

Such a condition in members would give them the security of having received all the gifts necessary to life (though these are not what the popular culture assumes them to be) together with the confidence that one will continue to receive them from their Source. If a man or woman has said no to the grateful reception of nourishment, the possibility of a well-founded chastity or celibacy will be low. To block grateful receptivity is to make oneself ravenous. Appreciation of beauty, of a painting or symphony, say, engages all one's sensitivities, even those that edge over into sexual affect. I am not meant to freeze any of my affects, even this one. Partial or entire deprivation of drives will make the system hungry for pleasure, seeking it now in grosser and lower

ways. These inevitably include nonintegrated sexual actions, the very thing a walling-off of everything sexual was supposed to exclude! It is a fully nourished person, not a starved one, who can live the vow of chastity.

The more a balanced openness is in place, the more members can relax favorite idiosyncratic needs, controls, possessiveness, dislikes, and so on, the very things that make community life more difficult. The more a healthy celibacy is present, the less will members show a distant coldness to one another on the one hand and affective dependency on the other. Men or women who love well—in the sense I have been describing—will be able to love one another in the coeffer toward apostolic objectives. I admit that this is an idealistic picture; but, again, the present study is presenting a goal toward which Jesuits and other religious human beings can work, individually and in common, not a coercive standard to which all must conform. The ideal is simple: Community in the Society is best founded on mature and flowing love, the kind that celibacy is meant to attain.

Let me gather these reflections on the vow of chastity. I have said that in the broader meaning of sexuality every action and thought is tinged with gender reality. But even specifically sexual capacities are not so much a right as a gift. As such they are a way to accomplish a far more important goal: existence as a full, integral human being. This implies development and integration of sexuality as a part of one's life. The main prerequisite for celibacy, and for married love as well, is self-possession in the best sense. We must be able to come home to ourselves. This, I said, is the structural answer to pervasive loneliness. Becoming oneself means coming to have what I called a "personal terrain," a kind of "self-space" that contains, as a component part, openings and invitations to the other. These contrast with a movement toward attachment—to some other person or to God, since attachment results in a compromise of my personal terrain—or toward rugged aloneness.

Not only should celibates not hide from their gendered identity, they should promote it and even revel in it. But the real question still required an answer: How can relinquishing genital sexuality ever signify anything but sterility and suppression? I said that celibacy operates in the same mysterious manner as God did when he relinquished Jesus to humiliation and death. Jesus displayed God's own kind of flowing love in handing over everything he had received, everything God had given in love and now received back as the ultimate gift. This was Jesus' great move in his ongoing relation with the loving Source and with the human beings of the earth. He became like a river, emptying and being filled at every moment. Celibates are meant to do this too, offering not only intellect and will but sexually explicit affectivity as well.

I noted that grateful reception of all gifts is a safety valve for the celibate, since delectation is needed by everyone and undernourishment breeds depravity. This fact reemphasized the necessity of receiving well. Community

life among healthy celibates presupposes the kind of affective love that undergirds celibacy as I have described it. Relations in general need this loving affect, but especially those in religious community. Christians are all developing into Jesus-like people, whose acts of self-possession and love mirror and unite with those of God's own child, the Christ of God. Here celibacy has its roots.

## Obedience

A recent study, "Future of Religious Orders in the United States," reports that current great shifts in American culture have been paralleled in religious life. These include individualism, cultural assimilation, and democratization of all authority.<sup>15</sup> The study detects a leveling of traditional notions of obedience in favor of democratic ideals. In particular,

Authority in many American institutions, including religious life, has undergone *deconstruction*. Variable understandings of consensus, subsidiarity, discernment and leadership have diffused [our] understandings of authority. This, coupled with the dynamics of individualism, limited understandings of obedience and the separation of one's spiritual life from the life of the Christian community, has made the exercise of authority extremely difficult.<sup>16</sup>

Such vast changes also make the vow of obedience difficult to understand. In order to begin our discussion, then, let us start with the wider reality, community.

Robert Bellah gives helpful definitions of community.<sup>17</sup> He says that community ("in the strong sense," as opposed to media usage such as "the car-dealer community") has the following characteristics. It consists of

- ▶ a group of people who are socially interdependent,
- ▶ who participate together in discussion and decision making,
- ▶ and who share certain *practices* that both define the community and are nurtured by it.

