

GUIDES

EIDES

13

Apostolic Discernment in Common

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APOSTOLIC DISCERNMENT IN COMMON
BASIC TEXTS OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

Josep M. Rambla and Josep M. Lozano (eds.)

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PRELIMINARY NOTE

In keeping with the aims of the “Guides” collection of EIDES, we offer in these pages some basic material to help with the study and practice of *apostolic discernment in common*. Many publications have appeared over the last fifty years about *discernment in common*, and more are appearing even now, responding to the invitation of Arturo Sosa, Father General of the Society of Jesus, to apply this discernment to apostolic planning. The publication of this Booklet does not pretend to break new ground but simply to offer the support of authority to the study and application of *discernment in common* and *apostolic discernment in common* by compiling all the relevant documents from the General Congregations, as well as from the letters and other pertinent texts of the Superiors General of the Society. The journals of Ignatian spirituality and other publications have published many interesting studies and practical resources for *discernment in common* and *apostolic discernment in common*, and we make reference to them to help readers prolong their reflections and make practical applications.

The following pages contain, first of all, the words of the present Father General, Arturo Sosa, as he urges Jesuits and all those who collaborate in the Society’s works to engage in *apostolic discernment in common*. There then follows a review of earlier documents, from those of 1965, which first reawakened Jesuits to the need to practice *discernment in common*, to the significant contributions of Superior General Adolfo Nicolás. All the documents are accompanied by questions for reflection elaborated by the editors. At the end of the booklet is a glossary of words and expressions that may be unfamiliar to some readers.

We offer these pages as an aid for reflection, prayer, and group study, trusting that they will help Jesuits and collaborators toward a deeper understanding of the *apostolic discernment in common* to which we are insistently called. We also hope that the booklet will endow individuals, communities, and apostolic teams with an Ignatian spirit that is ready to practice the *apostolic discernment in common* in order to respond effectively to the challenges of our historical moment.

Finally, advancing in our practice of discernment will be one of the best ways of responding to Pope Francis’s repeated exhortations to the whole Church and to the Society of Jesus in particular.

FOREWORD

What you hold in your hands is not just an anthology of texts. It is that, to be sure, but it is much more than that. It is the account of a sudden increase in awareness, which is at the same time a proposal and a challenge: to fully incorporate *apostolic discernment in common* into the way of proceeding of all the teams, communities, organizations, and institutions that seek to be nourished by Ignatian spirituality.

In recent times the renewal of Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality has often been focused on programmatic concerns: making proclamation of the faith inseparable from promotion of justice; inculturation, interreligious dialogue, etc. There has been comparatively much less mention of the decisive importance of learning about and engaging in *apostolic discernment in common* as a way of advancing in these fundamental options. It is important to point out that, along with some founding texts that have been decisive for the Society's history, conscientious consideration of *apostolic discernment in common* has been an essential element in the renewal and transformation of the Society of Jesus in the last fifty years.

The Ignatian tradition, and especially the Spiritual Exercises that ground it and sustain it, have a strong personal and personalizing component. They orient persons toward assuming a transformative role in the world. However, this option is nowadays almost never realized individually; rather, it occurs within a framework of teams, communities, organizations, and institutions. Consequently, the quality of the decisions and options made by those same teams, communities, organizations, and institutions are absolutely decisive for the effective fulfillment of the personal election and vocation that emerge from the Exercises. As has often been said, we find ourselves not in an epoch of change but in a change of epochs, and one of the

constitutive elements of this change of epochs is the sober realization that the quality of our personal commitments and options is strongly linked to the quality of the commitments and options of the organizations within which we live and labor.

The importance of *apostolic discernment in common* must be seen in this context; in a certain sense this is the heart of the matter. It is evident that our understanding of such discernment cannot be univocal, valid a priori in any context. *Apostolic discernment in common* will vary in form, depending on where it takes place: in a community of Jesuits, in a Christian community of lay persons, in an institution of the Society of Jesus, or in an organization in which Ignatian inspiration plays an important role. Indeed, we may even speak analogously of *apostolic discernment in common* in any organization that functions with a strong sense of mission. In all these cases, it is a matter of seeking orientations for taking action and making decisions, where the key agent is not a person but a team, a community, an organization, or an institution, and where those practicing *apostolic discernment in common* are the persons who are responsible for the group (take note that *apostolic discernment in common* is not a variant of direct or representative democracy).

Apostolic discernment in common should therefore be understood as a dynamic process that is highly participatory; it is not simply the sum total of processes that individuals engage in on their own. For that very reason it requires a particular apprenticeship and practice. In a word, *apostolic discernment in common* is not the result of summing up or juxtaposing individual discernments. But neither should it be confused with just one more technique or methodology for making decisions; even less should it be understood as a decision-making process that guarantees, as Bob Dylan sings, that God is on our side. In this sense, those who undertake *apostolic discernment in common* should meditate often on what Ignatius wrote to Saint Francis Borgia: “Despite all this, I was also convinced, and still am, that while it was God’s will that I should adopt a clear position while others adopted a contrary view, ...there would be no contradiction whatsoever. The same divine Spirit could move me to take up one point of view for some reasons and could move others to the contrary for other reasons. ... May God our Lord bring about his own praise and honor.”

It has been said that a key characteristic of the Jesuit tradition is the ability to flourish amid tensions that can never be fully reconciled (e.g., contemplation and action, faith and justice, universal availability and local insertion, Christian identity and interreligious dialogue, etc.). It may be that *apostolic discernment in common* creates still another tension: between discernment and planning. There will always be those who say that the two are like oil and water; or that trying to engage simultaneously in what are at times experienced as two distinct processes is a sure road to schizophrenia; or even that one of the two processes will inevitably negate the other and that, given the way things are today, it is planning that will most likely swallow up discernment. We must tell such prophets of doom that what motivates *apostolic discernment in common* is not merely the desire for suc-

cess but greater fidelity to the mission. Such fidelity acknowledges that efficiency, earnest pursuit of objectives, and detailed planning are not irrelevant or opposed to fidelity; rather, they are required by it.

Apostolic discernment in common can be integrated into diverse collective dynamics, but such dynamics should be concretely focused in order to avoid confusion. The participants may engage in the dynamics without knowing what the objective is. Is it dialogue (about how to relate to and evaluate a decision, based on the desire to listen and learn), consultation (about a decision or a choice to be made), or a deliberation (a shared inquiry about a choice or decision to be made by the person responsible)? In any case, we should not give the name *apostolic discernment in common* to collective therapy (that is, sharing our griefs, frustrations, or wounds for the sake of healing), nor should we use it as an escape valve for the pressures that affect us (thus revealing buried and wayward tensions).

We should therefore consider carefully when *apostolic discernment in common* should be practiced. It should not be seen as the solution for all the problems and tensions produced by the exercise of responsibility, nor should it be considered suitable for every challenge faced or for every decision to be made by a team, a community, an organization, or an institution. But it can be, and it is, especially relevant for those situations where decisions must be made that involve fidelity to the institutional mission. It is also relevant when decisions are to be made or when orientations are to be taken that establish a long-lasting directionality.

Of course, the quality of the *apostolic discernment in common* should not be a matter of improvisation. The Exercises involve those who practice them in a constant and patient apprenticeship regarding examination of conscience, discernment of spirits, reform of life, and other matters. By analogy, we can say that if the leaders of an organization are not willing to carry out, in a collective way, the equivalent of the examination of conscience, discernment of spirits, and reform of life, then it will be difficult for them to benefit from the practice of *apostolic discernment in common*. After all, *apostolic discernment in common* requires, and at the same time foments, mindfulness, a state that is not activated with a click or achieved from one day to the next. Rather, it is the result of a process that demands care and dedication. It is the responsibility of those with leadership duties to facilitate this process in a deliberate manner.

It is in this context, then, that we offer this anthology of texts and hope that it will inspire the creation of fresh criteria and act as a stimulus for fomenting new practices or for refining and adapting existing practices. Above all, we want this booklet to prepare us to meet one of the most important challenges now facing the teams, communities, organizations, and institutions that desire to live in fidelity to their Ignatian inspiration.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

For some fifty years now, Jesuits and those close to them (retreatants, collaborators, members of Christian Life Communities, etc.) have increased their awareness of the importance of discernment, and especially *discernment in common*. Since some people may think that such discernment is a particularly Jesuit practice or something merely circumstantial, it is good to stress that discernment, as Father Kolvenbach reminds us, is an essential aspect of Christian life that has its roots in New Testament teachings. It is true, nonetheless, that Ignatius was especially gifted in the charism of discernment and that he presented the Spiritual Exercises as a school of discernment. In our present day, both the unprecedented challenges with which the Church must deal and the keen evangelical sensibility of Pope Francis, who is a Jesuit, impel us to undertake this evangelical task. Pope Francis himself has asked Jesuits to help initiate processes of discernment in the Church, and most especially in the training of priests.

After fifty years of growing awareness, the present Father General, Arturo Sosa, is strongly insisting that we engage in *apostolic* discernment, and he is urging us to equip ourselves with suitable instruments for putting it into practice. In a conference on this topic, Father Sosa pointed out the following:

- Many articles, in diverse languages, have been written about *discernment in common*. All three of his predecessors (Fathers Nicolás, Kolvenbach, and Arrupe) wrote letters to the whole Society about *discernment in common*, and their encouragement was very helpful.
- There also many resource materials about planning and specifically about apostolic planning.

- All these vital resources need to be collected and made them available to all. They cannot be left hidden away in some obscure library. An on-line resource bank would be a tremendous advance, and there are plans to set up a website or a learning platform in *Moodle* for this purpose.
- The Office for Discernment in Common has a key role to play in this regard, especially with its new project director. The collaboration of all is requested to help the Office in carrying out this task.

As a way of collaborating in this work that Father Sosa commends to us, we have collected in this booklet the most important texts that the Society of Jesus has published in recent years, as well as the indispensable “Deliberation of the First Fathers” of 1539. This collection of texts serves an eminently practical end: using the most authoritative teaching of the Society to impart a solid knowledge of what *discernment in common* is and what conditions are needed for its correct practice. The reading of these pages is an invitation to undergo the profound conversion that this discernment requires. This prior condition is necessary to guarantee that good will result from the schemas and practical proposals which, though not offered here, can be found in other publications or in groups of study or initiation. In any case, to help readers assimilate the orientations described in the texts of this collection, we have added at the end of each section a series of questions for personal and group reflection.

The documents included here begin with Father Sosa’s summons to engage in *apostolic discernment in common* and continue with documents that help us penetrate into the heart of his proposal and put it into practice. These documents cover the fifty-year process of growing awareness of *apostolic discernment in common* up to the present:

- The letter and the talks of Father General, Arturo Sosa (1.1 and 1.2).
- The awakening of the Society to discernment, in General Congregation 31 (2.1).
- The Deliberation of the First Fathers, which has been a reference point for reflections and practices since GC 31 (3.1).
- Father Arrupe’s document on *discernment in common*, with its reflections on the dynamic of authority and obedience proper to the Society (3.2).
- Some paragraphs from General Congregations 32 and 33 that reaffirm, with the maximum authority of the Society, the importance of *discernment in common* (4.1 and 4.1).
- The far-reaching document of Father Kolvenbach about *apostolic discernment in common*, based on the experiences of the universal Society (4.3).
- Pertinent texts of GC 34, followed by the Complementary Norms of the Constitutions, as promulgated by the same GC (5.1 and 5.2).

- Relevant paragraphs of GC 35, new contributions of Father General Adolfo Nicolás, and several texts from GC 36 (6.1, 6.2, and 6.3).
- In the annex, a long series of diverse texts relating to *apostolic discernment in common*, taken from different documents written by Fathers General Arrupe, Kolvenbach, and Nicolás.

Our hope is that communities and groups will seek out practical resources for the varying ways of implementing *apostolic discernment in common*. The aim of this selection of texts, which should be adapted to the great diversity of circumstances, is to insure that *apostolic discernment in common* is undertaken in accord with the “true foundation,” as Saint Ignatius would say.

1. LETTERS AND WORDS OF FATHER ARTURO SOSA

Although the texts in this booklet are for the most part ordered chronologically, they begin with the words of the present Father General, Arturo Sosa, who urges us to engage in *discernment in common* and to make progress in it. The following pages include text that we consider essential for understanding Father Sosa's call and putting it into practice.

1.1. An urgent summons [27 September 2017]

Dear Brothers in the Lord,

This past 10 July, I addressed a letter (2017/08) to the whole Society, inviting all Jesuits to reflect on the intimate relationship between our lives and the mission to which we are called and sent. The letter was an invitation to discover, embrace, and live out in depth the message of the 36th General Congregation. In continuity with that reflection, I would now like to share with you some considerations about *discernment in common*, which is a prerequisite for implementing the decisions of the General Congregation, in keeping with the characteristics of the spirituality which animate our religious and apostolic body.

Called to discern

Two great challenges proposed to us by the 36th General Congregation are 1) discerning the consequences of formulating the Society's mission as a contribution

to reconciliation and 2) choosing universal apostolic preferences at this particular moment in history for the world and the Society. These challenges demand that we, and our partners in mission, improve our ability to discern in common. There are other areas in which we are invited to grow in our capacity for communal discernment, among others, constituting ourselves as an intercultural body, deepening our dialogue with other cultures and religions, and promoting a culture of protection for children, young people, and vulnerable persons.

The 36th General Congregation confirmed that *discernment in common* is inherent to the way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus. The image of the first companions in Venice (1537) highlights the capacity they acquired of deliberating in common, led by the light of the Holy Spirit, even though they were such a culturally diverse group.¹ Nevertheless, they all had an active spiritual life, characterized by their having fallen in love with Christ in the Spiritual Exercises, by their service to the poor, and by their availability to be sent by the Church to any place where the need was greater.

Today, the Society of Jesus, in collaboration with others in the Church's mission of reconciling all in Christ, is also faced with the challenge of discerning in common, at all levels, its most important decisions. At the same time, the Society must encourage the participation of the whole apostolic body, which is called to *elect* the best possible ways to contribute to the proclamation of the Good News and the transformation of the world, in this epoch of swift and profound changes.

Pope Francis, for his part, has repeatedly insisted on the importance of spiritual discernment for the Church as a whole, and he has especially asked the Society of Jesus to contribute to the diffusion of discernment in all aspects of ecclesial life. From this perspective, we feel that having regular recourse to spiritual discernment as the means for seeking and finding the will of God in every dimension of our life-mission will bring about as a consequence a revitalization of our life-mission and also an increase in our capacity to serve the Church in these present times.

Discernment in common and apostolic planning

Discernment in common takes place both in our communities and in our apostolic works, with the active participation of our partners in mission. It makes sense that the particular group which discerns in common should vary with the decision that is to be made. In the life of the Society many decisions require that more than one group contribute to the *discernment in common* so that a final decision may be reached that is in consonance with the will of God that is earnestly sought. *Discernment in common* can be fruitfully practiced in the Consults of the Province, in Board Meetings of institutions with a Jesuit identity, and in all instances of apostolic governance.

Discernment in common is the prior condition for *apostolic planning* at all levels of the Society's organizational structure. Thus, *discernment in common* and apostolic planning work in tandem to ensure that decisions are made in the light of the experience of God, and that these decisions are put into practice in such a way that they realize the will of God with evangelical effectiveness.

The positive tension between *discernment in common* and apostolic planning requires, according to the Ignatian vision, a spiritual *examen* of what we have experienced, so that we continually grow in fidelity to the will of God. Therefore, a systematic evaluation of our apostolates is not sufficient. We must supplement that systematic evaluation with the spiritual perspective of the *examen*, a practice by which Ignatius invites us to recognize the action of God in history, to be grateful for his gifts, to beg pardon for our failure to measure up, and to ask for the grace to be ever better collaborators in God's work in the world. Thus, apostolic planning born of *discernment in common* becomes an instrument of our apostolic effectiveness, and we avoid the dangers of a trendy type of planning that makes use of only the techniques of corporate development.

The practice of discernment in common

The conviction that God is acting in history and is constantly communicating with human beings is the assumption on which our efforts to discern in common are based. For this reason, we should seek out those conditions which allow us to hear the Holy Spirit and be guided by Him in our life-mission. The personal and group disposition to receive and follow the Spirit who communicates with us prevents a false type of *discernment in common*, which only seeks to clothe in correct Ignatian language decisions that were already made on the basis of the criteria of one's own group.¹

There have been many valuable experiences of *discernment in common* both in our tradition and in the present life of the Society. Gathering together the best practices of *discernment in common*, as well as providing a pertinent bibliography that is made available to all who participate in our mission, would be a most helpful means of strengthening the culture of *discernment in common*. I encourage apostolic works, Provinces, Regions, and Conferences of Major Superiors to undertake this task promptly and resolutely, and I urge them to design formation processes for *discernment in common* that are accessible to all those persons with whom we share our mission, as well as with all those members of the Church who feel called to grow in this dimension of Christian life.

1. Chapters 42 and 43 of the prophet Jeremiah give a good example of false discernment in common.

Properties of discernment in common

Desiring to foster the growth of this dimension of our life, but without claiming to replace other good aids to and excellent studies on the topic, I wish to describe the principal properties of *discernment in common*. These properties are present in different degrees, depending on the circumstances in which the discernment is done. The following enumeration is not intended to propose stages or steps in a process, but rather, simply to describe the main features of *discernment in common*. Sometimes we will find that all these properties are present, while at other times they will not be present in the same form. *Discernment in common* follows traditional Ignatian criteria, taking into account *the persons, the times, and the places*.² Thus, good *discernment in common* requires the following:

1. Choosing the matter well. Not every decision requires *discernment in common*. The aim of *discernment in common* is *seeking and finding the will of God* in important matters, in which it is not completely clear what is to be done or how it is to be done, what is best or how to do it in the best way possible. It is therefore crucial that we know how to choose the matter or the matters that require an *election* through *discernment in common*. At the same time, full information, of good quality and accessible to all, about the matter to be treated is needed. Good discernment depends on having a precise knowledge about the matter to be decided and about the result that is to be expected from such a complex and demanding process. In this way we avoid banalizing “discernment,” using the word as a way to justify either major or minor decisions.
2. Knowing who should take part in the discernment and why. It is necessary to establish clearly *which persons* will participate in the process of discernment, *why* they participate, and *under what conditions* they do so. The matter about which the *election* is to be made will determine who is invited to participate in the process. This means that each participant should know precisely and should freely accept both the reasons for which he/she forms part of the group that is discerning and the conditions under which he/she does so. Depending on the group, the matter being discerned, and other conditions in which the process takes place, it may be convenient and prudent to invite other persons to accompany the process or to provide expertise in the matters being treated.
3. Interior freedom, or Ignatian *indifference*, is a condition without which it is not possible to make a good election. Those who take part in the discernment should cultivate interior freedom; that is, they should be detached from their own interests and be free to assume whatever is the greater good in the light of the Gospel. Indifference is the fruit of an authentic spiritual life in which life and mission are inseparable, as the 36th General Congregation has made clear.

2. For example, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, nos. 64, 238, 343.

It is possible and necessary also for those who share in our mission but not in our Christian faith to acquire that interior freedom which enables them *to divest themselves of self-love, self-will, and self-interests*.³ This interior freedom is the human possibility to grow as persons in gratuitous relationship with others, seeking the greater good of all, even when such a pursuit involves as a consequence personal renunciation and sacrifice.