This kind of community is nearly 'always a *community of memory*, defined in part by its past and its memory of the past. "Practices" are defined as shared activities undertaken simply because they are good in themselves. Normally they are what Bellah calls "practices of commitment," since they tend to incorporate their doers in the community. Pre-Vatican II "practices" in the Society were quite specific: rising early, daily Mass, morning prayer at the bell, reading at table, cassocks, recreation after dinner, and so on. Today's practices of commitment would be interesting matter for another article, but the following can be tentatively proposed: province congresses, ordinations, meals to-

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<sup>15</sup> From the study's research executive summary, published in *Origins* 22, no. 15 (Sept. 24, 1992): 270.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 271 (emphasis added).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 333-35.

gether, drinks before dinner, community meetings, discussions, and so on. In particular, eating together has become one of the main daily “practices.”

BellaH contrasts community in this sense with what he names “lifestyle enclaves.” These are formed by people who

- ▶ share some feature of private life,
- ▶ express their identity by shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities,
- ▶ are not interdependent (that is, they do not act together in an organized fashion for a common purpose),
- ▶ do not share a history.

An example would be golfing buddies, bridge groups, bowling partners. People in a lifestyle enclave dress alike, more or less, and do things together for fun. Immediately the suspicion arises that Jesuit meals together could be interpreted as promoting a lifestyle enclave. Also this warns us against too much reliance on leisure activities to renew the sense of community that post-Vatican II changes may seem to have taken away.

In any case, I would like to accept for the moment BellaH’s notion of community. The Society of Jesus certainly ought to be a community in this sense, not simply a conglomeration of lifestyle enclaves. Some think that the individual works of members—teaching, ministering to the faithful, celebrating liturgies for people outside the community—have taken away the inner integration of a real community. Can the Society be described as men who are socially *interdependent*, who have the sense of participating together in discussion and decision making, and who engage in “practices” that define and nurture real community?

Shared decision was less obvious in the older Society, where the superior gave orders and the presumption was that everyone would follow them. Decisions were *not* made by “us” but by “him.” The very names “superior” and “subject” point to this status. Even so, superiors’ decisions always were meant to rest on the already existing consensus. If not, they would have no foundation. Today discussion and codecision have a more overt place. The deliberation about repartitioning provinces is one example. Provincials conducted a lengthy polling of members in order to come to a shared decision, and the polled opinions influenced the decision greatly, which at this point is not to repartition. Also, the Society is clearly a “community of memory,” based on remembrance of the founder, the history, and the evolving purpose of the order. Instilling relevant memories is one of the main purposes of the novitiate.

What place does authority have in “shared decision making” today? During my theology years, one of my teachers gave a simple model to illustrate the meaning of authority and law. When a small group of people come together for a common purpose, he said, each member feels responsible for carrying out whatever needs doing to accomplish this purpose. Whoever is last out locks the

door; no need to delegate someone to do this. When a group expands through time and space, duties have to become specified. The wider community designates certain people to take care of tasks that transcend the responsibility of the large group: bookkeeping or disbursement of funds, for instance. This does not mean that other members can be fiscally irresponsible. The financial officer does the job not *instead of* the others but *on behalf of* them, assuming their cooperation and responsibility. All of this takes place to ensure the continued existence and unity of the expanded community. The community also enacts laws, which are like outside boundaries, violation of which indicates that the law-breaking member no longer has minimal identification with the body of the community.

Growth and dispersion in the early Society of Jesus created this kind of need for maintenance of common vision and forward thrust. Members put someone in charge of the decision-making function, someone who embodied the meaning and ideals of the whole community. That person was the superior. Compassion and lived Jesuit spirituality head the list of requisites for Jesuit superiors appointed in this fashion. The Society vests a certain ultimacy in the decisions of superiors. As one rector put it, "All this consultation is fine, but the decision is mine." This is true in the Society; but even so, in the new as well as in the old Society, the superior is not meant to make decisions *instead of* the members, but *in concert with* members and in accordance with the Society's commonly held identity through history. Instead of contradicting Bellah's definition of a community's "discussion and decision making," superiors are a means of carrying it out. The vow of obedience, therefore, means taking part in the community of the Society. To use an image I heard in my novitiate, Jesuits are like a team of strong horses who need someone to channel them in the common, desired direction.