4. Union of minds and hearts. *Discernment in common* requires the existence of what Ignatius Loyola calls the *union of hearts and minds* in the group that is discerning, because the purpose of the process is to make an *election* freely according to the will of God. This union of hearts and minds is born of the shared sense of purpose possessed by all who form part of the group since what is at stake in the discernment directly affects all and each one. Thus, good mutual knowledge of each other is needed, a mutual knowledge that gives birth to trust in each other and motivates the active participation of each one.
5. Knowledge about how to discern. In the Exercises Ignatius presents three different *times* for making good, sound decisions.⁴ In the *first time*,⁵ there is no doubt about what the will of God is. In the *second time*, *discernment in common* may be done,⁶ by taking account of spiritual movements and their confirmation, or it may also be done by reasoning and deciding according to what is described in the *third time*.⁷

For a group of persons who have experience in the discernment of spirits, *discernment in common* can take the form of a process in which they perceive and weigh the *movements* which the spirits provoke in the group that is seeking the will of God. The capacity of the group to discern the spirits in this way is thus a condition for its being able to make use of the second time of election. The discernment of spirits makes it possible for the group to become aware of the direction that its life would take if it were to follow one or another movement of spirit, in order to follow the movements of the good spirit. In Ignatian language, the movements that are most relevant for discernment are called *consolation and desolation*.⁸ “For just as in consolation it is more the good

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3. SpEx 189. It is not usual that persons who do not share our Christian faith take part in works of the Society, and we sometimes collaborate with such persons in our service to the needy. Find a respectful way to involve them truly in *discernment in common* is a challenge to our freedom and creativity as children of God.
 4. SpEx 175-188.
 5. SpEx 175.
 6. SpEx 176, 183, 188.
 7. SpEx 177-178.
 8. See the Rules to Aid Us Toward Perceiving and Then Understanding the Various Motions ... [SpEx 313-327] and the Rules for the Same Purpose, with a More Probing Discernment of Spirits [SpEx 328-336].

spirit who guides and counsels us, so in desolation it is the bad spirit, and by following his counsels we can never find the right way.”⁹

The spiritual *movements* are not states of soul. They are palpable effects of the spirits that are trying to move a person’s will in one direction or another. Thus, *consolation* and *desolation* are not synonyms for being happy or sad, for feeling good or bad, for being contented or discontented, for agreeing or disagreeing with someone else’s idea or position. The scene of Jesus praying in the Garden of Olives before the Passion¹⁰ can help us to distinguish the movements from our states of soul. The movements appeal to our freedom to choose. Although feeling sadness and anguish (vv. 37-38), Jesus *elected* to follow the will of the Father.¹¹ The movements of the good Spirit bring about a growth in faith, hope, and charity.¹² Profound interior peace is the sign of being in consonance with the Holy Spirit as a fruit of discernment. That interior peace, which may be felt even in situations of great suffering, is the sign of having *found* the will of God. Such confirmation of being in consonance with the Spirit is perceived in the *joy* of the Gospel—experienced interiorly in each person and sensed by the group that discerns in common—or in the *consolation* that Pope Francis urged us to ask for insistently during his visit to the 36th General Congregation.

On occasion, depending on the conditions experienced by those who make up the group that is discerning, it may be advisable to make use of reasoning or deliberating the advantages (pros) and the disadvantages (cons) of making a certain election against the horizon of the greater and better service of the glory of God. In this case the condition for a good discernment is the group’s ability to use its understanding lucidly to perceive what the greater good is according to the values of the Kingdom and to offer the decision made to the Lord for confirmation.¹³

6. Prayer in common is another requirement for good discernment. The group that proposes to discern in common should find ways and spaces for personal and communal prayer, in accord with its particular characteristics. Personal prayer and communal prayer maintain a healthy tension between heaven and earth¹⁴ as we seek the *magis* that derives from our relationship with God and his Word. Such prayer helps us to keep in mind that *as a body* we are servants

9. SpEx 318.

10. Matt 26:36-46.

11. Sacred scripture offers numerous examples of the difference between following the Spirit and a person’s emotional state. The vocation and life of the prophets are clear examples. The decision of Joseph to accept the already Mary as his spouse also shows us the difference between letting oneself be carried by the Spirit as opposed to being carried away by emotions (Matt 1:18-24).

12. SpEx 316.

13. SpEx 316.

14. SpEx 183.

of the *missio Dei*. The Eucharist is the privileged mode of prayer in common. Thus it may have special significance and a central role in the processes of *discernment in common*. A community or a group that is able to celebrate the Eucharist as a source of life in the Spirit increases its ability to perceive the action of the Spirit in history and to experience how the Lord fulfills his promise to be with us all days until the end of history.¹⁵

7. Spiritual conversation characterizes *discernment in common*. The 36th General Congregation strongly recommended that we improve our capacity to converse spiritually.¹⁶ *Discernment in common* should include periods of time dedicated to sharing the fruit of prayer or personal reflection. The sharing is an opportunity to present to others with simplicity and without making speeches, what one has perceived as movements of the Spirit or as the fruit of one's personal reflection on the point in question. On the other hand, our disposition to "listen to the other person" respectfully, without contradicting the spiritual movements that the other person has felt interiorly, can produce a spiritual echo or new spiritual movements in the person listening, giving rise to a fresh way of perceiving things. The custom of spiritual conversation, the habit of listening attentively to others and knowing how to communicate one's own experience and ideas simply and clearly contribute to good *discernment in common* when the matter under consideration requires it.

Sharing in a spiritual conversation is different from a business discussion in which the aim is to make the most reasonable decision according to administrative logic. It is also different from a parliamentary exercise in which consideration is given to the majority, minority, alliances, etc., in function of individual or group interests, making use of oratorical ability and other parliamentary "techniques." Such forums have in common with discernment the need to offer good information about matters to be decided and the capacity to argue rationally. Discernment needs these elements but is not limited to them. Discernment ultimately has to do with spiritual movements, or if there is no clarity about these, with that which can reasonably generate greater love and service for the glory of God, seeking also the confirmation which comes from on high.

8. The systematic practice of the examen during the process of *discernment in common* allows us to pass from *seeking* to *finding* the will of God. The *examen* helps us to perceive the true nature of spiritual movements and to confirm that we are on the right path. The personal *examen* of each participant needs to be combined with the *examen* of what is happening in the group as a whole. Learning to examine the movements of the group allows us to take the pulse of the process or to confirm it, so that we can know whether we should continue onward, and how, guided by the Spirit. The constant monitoring of the

15. SpEx 101-105.

16. Matt 28:20.

movements of the group reflected in the *examen* is an instrument which helps us maintain a memory of the process. Just as we learn to perceive our interior movements, *discernment in common* requires that we develop the ability to perceive and interpret spiritual movements of the group which is listening to the Spirit in order to find the will of God.

9. Establishing how the final decision is to be made is something that should be clearly and precisely settled from the very beginning of the process of discernment. Those who take part in the discernment should know and accept from the start the manner by which a final decision is to be made. For example, we understand clearly that a General Congregation of the Society of Jesus makes its decisions by a majority of votes, except when the Formula prescribes otherwise. Similarly, it is known that, in the discernment of a religious community of Jesuits, the final decision rests with the Local Superior, and the decisions of a Province or a Region are the responsibility of the Major Superior. The apostolic works and institutions are governed by their own statutes and norms, which determine how decisions that affect the whole are made and who makes them.

Placing all our confidence in God

Discernment is a rich heritage of the Spiritual Exercises, one that is especially useful at moments of making the elections that our life and mission require. Discernment and good elections demand that we free ourselves from our disordered attachments and affections, so that we can place ourselves completely in the hands of the Lord. Promoting *discernment in common* was an intuition of the 36th General Congregation in its search for ways of improving our common life through deeper personal prayer and a richer sharing of our faith and our lives.

The allocution of Pope Francis to the members of General Congregation 36 ends with this prayer: “We beg Our Mother to direct and accompany every Jesuit, along with that part of the faithful people faithful of God to whom he has been sent, along these paths of consolation, of compassion, and discernment.”¹⁷ Let us make this prayer our own, requesting this grace for each one who is called to share this mission of serving reconciliation and the justice of the Gospel, as well as for our communities and the works and institutions through which we carry out our apostolate.

Let us therefore ask for the grace of personal and institutional conversion, and that the contemplation of Jesus in the gospels help us to learn from his loving and faithful relationship with the Father, how to perceive where the Spirit leads, and how to elect to live according to the will of God.

17. Allocution of the Holy Father to General Congregation 36 on 24 October 2016.

1.2. Father Arturo Sosa: “Discernment in common and apostolic planning” (excerpts from a talk he gave in Brazil on 27 October 2017)

The Society is experiencing a critical moment in its history as it faces a more complex world.

- We have become a multicultural apostolic body. Just look around you! We want to grow into an intercultural apostolic body in order to be true to our “catholic” vocation. We want to grow together, religious and laity, in order to incarnate the Church as the People of God (Vatican II). The Society is facing critical choices all around the world. There are many calls for help, and we Jesuits, together with our companions in the mission, cannot keep responding to an unlimited number of needs.
- For many years we have been trying to define our mission—for example, our mission of faith and justice (GC 32), our mission of dialogue with other religions and other cultures (GC 35), and our mission of reconciliation (GC 35 and GC 36). We have been seeking the “what” of our mission; we have spent much time seeking the “what” and have very little to add to it. Now we realize that we must also be concerned with the “how”: how we discern our mission and how we carry out our mission is something crucial. The last General Congregation has asked us to concentrate on the “how.”

In last Sunday’s Eucharist we read the text of Mark 1:29-39.

- Jesus had extraordinary success in his ministry in Capernaum. Everybody marveled at his words and deeds. The temptation for the disciples was to stay there, enjoying the success, but Jesus went apart to pray. We might say that he made an “examen” of his apostolic experience, as a first moment of discernment about his next step. Jesus followed the Spirit and chose to go to other places. He renewed his mission and set out for a new frontier, to use the language of Father Nicolás. Perhaps this can be a model for the Society of Jesus so that we avoid staying too long in places where we feel comfortable, where we feel at home, where we have had important apostolic successes. We need to evaluate our apostolic commitment and continually examine our experience, thanking God for what he has been doing through us and asking him to empower us to advance in a new direction. God will constantly show us how he wants us to collaborate with his action in this particular moment of the history of humankind. But this requires that we practice *discernment in common*.

Under the leadership of Pope Francis, the Church seeks to move forward with vigor and resolve. We Jesuits want to move in the same direction and with the same enthusiasm, just as our vocation asks of us.

- To do that, we need to be in contact with the Spirit of God, who guides us. This Spirit animates all creation and is present in every baptized person; the Spirit is also present outside the Church. The Spirit “moves where she will.” This week, listen to the Spirit in yourselves and in others. We can help one another to listen. That is the beauty of *discernment in common* and spiritual conversation.
- Discernment is at the heart of the teachings of Pope Francis. He frequently speaks of discernment. If you look for the word “discern” in the internet or go through the texts of Pope Francis, you will find that it is a word he uses often. He knows that the Church needs to develop this charism of discernment. You are a privileged group because you know a lot about this topic. But how can we make this knowledge more accessible in the Church? How can we help Pope Francis to transform the Church in this direction?
- Certainly we can do so by helping many people with their personal discernment and by encouraging *discernment in common* in our communities and apostolates. We have the means, but we have to make those means more accessible. Of course, *discernment in common* can be complicated because of the many motions and reactions that intervene in the process, but we can all help one another to listen and to discern better.

Discernment

At the personal level, discernment has progressed quite well during the last forty years. The Secretariat of Ignatian Spirituality has done great work in promoting it.

- There has been much growth in directed retreats and spiritual accompaniment. We have advanced in our ability to share about faith, and we have acquired a vocabulary for talking about the movements that occur within us.
- At this stage of our history, therefore, we are being invited to go further, to develop *discernment in common*. One of your tasks this week is to describe the key principles, tools, and methodologies for *discernment in common*. That is not an easy job since you come from different cultural contexts, but it is important because if we are able to build a common base, we will make great progress.
- I know that there has been some concern as to why *discernment in common* has not “caught on” in the Society. I believe one reason for this is that it has remained in geographical pockets (for example, North America, France, Belgium, and parts of Latin America). For this reason and others, we have not developed a global methodology. This must change. I therefore sincerely hope and desire that this week’s workshop will help bring about change.

Another crucial matter is developing a relation between *discernment in common* and apostolic planning. Sometimes when planning is being done, people tend to abandon discernment in order to be “practical.” Discernment is seen as somehow too “spiritual” or too “abstract.” People fear that it will not produce results. By all means, we need to be practical, but we must be practical through discernment. So that is the challenge before us: connecting *discernment in common* with apostolic planning. I am asking you to treat this topic in the coming days and to make sure you integrate the two.

Questions for reflection

- What are my first reactions after reading the preceding texts—confusion, concern, interest, desire for more orientation?
- If discernment in common is something new for me, do I have a basic idea of what it consists in? Am I able to distinguish it from “apostolic planning” and from “corporative development techniques”?
- If I am already somewhat familiar with discernment in common, what aspects of it are new to me, and what aspects have become clearer for me?
- Do I feel motivated and eager to practice discernment in common? Why?
- How about my group or my community?
- Of the nine characteristics of discernment in common, which ones appear most important to me?
- Which ones appear most difficult to practice?
- What assistance would you like in order to gain more practical knowledge about discernment in common?
- The documents in the following sections should help you learn more about the nature and the practice of discernment in common. At what level of theoretical/practical knowledge would you place yourself right now—low, medium, high?

2. THE NEW AWARENESS OF DISCERNMENT IN COMMON

General Congregation 31 (1965) was probably the most ground-breaking GC of all since it unblocked the institutional prohibition that prevented any revision of the Institute of the Society. Among the many seeds of change that GC 31 sowed are its important references to seeking the will of God in our life and apostolate, a seeking that requires both individual and communal discernment.

2.1. General Congregation 31¹⁸

Decree 8: The Spiritual Formation of Jesuits

3. Our following of Christ will be more genuine and intimate the more intent each Jesuit is on adopting that manner of serving Christ peculiar to this Society. ... Let those attitudes of mind be cultivated which St. Ignatius held most dear: ... the ability to find God in all things [and] development of skill in the discernment of spirits.

5. We should all cooperate actively in a spirit of fraternal love, bearing one another's burdens. ... All should therefore have high regard for the account of conscience,... and also for fraternal gatherings which, if they promote a common seeking of God's will, bring spiritual joy, encouragement, and apostolic fruitfulness to all.

18. The texts that follow are the ones cited by Father Kolvenbach in his letter on discernment, which is found in section 4.3.

Decree 17: The Life of Obedience

6. But in order that he may more easily discover the will of God, the superior should have at hand able advisers and should often consult them. He should also use the services of experts in reaching decisions on complex matters. ... Besides, since all who work together in God's service are under the influence of the Holy Spirit and His grace, it will be well in the Lord to use their ideas and advice so as to understand God's will better. Superiors in the Society should readily and often ask for and listen to the counsel of their brethren, of a few or of many, or even of all gathered together, according to the importance and nature of the matter. Superiors should gratefully welcome suggestions which their fellow Jesuits offer spontaneously, with a single desire of greater spiritual good and the better service of God, but the duty of the superior himself to decide and enjoin what ought to be done remains intact.

Decree 19: Community Life and Religious Discipline

5. More concretely, the following are increasingly necessary for community life in the Society of Jesus:

- c) Frequent consultation with experts, to share their insights, and frequent consultation among the members of the community, aimed at actively engaging everyone in the process of coordinating and promoting the apostolate, and in other things which pertain to the good of the community.

Questions for reflection

- Which of the motivations for discernment in common mentioned in this document seem to me most valid for our present time?
- What motivations would I add for individuals, communities, and apostolic institutions in general? And what motivations would I add for the particular work or institution in which I collaborate?
- Has this document, which is more than fifty years old, had a real influence on individuals, communities, and institutions? What has been put into practice? What has not?

3. A MOVEMENT OF REFLECTION, STUDY AND PRACTICE

The new awareness of discernment brought on by GC 31 gave rise to studies, publications, workshops, and also practical application of *discernment in common*. Special attention was paid in this period to the Deliberation of the First Fathers (1539), which was not well known previously in the Society. The text was analyzed for the purpose of applying its method to present-day situations. Even though the first companions were deliberating on a very specific matter, the founding of the Society and its characteristics, their deliberation was, properly speaking, *discernment in common*. However, once a regimen of religious obedience was established in the Society, such *discernment in common* was not ordinarily practiced. Many studies of the Deliberation have been published, including three dossiers by the CIS, but there is one that stands out: the letter in which Father Arrupe explains that *discernment in common* is not opposed to the exercise of authority and the practice of obedience and then defines the conditions and circumstances in which *discernment in common* can be practiced. Father Arrupe also considered *discernment in common* as an excellent method for preparing for GC 32.

3.1. The deliberation and conclusion of Ignatius and the first companions (1539)

In Paris in 1534, the small group made up of Ignatius and the first companions had resolved to go to the Holy Land or, if that project proved impossible, to place themselves at the disposition of the Pope. By 1539 they found themselves in Rome; unable to travel to the East, the group felt the need to define their future way of life. They were thinking about how to carry out their commitment to the

Pope, who was already beginning to make use of their services. Since the group had already experienced years of fraternal sharing and spiritual union, they debated whether they should formalize their association or let each one go his own way. If they decided to join together, the next question would be what type of association they should form; more particularly, they discussed whether the members of the new community should vow obedience to one of their number and thus become a religious order. The first question, about forming an association, was answered easily in the affirmative, but the second question was more difficult. The companions therefore changed the method of discernment and sought a suitable way to resolve the question.

After they had arrived at a positive answer to both questions, they deliberated about various particular matters, such as the manner of apostolate, the form of personal and group life, and the formation that would be needed for those who wanted to join the new religious order. All these issues were part of the *discernment in common* carried out for three months by the original ten companions, along with some others who had joined them subsequently. While they were involved in this exercise of spiritual discernment, they dedicated themselves also to ministries such as preaching, hearing confessions, helping the poor, and attending to the sick in the hospitals. The document that follows is the record of their deliberation on the first two matters considered, which were the most basic ones. The document reveals to us both the problems they faced and their spiritual manner of discerning in common. The great value of this document is that it is not a theoretical treatise on *discernment in common*; rather, it is a living and very complete testimony of the dispositions required for such discernment and of the different ways to apply it, depending on the degree of difficulty of the matters being considered.

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[1] It was just before the end of Lent. The time was drawing near when we would have to be separated from one another. We were looking forward to this dispersal with great anticipation, recognizing it as a necessary means for attaining more quickly the goal which we had conceived and set as the object of our hearts. We decided to assemble before the day of separation and discuss for a number of days our common calling and the style of life we had adopted.

After a number of such sessions, we found ourselves divided. Some of our group were French, others Spaniards, still others Savoyards or Portuguese; our views and opinions were diversified. We were in perfect accord in singleness of purpose and intent; namely, to discover the gracious design of God's will within the scope of our vocation. But when it came to the question

of which means would be more efficacious and more fruitful, both for ourselves and for our neighbor, there was a plurality of views. No one should be astonished that among us, weak and frail men, this difference of opinion should have arisen, since even the princes and apostolic pillars of the most holy Church, and many other holy men with whom we are in no way worthy to be compared, experienced a similar diversity of opinion and, at times, were in open conflict. They even left us a written record of their controversies.

Well, then, since we too were of diverse opinion, we were anxious to find some course clearly indicated as the path to follow in offering ourselves as a holocaust to God, to whose praise, honor, and glory all our actions might be dedicated. Finally, we decided and resolved unanimously to devote ourselves to prayer, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice and meditation, in a manner even more fervent than usual; and after we had diligently expended all human effort, we would then cast all our cares upon the Lord, trusting in Him who is so good and generous. He imparts His good spirit to everyone who petitions Him in humility and simplicity of heart; in fact, He is incredibly lavish in His gifts to everyone, never does He disappoint anyone. We were confident that He would in no way fail us, but since His kindness is without measure, He would assist us beyond our fondest hopes and expectations.

- [2] We began, therefore, to exercise our human energies, setting before the group questions considered worthy of careful consideration and prolonged inquiry. Our procedure was this: all day long we reflected and meditated on the subject; prayer was also enlisted as a source of light. At night each person proposed to the group what he considered the better and more expedient course. In this way we hoped that all of us could embrace as the truer judgment the view which was recommended by the force of stronger arguments and enjoyed a majority of votes.
- [3] During the first night's discussion, the question posed was this: we had offered and dedicated our lives to Christ our Lord and to His true and lawful vicar on earth, so that he might dispose of us and send us wherever he might judge us more capable of producing better results, whether it be to (the Turks), to the Indies, to the heretics, or to any other group of Christians or pagans—would it be more advantageous for us to be so joined and united into one body that no physical separation of our persons, be it ever so great, could divide our hearts? Or, on the contrary, would such an arrangement be not at all desirable?

An example is at hand to illustrate the urgency of this question. The Pope is about to send two of our company to the city of Siena. Should we have a mutual understanding so that those who are sent from our midst will still be the object of our affectionate concern as we will be of theirs, or should

we have no more concern for them than for others who are strangers to our fraternity? After much discussion we came to a decision in the affirmative. Since our most merciful and affectionate Lord had seen fit to assemble and bind us to one another—we who are so frail and from such diverse national and cultural backgrounds—we ought not to sever what God has united and bound together. Rather, with each passing day we ought to confirm and strengthen the bond of union, forming ourselves into a single body. Each should have a knowledge of and a concern for the others, leading to a richer harvest of souls; for spiritual power, as well as natural, is intensified and strengthened when united in a common arduous enterprise far more than if it remains fragmented in many parts.

In all these matters which have been narrated and in those still to be described, we wish it to be understood that absolutely no course of action adopted by us was the fruit merely of our own personal ingenuity and reasoning. Rather, we simply assented to whatever the Lord inspired and the Apostolic See subsequently confirmed and approved.