Mention of the word "channel" brings to mind the river image, this time in a community sense. Rushing waters create the very banks that restrain them. A river has to have shores, on pain of becoming a flabby pool. A society needs leaders. When the force of strong currents yearns for a change in direction, the shores yield but also direct the change. Sometimes the action of a particularly strong shoreline—or superior—itself mandates the change. Throughout all of this, of course, there is implied pressure and even pounding on the restraining shores. Superiors sometimes have to take a battering—in some cases for right reasons, in others because the members are making life difficult.

Channeling describes married life as well. The flow of love for one another cuts a channel for the husband and wife and for the children. All are directed by this channel and helped to flow together. Families are, after all, communities in Bellah's sense. Wife, husband, and children form a socially interdependent group, participating in discussion and decision making, and engaging in "practices of commitment." This implies individuals who are coming to a sense of themselves—with adults further along and youths still

taking first steps. Obedience in this sense means fidelity to the channel of the river that is a particular family.

What is it within the individual that makes him (or her in women's orders) apt for the kind of religious community obedience I have been describing? Like the other vows, religious obedience presumes a *letting go into the hands of love*. This is specifically a letting go of self-will. To say that someone is "self-willed" can at times be a compliment, but in the present sense it means an attempt to grasp and keep. As implied above, this attempt compromises the flowing human reality each of us is called to. Let us spend a moment on self-will and its opposite, as demonstrated in the metaphor of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness.

Jesus enters the desert and eats nothing for forty days. He is thus symbolized as empty, perhaps referring to the true nature of human reality as an openness to receive. The devil figure intuitively knows Jesus' power. He first tempts Jesus to make use of that power to assuage forty days of hunger by the extraordinary act of turning a stone into bread. Jesus' answer is very interesting. In Luke 4:4 he says, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" This seems an incomplete answer. "Man" does live by bread *also*, and in this case it would taste awfully good. The full meaning only becomes clear when one hears the rest of the sentence, which is included in Matthew 4:4, quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." Jesus is to receive bread when it is given; but more, he is to receive the gift of his being from God the Source, to stay empty in order to receive that gift. The present temptation is therefore to self-will. Take instead of receive. Use your power to get something for yourself. Jump outside the shores of the river and flow where you will.

The second temptation is more explicit. Satan shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world and offers to give him "all this authority and their glory." The devil, who is here the figure of competition with God for power, says he possesses this power and glory and can distribute it to whom he will. The temptation is thus to receive strength not from God in a love relationship but from the devil in a power play. This becomes obvious by the condition attached: "if you will worship me." In other words, "Subscribe to my plan for the river and there will be no more shores to constrain you." Jesus declines, with another reference to Deuteronomy: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve" (6:13). He refuses to substitute self-will for the gift of God.

Finally, the devil asks Jesus to test God. Throw yourself off this pinnacle and force God to save you with angels. Did not God promise to have them guard you? Jesus says, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (referring to Deuteronomy 6:16). But why not? Is God not up to it? Or is it forbidden? This is not the reason. Waves do not coerce water from the source. Rivers

flow because abundant water is freely given, not extracted. If I am unsatisfied with what I receive, if I set up conditions to force more out of God, I am no longer gratefully receiving at all; I am taking by manipulation and force. Jesus' humanity and godliness were both at stake in this temptation.

Religious obedience is the opposite of the self-will to which Jesus was tempted. To receive everything from God, to let it flow within the channel of community life—these require men or women whose inner self is acknowledged, whose self-identity is, however tenuously, already being achieved and therefore does not grasp for control, does not decide to ignore the channel in which it runs. All religious are tempted to self-will, and the story of Jesus' temptations forms a wonderful example of resisting the temptation.

I am struck by the very next sentence after Luke's account of these temptations. Jesus returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit." Power. This is what Jesus has exercised in the temptations, but it was the loving power of God's Spirit. Theology holds that the Holy Spirit is the purveyor and reality of God's mysterious inner trinitarian life: God who always receives instead of taking, who always gives lavishly of himself instead of holding back. This godly power of love, the source of human life well lived, was poured out on Jesus in the temptations. It is the power of the Spirit, whose presence is the wellspring of the Society's shared life and the grounding for the vow of obedience. We too are meant to be filled with that Spirit.