- [4] After this first question had been decided and resolved, another more difficult, worthy of no less deliberate consideration, presented itself. The question was this: all of us had pronounced perpetual vows of chastity and poverty in the presence of the Most Reverend Legate of His Holiness when we were working among the Venetians—would it be expedient for us to pronounce a third vow, namely that of obedience to one of our number, so that we might be able to fulfill the will of the Lord our God in all things with greater integrity and merit and greater glory to God, and at the same time fulfill the wish and directive of His Holiness, to whom we had offered most willingly our entire persons—will, intellect, strength, and so forth?
- [5] We devoted many days to personal prayer and reflection in seeking a solution to this question, but could find none which set our minds at peace. We put our trust in God and began to discuss ways to resolve this impasse. Would it be expedient for all of us to withdraw to some secluded place and remain there for thirty or forty days, devoting our time to meditation, fasting, and penance, in order that God might heed our pleas and communicate the solution to this question? A second possibility was that just three or four of us, as representatives of the entire group, should retire to such a retreat for the same purpose. Still a third course of action called for no one to go into seclusion; rather, remaining in the city, we would devote half of the day to this principal concern of ours, so that the more suitable and lengthier part of the day would be given to meditation, reflection and prayer, while the remainder of the day would be spent in our usual practice of preaching and hearing confessions.

- [6] Two considerations were decisive: first, we feared that we might give rise to gossip and scandal within the city and among the populace; since men are rather prone to form rash judgments, they might conclude that we had either fled from Rome and turned to some new endeavor, or that we lacked constancy and firmness in pursuing tasks undertaken. Secondly, we decided to remain in Rome so that the benefits which we saw resulting from our work in the confessional, our preaching and other apostolic activity might not be lost due to our absence. For even if our number were four times as great as we are, we would be unable to meet all the charitable demands made upon us, just as we are presently unable to meet all requests.

Then we determined a mode of procedure for seeking a solution to our problem, prescribing for each and every one the following three steps. First, each should so dispose himself, so devote himself to prayer, the Holy Sacrifice, and meditation, that he make every effort to find peace and joy in the Holy Spirit concerning the vow of obedience. Each must strive, insofar as it depends on his personal efforts, so to dispose himself that he would rather obey than command, whenever glory to God and praise to His Majesty would follow in equal measure. The second preparatory step was that no one of our band should talk over this matter with another or ask his arguments. In this way, no one would be swayed by another's reasoning or disposed more favorably towards embracing obedience rather than towards rejecting it, or vice versa. Our aim was for each to consider as more desirable what he had derived from his personal prayer and meditation. The third preparatory step was that each should consider himself unrelated to our company, into which he never expected to be received. With such a disposition, no emotional involvement would sway his judgment more one way or the another; rather, as an extern, he might freely advance for discussion his opinion concerning the taking or rejecting of obedience, and thus he could judge and approve that course of action which he believes will promote God's greater service and most securely assure our Society's permanence.

- [7] With these dispositions of mind and heart as a preparation we were to assemble on the following day. We agreed that each in turn should propose all disadvantages whatsoever against obedience and all the counterarguments which he had derived from his private reflection, meditation and prayer. For example, one said: It seems that this term religious obedience has fallen into disfavor and has been discredited among Christian people, due to our shortcomings and sins. Another remarked: If we wish to live under obedience, perhaps we will be obliged by the Pope to live under some rule which is already formulated and approved. In such a case, it might happen that the rule will not provide ample opportunity and scope to labor for the salvation of souls; yet it was to this single end, after our own salvation, that

we dedicated ourselves. All our fondest dreams, conceived, as we believe, under God's inspiration, would come to nought. Still another commented: If we vow obedience to someone, the number of prospects entering our congregation to labor faithfully in the Lord's vineyard will decrease. Though the harvest is great, only a few genuine workers can be found; such is the weakness and inconstancy of men that many seek their own advantage and the fulfillment of their own will rather than the interests of Christ and their own total self-abnegation. We proceeded in this manner with a fourth, a fifth, etc., each successively bringing forth the disadvantages which accompanied the vow of obedience.

Then on the following day our discussion centered on the contrary view, advancing for consideration all the advantages and benefits of the vow of obedience which each had drawn from his prayerful reflection. Thus each in his turn proposed the conclusions at which he had arrived, at times deducing the unrealistic consequence of a hypothetical proposition, or again simply arguing by direct affirmation. For example, one reduced the case to this absurd impossibility: if this congregation of ours should undertake responsibility for a project without the gentle yoke of obedience, no one would have a specific assignment, since each would throw the burden of decision on another, as we have frequently experienced. Likewise, if our congregation does not have the benefit of a vow of obedience, it will not endure and continue steadfast; yet this is contrary to our initial resolution of preserving our Society forever. Therefore, since nothing preserves any congregation more than obedience, this vow seems essential, especially for us who have vowed perpetual poverty and are engaged in arduous and continual labors, both spiritual and temporal, since such enterprises are not in themselves conducive to preserving a society. Another spoke in support of obedience by direct argument: obedience occasions continual acts of heroic virtue; for a person who genuinely lives under obedience is most prompt to do whatever is imposed upon him, even if it be extremely difficult or even likely to expose him to the laughter and ridicule of the world. Suppose, for example, I were commanded to walk through the streets and squares of the town naked or dressed in unusual garb. Now, even though such a command might never be given, as long as a person is perfectly willing to carry it out, by denying his own judgment and personal will, he has an abiding heroic disposition and is making acts which increase his merit. Another remarked: Nothing lays low pride and arrogance as does obedience; for pride makes a point of following one's own judgment and will, yielding to no one. It is preoccupied with grandiose projects beyond its capacity. Obedience is diametrically opposed to this attitude; for it always follows the judgment and will of another, yields to everyone, is associated as much as possible with humility, the enemy of pride. And although we have professed total obedience, both in general and in particular details, to our su-

preme Pontiff and Shepherd, nevertheless the Pope would not be able—and even if he could it would be unbecoming for him—to take time to provide for our incidental and personal concerns, which are numberless.

- [8] For many days we discussed the various aspects of this question, analyzing and weighing the relative merits and cogency of each argument, always allowing time for our customary practices of prayer, meditation and reflection. Finally, with the help of God, we came to a decision. We concluded, not only by a majority vote but indeed without a single dissenting voice, that it would be more advantageous and even essential for us to vow obedience to one of our number in order to attain three aims: first, that we might better and more exactly pursue our supreme goal of fulfilling the divine will in all things; second, that the Society might be more securely preserved; and finally, that proper provision might be made for those individual matters, of both spiritual and temporal moment, that will arise.
- [9] We continued in these and other deliberations for almost three months—from the latter part of Lent to the feast of John the Baptist—adhering to this same mode of procedure in our analysis and discussion of each issue, always proposing both sides of the question. By the feast of St. John, all our business was pleasantly concluded in a spirit of perfect harmony. But it was only by first engaging in prolonged vigils and prayers, with much expenditure of physical and mental energy that we resolved these problems and brought them to this happy conclusion.

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[Editors' note] As this text states, the companions spent three months discussing “these and other things,” making it clear that good deliberation seeks to define the topic being discussed as concretely as possible. Drawing on the available historical documentation, we present below a summary of the “other things” that the companions decided during their deliberations.

Deliberations and conclusions of 1539-40

Between mid-March and 15 April 1539

1. The Society is confirmed as a stable congregation.
2. There will be a vow of obedience to one in the Society.

Broët, Rodrigues, and A. Estrada left for Siena on 15 April.

Between 15 April and 3 May 1539

1. All should make a vow of obedience to the Pope.
2. Even those with less formation.
3. All should teach the commandments to children for an hour a day for forty days.
4. The Superior will determine the duties of each member.
5. No one should arrange with the Pope to go from one place or another; rather, assignments should be left to the Society or the Superior.
6. Before the year of probation, candidates for the Society should dedicate three months to Spiritual Exercises, pilgrimage, and service in hospitals. Adaptations will be made at the judgment of the Society or the Superior. One or another of the other trials may be omitted depending on the danger involved or the condition of the candidate.
7. The person enters should be effectively poor.
8. When a member manifests his desire to go to non-Christian lands and the Pope leaves it to the judgment of the Superior or the Society: ten days of Exercises to test by what spirit he is guided; then, if it seems fitting, send him.

Between 3 May and 23 May 1539

1. Members are obliged to teach children and to obey the Pope and the Superior; the vow is binding under pain of mortal sin.
2. Because of Bobadilla's opposition to the preceding points, decisions will be made by majority vote.

The companions who did not sign the document were Francis Xavier, probably because of sickness, and Bobadilla, out of protest. Also, Bobadilla did not take further part in the deliberation because of sickness.

Between 23 May 1539 and 11 January 1540

1. The Superior General will be elected for life.
2. Houses and churches may be held but not as property.
3. The Superior has the right to admit and dismiss members, after consulting with the companions. That right is limited when the candidate is a relative, a compatriot, a close friend, a penitent, or someone the Superior guided in the Exercises.

Between 11 January and 24 June 1540

There is no record of what was treated, maybe because Favre, who was most likely the secretary, had already left on a pontifical mission. Nevertheless, it seems that the conclusions were these:

1. The style of life should be suited to the apostolic vocation: office recited in private, not in choir; liturgical celebrations without music; no regular habit; no established penances.

Favre and Laynez left on the pontifical mission on 20 June 1540.

Questions for reflection

- What impact does the Deliberation of the First Fathers have on me? What are the most remarkable aspects of their attitudes and their method of deliberation for the practice of discernment in common?
- What aspects are most useful for the present time?
- What relationship do I see between this Deliberation and the spirituality of the Exercises? Mention some concrete points.
- To what extent do I consider discernment in common useful for making basic planning decisions, but not so useful for making decisions once responsibilities have been assigned?
- Using this Deliberation as a starting point, try to make a very simple schema for a deliberation in the institution where you work.

3.2. Father Pedro Arrupe: Letter on Spiritual Discernment in Common (25 December 1971)

Saint Ignatius wanted Superiors to consult with “persons designated to give counsel” before making their decisions, and he considered Polanco’s suggestion valid: “The more difficult they consider the decision to be, the more they should consult with other persons or with all who are there in the house” (MI, series III, vol. I, pp. 218-219).

And General Congregation 31 has stressed the same idea: “Superiors in the Society should readily and often ask for and listen to the counsel of their brethren, of a few or of many, or even of all gathered together” (Decree 17, no. 6).

In our own day and age, certain human values are more especially stressed: greater recognition of the rights of individuals and their freedom, a desire for integral development of the personality, the demand to participate and share in the responsibility for making decisions and implementing them, especially in a corporate way. Such a way of proceeding leads to greater interpersonal relations and fosters the *unio cordium* that is the basis of a community life built around joint reflection and action.

These new tendencies, which should be the object of serious spiritual discernment (and honest reading of the “signs of the times”), are evidence of vital energy and very positive values, and they should be heeded without disturbing the balance that Ignatius tried to establish in the Constitutions between personal authority and communitarian elements, between the greater agility and speed characteristic of personal decisions and the greater deliberation and objectivity that can be provided by wider consultation.

Conditions of discernment in common

These elements are stressed in modern society, in the Church, and in the Society as well, as in natural. In order to incorporate them into our work, we should imbue them with the spirit of the Exercises and the Constitutions; that is, with the true Ignatian spirit to which we must be true every day, both individually and communally.

It is true that, according to the Constitutions, the universal body of the Society represents the individual Jesuit’s true community. Despite that, our life in the Society normally takes concrete form in some local apostolic group. We ordinarily live in specific communities and collaborate with particular working groups; it is there that we experience deeply the grace of our vocation of service to the Church. It is within such communities and working groups, and in the meetings and conferences they sponsor, that we receive new lights and perceive new calls of the Spirit.

Such community spirit, based and centered on Christ, is a most valuable aid for sustaining members who must work in scattered locations, and in a world as secularized as our own. The local community in the Society is not an end in itself but is oriented and subordinated to an apostolic end, which in many cases requires the dispersion of its members.

When I communicate to the Society, through the provincials, documents that request all Jesuits to reflect on an issue and give a response, I seek to encourage in them an attitude of sincere and authentic spiritual conversation in community. Such conversation is the basis of profound union and can sometimes become true spiritual discernment or deliberation in common.

Spiritual conversation in community requires a high degree of maturity, integration, and balance; it helps to overcome tensions and inhibitions, and it opens a path to frank and open communication of diverse ideas and ways of thinking. Such conversation helps to create a community that is able to ask honest questions about its own apostolate, its day-to-day life, and the differing positions and attitude of its members. Such questioning will enable the members to reach agreements that are unanimous enough to allow for serenely coordinated communal action.

In such a community it is possible to pass from the stage of simple reasoning (that is, discussion of reasons) to the stage of spiritual perception of God's will in our concrete lives and in the diverse topics that are submitted to our consideration. Here we find a prolongation and application of the spiritual pedagogy of Saint Ignatius. The community dimension should not moderate this pedagogy in the least; to the contrary, it should invigorate our fidelity to the Holy Spirit.

Such a way of proceeding will contribute to elevating and spiritualizing the sense of community that nowadays is everywhere so profound; at the same time it will prevent us from falling into a type of pseudo-democracy in which decisions are made by a binding deliberative vote. It will also prevent a weakening of the spirit of true Ignatian obedience since it is clear that such discernment is made in union with the Superior and that the decision is ultimately the Superior's. The Superior runs the meetings and, when he thinks appropriate, seeks to be helped in his labor by his brothers and sisters, but at the same time he should feel free to decide. The community should in turn keep itself always inclined to obedience since it is obedience that integrates our apostolic activity into God's redemptive plan.

The conclusion reached by a community in such circumstances is clearly a most valuable element and should be taken into consideration by the Superior. However, he may have other elements to consider and may feel spiritual movements that lead him to make a decision that differs from the community's conclusion. A community with a true spirit of indifference will easily accept that decision, but a community whose conclusion was not the fruit of an Ignatian disposition or was the result of improper pressure will not find such acceptance easy.

Objectives and effects of searching in common

This effort of searching in common should first of all treat of the ordinary problems that are within the community's discerning capacity: the manner of life, the actual ecclesial commitments, the ways of giving testimony, and the concrete realization of desires conceived in prayer and in the apostolate.

The transformation of society calls out for new and better solutions, and the Church and the world are always making new demands. Such calls should find an echo and should provoke discernment in the intimate spiritual gatherings of Jesuits who live and work together.

In this way a profound spiritual union is created. Knowing other persons only externally is quite different from knowing them spiritually with all their supernatural gifts! We should not be surprised if at first our opinions are different and even divergent: the Spirit will use diverse experiences to reveal the richness of his gifts. Community discussion leads gradually to unity, provided we know how to listen with patience and respect the truth of each person, expressing and evaluating sincerely the differing points of view that can help to clarify one's own thinking.

Every community experiences moments of fervor and enthusiasm as well as moments of malaise and discouragement. There are times when fraternal expression flows easily, and there are times when communication is blocked. There are periods of conflict, but also period of cooperation and convergence. Both types of moments proceed from "diverse spirits" and reveal motives that need to be purified, clarified, and discerned.

With regard to all these alternatives, which constitute the woof and warp of life in community, we should preserve an attitude of discernment in order to detect the direction in which God is orienting his action in the life of a community that is docile to his Spirit. A community should seek to accept itself serenely, maintaining true unity or striving to recover it if it has been lost. Despite the possible tensions, the community will harmonize its efforts toward the future by means of the slow purification of its members through sincere and respectful conversation. In this way it will often find new and better perspectives that produce peace and joy in the Spirit.

The effects of life in community as here described will bring an increase in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity for each of its members; the members will become "more present" to one another as the result of a deeper fraternal understanding and a clearer perception of the apostolic services the Spirit is asking of us.

Difficulties in the process of searching in common

For some communities this process of searching in common will no doubt raise questions that cannot be immediately resolved. It will then be necessary to have recourse to personal prayer and to meetings involving "spiritual participation." The goal will

be to clarify the situation, adopt the appropriate attitudes, find the most propitious conditions, and seek out the best means for practice. We should not allow ourselves to be frustrated by difficulties that may arise, nor should we wait for ideal conditions.

It is not a matter of multiplying useless meetings; indeed, that would be contrary to our apostolic mobility and a great waste of time. Nor should we treat topics that exceed the community's capacity, for not all communities are able to deal with all topics. Above all, the aim should be to learn to adopt the proper attitude in the meetings we hold about appropriate questions, and thus to make use of the many "signs of God" that often escape our attention in community discussions when we fail to comprehend their true significance.

I want the Superiors to promote apostolic communities of this type, communities adapted to the modern times. But I also believe that all of us Jesuits should feel responsible for our communities and for the life of universal body of the Society, which cannot make progress unless each one of us becomes renewed interiorly in his vocation.

I dare to think that this attitude is not essentially different from the one that motivated our first Fathers in 1539, when they met together to "deliberate" in common about whether they would make a vow of obedience. We are not now in the same situation as the founders, since we are following the very path that was traced out in that first deliberation and in subsequent developments. What we have now is a vow of obedience and a concrete Society that we need to adapt to the world of today, by being as apostolically creative as possible while also being completely faithful to our foundational charism. If the Society was forged in that common accord of the first Fathers, reached in an atmosphere of prayer and deliberation in common, then today the Society will be able to strengthen its dynamic unity and serve the Church better through community experience that is infused with the same spirit that animated our first Fathers and that takes modern circumstances into account when planning its concrete actions.

Practical effects of searching in common

Summing up: what practical effects do I hope will follow from the disposition of soul I have described and from this continual practice of discernment of spirits, both individually and communally? As regards our ordinary life, I consider the effects would be the following:

1. More frequent exercise of true Ignatian discernment, personal and communal, by living continually in the spirit of the Exercises. For that it will be necessary to develop the Exercises more seriously.
2. Formation of communities that define their apostolic goals better and that serve to sustain and inspire their own members, even when these members,

following their vocation, must travel to different regions and must work, especially today, in all types of environments.

3. Greater ability on the part of local communities in applying concretely, effectively, and easily the general norms and orientations given at the provincial or universal level.

As regards the preparation for the General Congregation, I believe that the effects can be the following:

1. Creation of such an ambience of unity, charity, and obedience (Const. 666, 659, 671), and such a spirit of spiritual reflection, discernment, and apostolic collaboration, that the General Congregation will develop as their natural, spontaneous fruit.
2. Creation of a spirit that will motivate 1) local communities with regard to the material within their remit and 2) specialized working groups in their respective areas of reflection. And creation of a way of proceeding that helps both local communities and working groups in the study of the topics proposed.
3. Promoting concrete, immediate experiences that properly dispose the soul and the way of proceeding of those who will one day be designated to take part in Provincial Congregations and the General Congregation.

Since we want to discover the best methods for creating communities capable of realizing this ideal, I am asking all those who have already had some practical experience in this field to communicate with me by means of their Provincial so that we can report the most fruitful experiences to the rest of the Society.

I hope that the desire to experience this spirit is awakened in everybody. If it is, our vocation will glow with a lovelier light, and both our communities and our universal Society will breathe with a new dynamism, which will be the best preparation for the future General Congregation.

Questions for reflection

- As I read this first official document on *discernment in common*, what new aspects do I find in it, as compared to the documents already seen? What is the most important reason for promoting *discernment in common*?
- What influence has *discernment in common* had in my own life experience, both personally and in community?
- Have I had some experience of *discernment in common*? If so, how would I describe it briefly?
- If I have practiced it personally, what effects has it had in my community? If I have not practiced it, what do I think would be the effects of practicing it?
- What type personal conversion does *discernment in common* require?
- What type of community conversion does *discernment in common* require?

4. A TIME OF MATURATION

When GC 32 met, nine years after the wake-up call of GC 31, *discernment in common* had already penetrated into the Society's consciousness, even though practice faltered and progress was slow. GC 32 provided an opportunity to collate the best experiences and formulate practical guidelines in the context of a redefinition of the Society at a time of rapid change and many new challenges. In the great apostolic agitation that followed GC 32, *discernment in common* caught on in the Society (see 4.1 below). When GC 33 was called to accept Father Arrupe's resignation and elect a new Superior General, it insisted strongly on the need for *discernment in common* (see 4.2 below). Later, when Father Kolvenbach had been Superior General for three years, he appealed to the Society's long experience and gave a new impulse to *discernment in common* in a remarkable document that was both stimulating and illuminating (see 4.3 below).

4.1. General Congregation 32¹⁹

Decree 2: Jesuits Today

19. The Jesuit community is also a community of discernment. The missions on which Jesuits are sent, whether corporately or individually, do not exempt us from the need of discerning together in what manner and by what means such missions are to be accomplished. That is why we open our minds and hearts, ... always on the shared understanding that final decisions belong to those who have the burden of authority.

19. The texts in this section are those selected by Father Kolvenbach; see his letter in section 4.3.

Decree 4: Our Mission Yesterday and Today

71. Considering the variety of situations in which Jesuits are working, the General Congregation cannot provide the programs each region will need to reflect upon and implement the decisions and guidelines presented there. Each province or group of provinces must undertake a program of reflection and a review of our apostolates to discover what action is appropriate in each particular context.

72. What is required is not so much a research program as a process of reflection and evaluation inspired by the Ignatian tradition of spiritual discernment, in which the primary stress is on prayer and the effort to attain “indifference,” that is, an apostolic readiness for anything.

73. The general method to be followed to produce this awareness and to engage in this discernment may be described (see *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 4) as a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision and action, in line with the Jesuit ideal of being “contemplative in action.” The aim is to insure a change in our habitual patterns of thought, a conversion of heart as well as of spirit. The result will be effective apostolic decisions.

74. The process of evaluation and discernment must be brought to bear principally on the following: the identification and analysis of the problems involved in the service of faith and the promotion of justice and the review and renewal of our apostolic commitments.

77. In each province or region, or at least at the Assistancy level, there should be a definite mechanism for the review of our ministries. Now is a good time to examine critically how these arrangements are working and, if need be, to replace them by others which are more effective and allow for a wider participation in the process of communal discernment.

Decree 11: Union of Minds and Hearts in the Society

20. Certain features of our Ignatian heritage can be given a communitarian dimension. ... For instance, the examination of conscience could, at times, be made a shared reflection on the community’s fidelity to its apostolic mission. Similarly, fraternal correction and personal dialogue with the superior can usefully become a community review of community lifestyle.

21. We can go further and say that community spiritual interchange can, under certain conditions, become communitarian discernment. This is something quite

distinct from the usual community dialogue. It is “a corporate search for the will of God by means of a shared reflection on the signs which point where the Spirit of Christ is leading” [R.P. Arrupe, “De Nostrorum in spiritu institutione,” *AR*, XV (1967), 123-124]. The method to follow in such communitarian discernment is analogous to that which St. Ignatius teaches for the making of a personal decision on a matter of importance [SpEx 168-189].

22. There are prerequisites for a valid communitarian discernment. On the part of the individual member of the community, a certain familiarity with the Ignatian rules for the discernment of spirits, derived from actual use [SpEx 313-336]; a determined resolution to find the will of God for the community whatever it may cost; and, in general, the dispositions of mind and heart called for and cultivated in the First and Second Weeks of the Exercises. On the part of the community as such, a clear definition of the matter to be discerned, sufficient information regarding it, and “a capacity to convey to one another what each one really thinks and feels.”

23. Clearly, the requisite dispositions for true communitarian discernment are such that they will not be verified as often as those for ordinary community dialogue. Nevertheless, every community should seek to acquire them, so that when need arises it can enter into this special way of seeking the will of God. Indeed, ... even ordinary community meetings and house consultations can incorporate elements of true communitarian discernment, provided we seriously seek God’s will concerning the life and work of the community.

24. What is the role of the superior in communitarian discernment? It is, first, to develop, as far as he can, the requisite disposition for it; second, to decide when to convoke the community for it, and clearly to define its object; third, to take active part in it as the bond of union within the community and as the link between the community and the Society as a whole; and, finally, to make the final decision in the light of the discernment, but freely, as the one to whom both the grace and the burden of authority are given. For in our Society the discerning community is not a deliberative or capitular body but a consultative one, whose object, clearly understood and fully accepted, is to assist the superior to determine what course of action is for God’s greater glory and the service of people.

50. To the extent possible, superiors should strive to build an Ignatian apostolic community in which many forms of open and friendly communication on a spiritual level are possible. Since it is a privileged way to find God’s will, the use of communal spiritual discernment is encouraged if the question at issue is of some importance and the necessary preconditions have been verified.

4.2. General Congregation 33

Decree 1: Companions of Jesus Sent into Today's World

12. If we are to hear and respond to the call of God in this kind of world, then we must have a discerning attitude. For us Jesuits the way of discernment involves: the examination of conscience, prayer and brotherly dialogue within our communities, and the openness to superiors that facilitates obedience.

13. We cannot attain this discerning attitude without self-abnegation. ... Without such an attitude we cannot present ourselves as interiorly free enough for the authentic service of Him who calls us.

39. If we are to fulfill our mission, we must be faithful to that practice of communal apostolic discernment so central to "our way of proceeding," a practice rooted in the Exercises and Constitutions. This way of proceeding calls for a review of all our ministries, both traditional and new.

40. Such a review includes: an attentiveness to the Word of God; an examen and reflection inspired by the Ignatian tradition; a personal and communitarian conversion necessary in order to become "contemplatives in action"; an effort to live an indifference and availability that will enable us to find God in all things; and a transformation of our habitual patterns of thought through a constant interplay of experience, reflection, and action. ... This process, undertaken in the local community, province, or region, leads to apostolic decisions made by superiors, after normal consultation and with accountability to Father General.

41. But such an effort runs the risk of failure unless we attend to the practical conditions required for its serious application. These conditions, to be given special attention both in initial and ongoing formation, include: deeper involvement in the lives of the people around us in order to hear "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted"; a regular exposure to new situations of life and thought which oblige us to question our way of seeing and judging; a gradual assimilation of that apostolic pedagogy of St. Ignatius; a well-informed use of social and cultural analysis; and an inculturation which opens us to the newness of Jesus the Savior in the evolution of every people, and thereby prevents us from absolutizing our perceptions and actions.

42. Definitions alone cannot clarify the apostolic directions of our mission. Such clarity can only come when we are faithful to the process and conditions of communal discernment and to the lived experience of religious men striving to labor with Christ in serving the Kingdom.

Questions for reflection

- What aspects of *discernment in common* are most stressed in GC 32 and GC 33? What aspects seem to me indispensable?
- Are there some new aspects with respect to the documents previously seen? What are they?
- What resources for advancing in *discernment in common* seem most useful to me?
- When passing from *discernment in common* to apostolic *discernment in common*, what nuances are added?

4.3. Father Kolvenbach: on apostolic discernment in common (5 November 1986)

I. Occasionally I am asked how the Society manages to make such an easy transition from one Generalate to the next. The question is even more pertinent when the new General has been familiar with only one small part of the Society, a complex and suffering part, to be sure, but one that is in no way typical of the generality of the Church or of religious life. I'm always happy to be able to answer that the Society's spiritual and apostolic dynamism does not depend only on superiors but on creative participation, generous collaboration, and careful consultation among Jesuits. It is in the form of an apostolic body—that is, united together—that the Society incessantly scrutinizes, in and for the Church, the signs of the times.

At this time, in the midst of a torn and wounded humanity, the whole Church is trying to be the mystery of communion in the Spirit. At this time most of our provinces are searching, through apostolic planning which involves the maximum possible participation, for ways to embody in our lives and in our works the proclamation of the faith and the promotion of justice in the name of the Gospel. At this time, on the occasion of the Congregation of Procurators and the Province Congregations, the Society is entering upon a period of spiritual discernment about itself; it is therefore a time of spiritual and apostolic renewal. For these reasons, it is an opportune time for me to draw our attention once again, and in a new way, to *apostolic discernment in common*.

I. *The Annual Letters of 1986*

2. *Apostolic discernment in common*: such was, in fact, the specific theme proposed this year for the annual letters. Superiors were invited to describe their

practice in this regard and to prepare for this by means of a communal reflection with their consultors, done as a true discernment.

As a result, the letters sent to me have made reference to the Society's efforts in the area of *apostolic discernment in common*: they have reported the successes, the difficulties, and the obstacles encountered. This report will be an attempt, first of all, to synthesize the positive and negative aspects in these letters, before offering the help which many requested as an orientation in this area.

Positive Aspects

3. My letter asking that the annual letters reflect on the practice of apostolic discernment met with a general reaction of willingness and hopefulness. Broadly speaking, Jesuits and Jesuit communities say that they are open to the recommendations in this regard which have made with growing insistence by the last three General Congregations. In the Society today there is widespread awareness of the importance of apostolic discernment for the vitality of our communities; there is also awareness of the demands this discernment makes both on individuals and on communities. Moreover, there is a growing awareness of just what *apostolic discernment in common* is, and what its rules are. The development of a capacity for mutual listening in communities is of great help here. Many Jesuits want to have practical experience of *discernment in common*. And those who have begun to practice it, even tentatively, testify that their experience encourages them and helps them to proceed further with it.

4. In many places, interpersonal exchange has made great progress in recent years. And, while the organization of regular exchanges is easier and more frequent in smaller communities, some larger communities have managed it as well. At times, larger communities have broken into subgroups to facilitate such exchange among members. Where such exchanges have proved difficult, there have been at least attempts to develop some form of mutual sharing of information on apostolic life. In every case, the efforts that a good number of communities have faithfully made, in response to the orientations given by the last General Congregations, have helped members of these communities to grow in mutual trust and respect and in fraternal concern for one another. In this way there often arises the deeper unity that is proper to "friends in the Lord."

5. The foregoing statements reveal that the question of *discernment in common* is not perceived in a narrow sense, as something that occurs only at particular times, when a community faces a problem important for its apostolic future. Rather, there is a growing recognition of a need for "living together," for progressing toward a mutual relationship experienced in our shared vocation and mission.

Hence, there is much emphasis on how personal growth is aided by the directed Exercises, by the examination of conscience, and by spiritual direction and the account of conscience; these are all privileged ways of orienting one's life in the direction of fidelity to God. Thus, there is also a parallel emphasis on the importance, for the growth of apostolic life in common, of faith-sharing, of revision of life, of reflection on apostolic work, and even of retreats made in common or retreats proposed for all the members of a province. Several provinces have, in fact, proposed that all their members make simultaneously a "retreat in daily life," which includes regular spiritual exchanges on a community level.

6. In some communities the exchanges are centered more directly on apostolic life. There are some small communities, and occasionally some larger ones, that meet together periodically for this purpose. Some communities combine this meeting, which is usually weekly, with some special times of prayer in common—for example, one day of retreat every three months. In this context we might also note a practice adopted by some communities: shared reflection on the personal discernment made by various members of the community with regard to their apostolates.

7. There are times when circumstances or particular occasions will give rise to a communal process of discernment in the strict sense. This might take place, for example, when there is a consultation to prepare for the naming of a future provincial, when there is discussion of the future of an apostolic sector, or when a province is elaborating an apostolic plan. There are meetings of superiors or even of whole provinces which are carried on in a real spirit of discernment. And, as several letters emphasize, some communities have been brought to true *apostolic discernment in common* by life itself: when they have been presented with the need to decide on or to accept important changes. In cases where Jesuits have had to deal with the closing or the radical transformation of an apostolic work, they have often done so in an attitude of common searching for the will of God. And it is notable how many Jesuits have, despite undeniable shortcomings, progressed in recent years along the way of indifference and true availability. Lastly, today there seems to be less danger of confusing *discernment in common* with a democratic process that is incompatible with an Ignatian concept of obedience.

8. Thus, even if the experience of *apostolic discernment in common* in the strict sense is not all that frequent, nevertheless it does occur in the ongoing life of the Society. To be sure, it occurs especially in communities that are united and homogeneous, in certain apostolic teams, or in some numerically smaller groups. And it frequently enough happens that province consultants, and at times house consultants and other consultative bodies, practice true *apostolic discernment in common* in offering their services to the Society's governance.

9. A final word might be added concerning the inclusion of non-Jesuits in the practice of *apostolic discernment in common*, whether they be diocesan priests, other religious men or religious women, or lay people. This orientation is becoming more pronounced in retreat houses, parishes, and educational institutions or other apostolic groups in which the Society is involved—at least in small groups.

Negative Aspects

10. Despite these many indications that show that apostolic *discernment in common* is not confined to the world of ideas or ideals, many Jesuits still encounter real difficulties in this regard, whether in the theoretical or the practical order. We will attempt to describe the difficulties as they were mentioned in the annual letters.

11. The first difficulty has to do with the very meaning of the “*apostolic discernment in common*.” How are we to understand, some ask, the complex vocabulary in use today which speaks of “community deliberation,” “community discernment,” “apostolic discernment,” “spiritual community discernment,” “community exchange,” “discussion of community problems,” etc.? Or again, is it really helpful to call “*discernment in common*” any kind of conversation or exchange, any meeting dedicated to on-going formation or to mutual communication? Would it be helpful to restrict the term “discernment” to designate the precise method defined in the Exercises? Or should the meaning be expanded to include the whole process of consultation and every decision taken in an atmosphere of prayer? Finally, does the term “in common” indicate that we are talking about something more than simply sharing individually made discernments?

12. Another difficulty raised concerns the authentically Jesuit character of the practice of *apostolic discernment in common*. Is it quite certain that this way of governance is appropriate for Jesuits? While it is true that a limited form of it can be found in the functioning of Congregations, is it not also true that Saint Ignatius wanted to reduce the number of General Congregations as far as possible in order not to rob Jesuits of the time they give to carrying out their mission? And while it is true that our Constitutions speak of prudence, discretion, and discernment, it is also certain that we find in them no mention of *apostolic discernment in common*. Nor do we find any mention of it in our history. This is because the Society is a community “ad dispersionem,” so that individual Jesuits receive their missions from superiors without having to ask themselves continually whether what they are doing is the greater good. Isn’t there a danger that the constant searching for our identity and the continual questioning of our apostolates will exhaust our

energies instead of mobilizing them for our apostolic work? In fact, don't tendencies of this sort constitute a pathological aspect of contemporary society? When superiors have to make decisions, they of course have to collect the necessary information and have recourse to useful consultation. But can't they do this without having recourse to *apostolic discernment in common*, that is, by turning to consultors and other competent persons?

13. Still another difficulty in the theoretical order is raised in passing: isn't there lacking, in a certain number of Jesuits, sufficient understanding of the meaning and the process of *apostolic discernment in common*?

14. Other difficulties consider various limitations of persons and communities that render them minimally apt for the practice of *apostolic discernment in common*. Many Jesuits, it is said, lack sufficient experience of personal spiritual discernment. Not all possess the interior freedom, the availability, the indifference, the striving for the "magis"; that is, they lack the attitudes which, according to Ignatius, are prerequisites for finding the will of God. Besides, our formation—at least in the past—did not particularly prepare us for seeking the will of God in common. This is proved by the fact that in many communities there are serious limitations in the areas of mutual trust, honest communication, and capacity for sharing (especially on the spiritual level). We have to face the fact, too, that the presence in a community of one eccentric, aggressive, or cynical personality is enough to call into question the possibility of *discernment in common*. Furthermore, when *discernment in common* is attempted, who will be responsible for verifying the conditions needed for every true discernment? Who will judge whether human emotions may not be masquerading as divine "motions"? Finally, isn't it clear that many superiors show a marked lack of initiative in this field? Indeed, some of them readily forego even regular consultations and community meetings.

15. Moreover, some claim that many attitudes characteristic of Jesuits and their communities are completely incompatible with the practice of *discernment in common*. They say that Jesuits display, for example, a tendency toward individualism, a certain sense of reserve or of shyness, difficulties in overcoming real disagreements (whether about the Church, the Society, or a view of reality), and even a certain intolerance that at times can reinforce the tensions arising from the diversity of language and culture in the Society. Some stress also that a pervasive activism, or at least a frequent excess of work, makes Jesuits minimally available for sessions of discernment, or for their preparation. In many Jesuits one finds a fear of change and a temptation to make stability the highest value; they display a lack of faith or a tendency to look for harmony at all costs. Also, some persons or groups can tend toward a rationalistic approach that is manifested in their preoccupation with immediate results, especially with regard to apostolic plan-

ning. Finally, it is said, where large communities do not share a common apostolic task, it is impossible for them to make a communal discernment about their mission.

16. Other difficulties are mentioned that affect the practice of *apostolic discernment in common* directly. First of all, it often happens, especially where an apostolic work has its own distinct structure of authority and its own membership, that the occasions for decisions, and hence for discernment, are multiplied, and that the Jesuit community cannot take part in a discernment process. As a result, it is sometimes unclear just who should take the decision to submit a question to *discernment in common*. Some ask, in this regard, whether a person who does not find himself in harmony with the rest should be obliged to participate in *discernment in common*. And some stress that a number of efforts at discernment have been unsuccessful because of lack of preparation, lack of reflection, or even lack of a timely review of what emerged from the process.

17. One difficulty concerns the practice of discernment with non-Jesuits and in particular with lay persons. How often have we found it possible to share with them in depth the spirit according to which we try to live?

18. Finally, there are some questions about the role of the superior. Some see in the practice of *discernment in common* a danger of a further weakening of governance in the Society that they already see as indecisive. Will the superior, they ask, have the courage to decide against the opinion of the majority? Will he be afraid to appear as though he was going against the Spirit? Is *discernment in common* tending toward a “democratic” process opposed to the Ignatian concept of authority, whereby decision is rooted in a hierarchical principle? Worse still, wouldn’t discernment, precisely because it takes place in a kind of assembly, tend to favor pressure tactics and manipulation? On the other hand, a superior can sometimes falsify true discernment by turning to the community only after having already decided an issue himself. Still another difficulty is defining the relationship between the superior of a community and the director of an apostolic work.

19. Clearly, this letter cannot respond directly and in detail to all the difficulties cited, but I will attempt to deal with them by proposing two chapters of reflections. The first bears chiefly on the theory of *apostolic discernment in common*, and the second suggests some ways of facilitating its practice, considering all the positive elements pointed out at the beginning. Some clear requests were made of me in the annual letters. One was that I publish a brief treatise on the practice of *apostolic discernment in common*; another was that I draw up and communicate to the Society different models, simple in form, which would spell out the steps for processes of *discernment in common* of various lengths.

This letter does not respond fully to such requests, although I do propose, in Appendix 2, a brief sequence of the elements that must be included, in one way or another, in every process of *discernment in common*. However, we should note that *discernment in common* has already been the object of considerable reflection and writing, especially by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality in Rome. It will be up to this Center, and analogous centers in other regions and countries, to continue reflecting on this question and to facilitate an exchange of experiences in this field. Provincials should provide members of their provinces with helpful bibliographical materials. Finally, it is clear that, in writing this document, I want to remain in dialogue with the whole Society on this point, and especially on the concrete practice of *apostolic discernment in common* as it is experienced in our communities and our provinces.

II. Reflections on the Theory of Apostolic Discernment in Common

Clarification of Terminology

20. Some of the difficulties about discernment emerge explicitly from the expression “*apostolic discernment in common*.” It seems useful, therefore, to spend some time reflecting on the precise sense and scope of each word of that phrase.

21. a) Discernment is an attempt to find “that which is pleasing to God” (cf. Rom. 12, 2; Philip. 1, 10); it is therefore a spiritual attitude constitutive of every Christian life and central in Ignatian spirituality.

As used by recent General Congregations in the Pauline sense, the term is not limited to the “discernment of spirits” for which Ignatius proposes two series of rules in the Spiritual Exercises. Rather, the term encompasses everything that Ignatius discusses when he speaks of the process of the “elections,” which is itself identical with the ultimate purpose of the Exercises as defined at the beginning of the book: “To Seek and to Find the Will of God.”

In his understanding of the election (cf. especially SpEx 175-188), Ignatius proposes three different “times” when such an election can be made, and he refers also to the rules for the discernment of spirits, when recourse to them is necessary (cf. SpEx 176).

22. b) The discernment or the search for the will of God that the 33rd General Congregation recommends to us is not only personal discernment but also *discernment made in common*. This implies more than merely collecting together separate discernments made by individuals; in a *discernment in common*, the group itself becomes the subject of the act of discernment. The phrase “in common” can refer, according to circumstances and needs, to an entire community, to

part of a community, to a group of Jesuits committed to a specific apostolate, or to a group of Jesuits and lay persons who collaborate in an apostolic work. It should be noted also that discernment, whether carried on by all members or only by part of the membership, may refer to the local community (or its apostolic work), or the community of the province, or the entire body of the Society.

As will be understood immediately, *discernment in common* in the Society is normally consultative, because the responsibility for making decisions is reserved to the superior. The purpose of *discernment in common* in preparing for such decisions is to provide help for the superior in searching for God's will. There are some cases, however—for example, in Provincial and General Congregations—in which decisions are taken by vote. In those cases, *discernment in common* is juridically deliberative. The fact that in most cases it is consultative should not lessen its importance. It is clear how important it is to prepare well for making any decision.