In this way obedience shows itself as an adult virtue, not a child's. The child cannot have disposition over its own life and therefore must do what appropriate adults say. If it refuses, it must be disciplined. The child has not yet attained much self-possession, so it grabs and hangs on to other children's toys. Though it is a member of the family community, someone else makes that community function, allowing the child a blessed freedom for play and growth. In an adult community, on the other hand, all members make it function. Self-possession (or growth toward it) is highly in place. Men or women have received and then given over their will to God, not by crushing it, but by allowing the gift to be directed by God and the community through superiors. Only a caricature of adult obedience would have members be told what to do as if they were mere children. It is not that they *must* do what the superior says, it is that they *desire* with full humanity to receive and give their whole self in the movement toward God in the world.

What happens when the superior is clearly wrong? Or when a superior acts, inappropriately, like the parent of errant children? Of course, members should do everything possible to set things right (following the example of Ignatius with popes). But in any human system there will be mistakes and misguidance, and these will inflict damage. What then? Does this teach us obedience of a different kind? Or nonobedience?



The Letter to the Hebrews has a curious passage: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, *and he was heard for his godly fear*. Although he was a Son, *he learned obedience through what he suffered*" (Heb. 5:7f. [emphasis added]). He *was heard*? But in fact God did not save him from death; God allowed life to return only after the cruel death Jesus had to undergo fully.

The usual presupposition has it that if we are heard God will give us what we want. But is this not again the child's attitude? If I ask in the right way, Mom or Dad will answer my every need. Perhaps the cry Jesus addressed to God was an adult cry of the heart, the sound of a river flowing, of a person who really did give everything over to God even in the midst of terrible trial. This cry was heard and accepted in love.

What about Jesus *learning* obedience? Would we not presume that the Son of God already had obedience at his core? But human obedience means opening to what is present in the world: sin and misdeeds along with the good. This reality has to be learned in its specifics by a human being. To open to another person does not mean receiving just their good points—certainly these are cause for gratitude. But loving someone means taking down the bars and letting the whole person in, both the gifts and the gouges. If we want only the good, we do not really love the person as he or she is. In his passion Jesus received in love not only God but also human beings, in their wonder, in their quiet splendor, and in their mistakes and hatred. Refusal of their evil aspects would have derailed the fully human center of his person. In came love and in came suffering at the hands of the loved ones. Instead of agreeing at last with the devil and using his power to shield himself, according to Luke's description of his temptation Jesus remained true to the river-flow of his love for God and people. He was not self-willed. He learned to let in the force of self-will turned against him. He learned obedience.

This reminds me of Dag Hammarskjöld's short description of forgiveness in *Markings*. Forgiveness is *bearing the consequences of the action of another, because I myself have been forgiven*.<sup>18</sup> This kind of forgiveness is close to the heart of obedience. Its opposite, rejection of a community member who offends, for instance; will wound the human soul of the rejector. Can we turn forgiving obedience toward other Jesuits and toward superiors who fall short of the job

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<sup>18</sup> "Forgiveness breaks the chain of causality because he who 'forgives' you—out of love—takes upon himself the consequences of what *you* have done. Forgiveness, therefore, always entails a sacrifice.

"The price you must pay for your own liberation through another's sacrifice is that you in turn must be willing to liberate in the same way, irrespective of the consequences to yourself" (*Markings*, 197).

for which we empower them? If we do, it will be a flow of both gratitude and generosity, a giving motivated by how much one has been given and forgiven.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, what about the divine authority of superiors? Does not God ratify all authority in the Church, in a descending hierarchy down to the subject? From what I have said above, the following answer might be appropriate: In the love relation of God and Jesuits described in the Contemplation, God is fully present and active. God uses the mechanisms of ecclesiastical authority, general congregations, appointments by Father General, *ternas*, polling of members, and so on as means to bring about the godly purpose of the Society and its members. In short, we are God's means. The "sociological" aspects do not replace the godly; they are its mode. A one-sided view says *either* God authorizes superiors *or* we do it. A more complete insight accepts both alternatives. The whole intent of this paper has been to uncover the full intimacy of God's relation to human beings: God lovingly within us as we act in the manner human beings and human groupings act. Does God authorize superiors? Yes. Does the community at large authorize them? Yes. This is the miraculous manner of love.

Perhaps that is enough for this vow. A retrospect of the vow of obedience will bring us close to the end. Following Bellah, I said initially that the Society and its local communities consist of socially interdependent people who share "practices of commitment," practices that rest on and activate their collective memory. These people participate together in discussion and decision making. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they delegate decision making to superiors, an assigning that does not evacuate a member's own capacity to decide, but mingles it with that of the whole Society. The mechanism for all this is the structure and law of the Society under the Church—all divinely warranted because of the intimate involvement of God in the lives of the members. Superiors become an analogy to the channel of a river, something to contain and direct the great flow of lives received and given over to God in the world.

I contrasted this kind of love to self-will, in which one grasps advantages for oneself and manipulates others (and superiors) to get what one wants. We saw Jesus doing the opposite of this each time the devil tempted him. Those

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<sup>19</sup> Jesus himself made an example of this principle, if I read him right. In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus asks which person will love a creditor more, the one who was "forgiven" fifty denarii, or the other who was released from five hundred. The Pharisee answers, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." Exactly, Jesus replies. Because this woman before you is showing such gratitude, she must know she has been forgiven her many sins. The one who is forgiven little loves little; the one who is forgiven much, who is loved much and has *received* that love, will in turn love much. This is the motivation we have been tracing throughout the present essay. If religious people do receive the love of forgiveness, they will in turn desire to love and forgive each other, and forgive the superior who must issue an odious command, or who erroneously prescribes precisely the wrong thing.

who refuse to abandon the love association with God are “filled with the Holy Spirit,” just as Jesus was, and they are the ones who can practice the communitarian vow of holy obedience.

I did not describe such obedience as free from harm and injury. Any significant opening of oneself will let in not only good but—in this world—bad as well. Jesus “learned” this kind of forgiving love as he opened his arms wide to the other people of the world. He showed, not so much a child’s obedience, which expects to receive good only, but the obedience of a loving adult who freely opens to what is there and gives over *everything*, not as a bargain to get what one wants, but as a response of gratitude to the overwhelming generosity of what is already given. When members of the Society practice this kind of receiving and releasing love, the vow of obedience is in place. It is founded on the mysterious capacities of the human spirit, filled with the Spirit of God.

## Conclusion

**A**n overall summary might be of help now, to take the discussion back to its beginning—the river metaphor—and then to briefly retrace the implications.

I asked the reader to imagine a tiny stream trickling out of its lake source, then receiving life from other streams and from precipitation, growing wider and stronger as it goes. Its life force curves it at places, and then reverses the curves. Other big rivers join in, and the result is a great river, not just a stream. The sea toward which it runs is death, but it is also life in a greater sense, because every reality of river flow is made grander and wider, the water now running with tidal force.

The inner dynamic of river life is flow: reception and release at every moment, each movement accepting its whole life from the water behind it, giving that life completely to what is ahead. Flow is the identity, the “who I am,” of the river. Its self is a dynamic of receiving and releasing, not a solid “thing.”

The first application of this metaphorical description was to human life. Each life is like a river. If it clings to shore, trying to stop and become a solid object—dependable and secure—it ceases to have its real identity. But if a human learns to flow, he or she will find life delightful and right, more true to itself. Receiving freely and openly will bring forth gratitude, a sure sign. The loving release of everything will show itself in what others will call generosity. Receive all, release all. This is the most true, the most characteristic movement of human life. When persons search for their “true self,” when they ask “Who am I?” the answer will not be clear and definable. The mystery of each self stands always beyond our reach because it is the dynamic flow of a life that we name

Joe or Mary, yet self-possession is always necessary, a becoming one with the mysterious me that underlies everything I am and know.

The next application came through the lens of faith. "Take, Lord, and receive" at first seems merely like a command to strip oneself. But its real purpose is to say how I will feel if I even glimpse all that God gives and is to me. My reception of that love will result in gratitude and in the desire to let go of everything into the hands of love. This river relation to God, which most people would desire greatly if they knew about it, is the most true, most primordial movement of Christian life. It is not individualistic, it is intrinsically related to others. To find oneself is to find this relational identity.

The ordinary state of most of us seems far from this ideal description. We resist. We often keep the door to our soul closed, hiding away the fearful inner darkness and by the same act warding off the daily gift of grace and love. Much forgiveness and patience toward our good selves are required if we are to wait for the breakthrough.

The major application of the river image was to the vows. I said that the first great dynamic of *poverty* is not to dispossess oneself but to gratefully receive, just as the river does. One cannot give away what one does not have, and to have something is to receive it with gratitude. The corollary of this first dynamic says that receiving (as well as releasing) is an action and attitude founded on healthy love of oneself. Otherwise one always craves and grabs in order to fill the unloved emptiness. The emptiness is actually a flow of goodness and it needs to be loved. This will lead to a freedom from what Ignatius called "inordinate attachments." To value created things too much is to replace our soul with them. To value them too little is to deny them entrance. The popular saying applies here: Love them and let them go.