23. What is said in the Spiritual Exercises regarding the three “times” of election can also be applied to the process of searching in common for the will of God. It may be that we think of *discernment in common* corresponds to the third time of election, which is more spontaneous and stresses the need to weigh different aspects of a question, primarily on a rational level. However, if we are to avoid remaining solely in the sphere of human wisdom, we must stress the pointers Ignatius gives us in the successive steps of the election process, especially with regard to the third time. They are the following: trying for true indifference (no. 179); asking for the light of the Holy Spirit (no. 180); weighing motives according to the criteria furnished by the Gospel, by our Constitutions; and by the decrees of General Congregations, as well as by directives given by the ordinary government of the Society; and finally begging of God Our Lord a confirmation of our choice (no. 183).

Returning to the times of election, we must also consider whether the first two times can be applied to *discernment in common*. In fact, Ignatius did not exclude a common election made according to the first time when he treated the election of a General in the Constitutions (cf. Const. [700]). Consequently, there can be cases in which God's will is discovered together immediately, beyond any shadow of doubt.

Similarly, with regard to the second time, it must be affirmed that the community itself, in its practice of *discernment in common*, can experience consolation and desolation traceable to different spirits and their motions. In this regard I remind you of that Father Arrupe, in an Instruction prior to the 32nd General Congregation, spoke of “the active presence (in the midst of a community which is discerning) of opposing spirits” (First Instruction, no. 6).

24. c) The 33rd General Congregation explicitly added a further qualification to discernment, namely, that it is apostolic. It did this to indicate that the apostolate, because it is an essential aspect of our vocation, plays a part in our common

search for God's will. In fact, the God whose will we are together trying to find is the same God who has called us to continue today in the Church the mission of salvation inaugurated by Christ, in conformity with our charism. To discern together about our apostolate will therefore help us to keep alive the passion and the dynamism with which we ought to carry out our mission.

Ignatian Roots

25. These observations on the terminology used today in Society documents can perhaps throw some light on a number of difficulties that some have brought up with regard to *apostolic discernment in common*. Some Jesuits, for example, have raised questions about the authentic Ignatian character of such discernment. Without attempting to search through our entire history for antecedents of greater or less clarity, we can at least establish the following elements.

26. a) Prior to the Society's founding, precisely when the first Fathers were debating its founding, they came together to seek God's will by means of a process that utilized the directions in the Exercises about making an election. This process was the "Deliberation of the First Fathers" of 1539, which was itself preceded by the discernments already made in common at Montmartre and at Vicenza.

27. b) Once the Society was founded, there came into being, clearly, an exercise of religious authority which normally determined for each Jesuit his fidelity to the will of God. On certain points, though, the companions continued to search for—to "discern" together—the will of God. This was especially true with regard to drafting the Constitutions (January-February 1551). This was a very particular kind of experience, and its continuation can be seen in the procedures for General Congregations established by the Constitutions (cf. Const. [711] - [715]).

28. c) Still, the difficulty as usually expressed has to do with the use of *discernment in common* in exercising the normal governance of the Society. The material relevant to this point that can be found in the Constitutions and in other documents that describe Ignatius's way of proceeding can offer us only some indications of possible connections with *discernment in common*.

At the same time, it seems clear that the governance proper to the Society ought to be carried on habitually by means of a spiritual dialogue that involves a common search for the will of God. With regard to making decisions, the Constitutions often use the Spanish word "discreción." And the more important a decision is, the more prayer and consultation it requires:

Const. [211]: Consequently this [a decision about dismissal] must be left to the discreet zeal of those who have charge of the matter. The more difficulty and

doubt they have, the more will they commend the matter to God our Lord and the more will they discuss it with others who can be helpful toward perceiving the divine will in the matter.

Const. [618]: Should [the superior] think it advisable because of the difficulty or importance of the decision, he will commend the matter to his Divine Majesty and cause it to be commended in the prayers and Masses of the house, as well as discussing it with one or more members of the Society who happen to be present and whom he thinks suitable. Having done this, the superior will on his own authority decide about sending or not sending, and about the other circumstances, as he will judge to be expedient for the greater glory of God.

On the other hand, we should bear in mind the scope of official consultations (cf. Const. [810]) regarding the Counsellors of the General) as they have existed throughout the Society's history, in the light of Ignatian spirituality. Whatever limits and defects there may have been in the way they were used, the purpose of the Counsellors cannot be anything else but that of searching together, often with regard to the apostolate, for better means to fulfill God's will, in conformity with our vocation, and to respond to his expectations and calls.

In this context we may usefully cite a letter of Ignatius to Father Araoz: "I want to speak to you about another thing: just as I have recourse to consultation and discussion with those of this house about things of some importance to which I must attend, so I would like you to do the same . . . , recalling the spirit of kindness and charity that the Vicar of Christ our Lord recommends to us in the Bulls instituting our Society" (*MHSI*, Mon. Ignat. 8, 225).

Moreover, although consultations involve only some of the Jesuits to be affected by a decision, Ignatius put no prior limits on the number of those who could be involved in preparing for the decisions he made. Indeed, he approved Polanco's suggestion: the greater a particular difficulty, the more consultation should be sought—perhaps even of all those who live in the same house" (*MI*, ser. III, vol. 1, 128f.).²⁰

Today's Historical Context

29. "Community discernment" was recommended to the Society in explicit terms for the first time in Father Arrupe's letter of 25 December 1971. In the first part of his letter, Father Arrupe stressed that he was making such a recommendation because of the new demands coming from society and the Church.

In our contemporary world, Father Arrupe reminded us, the dignity of free individuals and their capacity for participation are affirmed ever more clearly. Vati-

20. Footnote in Kolvenbach letter: "This text was cited by Father Arrupe at the beginning of his letter on spiritual discernment in common (cf. *A.R.* XV, 1971, p. 767)." (See section 3.2 of this booklet.)

can II, for its part, defined the Church as a mystery of communion and opened the way for a more participative exercise of ecclesial responsibility. In like manner, religious life itself was instructed about “responsible obedience” and the exercise of authority capable that encouraged the cooperation of all members (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 14). Moreover, *Perfectae Caritatis* (no. 2) urged that religious be given an “adequate understanding of the world of today and of the needs of the Church, so that they will be able to give people assistance that is more valid because it is based on judgments about real situations, made in the light of faith.”

Together with this invitation to a more participative form of life, the Council also asked religious congregations to return to their spiritual sources (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 2). Now, undoubtedly among the treasures of Ignatian spirituality is the practice of spiritual discernment that is central to the Spiritual Exercises. It is therefore understandable that the present ecclesial context, with its stress on communion and participation, has focused on *discernment in common* as a legitimate, even necessary expression of our charism.

30. Following the lines of the Council, the new Code of Canon Law, in its turn, encourages religious institutes to promote the participation of individual members in internal affairs, in accord with the forms of government particular to each institute (Canon 618).

31. In keeping with this ecclesial movement, our last General Congregations have pronounced themselves in an ever clearer way on the theme of apostolic discernment.²¹

It goes without saying that the involvement of everyone in the search for God’s will seems more appropriate at the present time, when the complexity of situations renders the analysis of their various aspects more and more difficult. Thus, to the need for participation is added the necessity of having recourse to every inspiration, human and spiritual, for the analysis of complex situations. That inspiration can come precisely from the members of a community. Moreover, when everyone has been involved in preparing for apostolic decisions, then everyone will be able to appropriate better the decisions that are made. In any case, it should be clear that, far from limiting the exercise of authority and the readiness to obey, the practice of *discernment in common* does no more than help prepare the superior for the decision to be made. It does this by offering him all the aids of light, reflection, and prayer which can help him arrive more expeditiously at the will of God “here and now.”

21. Footnote in Kolvenbach letter: To avoid the multiplication here of precise references, the texts which treat this subject directly, whether from the 31st, 32nd, or 33rd General Congregation, are reproduced in Appendix 1. (For this booklet we reproduce these texts in sections 2.1, 4.1, and 4.2.)

The Subject and the Object of Discernment

32. a) In some annual letters, certain communities expressed the belief that they do not have any object for *discernment in common*. In fact, they say, the object of their apostolic mission has been determined by superiors and so leaves no room for any form of doubt or any further searching. And some believe that the separation between apostolic work and community takes decisions regarding the work out of the hands of the community and so deprives it of any object about which to discern.

To respond to this kind of difficulty, it must be said clearly that the object of discernment is not limited to questions about opening or closing works, or to choices of new apostolic fields. In fact, it is not limited to decisions of an institutional type.

Given its specific object, which is the apostolate, *apostolic discernment in common* is exercised in all possible forms concerning the experience of the apostolate and how best to manage it. It is always seeking the more suitable “means” to accomplish faithfully and effectively the mission received, taking into account the continually changing circumstances.

33. b) With respect to this overall object and the various aspects about which decisions are to be made, different subjects can be invited to practice *discernment in common*. The subject can be the local community or a part of it; it can be representatives of an apostolic sector or a group of experts; often it will be the consultants, whether local or provincial.

Since I cannot analyze all the different possible situations, I limit myself here to the following reflections:

In apostolic works, there will often be established institutional procedures that must be respected; there will also be responsible groups on various levels to which recourse must be had. In these situations, even if true discernment is not always possible, we can seek to apply its rules and conditions in an analogous way. We can also hope that, to the degree that we Jesuits become capable of discerning together, we can learn to share with our lay collaborators, in whatever way possible, a process of seeking the will of God.

It will be useful in every case to situate discernment in the phase of actively preparing for a decision-making process. In this way the specific role of the competent authority will appear more clearly, whether in convoking the discerning group, in defining the question to be resolved, or in accompanying the entire process more or less directly. When there is question of a community of the Society or a particular group of Jesuits, there will always be a corresponding superior who takes an appropriate part in the discernment process, actively accompanying the effort of seeking the will of God. Responsibility for making decisions belongs to him.

A Society in a State of Discernment

34. 1) If the Society is to grow in its ability to *discern in common* about its apostolate, certain conditions must first of all be met.

These conditions have been stated precisely, from both a personal and a communal point of view, in number 22 of Decree 11 of the 32nd General Congregation. Still, to the conditions laid down there we can add the following:

- From the personal point of view, the requirements for obtaining and maintaining the spiritual dispositions proper to the first two weeks of the Spiritual Exercises are the practice of personal prayer, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, and repeated experience of the Exercises themselves, made under expert guidance. We also stress the importance of being keenly aware of the human and social reality which forms the context of our apostolic commitment.
- From the communal point of view, there must be a clear sense of “belonging,” whether to a particular form of apostolate or more generally to the global apostolic mission of the Society.

By way of precondition, obviously, there has to be freedom from serious psychological problems.

35. 2) The last General Congregations have urged Jesuits to adopt a style of community life that allows them to live in an attitude of constantly searching for fidelity to the will of God. The more the conditions for such a search are deepened, the deeper community life itself will be and the greater its apostolic effectiveness.

36. 3) If this attitude is effectively lived out, a community or a group that is discerning together will be able to realize more easily a process of discernment (of “election”) in the strict sense of the word whenever it needs to prepare for important choices or decisions.

37. 4) Apart from these occasions, which are not very frequent, a community will be able to enjoy mutual relationships and rich communal sharing as it strives to develop its capacity for responding to the grace and the call of God.

This communal sharing becomes manifest in the attitude of discernment that has already been acquired (cf. 2 above) or in progressive preparation for this style of community life.

We must acknowledge honestly that, in reality, not all communities will be able to practice *apostolic discernment in common*. However, all of them can at least make an effort to grow and to find appropriate ways of deepening relationships, in accord with their present possibilities.

We list here some community practices that support real discernment:

- a) Shared community prayer based, for example, on a text of Scripture or the Constitutions.
- b) Faith-sharing in common about experiences connected with a determined aspect of our life (for example, our apostolic mission). In my talk to the Superiors of the Province of Italy at Galloro January 31, 1985, I stressed how the effective use of house consultors and community meetings can help the spiritual growth of a community in keeping with our Ignatian charism. We meet the Lord in meeting our brothers, and regular community meetings, I remarked, promote “the active participation of everyone in the process of coordinating and stimulating the community’s well-being and everything else the apostolate requires.”
- c) A variation on the preceding would be sharing in community about the personal spiritual discernment of community members. This exchange could also be related to the apostolic mission.
- d) “Review of Life” or a communal faith-sharing on certain elements of community life or discipline, according to the familiar process of “observe” (facts), “judge” (in the light of the Gospel), and for us, in the light of our specific vocation, “act” (a program of action).
- e) Evaluation of apostolic work in the light of something like province apostolic planning. This is really the Ignatian examination of conscience being applied by a community to its apostolic work: a kind of “Review of Life” dedicated to its own apostolic mission.

III. Growth in the practice of apostolic discernment in common

38. The texts of the last three General Congregations cited at end of this letter²² indicate the degree to which the theme of communal discernment has been the object of ever more careful reflection and of constant recommendation on the part of the Society. The directives given by Father Arrupe clearly go along these same lines. Grouping together the texts on discernment, we have a clear idea of what every Jesuit ought to try to live out, what every community ought to make an effort to realize, what the decisive role of the superior ought to be, and what processes must be respected to make operative the *apostolic discernment in common* asked of us by the highest authorities of the Society.

It is the ideal thus delineated that has guided the writing of the following notes. They are not meant to offer a model impossible of realization, but to stimulate each of us to walk in hope. To the degree that we are not yet the persons we are

22. In this booklet the texts are found in sections 2.1, 4.1, and 4.2.

called to become, should we not count all the more on God's grace and try to conform better to what the Society expects of us, to the extent that we can?

Personal challenges for every Jesuit in the practice of apostolic discernment in common

39. To enter fully into the life of discernment, whether personal or communal, every Jesuit must make an effort to grow in freedom. He will thus be more receptive to the ways of apostolic renewal and to the detachment to which the Lord calls us incessantly, and he will understand more clearly his particular responsibility in the apostolic life of his community and of the Society as a whole. It is first of all by means of prayer and a growing union with God that each Jesuit will progress on this path toward freedom.

The Jesuit who is desirous of discerning must be able to harmonize work and reflection. In fact, it is concrete experience and the contemplation of all things in the mystery of Christ that will make him capable of seeking the will of God with greater attention and fidelity.

For Jesuits, who are called to *discernment in common*, there is also the question of living fully integrated into the body of the Society and of engaging in fraternal dialogue with those who share their life and their work. Jesuits should make an effort, therefore, to overcome every form of individualism, every lack of attention to others, every temptation to intolerance. They should root themselves in the body of this Society which, though highly diversified, carries out the unified mission communicated to it by the Lord of the Harvest through the agency of all those people who share in responsibility for the mission. A sincere openness to their superiors and spiritual directors will help the grow in fraternal exchange and in shared responsibility for the mission.

Demands for the building of community

40. When we speak of the community to be built, we speak first of all of the apostolic community. The apostolic community, in its turn, demands that we forge a spiritual communion and that we search for a life in common that will encapsulate the various aspects of human existence.

Every community must therefore strive for the creation and fostering of friendship among its members. Such friendship will express itself in mutual trust, shared interests, and reciprocal respect, as well as in generous exchange and collaboration. It will draw profit from shared opportunities for leisure and recreation; it will give more importance to persons than to work; it will invite each of its members to share with the others his joys and sufferings; it will offer to all the re-

sources needed to overcome menacing insecurity and aggressivity. Finally, it will lead everyone to relativize his own ideas and convictions in dialogue with others.

Gathered in the name of the Lord and of His spirit, this community will be founded on charity and the gift of divine grace; it will tend to a sharing of prayer and experience in which members will open themselves more deeply to one another.

Finally the community, mobilized by its mission, will engage in real apostolic collaboration, which will translate into common projects that are open to the contributions of lay persons and other non-Jesuits.

The Role of the Superior

41. I have already said (cf. no. 31) that *discernment in common* places no limits on the exercise of the authority that is defined clearly enough in our Constitutions. I pointed out, in fact, that the practice of *discernment in common*, with its function of preparing for the decision by the competent superior, often offers him significant help in his government. Without returning to that theme, I will speak here more directly about what is expected of Superiors in the actual exercise of *discernment in common*.

To be a superior in the Society means to be given a specific mission with regard to the body of the Society. Consequently, it also means being given a particular responsibility with regard to the building up of this body, and with regard to the effort of discernment that we are called to practice in common about our apostolate.

Superiors readily recognize their limits in serving their communities. Every Jesuit must overcome personal obstacles in order to enter more fully on the path of *apostolic discernment in common*. Superiors also can encounter difficulties and personal limits along the same path, but these do not contradict their deepest intentions. So let us trace the ideal image of the superior who wants to invite his community or the apostolic group he leads to *discern in common*, as a way of preparing the decisions he must make.

First of all, the superior ought to have an attitude and habitual practice of discernment. He should discern in the light of the Society's apostolic orientations, and his discernment should be grounded in a correct understanding of the socio-cultural situation that forms the context of the apostolate for which he is responsible. The superior ought to have a good sense for dialogue, both with individual persons and with the group as a whole. He is the one who must guide the discernment, even if he delegates to another the task of chairing meetings. His first responsibilities are to remind the group of the prerequisites for *discernment in common*, to define the questions for common reflection, and to prepare the necessary data and information. Even as he unifies the group through his decisions, the superior ought also to open the apostolic group to the entire body of the Society.

IV. Elements or steps in a process of apostolic discernment in common

42. After the question to be treated has been defined, there should be appropriate analysis of the reality surrounding the apostolate under consideration. This analysis should be done at greater or lesser length, and in a more or less “professional” manner, depending on the nature of question at hand. It may mean inviting committed and well-informed persons to take part in the discussion.

After the analysis comes the time of prayer and reflection, during which each participant practices personal discernment, applying what Saint Ignatius says about the various times of election. After that there will be a pooling of rational arguments and spiritual feelings, without entering into discussion or controversy. (These times of prayer and personal reflection, as well as the pooling the results, may be repeated if they are seen to foster a deeper examination or a broader understanding of the question under consideration.) Then comes a time of common prayer (ordinarily including a common Eucharistic celebration), after which all the participants express their conclusions in their own name. Finally, it is up to the superior to make the decision; the unanimity of the group will be made concrete in its acceptance of this decision.

These general indications will allow for the best possible organization of every process of *discernment in common*, taking into account the nature of the group using it: local consultors, communities, apostolic teams, province commissions, superiors’ meetings, province assemblies, province consultors, Province Congregations, or finally General Congregation.

Relationship between the superior of a community and the director of an apostolic work

43. In this regard, see Father Arrupe’s letter of December 31, 1976 (*Acta Romana* XVI, pp. 1024-60). This is obviously a complex problem with a great diversity of situations. It will always be necessary, therefore, to consider not only the responsibility of each of the two persons involved but also their common responsibility since as they are (or may be) members of the same apostolic community, and since they are certainly members of the same Society which is ultimately responsible for the apostolic work.

Conclusion

44. This letter is certainly not the first word on *discernment in common* in the Society, and it will not be the last. In fact, recent General Congregations and the letters of Pedro Arrupe show a growing consciousness of the spiritual and apostolic

importance of discernment. The positive and negative aspects of current practice tell us that the Society is already engaged in a process of growth which includes many valid expressions of *discernment in common* that can be confirmed, deepened, and shared among ourselves.

I ask to be kept informed of the experiences the Society is accumulating so that, by our knowledge of our successes and our failures, we can help one another to grow in what I am convinced is an authentic application today of the Ignatian charism of discernment. The following reflection of Ignatius seems to have been written for our contemporary world: “The more difficult it is for the members of this congregation to be united with their head and among themselves, since they are so scattered among the faithful and among the unbelievers in diverse regions of the world, the more ought means to be sought for that union. For the Society cannot be preserved or governed or consequently attain the end it seeks for the greater glory of God unless its members are united among themselves and with their head” (Const. [655]).

To me it seems clear that a very important means for creating and fostering this vital unity in the Society is, for us today, *apostolic discernment in common*. There is in fact no better way to grow together in the “chief bond to cement the union of the members among themselves and with their head [which] is, on both sides, the love of God our Lord” (Const. [671]).

Appendix 1. Texts of the last three General Congregations on *discernment in common*²³

Appendix 2. Steps in a process of discernment in common

N.B. There is no question here of presenting a detailed method to be followed. There are different ways of building in the successive moments of prayer, reflection, and exchange which constitute every process of *discernment in common*. The experience of such discernment will help every community and every group to discover its own rhythm and to understand what it concretely needs in order to embark together on a genuine search for the will of God. Thus, in order to give some indication of the road to follow in a process of *discernment in common*, we sketch here in very broad strokes the steps that are ordinarily involved in such a process.

- 1) Defining the question. The definition ought to be precise, and the question itself ought to be of sufficient importance to warrant such a discernment.

23. These texts have been reproduced in sections 2.1, 4.1, and 4.2.

- 2) At the beginning of the process, all participants should make an effort to achieve true indifference and to place themselves in the presence of God, as individuals and as members of a community. At this moment in the process, personal and communal prayer is in order, to purify disordered affections.
- 3) While individuals reflect personally, the community should strive to grow in an evangelical spirit of openness to God, putting before itself the criteria outlined in the Exercises, especially in the Two Standards and in the Three Modes of Humility.
- 4) At this point begins the exchange about the question being discerned:
 - The question is reformulated.
 - Each one expresses his own “reasons” and his own “motions.” There is no debate, only mutual listening and a pervasive climate of prayer.
 - Then, generally at a later time, there should be discussion of the participants’ different contributions. This too is to be carried on in an atmosphere of silence and prayer, in order to capture more accurately the sense and the scope of the various reasons and motions.
- 5) A time of confirmation ends the process. A decision is taken by the competent superior, who will attempt to integrate the experience of searching in common. The community will find its unity in its acceptance of the decision made by the superior.

Questions for reflection

- Discernment is a habit, a way of living and/or working together. What might it require of my institution, community, or group?
- Have I had any experience of *apostolic discernment in common* done by Jesuits and non-Jesuits together?
- Do I have resolved in my mind the theoretical difficulties mentioned by Kolvenbach? Do I have other difficulties? What are they? How do I respond to them?
- What difficulties do I see in my group's habits or its ways of proceeding? What can be done about them?
- Do I see situations where my community or institution can apply some of the elements of *apostolic discernment in common* that Kolvenbach proposes?
- Is the role of the Superior or the Director in *apostolic discernment in common* well recognized and resolved in my community or institution? How? If it is not well resolved, how do I think that can be achieved?
- How would I define the "state of discernment" in a community or group?
- Summarize the demands that *apostolic discernment in common* makes on each person, community, or group; and on the Superior or Director.
- Compare the "stages" proposed by Kolvenbach with the 9 "properties" proposed by Sosa (section 1.1). Is it possible to integrate or synthesize them? From your own experience, what connections do you see among them?

5. CONFIRMATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF APOSTOLIC DISCERNMENT IN COMMON

General Congregation 34 not only confirmed the proposals of earlier years and made them much more concrete, but it also undertook a revision of the Constitutions, in accord with the desires of Vatican II. It did so by means of the Complementary Norms, which are the authentic manner of updating the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. *Apostolic discernment in common* is now explicitly mentioned in these Complementary Norms and so forms part of the Institute of the Society of Jesus.

5.1. General Congregation 34

Decree 13: Cooperation with the Laity in Mission

8. Laity who collaborate in Jesuit apostolates can expect from us a specific formation in Ignatian values, help in discernment of apostolic priorities and objectives, and practical strategies for their realization.

13. All those engaged in the work should exercise co-responsibility and be engaged in discernment and participative decision-making where it is appropriate. Lay persons must have access to and be trained for positions of responsibility, according to their qualifications and commitment.

Decree 26: Characteristics of Our Way of Proceeding

8. God invites us to join with him in his labors, on his terms, and in his way. To discover and join the Lord, laboring to bring everything to its fullness, is central to the Jesuit way of proceeding. It is the Ignatian method of prayerful discernment, which can be described as “a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision and action, in line with the Jesuit ideal of being ‘contemplative in action’” [CG 32, d.4, 73]. Through individual and communal apostolic discernment, lived in obedience, Jesuits take responsibility for their apostolic choices in today’s world. Such discernment reaches out, at the same time, to embrace the larger community of all those with whom we labor in mission.

5.2. Complementary Norms of the Constitutions

Sixth Part: On Obedience

150.2. If we are to receive and to fulfill our mission through obedience, we must be faithful to that practice of spiritual apostolic discernment, both personal and in community, so central to our way of proceeding, as rooted in the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions. This discernment grows and gains strength by the examination of conscience, personal prayer and brotherly dialogue within our community, and the openness to superiors through the account of conscience that inclines us toward obedience.

151.1. All receive their mission from the superior, but the superior himself expects the community to discern in union with him and in conformity with his final decision, the concrete ways whereby that mission is to be accomplished and the procedure by which it is to be evaluated and revised in the light of actual performance.

151.2. If, therefore, the question at issue is of some importance and the necessary preconditions have been verified, the use of communal and apostolic discernment is encouraged as a privileged way to find God’s will.

151.3. In the Society the discerning community is not a deliberative or capitular body but a consultative one whose object, clearly understood and fully accepted, is to assist the superior to determine what course of action is for God’s greater glory and the service of humankind. It is up to him to make the final decision in the light of the discernment, but freely, as the one to whom both the grace and the burden of authority are given.

Part Seven: Missions from the Superiors of the Society and Our Choice of Ministries

256.2. Hence all our ministries, both traditional and new, must be reviewed by means of apostolic spiritual discernment, both personal and communitarian, with great attention to the role they can play in the service of faith and the promotion of justice, in solidarity with the poor,[43] so that, if need be, they may be replaced by others which are more effective.

Part Eight: Fostering Union in the Society

315. A local Jesuit community is an apostolic community, whose focus of concern is the service that Ours are bound, in virtue of their vocation, to give to people. It is a community *ad dispersionem*, since its members are ready to go wherever they are sent; but it is also a *koinonia*, a close sharing of life and goods, with the Eucharist at its center, and a community of discernment with superiors, to whom belong the final steps in making decisions about undertaking and accomplishing missions.

324.1. To the extent possible, superiors should strive to build an Ignatian apostolic community in which many forms of open and friendly communication on a spiritual level are possible.

324.2. Taking into account the mission it has been given, every community should after mature deliberation under the direction of the superior establish a daily order for community life, to be approved by the provincial and periodically reviewed.

324.3. The daily order of the community should include, besides a brief prayer every day as mentioned in no. 230, occasionally a longer period for prayerful discussion; when the will of God is seriously sought concerning the life and work of the community, elements of true spiritual *discernment in common* can be included.

326.3. Communities that include priests, brothers, and scholastics are to be encouraged. If everyone in them shares in all aspects of community life, including faith, domestic tasks, relaxation, prayer, apostolic discernment, the Eucharist, and the Spiritual Exercises, more and more we will truly become friends in the Lord. This sharing of life will help to build up communities of shared responsibility in our common following of Jesus and complementarity in the one mission. To make this sharing a reality among us, we need human and spiritual maturity and a better formation in interpersonal communication.

Part Nine: Governance of the Society

354.1. Superiors should readily and often ask for and listen to the counsel of their brethren, of a few or of many, or even of all gathered together, according to the importance and nature of the matter, and even by means of spiritual discernment carried out in common (according to no. 151.2). They should gratefully welcome suggestions that their brothers offer spontaneously, but the duty of superiors themselves to decide and enjoin what ought to be done remains intact.

354.2. Directors of works, of whom nos. 406 and 407 speak, should do the same; they should be altogether alert to the advice and suggestions of their brethren, so as to be helped by them in carrying out their offices.

Questions for reflection

- Given my situation in life and my vocational option, what aspects of the Complementary Norms of the Constitutions seem to me most relevant?
- What do these most relevant aspects of the Norms require of persons, community, groups, or institutions?

6. NEW APOSTOLIC IMPULSES AND THE SHARED MISSION

General Congregation 35, following the path blazed by previous Congregations and Superiors General, developed the concept further. It insisted on the importance of discernment for Jesuit communities and also warned of possible distortions of the process. Nowadays we are experiencing dynamic new movements and novel apostolic initiatives that are increasingly shared by Jesuits and non-Jesuits. Everything impels us to make progress in *apostolic discernment in common* and to practice it creatively. The Superiors General have strongly encouraged the Society and its collaborators in this regard. Adolfo Nicolás brought wisdom from the East to motivate us and to help us to understand *apostolic discernment in common* better (see section 6.2); he also addressed the specific issue of apostolic planning (see section 6.3). Arturo Sosa has insisted that *apostolic discernment in common* is needed at the present time to define the paths and the objectives by which the Society should carry out its mission. “The Society is passing through a key moment in its history, and it is doing so in a more complex world.” Also, the participation of non-Jesuit collaborators in the Society’s apostolate enriches the possibilities of *apostolic discernment in common*; at the same time, it requires greater creativity and more work of formation (see sections 1.1 and 1.2).

6.1. General Congregation 35

Decree 4: Obedience in the Life of the Society of Jesus

20. Some have used the language of discernment to excuse a desire to determine their own mission, forgetting that discernment in the Society is a communal exercise that takes into account a multiplicity of voices but reaches its completion only in the conferral of a mission by the superior.

28. The community has its role to play. We obey our superiors in community so that our common life can effectively support our mission and become a sign of the possibility of human communion our world so sorely needs. The community is also a privileged place for the practice of apostolic discernment, whether through formally structured communal discernment or through informal conversation that has the more effective pursuit of the mission as its goal. Such discernment will help us not only accept our personal missions but also rejoice in and support the missions received by our brothers. In this way, our common mission is strengthened and the union of minds and hearts confirmed and deepened.

Decree 5: Governance at the Service of Universal Mission

28. The Society's law (cf. especially NC 354.1) strongly encourages a participatory and discerning approach to decision-making at all levels, including that of the Province. So that this approach may be even more effective, care needs to be taken that:

- a) It remain clear that it is the appropriate superior, not a consultative body, that makes the final decision (cf. NC 354.1).
- b) There be sufficient clarity about the process for planning and decision-making, with the specific roles of various commissions and officials being adequately communicated to members of the Province.
- c) The role of the Province Consultors, as laid down in universal and proper law, be respected. This role should not be eroded by the responsibilities rightly given to staff, officials, or commissions.
- d) The Commission on Ministries (cf. NC 260.1) be an effective instrument for apostolic planning and its review, especially as this relates to established works and ministries of the Province, the creation of new apostolic works, and the ongoing apostolic formation of collaborators.
- e) The legal and economic aspects of any decision should be considered.
- f) There be structures for implementation and ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of Province plans.

34. From his privileged place at the heart of the community, the superior is also responsible, together with each member, for developing its apostolic life. Concretely, this commits the local superior to lead his community in a Jesuit common life characterized by the celebration of Eucharist, prayer, faith sharing, communal discernment, simplicity, hospitality, solidarity with the poor, and the witness that “friends in the Lord” can make to the world.

Decree 6: Collaboration at the Heart of Mission

9. The heart of an Ignatian work is the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. Indeed, any work may be said to be Ignatian when it manifests the Ignatian charism: i.e., when it intentionally seeks God in all things; when it practices Ignatian discernment; when it engages the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation. Such a work does not rely necessarily upon the Society of Jesus for its Ignatian identity, though it may affiliate with the Society in partnership through networks and other structures.

13. The local Jesuit superior and local Jesuits do much to foster the connection between a Jesuit ministry and the Society. All Jesuits, but especially those assigned to a work, can help to foster a spirit of discernment and collaboration by their example and their willingness to share their lives with others. Likewise, our communities, as apostolic centers and not as mere residences, are called to explore how their hospitality may promote collaboration.

20. A final dimension of formation for mission involves programs of preparation and support for collaborators in leadership positions. ... They should receive suitable formation in the distinctive dimensions of our way of proceeding, especially the integration of apostolic discernment in decision making.

6.2. Responses of Father Adolfo Nicolás to questions about discernment in common

During the first morning of the workshop on “Apostolic Discernment in Common in the Light of GC 35,” held in Rome in January 2009, the group of 86 persons, Jesuits and lay, enjoyed the privilege of meeting with Father General, Adolfo Nicolás SJ, for an informal conversation in which he responded to various questions posed by the group.²⁴

24. *Revista de Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, no. 122, pp. 9-21.

I am delighted to see so many persons interested in spirituality, accompaniment, discernment, and other related matters. My talk will give you some basic ideas about how I think about these issues. Certainly, I am happy that you have had the opportunity to consider them; that means that the dialogue among us has already begun.

First question

The first question is the following: why does the work of an apostolic body need ongoing discernment in common? Why is the personal discernment of superiors and other leaders not sufficient? Is it necessary to involve the whole apostolic body?

A few days ago, when we were preparing for the Spiritual Exercises, I read a booklet that had been sent to me from Japan a few weeks before. The booklet described the teachings of a very famous Zen master named Dogen; he has perhaps been the most influential Zen master in the history of Japan. The booklet is very short; each page has a Buddhist aphorism explained by Dogen. One chapter offers a response to the question you have asked. Dogen asks why some persons fear changes. When they open their eyes, he said, they must see that there always are changes.

I lived six years in the Philippines, and I saw how each national group celebrated its own culture, its own spirituality, and its own theology. They did so, naturally, in different ways. The Japanese culture is based on change. The only fixed thing for the Japanese is that there are four seasons, and the essence of the four seasons is that they are changing constantly.

Consider the blossoming cherry tree: the cherry tree is the symbol of Japanese culture and beauty. It blossoms quickly. After a few days when there is rain and cold weather, the petals fall off and cover the ground like a carpet. It is all very beautiful, to be sure, but the cherry blossoms essentially wither in just one week. If good weather continues and they last more than a week, the Japanese become anxious and ask what's wrong with the world.

Everything is changing, and that is why we need ongoing discernment. Last year they elected me General, and now I see things very differently from how I saw them a year ago. Our priorities have not changed, but our way of considering them has. After visiting different parts of the world, I realize that my way of thinking has been very limited. I have had to change because the reality is not the same in all places.

My predecessor, Father Kolvenbach, spoke about creative fidelity. Fidelity means that there is something basic in our relation with Christ, the Church, the world, and humankind. At the same time, fidelity must be creative because things are always changing.

Saint Ignatius was never content with the status quo. His famous *magis* indicates a certain dissatisfaction with the way things are, a spiritual refusal to accept the present state of things.

In our Constitutions and also in the New Testament, the verbs used are active ones: love, service, walk, advance, proceed, aspire, grow. They are all verbs of action. The spiritual life either increases or diminishes; it never just stays the same. If we don't grow, we are overcome by the weight of our weaknesses. We grow and change all the time. This means being continually aware of what is happening around us: what is good and what is not so good.

The persons we serve are also changing, and that is why our language changes. There is the language of children, of adolescents, of young married couples and older married couples, of people who work together—the language is not the same for all. We become more aware of that as we age.

When I was visited in India, I noticed that the program for my visit included a message of encouragement for the children. I didn't know how I should talk to them. I wondered what their vocabulary and their language was like. An experience I had one Easter Sunday in Tokyo will explain what I mean: the workers were coming to Mass with their families and children. The homily was being given by a priest of the community, who asked the children what was the most important thing in their lives. Surprised by the question, the children looked at one another and answered, "That is very complicated!" The priest became aware that the language he was using was not the language of the children, and so he asked them: "Okay, what TV program do you watch?" They responded immediately, but then he had no idea what they were telling him!

When I travel, I am not worried about the food or the climate. I'm used to both tropical and non-tropical climates. What scares me most is speaking to people about whom I know nothing, people with whom I have not shared experiences, people whose problems are unknown to me. I don't like to give conferences without knowing the people who are listening to me. That was an experience I had previously, before serving in a parish.

The languages, the images, and the symbols are different. As you know from cultural anthropology, symbols are very important in people's lives. Symbols are born, and they grow and develop, but they also get sick and die. Some are resurrected. We have to rediscover our own world in practically every generation. This requires perceptiveness, feeling, response, ability to react and to face reality, etc.

People's hearts also change. They draw closer to God, or they distance themselves from him. That is why Saint Ignatius, each time he was about to celebrate Mass, looked deep within his own heart. How I would like for us Jesuits to do that more often! In that intimate contact with his heart, Saint Ignatius would decide whether to pray to Mary, to Jesus, or directly to the Father. If he felt very united to God, he would go directly to the Father. If he felt a little distant, he would go directly to Christ. If he noticed that the distance was greater, he knew that he needed

a Mother. He would pray first to Mary, then to Jesus, and finally to the Father. If we know our own situation well, we will understand that we are not always in the same disposition. We must change, and we must be attentive.

The circumstances of our apostolate change; the situation of a school changes, as does that of a parish. Our knowledge of reality also changes. In a school, the students are different: one class is not like another; one group may be impossible to control while another group is marvelous!

The parents also change; they are different. And so are the possibilities for learning, studying, entertainment, and teaching. I remember that when I went to Japan in 1961, we had to study Japanese laboriously, with a teacher and various books. A few years later new teaching methods appeared, using cassettes and different teaching aids. Now the courses are very rapid, and in six months you learn to speak; previously, three years of study were required.

We live in a world, researchers tell us, where change will go far beyond anything we can foresee. For example, consider the research into the brain in our time, how the brain of a child develops. New horizons are opening up. I have a sister-in-law who, when she began to teach remedial English in the university, became intensely interested in learning why some students needed remedial English since they were already very intelligent, open, and receptive. She then realized that their brains were functioning differently from those of other students. She got interested in neurobiology, and she soon learned that the brain has different parts and that the way the parts combine and actively relate to one plays a large role in determining how we act, learn, and study. All these factors change our way of working and relating to one another.

Thus, they also change the questions we ask. We ask ourselves whether we should be teaching in our classrooms or, instead, doing educational research that would help improve our schools. Should we be working with middle-class students or rather with immigrants or poor children from the slums, or perhaps with children in rural areas? Should we strive to have more prestigious schools or rather simpler schools that can be multiplied so that education can develop according to a country's needs? Along the same line, should we work in traditional schools or in technical ones? In some places we have community schools that attend to students who are "drop-outs." Instead of giving them a liberal education, as we did in the past, we try to form them for work; this requires a very different approach, but it also includes the humanistic aspect of our education. Instead of working in traditional schools, we might work in networks such as *Fe y Alegría* in Latin America or the *Cristo Rey* and *Nativity* schools in the United States. The answers to these questions will be totally different in Canada, Italy, Timor, or other countries.

All this means that we need to discern, but our discernment cannot happen once and for all. We have to continue discerning because the process never ends. Those of you who are or who have been provincials know quite well that this is an ongoing task, a continual challenge. The world tries to respond to our needs

by different paths. New situations require new discernment, new creativity, and new responses.

On 1 January 2000, I was in Manila, after finishing my period as Provincial of Japan. I was invited to give a talk to Jesuits, and I chose as a topic what we can learn from 2000 years of Church history. Concretely, I discussed what produced results in the past and what did not. Such a reflection sheds a bright light and makes quite manifest the need for change. The history of the Church is a history of change, but it also a history of religious life and lay apostolate. There are always new forms, new developments, new needs, and new responses.

Every generation needs to rediscover itself, to rediscover Christianity, and to rediscover ways to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every generation has something to discover.

But what about Tradition? Tradition provides us a basic wisdom. We have to accept it and make it our own. If we don't, it will be of no use to us. Sometimes we accept only a part of the Tradition; we tend to say: "Well, I accept this tradition, but I leave aside the substance of it."

That is why we need to discern. The questions we need to discern are about what, how, how long, etc. We need formation programs to help answer those questions; we need a formation that prepares us and others to enter this process of change. Discernment is how we must live in the midst of a changing world. Discernment must be done in common because no one person can comprehend everything; God doesn't allow himself to be captured by any one person.

In discernment we become aware that we can never possess the will of God. We can come close to knowing it, and we can say, "Well, I think that in the present circumstances, with prayer, with consensus, with the information we have, and with our convictions, we are as close to God's will as we can be. This is our decision." But Saint Ignatius made it clear that if we have new information which sheds light on our problem, we should always be ready to reconsider things. God is free, and his ways are far beyond our understanding.

Obedience is never a one-act reality. Discernment is a process in which every factor counts: every experience, every positive act, and every point of information. That is why we need community. Remember the book Hillary Clinton wrote about education, *It Takes a Village*.²⁵ In the same way, "it takes a community" to discern.

So we may wonder why we have superiors. Wherever there is a community, there is need for someone to coordinate. If we did not have communities, we would not need superiors. But the superior is always at the service of the community and of the will of God. Both the superior and the community have to obey. I am ill at ease when a superior is so certain that he knows the will of God that he is unwilling to change, no matter what happens around him. God shows us signs of his will in

25. CLINTON, Hillary (1996). *It Takes a Village*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

many ways, and we learn his will by accepting those signs. If we do not accept them, we are disobeying, and unfortunately there are superiors who in fact disobey.

In my opinion, *discernment in common* is a slow process, slow but real. There is no instantaneous discernment. It is true, as Saint Ignatius says, that in some case we receive a sudden light, as happened with Saint Paul on the road to Damascus. But discernment is different; it is by nature a search, and searching is a slow process.

If you don't form part of the process, you can easily cause it to fail. If you're not really involved in it, you will never be in tune with it. If a superior makes decisions and the community hasn't been part of the process, I can tell you that sooner or later I will receive letters from the community, complaining that the superior never consults and decides everything on his own. Consequently, the participation of everybody means the process will be slow, but such participation is necessary for genuine change.