The second dynamic of *poverty* is a grateful response, a letting go into the hands of love. The Exercises say that our river-flow is to Jesus, in the concrete events of his life. He chose poverty instead of riches, insults instead of honor, a reputation of worthlessness rather than one of wisdom and prudence. This is the ultimate act of letting go, of becoming the river. Jesus excluded anything that might compromise this flow (riches, honor, pride) and chose their opposite. He received everything from God and gave it all back to God. This Third Mode of Humility defines poverty and forms the ideal for the religious vow. All Christians are called to this kind of poverty, but the vow formalizes a commitment to it.

When it came to celibacy, I provisionally defined chastity as restricting explicit sexual activity to appropriate relations, and celibacy as involving abstinence from genital sexual relations. Since life is about something much deeper than "having sex," I spoke about sexual capabilities as an important way to accomplish the goal of becoming fully human. This would involve growing integration of such capacities into one's life and personality and a gentle

revering of oneself in one's sexual/affective aspects. Loneliness, in the pervasive sense, rather than being a necessary result of celibacy, results from the lack of a true relationship with one's own self, a relationship that lets others in. I spoke of a "personal terrain" that an individual can "come home to," an interior "place" for which there is no substitute—even by intimate relationships. This "interior terrain" is the basis for all relationships, even sexual ones. It includes real openings to the other, but does not bind one person's identity to that of the other. In other words, it is a receiving of the other and simultaneously a letting go.

Having said all this, it was time to approach the bigger question about celibacy. Genital sexuality seems like the best and most healthy way to express an integrated personality and a complete relationship. How can giving it up be an expression of love? I pondered Jesus' action on the cross. His loving relation to God and to human beings was expressed by his giving up life itself. How can death be a full expression of life? In the same way that giving up genital sexuality can. There is something far deeper in the human project than sexuality and even life. I expressed that something in the metaphor of the river: receiving and giving, finding oneself by losing oneself. If life is received as a gift, then it also can be let go of as a gift of gratitude to the beloved. If sexual capacities are a gift, then they also can be let go of as a gift of gratitude, gratitude to the one who has given every gift. River-flow defines celibacy. A healthy celibacy has as much possibility as any other way to accomplish a deeply human, deeply Christian, deeply communitarian life.

I then turned to the vow of obedience. The river reality became a symbol of the community as well as of just the individual. Many streams of life flow together into a great waterway. Rules, legislation, common discussion, practices of commitment—all serve to channel common purpose into its direction. Superiors represent this purpose as it comes into contact with present decisions. The whole worldwide group cannot make all decisions. Superiors are like the banks of the river, holding the river to its vital, ever coursing journey, as true and as faithful to the common, centuries-old purpose as human beings can be.

Persons who are apt for entering this great stream of obedience are ones who gradually, through grace, let go into the hands of love in gratitude and generosity. The opposite of this, I said, is self-will. The individual decides to flow where he or she wills, regardless of where God's river of community is going. Jesus was tempted in this way to forsake the river-path, to take instead of receive, to forsake God's kind of power and grab Satan's promise of unlimited dominion. Jesus said no to the temptations and returned from the desert charged with the "power of the Spirit." The Spirit consists of God's own quiet nature, which receives all and returns all. This Spirit is Jesus' power and the meaning of religious obedience. Obedience is the commitment of people who possess themselves and desire to give themselves, not as children who need

someone to tell them what to do, but as adults who mingle their wills with those of others out of humble love.

Finally, the presence of suffering within obedience had to be mentioned. Superiors are ordinary human beings and so are the community members. To open one's soul to the superior and fellow members of the community means letting in not only the good parts of them but also the bad. Jesus learned this kind of obedience on the cross: not refusing, not rejecting, but letting in everything of the human condition. Jesus was always "yes," even when he said it to the difficult "yes and no" reality of people. This is the river-flow of the vows.