One final word on this question: I think that God is hidden in the discernment process. If we follow a process that is authentic, we will find God. If we are in a rush and don't pay attention, we will miss God, who is hidden there. The process is a big help, and that is why Saint Ignatius favored it. The process carries us from where we are to where God wants us to be, but we shouldn't assume that we'll find that out easily.

Second question

What elements and dimensions should we keep in mind today for apostolic discernment in common?

Saint Ignatius works with us through our exercises. The elements I have in mind are related to the type of exercises we are doing. They help free our minds and our hearts so that we can carry out exercises that touch the reality and the needs and the suffering of the people. Since the days when I was studying theology, I have been thinking about how Jesus in the gospels reacted to the needs of the people. Jesus reacted in three ways: first, by giving people what they asked—curing the leprosy, the blindness, the paralysis, or whatever illness they suffered. Second, he responded to hidden, deeper needs: the paralytic needed forgiveness, the leper needed integration into the community, and similarly in other cases. Third, Jesus opened up a new horizons to everyone generally, revealing new dimensions to all who witnessed the events. That is why the people felt happy whenever Jesus worked a miracle; they marveled and praised God, saying, “Nothing like this has ever happened before!”

An excellent exercise for us is discovering people's immediate needs and then penetrating deeper to discover their real, hidden needs. This exercise is important for justice and peace, for the Church, for religious life. It helps us to contemplate

the depths of people's humanity, and it shows us the root causes of their condition. We are not always conscious of these aspects.

It is important to consider not only the problems of an individual person but the general tendency. We ask ourselves, for example, why young people are not receiving the help they used to receive—help from their families, help from their formation, help from the social setting. This will reveal a different type of problem. Everything that puts us in touch with reality is a great help in our discernment.

Superficial tendencies are obvious but still superficial. We can mention, for example, the matter of fast foods. Someone consumes food without really having time to savor it, and so life becomes superficial for that person. A booklet on Zen Buddhism reflects on the fact that the experience of eating something truly delicious—such as when you eat something and say, “Wow, this is really good!”—is excellent preparation for receiving enlightenment because it is a moment without thinking (we're talking about Buddhism), without thoughts; there is only pure feeling, a moment of happiness. Fast food deprives us of the experience of joy; it leaves no time for stopping and enjoying something. There is no sense of delight; we limit ourselves to doing quickly what we have to do, and nothing more. How does all this affect the people, both the young and the old?

If we consider these aspects, they will help us in discernment. When we discern, we are conscious of experience, of anxiety, of insecurity, of criticism, of our openness to criticism, and of the lack of help for people who need help. I remember a Jesuit professor at Sophia University in Japan once told me: “Recently I have found it very difficult to flunk students in the exams because they might commit suicide or fall into a deep depression. So I ask myself what I should do. On the one hand, the students are under great pressure, and on the other, they are so weak psychologically that they cannot accept failure! How do I resolve this dilemma? How can I help them strengthen their character?” This is a concrete problem for a community's discernment or for a pastoral or educational program.

Other exercises bring about a change in our hearts and minds, that is, in our interior life. A good exercise might make us aware of our deficiencies. I would say that we need psychological awareness. We are not all psychologists, but we all know enough about psychology so that, in speaking with others, we can tell whether there is a lack of contact with the Spirit or simply psychological inability to confront reality and make a choice.

The Spiritual Exercises help us to find our connection with places, groups, and results. This is something very basic in Christian spirituality, just as it is also in Buddhist and Hindu spirituality. You work and you do what you can, but you're not attached to the fruit of your work. The connection with the fruit of your work is a source of unhappiness for many of us: we work too much, and we want to see the results, but the results depend on many factors. That is why all the spiritual traditions insist on remaining indifferent with regard to the results. It's not detachment from work; it's not laziness. We have to work hard but remain free, detached from the

fruits. The Gospel says that if the people don't receive your message, you should shake the dust from your sandals and continue on your way, free and content. Thus, the Exercises deal with tendencies and fears, with the spiritual state of the person, etc.

Other Exercises affect religious community interiorly and exteriorly—for example, the ways of praying in a community. Some people may have very good will, but perhaps they don't know how to treat the problems of community prayer. The Exercises can help us discover the roots of the problems: perhaps it is a lack of unity, or a distorted vision, or unwillingness to cooperate, or little appreciation for the values of others, or some ideological factor. When ideologies are present, there is no way to create a sense of community.

Other risk factors can also prevent us from discerning, though we might not believe it. These are the risks such as material poverty, financial problems, resistance to what is new, or lack of inculturation. The risks make us feel ill at ease. In this matter of risk, I think we need to pay special attention to the value we put on success. I'm convinced that the need to succeed has been one of the fiercest enemies we've had to fight against. It is true that success is something for which we thank God, but is also a great temptation. For example, we may think we should stay in one place when we are no longer necessary, simply because we have been successful. Or we may avoid taking risks because we fear we might fail. Remember that the life of Jesus ended in failure. We are constantly celebrating successes, but I still haven't found a single community that has celebrated the failure of its work for the kingdom of God!

Third question

Is it possible that apostolic discernment in common will be the special contribution that the Ignatian apostolic community (lay and religious) makes to the Church of today?

Here we must speak with great humility because we are only servants of the Church. We possess nothing that is our own. I believe that Ignatian discernment can contribute much to the Church. We can help the Church in a few of its needs by applying to them our process of discernment. That's why I have divided discernment into three stages: its starting point, its process, and its endpoint.

In the starting point we treat of the needs of the Church as they are "incarnated" in real problems. Discernment is never abstract; it is always about something concrete. It is important to understand human reality, human suffering, and human confusion. We need to be sure that our concerns and our challenges are those of humankind and not some other problems of our own creation. I believe that bringing this quality to the Church's processes of discernment is a great contribution that our communities and groups can make.

We need to learn how to draw close to reality and feel its influence; we need to know how to move within reality under the impulses of the Holy Spirit. The Inquisitors did not find anything heterodox or improper in Saint Ignatius, but they were concerned because this man was tending toward something dangerous, something revolutionary. He was most certainly revolutionary because he took human reality very seriously as his starting point; it was the place where he found the will of God. As did Jesus, so did Ignatius live in the middle of reality. He did not start off with the law but concretely, with from the life of the people, and from there he sought out the law.

There are three words that I consider key for contributing to the process: *knowledge*, *listening*, and *integration*. The first word, knowledge, means knowing yourself and your internal movements. In his *sadhanas*, Father Tony De Mello had high praise for this type of knowledge; he considered it the core of spirituality. It involves being conscious of how God is working, moving, and acting among us; it means realizing that we are surrounded by signs, and being able to distinguish among them so that we can recognize the meaning of our internal movements, our feelings, and our inspirations—and so discern them well. In this way we learn to purify ourselves and be led correctly; we learn to struggle with things that seem contradictory by delving deeper into them. Ignatius proposed these steps; he insisted on repetition and application of the senses, and then bringing the matter to the community, so as to reach finally a confirmation.

The second word is *listening*: learning to listen to the Holy Spirit. This is not something spontaneous; there is no room for romanticism or self-deception. It is very easy to confuse yourself with the Holy Spirit. When you feel satisfied with something, you may think right away that it is the Holy Spirit. It is better to wait! Even in our ordinary conversation, we sometimes talk too easily of “consolation” or “desolation.” We shouldn’t say, “Today I feel consoled,” just because the weather is nice, or we had a good breakfast, or the backache is gone. That is not consolation. Learning to feel the action of the Holy Spirit is a great grace for the Church. It is in this area, I think, that we can make our contribution without manipulation, because manipulation means there is a lack of true freedom.

The third key word in the process is *integration*. I believe that we can help the Church by learning to integrate our perspectives with those of the community. Again, we find ourselves needing *discernment in common*. Integration is something we have to learn. We have to listen to one another and be constantly listening to the community. We should adopt a position of great humility. In that way we can begin to hear not only the musical notes of individuals, so to speak, but also the symphony played by the full orchestra. *Discernment in common* requires more humility than personal neutrality does. It also requires us to prefer the common good over an individual’s idea.

This is also where obedience to God through others takes place. Obedience is difficult even for superiors, but we should all obey the will of God. Authority is part of the whole process of discernment and not an external element. Real *discernment in common* will show that, in the end, authority confirms the process.

At the end of the process, I think that it will help the Church at many levels if we show ourselves to be open and if we seek signs to confirm what has been discerned. It will be no help at all if we remain fixed on our own personal ideas and refuse to accept decisions that may run contrary to our opinion, arguing, “I have already made my opinion known, and I cannot change; if I changed, I would lose my reputation and my authority.” The interior signs of confirmation are joy, hope, charity in the community, and sometimes even good health. When Father Charles de Foucauld wanted to do something very difficult, he felt that Jesus was telling him in prayer: “Charles, your health will help you discover my will.”

If the process becomes dreary, people will get bored and drift away. That is a sign that the discernment was not correct. With regard to its difficulty, we should keep in mind that we are now doing the same work with fewer persons and that we can keep on this way until people are worn out. That is not good discernment, which requires that we be free of such situations.

In cases like this, we have to be brave and strong enough to make a hard decision, such as withdrawing from a project, an institution, or a ministry that may have been very successful in the past but that we feel we can no longer continue. We cannot destroy people just for the sake of continuing work that was successful in the past. Let us thank God for the past and hope that others can continue the work in the future.

The positive external signs are the community itself, the consensus arrived at, and sometimes the superior. But our own personal advantages are never good signs.

Finally, we are always ready to revise everything if new signs appear or new information is available. Ignatius was always ready to reconsider. If he had that willingness and readiness, why can't we have it? We don't seek the will of God to demonstrate our authority. If we change our ideas, perhaps others will realize that we are, after all, trying to obey. I think that on this point we all at one time or another have undergone a test of our sincerity, good will, honesty, and readiness to change our minds.

6.3. Father Adolfo Nicolás: the apostolic institutions at service of the mission (January 2014)

Each Province or Region, by means of a careful process of discernment, should concretize the mission of the universal Society in an apostolic project that embodies the identity, the dreams, the challenges, the objectives, and the principal options that can help Jesuits and their collaborators, as well as all their apostolic institutions, to renew themselves continually and to advance decisively in the way of greater service. In this way they will realistically and positively put into effect the recommendations of the last General Congregations.

Institutions are an important source of resources for promoting the *missio Dei*, which is the Society's reason for being. ...

But it is also true that with institutions come risks. They can become obsolete and irrelevant; they can lose their religious and Jesuit identity; they can absorb huge amounts of personnel and economic resources; they become an obstacle to apostolic mobility; and they can make us neglect other more creative apostolic initiatives.

In the present circumstances of very swift sociocultural changes, the Ignatian examen or evaluation is a key means for judging whether the institutions are continuing to realize their proper apostolic objective.

In conformity with the criteria of Saint Ignatius and the first companions as reflected in the foundational documents of the Society, we should always keep in mind a number of important concerns and honest questions when discerning about our institutions:

- Their ability to ask serious questions about their mission and their service to the Church and society, and even about their prophetic stance and their work on the frontiers.
- Their creativity and dynamism in advancing from the concrete reality of each particular context toward ideals that are desired and pursued.
- The repercussion of the use of the means required by the institutions on the lifestyle and the poverty of the Jesuits who work in them and on the solidarity and conduct of all the collaborators, etc.

It is not enough for the work to function well, provide a good service, enjoy prestige, and have great success among the people. In his document *De Statu* (Nairobi, 2012), Father Nicolás asserted that “it is not a question of control or power but of judging whether and how our institutions continue to be fundamentally apostolic instruments, and of clarifying their basic objective of service to the mission of the Church and the Society.”²⁶

6.4. General Congregation 36

Decree 1: Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice

8. In our individualistic and competitive age, we should remember that the community plays a very special role since it is a privileged place of apostolic discernment.

26. There follows a long series of practical reflections for Provincials and Apostolic Works. (*Apostolic Institutions at the Service of the Mission*, January 2014, a document drawn up at the request of GC 35 and communicated to Major Superiors by Father General Adolfo Nicolás: *A.R.* XXV, IV, I, pp. 899-906).

10. In our Jesuit community life, we should leave room for encounter and sharing. This disposition helps the community become a space of truth, joy, creativity, pardon, and of seeking the will of God. Thus, community can become a place of discernment.

11. Communal discernment requires that each of us develop some basic characteristics and attitudes: availability, mobility, humility, freedom, the ability to accompany others, patience, and a willingness to listen respectfully so that we may speak the truth to each other.

12. An essential tool that can animate apostolic communal discernment is spiritual conversation. Spiritual conversation involves an exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of that which touches us most deeply. It tries to take account of spiritual movements, individual and communal, with the objective of choosing the path of consolation that fortifies our faith, hope and love. Spiritual conversation creates an atmosphere of trust and welcome for ourselves and others. We ought not to deprive ourselves of such conversation in the community and in all other occasions for decision-making in the Society.

14. Of course, this disposition to attend to the Spirit in our relationships must include those with whom we work. Often they teach us this openness to the Spirit. Important discernments concerning mission are often enriched by their voices and their commitment.

23. A special gift Jesuits and the Ignatian family have to offer to the Church and her mission of evangelization is Ignatian spirituality, which facilitates the experience of God and can therefore greatly help the process of personal and communal conversion. Pope Francis constantly affirms that discernment should play a special role, in the family, among youth, in vocation promotion, and in the formation of clergy [cf. *Amoris Laetitia*, 296-306]. Christian life is more and more personalized through discernment.

Decree 2: Renewed Governance for a Renewed Mission

3. Discernment, collaboration, and networking offer three important perspectives on our contemporary way of proceeding.

4. Discernment, a precious gift of Ignatius, is integral to our personal and corporate apostolic life. It begins in contemplation of God at work in our world and allows us to draw more fruit in joining our efforts to God's designs. Discernment is what "roots us in the Church in which the Spirit works and distributes

his various gifts for the common good” [Pope Francis, “Discourse to GC 36,” 24 October 2016]. Discernment serves as the foundation for decision-making by the proper authority in our way of proceeding. . . . This discernment process offers the spiritual base that enables our apostolic planning.

7. Inclusive discernment and ongoing planning and evaluation of our efforts to go beyond the obstacles is required in order to mainstream the participation of mission partners further in various levels of the Society’s apostolic activities and governance. It is also important to discern to which projects, initiatives or activities carried out by others, we could offer our support, whether human, technical, intellectual or financial.

12. This Congregation identifies three areas for further reflection and action:

- a) The Society should continue to improve its process of discernment, making it always more coherent, that is, better able to identify and respond to challenges at the global level in a way that integrates local, provincial, conference and central governance. The Society should continue to develop ways at every level to implement, monitor and evaluate the results of decisions taken.
- b) The breadth and depth of our planning and review processes (for example, the review of central governance and the structures of Conferences) need greater attention and capacity.
- c) Some of the requests of Decree 5 of GC 35 (for example, communications, sharing financial resources, leadership development) have been acted on, but they are still works in progress that need attention.

14. GC 36 asks Father General to review the process—initiated by GC 34 [D. 21, no. 28] and continued by Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach [*AR* 23,1 (2003)]—to evaluate progress on our current apostolic preferences and, if appropriate, to identify new ones. Discernment of such preferences should include the greatest possible participation of the Society and of those involved with us in our mission. To this end, as indicated by GC 35 [D. 3, no. 40], Father General and the Council should establish procedures for assessing the Society’s complex processes for apostolic planning at all levels and encourage the use of ongoing discernment and planning.

22. GC 36 asks Major Superiors to ensure that apostolic discernment and planning in their Provinces or Regions is consistent with the universal apostolic preferences of the Society and the apostolic discernment and planning of their Conferences, so that the mission preferences of the whole Society are taken into account in the ministries of their Provinces or Regions. Discernment and decisions of Major Superiors about works in their Provinces or Regions must take into account

the effects they have on flexibility and availability for the universal mission of the Society, especially in their Conferences. This engagement enhances both the General's capacity to undertake global mission and the Major Superiors' co-responsibility in serving the universal mission of the Society.

25. GC 35 stated that "the effectiveness of the local Superior is critical to the apostolic vitality of the Jesuit community..." [D. 5, no. 33]. The apostolic leadership of the local Superior is today marked by the importance of the promotion of discernment, collaboration and networking. GC 36 requests that local Superiors exercise their service to communities from these three perspectives so that they promote mission at all levels: local, Province, Conference and universal.

26. GC 36 invites Superiors and Directors of works, and indeed all Jesuits and partners in mission, to foster deep habits of prayer and discernment as the pre-udes and accompaniment to ongoing planning, and to foster mutual relationships and collaboration in implementing plans. This means encouraging a spirit of availability and trust among us and with all who serve the *Missio Dei*.

Questions for reflection

- In what ways does GC 35 speak more explicitly about the conditions for *apostolic discernment in common*?
- What do the words of Father Nicolás add to the preceding documents? Do they add some nuances or correct any points?
- Does GC 36 add anything new? Does it add nuances?
- What are the most important requirements for *apostolic discernment in common* with the participation of Jesuits and non-Jesuit collaborators?
- How can we implement in practical ways Pope Francis's insistent request to help the Church make progress in discernment?
- After reading all the documents, try to sum up the essential properties of *apostolic discernment in common* in five points.
- Which elements would you consider most necessary for apostolic planning?

Besides the documents already cited, the Superiors General have provided many other statements and proposals on *apostolic discernment in common* in the course of their service to the Society of Jesus. The writings of Fathers Arrupe and Kolvenbach are obviously the most extensive, both because of the length of their terms and the newness of discourse about *apostolic discernment in common* in their time. We offer in the following pages a generous selection of the Generals' texts as they appear in various volumes. In each case we indicate the source in case the reader wants to view the excerpt in its context.

- Pedro ARRUPE (1981), *La identidad del jesuita en nuestros tiempos*. Santander: Sal Terrae.
- Pedro ARRUPE (1982), *La Iglesia de hoy y del futuro*. Bilbao-Santander: Mensajero-Sal Terrae.
- P. H. KOLVENBACH (1992), *Selección de Escritos del P. P.H. Kolvenbach, 1983-1990*. Madrid: Provincia de España de la Compañía de Jesús.
- P. H. KOLVENBACH (2007): *Selección de escritos del P. P.H. Kolvenbach, 1991-2007*. Madrid: Provincia de España de la Compañía de Jesús.

Spiritual discernment

1. *Discernment in common* merits special attention. Even though it is one of the pillars of spiritual and apostolic renewal, it is still little practiced. Today few communities can be said to be *communitates ad discretionem*, either because they lack the fundamental dispositions (indifference, interpersonal communication, etc.), as

can sometimes be seen in the manipulation by pressure groups, or because they do not know how to do discernment in a practical way.

(Arrupe, “Initial Discourse at the Procurators’ Congregation” [27 September 1978], in: *La identidad*, p. 30)

2. The isolated attempts to introduce pressure-group methods or political manipulation into our meetings, assemblies, or consultations ... should be vigorously combated since it is diametrically opposed to authentic *discernment in common* and the spirit that animates the governance of the Society.

(Arrupe, “Initial Discourse at the Procurators’ Congregation” [27 September 1978], in: *La identidad*, p. 27)

3. Saint Ignatius teaches us and leads us to live in an ambience of permanent spiritual discernment. The reason for this, as one modern author notes, is that “the will of God is not always imposed on the human heart in the form of a single possibility that is clear as day; it is not always identical to one’s own thinking, even when this thinking is as well-intentioned as possible. The will of God can present itself as multiple possibilities; it is not something established once and for all but is different in different situations. Every day we must discern anew what the will of God is for us. Each morning we are faced with the question: what should I do *hic et nunc*, in the present situation, in this new day of life?” (cf. Bonhoeffer, *Ethique*, Geneva, 1965, p. 21). Here the message of Ignatius acquires a marvelous depth. With simple terms and formulas, Ignatius places individuals before the fundamental problem of life: discerning at each moment the will of God so that they can personally fulfill their own end and so that the creatures around them can thereby reach their own end (SpEx 23; Rom 8:20-22).

(Arrupe, “Listening to the Spirit” [31 July 1975], in: *La identidad*, p. 483)

4. If we analyze discernment in a human way, we will see that what appears to be a simple intuition or a simple decision involves at least reasoning, reflection, experience, and “heart.” In discernment the human heart is lifted by the Spirit and by faith to commune with divine things. It involves reasoning in the form of human wisdom and theological reflection. It involves observation and experience. In other words, it involves human life in all its profound depth, and it involves continual learning. And all that so that we can come to concrete action, for as Saint Paul says, we cannot be content with good desires.