I want to make just two more summary comments. First, all the vows are intrinsically communitarian and personal at the same time. *Communitarian* because the "terrain" I establish by becoming myself is never isolated and self-centered. The vows each reflect an openness to the other that is intrinsic to each human soul. The vow of poverty asks me specifically to receive gratefully all that I am and have, and to receive humbly the other persons who relate to me: the people I serve in ministry, the good friends, the other members of my community, the poor, the people of the world. Because Jesuits are poor in this sense, they do not need to exclude others, but can receive them and give back to them. Chastity, instead of warding off intimacy and relationship, establishes them, inviting me to a gendered reception of the beauty of God, the world, and other persons. In response, it surrenders everything in gift, even the affective/sexual powers. It is therefore a striving for complete and appropriate openness to the other, especially in community. Finally, obedience is the community vow par excellence. Here a grateful giving of oneself infuses the sociological structure of community. Obedience is a channel not just for my personal life but for the direction of all of us together, in loving union for the sake of the apostolate.

The vows are *personal* because the flow within an individual's human spirit gives the worth of that life. The person does stand alone before God in this sense, because the person is the one who decides to open or to close to the Holy Spirit of love. No one else, no system, no law can do this for me or instead of me. I commune with Jesus' life in liturgy so that I can more and more take into myself the Spirit of gratitude and giving that he lived on earth.

By way of a second comment, one more elaboration is needed of the *ideal* nature of the picture I have drawn. Would it not be wonderful if all the above were fully true of each Jesuit here and now? But each of our spirits recoils from what seems such a heavy task. Perhaps we stand accused. Yet we are not accused and the task is really the lightest of all. It describes what all of us would be like together if we were each truly ourselves, holding everything lightly in our open hands. If we each had overcome our cravings, our self-will, our tendency to hoard, if we had resolved the inner tensions that each life has acquired in its own course toward the great flow of the Society, we would be

freely ourselves and generously members of the union toward God. We have each come a good way toward such realization, and we each resist in crucial aspects. Should we regret the latter? Yes. But Jesus' answer was to open his arms wider, to learn the forgiving obedience proper to any human being whatsoever, whether married or single or bound by religious vows: forgiveness of oneself and forgiveness of others. This is the river-reality of human life, ever flowing toward the sea which is death, which is life, which is union with the God of love.



## SOURCES

Claudio Aquaviva, S.J.

### *To the Provincials of the Society on the Employment of the Spiritual Exercises*

*This letter was sent by Father Aquaviva (1542–1615), the fifth general of the Society of Jesus, on the occasion of the publication of the official Directory of the Spiritual Exercises. Aquaviva was born at Naples, the son of the duke of Atri. He entered the novitiate in 1567 at the age of twenty-five and within fourteen years of his entrance had already been provincial of Naples and then of Rome before being elected general of the Society in 1581, at the age of thirty-nine. He was the youngest man ever elected general and also the one to hold that post longest in the history of the Society, for thirty-three years.*

*The official Directory of 1599 achieved publication at the end of a long period of research, experimentation, and discussion. An excellent brief account of the enormous labor involved can be found in the essay by Ignacio Ipparaguirre, S.J., in volume 76 of the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu* that deals with the texts of all the directories from 1540 to 1599. Suffice it to say here that the whole project was begun more than three times, several commissions and a very large number of Jesuits put themselves to the task, three general congregations and even more province congregations dealt with it, and four superiors general worked at getting the project completed. The Institute of Jesuit Sources hopes at some future date to publish a volume containing English translations of the many directories of the Exercises up to and including the official Directory of 1599.*

W e have on many other occasions urged the use of the Spiritual Exercises, since it is evident how from the very beginning of the Society God our Lord has fostered the help of souls through them. Now, however, with the *Directory to the Exercises* being sent to the provinces, finally revised by the committee appointed in the Fifth General Congregation, we thought that we should not pass up this fresh occasion for even more strongly urging Your Reverence to strive with all possible fervor to awaken and stimulate the practice of the Exercises, not merely for our own men but for those outside the Society as well.

For experience has shown that God regularly communicates spiritual grace through the Exercises not only to religious in their various vocations but abundantly

also, in accord with their capacities and states, to persons in the world. For this reason; I am very anxious that our men should cultivate the Exercises by frequent personal use so as to become competent masters of them, able to give them afterwards fruitfully to lay persons. I would also like Your Reverence to urge seriously upon our confessors the practice of suggesting the Exercises to any of their penitents they judge suitable, and of gently inviting and encouraging them to make them. Once these persons have tasted their fruit, they will be the best agents for attracting and stimulating others to desire them.

Here in Rome it is clear how, once the Exercises started being given to laypeople, it proved, through God's good-



ness, extremely edifying, rewarding, and consoling for them.

This being the case, it will be necessary for local superiors to display readiness and generosity in welcoming lay-people who desire to be helped by the Exercises. Setting aside considerations of the inconvenience or even the expense that will sometimes have to be incurred, they should open wide their hearts, give priority to the spiritual fruit which with God's grace may be expected, and energetically promote this. For if superiors show themselves grudging and disinclined to receive people, it is likely that not many will come to make the Spiritual Exercises; confessors, too, if they see superiors making difficulty in this matter, will hardly be inclined to urge their penitents to request them.

It will also be helpful if, as far as is feasible, Your Reverence has a certain number of rooms set aside in each college or house for non-Jesuits wishing to make the Exercises; moreover, future houses should be built with such rooms suitably located so as not to interfere with our own men.

Since I know Your Reverence clearly realizes the great importance of this matter, and how much it would contribute to the service of God and the good of souls to have this practice progressively introduced and flourish, I consider it superfluous to spend more words on the sub-

ject. I would merely suggest that an excellent occasion for this would be conferences with superiors on the practice of government, as well as provincial congregations which bring together all the superiors along with the professed and others whom you select. I want you to make clear to them what an ardent desire the Lord has deigned to instill in me for seeing our men really zealous and laboring as strenuously as possible for the help of souls: this is what the Lord called us to this institute for, and it is of this that he will demand that we give an accounting.

For this reason, Your Reverence should not merely urge all your men forward to this zeal; you should at the same time also discuss the best means and methods for aiding the largest number of souls, urging upon our men this ministry of the Exercises as well as those of preaching, hearing confessions, and the others which we practice by virtue of our institute, so that they will take care to make use of them with fervor of spirit both for themselves and for those entrusted to them, for the glory and praise of the Lord in all things and the benefit and gain of numerous souls.

I commend myself to your prayers.

Rome, August 14, 1599.

Your Reverence's servant in the Lord,  
Claudio Aquaviva

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

Thanks to Séamus Murphy for his *STUDIES* article, "The Many Ways of Justice" (March 1994), that has been of notable service to those who will formulate Society documents on faith and justice in the future. I do have one fear, though, that an option for the poor as an integral part of Christian education *in our time* might get lost among his categories.

Taking an example from the United States, if we teach the problematic elements in U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, we do not know whether this knowledge will be used for "outcome" or "duty" or "virtue," to use his categories of ethical theories and "different operative notions of justice." But I do not think that Christian educators should be satisfied with graduates who are as ignorant and as careless as the popular media regarding the impact of U.S. foreign policy on the poor peoples in the U.S. "sphere of influence." I believe that pages 32 to 34 on "Growth Ministries" need to be reworked with more sensitivity to what integral Christian education should mean in the United States in our time.

Jack Zupez, S.J.  
St. John's College  
Belize

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Editor:

The last two issues of the *STUDIES* (Staudenmaier, "To Fall in Love with the World," and Murphy, "The Many Ways of Justice") have been extraordinarily useful to me. Thank you for encouraging

Seminar members to concern themselves with issues of social and cultural importance for your readers. It has been my experience that many of us wishing to do the Lord's work in our world easily become confused by the complexity of some of these issues.

Had Séamus Murphy's analysis of the *Many Ways of Justice* (and what a felicitous title that is!) been available to the Sacred Heart nuns ten years ago, many head- and heartaches would have been avoided. But his analysis probably could not have happened earlier. Perhaps the very experience of so many struggles about questions of closing schools, sacrificing doctoral studies, giving up colleges, is what made his clear thought possible. I gave his essay to many Religious of the Sacred Heart.

And Staudenmaier's cultural study, made with the respectful mind of a historian, is fascinating and equally useful. How many complaints have we not all read about religious communities whose members have become passive before the onslaughts of media and the politically correct use of technology! Now, thanks to that recent issue of *STUDIES*, we can understand better how this phenomenon has occurred. We are simply part of our culture, perhaps not honest enough to name ourselves capitalists, but surely members of a capitalist society that justifies a prosperity that creates a permanent underclass, furnishes 162 nations with arms and munitions, and is presently trying to avoid reform of a health system closed to millions of hardworking citizens. Since when has prosperity become the trademark of Christians?

Thank you again for providing intelligent and objective explanations of situations which so many of us have deplored instinctively and can now do so with scholarly backing for our feelings.

Mary Byles, RSCJ  
Professor Emerita  
Maryville University  
Saint Louis, Mo.

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