(Arrupe, “Listening to the Spirit” [31 July 1975], in: *La identidad*, p. 484)

5. We should not imagine that discernment provides ready-made, prefabricated solutions to the pressing problems that afflict human beings today. Like Saint Paul, Saint Ignatius wants us to use all the resources of faith, human reflection, and experience in order to discover the authentic will of God in our ever-changing concrete historical situations: “I urge you, brothers and sisters, to let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your spirit so that you may discern what is the will of God” (Rom 12:1,2).

This is the meaning of the “examination of conscience” that Saint Ignatius constantly practiced during the day. It is not simply a scrupulous and detailed review of our actions; rather, it is a constant verification of the extent to which our life is in close harmony with the Spirit.

(Arrupe, “Listening to the Spirit” [31 July 1975], in: *La identidad*, p. 485)

6. Discernment is a distinctive characteristic of our way of proceeding. To be sure, it is a gift of the Spirit, but the same Spirit will also carefully educate us about discernment. We can submit to the Spirit’s pedagogy, as the whole of Ignatius’s life shows. We strive to be persons like Ignatius: persons who are educated through a long, unending experience of the Lord, who are permanently searching for and listening to the Lord, and who acquire a certain supernatural facility for perceiving where the Lord is and where he is not.

This trait is prior to and fundamental for all prophetic aspects of evangelizing action. Without it, such action ceases to be authentic; instead of building the Church and the Society up, it destroys them.

(Arrupe, “Our Way of Proceeding” [18 January 1979], in: *La identidad*, pp. 78-79)

7. Before we can do the discernment of which we speak, there is something prior and absolutely necessary. This prior need is *conversion*, which is often called *metanoia*: it is the radical interior transformation of a person, a transformation of spirit and heart.

But what exactly is conversion or *metanoia*? It is something like getting rid of one thing in order to make room for something else. It is getting rid of whatever prevents us from being filled with the Holy Spirit, from being totally at the disposal of the Spirit Jesus promised to send us, “the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father,” the Spirit who “bears witness” to Jesus and leads us, who are also called to be his witnesses,” to the “fullness of truth” (John 15:26-27).

There can therefore be no true discernment without conversion. Discernment is simply the fact of being guided by the Spirit; it is seeing the world—and what we should be and should do in it—not with our own eyes but with the eyes of the Spirit.

Consequently, conversion is a transformation brought about in our deepest self; it is a radical transformation. We should not fool ourselves: nothing about conversion is superficial. It's not a matter of deciding, after some fervent retreat, to "give something to the poor" or to be a little more generous with a particular charitable work. That is certainly praiseworthy, but it is not conversion.

Conversion is not the gift of something we can afford to lose. It is something much more profound than that. It means abandoning something we ourselves *are*: our old ways with our old prejudices, convictions, attitudes, and values; our too human ways of thinking and acting. It means abandoning those habits that have come to constitute so much a part of who we are that the mere idea of separating ourselves from them causes us real agony. But they are the very things that prevent us from interpreting the signs of the times accurately and from living life wisely and exuberantly.

(Arrupe, "Testimony of Justice," [1972], in: *La Iglesia*, p. 323)

8. The principles are relatively clear and evident, but when we want to move into action and employ concrete means, we enter into a difficult, ambiguous terrain that requires discernment. Saint Ignatius himself warns us about the essentially ambiguous nature of human actions, even in the spiritual field: our mortification, our service to others, and even our experiences of prayer can be ambiguous.

As we face this ambiguity that confronts us on all sides—the devil in the form of an angel of light—Saint Ignatius provides us not with a theology but with a spirituality and with concrete techniques for overcoming the deceits of the understanding and the will. If we can deceive ourselves in things that directly affect us—things that we presumably know quite well—then how much more will we deceive ourselves in realms with which we are less familiar, realms that are made even more ambiguous by the desire for profit, power, or prestige?

This does not justify our remaining inactive and failing to commit ourselves. Our commitments should take into account the ambiguity of the values and counter-values that are found in the field of human activity, even as we keep in mind the specific demands of our mission and vocation. One of our principal functions is precisely to free all humanity activity of ambiguity, to the extent possible. We are called to destroy the God-killing idols that people erect to signify the "death of God," even though they fail to realize that if God dies, then the hope for true and total liberation also dies in humanity and in the world.

(Arrupe, "Our Mission Today in Latin America," [July 1973], in: *La Iglesia*, pp. 70-71)

9. The discernment of which I speak here is nothing more than prayerful reflection on a human reality that we have tried to perceive as clearly and objectively

as possible in the light of our faith and the Gospel. The goal of discernment is to mold our lives and our actions so as to be able to respond to that reality in the way the Spirit dictates.

(Arrupe, “Our Mission Today in Latin America,” [July 1973], in: *La Iglesia*, p. 72)

10. Certain problems should be dealt with at the interprovincial or international level, but we should keep in mind the very large number of particular situations. That is why we cannot always expect the universal Society to take precise positions or make precise options in many areas, which are then imposed on Provinces and regions. However, since everything proceeds from a common spirituality and from apostolic priorities inscribed in our Constitutions and our General Congregations, as well as from the *modus procedendi* proper to the Society, union is ceaselessly achieved and maintained, including through the more concrete options and perspectives that apostolic planning has chosen in each of the Assistancies and Provinces.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Provincials’ Congregation on the State of the Society” [20 September 1990], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 239)

11. Without a doubt, consecrated life feels the need to determine better whether all that happens with it comes actually from the Spirit. In order to be ever sensitive to what the Spirit says, consecrated life needs to live provisionally and experientially, always available and ready to change. In responding to this impulse of the Spirit, consecrated life has sometimes made discernment into a fad, reducing it simply to community consultation or using it as a screen to conceal a government incapable of making a painful decision.

Nevertheless, Master Ignatius did not fail to indicate the essential conditions of discernment that is at the service of the Spirit. He insisted that an indispensable element was indifference as he conceived it: freedom acquired through contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Christ and through purification of our own desires. We must add that, in the present conditions, if there does not exist a community worthy of the name, then community discernment will be no more than a charade.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Procurators’ Congregation” [23 September 1999], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, pp. 131-2)

12. At the end of Procurators’ Congregation 66, Father Pedro Arrupe, after commenting at length on our mission and the implementation of Decree 4 of GC 32, concluded thus: “Allow me, contravening all the rules of rhetoric, to insist once

again: there is need for more profound, prolonged, personal prayer that we know how to share with others. Without prayer there is no possibility of conversion, evaluation, discernment, or apostolic endeavor.”

(Kolvenbach, “To the Procurators’ Congregation” [23 September 1999], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, pp. 131-2)

13. The great novelty was what we call *discernment in common*: a joint search for the will of God, to know his desires and his will about the local community as it carries out its mission. In the Spiritual Exercises Saint Ignatius provided orientations for personal discernment (SpEx 169-189). Guided by these Ignatian rules, the Society felt the need to elaborate directives for a type of *discernment in common* that would allow us to read together the signs of the times in the spirit of the Council.

Ordinary community meetings, consultants’ meetings, and regional or provincial assemblies can contribute to serving the mission of Christ in this way, and such meetings have in fact quite frequently produced community projects that define the mission of each and every member in concrete ways.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Superiors of France: General Congregation 34 and Community Life” [30 November 1996], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 207)

14. For a spiritual life to be dynamic, it should keep growing with the rhythm of life. A vigorous spirituality will not be created in any laboratory but will arise from our discernment about the successes and difficulties of experiencing God in our world. The Centers can make a decisive contribution to this effort of formulation.

(Kolvenbach, “For a Culture of Dialogue and Solidarity: Where Is General Congregation 34 Calling the Faith and Culture Centers?” [10 September 1995], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 405)

Apostolic discernment in common

15. It has quite wisely been stated that the critical function of Christians is, or should be, a thorn in the side of history, a goad that prevents people from resting on their laurels. But on what occasions and by what means can recourse be had to such a goad?

And for what type of action should Christian criticism be a goad? How can we choose, among the various options, the kind of criticism that will produce the

most lasting and universal good? How do we exclude an option that might bring only temporary relief for a present evil but would possibly create more problems than it resolves?

These are difficult questions, but they are no unsolvable. They by no means justify indecision or inaction. They demand discernment.

The first fruit of discernment is that of differentiating at the very outset the ambiguities in the struggle for justice. That is where we need the reflection we call discernment.

(Arrupe, "Testimony of Justice," in: *La Iglesia*, p. 320)

16. Does the Christian commitment to build a just social order mean that the Church should commit itself politically? If so, in what manner and to what extent?

The Church should feel inclined to take the side of the poor. Does this mean taking the side of the poor in each and every conflict? If this is so, how can such a stance be harmonized with the Church's other basic function, which is reconciliation? If this is not so, then what does taking the side of the poor mean?

The Church should bear witness to justice, but it should do so with charity. When a conflict arises between these two obligations, even if it is only apparent, what should the Church do?

Later we will discuss these questions; here we only state them. If the Church wants to fulfill its mission of giving testimony with regard to justice, it should practice spiritual discernment. Given the complexity of concrete situations, the Church must use supernatural discernment to discover the direction in which the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, wants to lead us.

(Arrupe, "Testimony of Justice," in: *La Iglesia*, p. 321)

17. The Christian community should become an organ of discernment and should be structured accordingly. "Each Christian community should objectively analyze the situation of its own country, clarify it by the inalterable word of the Gospel, and deduce principles of reflection according to the Church's social teachings" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 4). These words of Paul VI motivate us to speak about the method of discernment.

So that the work of discernment will reach all levels, those who hold positions of responsibility and influence in the Church have a special obligation to carry it forward and set the example. As we will try to show below, it is especially necessary that those with authority adopt a spiritual attitude that allows them to see clearly and justly. With regard to the situation to which discernment is to be applied, the following question should be asked: what are the facts?

To be able to discern the manner of promoting justice in a concrete situation, objective knowledge of the facts is indispensable. That is why it is important to

establish organisms and methods that make it possible to obtain exact information about a situation, so that it can be analyzed and then communicated to others. We should reflect on the facts and interpret them in the light of the faith.

Simply collecting and interpreting data about the concrete situation, as essential as that task is, is not yet doing discernment. Properly speaking, discernment is prayerful reflection about a human reality (that we have tried to grasp as clearly as possible) in the light of faith. The aim of the discernment is to model our lives and orient our actions with regard to that human reality strictly in accord with the Spirit's indications.

(Arrupe, "Testimony of Justice," in: *La Iglesia*, p. 321-2)

18. It is quite clear that *discernment in common* is one of the most important tasks of a Superior, among all his duties with respect to the community as such. At stake are the apostolic vitality of the community and the effectiveness of the work(s) promoted by the community. It is only in an atmosphere of discernment, done according to the well-known requirements, that it is possible to evaluate and opt for a mission of the height and depth required by the spiritual nature of our apostolic activity. The discernment should be done with the help of human elements and techniques, such as those prescribed by the General Congregation. I want to stress, from a practical point of view, that the initiative should generally be taken by the Superior, or it should at least have his approval. Whatever other forms of exchange may already exist, the moment may come when dialogue and deliberation should be raised to the level of spiritual discernment. However, that should not be considered an extraordinary event since by its nature "the Jesuit community is a community of discernment." Such discernment is a response to a request from higher levels of the Society's governance—such as the Region, the Province, the Assistancy, or the General himself—with a view to adopting important measures of governance or measures that affect the apostolate of a particular work or planning in general.

In this whole process of discernment what I want to emphasize here is the decisive role that you yourselves play. The final decision—which gives discernment its value as a religious process done in the light of the Spirit and which validates the option made—is solely the Superior's. But it would be illusory to pretend to do *discernment in common* in a situation where fraternal interchange was lacking or stagnating. If there is not already a community of life and faith that meets regularly and shares information habitually, then the spiritual level needed for discernment will be lacking. If there are not restricted and/or open consultations as circumstances require, then the community will not be spiritually prepared or humanly capable of the dynamics of relationship and functioning that are necessary. The superior's duty is therefore to work patiently and constantly in that direction, and General Congregation 32 encourages superiors in this regard. While it is true

that spiritual *discernment in common* is very different from ordinary deliberation, it presupposes, humanly speaking, that the latter is done effectively.

(Arrupe, “The Local Superior: His Apostolic Mission” [13-14 February 1981], in: *La Iglesia*, pp. 783-4)

19. We need to ask ourselves seriously before God whether our ministries and activities, both the more “spiritual” ones and the more “social” ones, and our own way of life reflect in fact all the liberating dimensions of our mission, its transcendence and its immanence. If such is not the case, then we need to ask whether we are taking the necessary measures to remedy the situation. We also need to ask ourselves whether, out of love of the poor and the oppressed, we have the evangelical audacity to break with the past if necessary, with “what we’ve always done.” Do we have the courage to abandon works and institutions less suited to present-day needs and follow new paths with hope? Are we following the example of Christ and truly making an option for the poor and the oppressed? Are we struggling effectively against oppression and exploitation with all the evangelical means at our disposal, relying only on the hope of liberation that is already present in the world through Christ? Are we not only willing but inclined, when circumstances require it, to live side by side with the poor, to share in the state of the oppressed, as Christ did? Are we able to fight against everything that is sinful, unjust, and oppressive, not for reasons of ideology but for motivations that are truly evangelical and apostolic? Are we willing to do this while respecting persons and while refraining from destroying authority or weakening the unity and communion that unites us all, faithful and pastors, in one body? Are we ready to give an example of greater equity, solidarity, and evangelical poverty in our own daily lives, in our houses, and in our Provinces, by avoiding unnecessary expenses and placing everything in common? Are we convinced that it was above all by his passion and death that Christ liberated us? And does this conviction find expression in our life and activity, in the value we give to the suffering and to the quiet, hidden work of so many Jesuits who die daily to free people from sin and its consequences and to inspire them to hope in God and in others?

If we are not ready for all this, then we must make a choice: either to prepare ourselves for it through a profound *metanoia*, or to declare ourselves incapable of going to the depth of the fundamental evangelical option, which is loving the poor Christ unreservedly.

(Arrupe, “Our Mission...,” in *La Iglesia*, pp. 72-3)

20. By vocation, the Society assumes the preferential option for the poor, but it will still have to pass through a period of apprenticeship and real experimentation in all sectors of its apostolic activity. Although Society, like the Church, makes a

commitment to justice in the service of faith, it does not yet know all the concrete consequences that will derive from that commitment for its pastoral ministry, its educational work, or its social apostolate. The Society will have to evaluate constantly the authenticity of its attempts, its experiences, and its efforts to advance along the path that the Church shows us in its most recent documents.

(Kolvenbach, “On the Reception of General Congregation 33” [3 May 1985], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 46)

21. Another point that is indispensable for the apostolate of the Society is apostolic discernment. Many reactions to it have been very lacking in precision and realism, but it is the only means for working in constant fidelity to the voice of the Spirit in and for the Church.

(Kolvenbach, “On the Reception of General Congregation 33” [3 May 1985], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 47)

22. *Apostolic discernment “in common”* is a work of the whole educational “community.” The Jesuits contribute their knowledge and experience of Ignatian spirituality, while the lay persons contribute their experience of familial, social, and political life. Our common mission will be more effective to the extent that we can all continue to learn from one another.

(Kolvenbach, “On the ‘Characteristics’ of Jesuit Education” [8 December 1986], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 144)

23. It is in community life, which is already mission, that we acquire the apostolic sensibility for such priorities, and it is in community life that we discern, by the light of Christ, the concrete ways in which an apostolic work should be accepted, modified, advanced, or abandoned (N.C. 15).

(Kolvenbach, “On Community Life” (12 March 1998), in *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 56)

24. Descending from our own positions of power might be too simple a course of action. Generally, that would serve only to abandon the whole social structure to exploitation by the selfish. Precisely here is where we begin to understand how difficult the struggle for justice is. Here is where you Jesuit alumni can help in the process of finding God’s will even in uncertain times, using a great gift we have received from our founder, Saint Ignatius. I am referring to *Ignatian discernment*, which is a process that frees us so that we can find God’s plan for us; it can help us to choose freely that greater good for ourselves and for all God’s children.

(Kolvenbach, “World Congress of Former Students” [21-24 January 2003], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 474)

25. If our love for Jesus Christ—inseparable from our love for his spouse, the Church—leads us to seek the will of God in every situation, then it can also oblige us to offer a constructive and loving criticism based on profound discernment. Such discernment might also lead us to remain in silence for the moment. However, criticism can never justify a lack of solidarity with the Church, from which we never in any way distinguish or separate ourselves.

(Kolvenbach, “To the General Assembly of the Communities of Christian Life” [4 August 2003], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 481)

26. The grace of seeing God in all things allowed Saint Ignatius to discern the signs of God’s presence even in the shadowy parts of the Church. By those signs he recognized the Lord present among us. Today it is not signs that are lacking but our loving ability to discover them.

(Kolvenbach, “To the General Assembly of the Communities of Christian Life” [4 August 2003], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 486)

27. To confirm discernment it is necessary to draw close to the Church, with Saint Ignatius, so as not to lose our way. Concretely, this means conversations and meetings with the local churches—parishes and dioceses—and with the universal Church.

(Kolvenbach, “To the General Assembly of the Communities of Christian Life” [4 August 2003], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 487)

28. “The practice of co-responsibility and the commitment to discernment in making decisions” (GC 34) require conscientious and systematic preparation.

(Kolvenbach, “Collaboration with Lay People in the Mission” [6 October 2004], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 495)

29. The translation of this being with Christ, living with Christ, and dying with Christ into concrete everyday reality—the political reality what is present to us here and now—takes place through a process of discernment of God’s will, which is made concrete through a genuine election.

(Kolvenbach, “The Mystique and Politics of Ignatius Loyola” [26 February 1991], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, p. 517)

31. Fortunately Jesuits everywhere feel the need for in-depth social analysis that will serve as a basis for our apostolic discernment. We want to know what new elements from a social, political, cultural, or religious perspective should play a part today in our spiritual discernment. Our contribution to reconciliation and peace should not neglect any aspect that can help us understand better present-day conflicts and the social processes within which we provide our apostolic service.

This “integral” vision demands that we pay special attention to the mystical, spiritual, and prophetic dimensions of life. Where is God suffering today in the world? How is God working in the hearts of all peoples to alleviate the tremendous suffering of others? To what sources of life can we have recourse to make up for so much death and restore the bonds between groups and people who violently exclude others or who are excluded themselves?

This discernment will also be of great help to us in identifying and supporting our closest collaborators in our shared mission of promoting reconciliation and peace. We all need one another. We are all humble cooperators in the “work of God” (John 6,28-29), called to offer our persons for the work.

(Nicolás, “Responses to *Ex Officio* Letters” [8 September 2014], *A.R.* XXV, IV, 1, pp. 1040-1)

32. In this new situation of reduced numbers and cultural changes, discernment takes on new meaning. It is something that touches on our charism and the Ignatian heritage we carry in our hearts. Some letters speak of our diminishing numbers in a rather sociological tone, as if the numbers depended on our apostolic effectiveness. I think there are reasons to think that such is not the case. Saint Ignatius had fewer companions and yet could set the world on fire. Perhaps we have not always faithfully acknowledged the need to discern constantly, such as is demanded in a world in constant change. Maybe we have fallen into the temptation of activism or overwork (as is the case for very gifted individuals who have three or four responsibilities that they cannot fully attend to). Or it may be that we have more faith in external criteria than in the quality of our lives and the joy of the Gospel. Authentic discernment is not easy. It assumes conditions of interior freedom or detachment that can never be taken for granted, especially when dealing with groups. Perhaps this continues to be one of the major challenges for the Society at the present time.

(Nicolás, “Responses to *Ex Officio* Letters,” *A.R.* XXV, IV, 2015, p. 1646)

Apostolic planning

33. The provinces find themselves in the process of apostolic planning for the future. Apostolic discernment is not just a sensible strategy for a multinational organization like the Society, which has lost more than 10,000 laborers in twenty years, has seen the number of its obligations increase, and can no longer maintain its activities. To the contrary, apostolic discernment is prayerful reflection on concrete human reality; it allows us to perceive that reality as clearly and objectively as possible, in the light of our faith in the Spirit and in the Church. Its purpose is to introduce into the fixed apostolic demands of the Society's own charism the future orientations to which the Spirit is calling us, in and for the Church.

(Kolvenbach, "On the Reception of General Congregation 33" [3 May 1985], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 47-8)

34. These orientations are translated into making choices among desirable apostolic activities and making decisions to renew, to close, or to open apostolic works. Some provinces are attempting, in this way, to achieve greater apostolic mobility. In other places the attempts are fewer, but they are motivated by the calls made by the Church and the recent General Congregations. In still other places, the sociopolitical circumstances hinder all apostolic freedom, but they should not prevent the spiritual renewal that is indispensable. In all places and in very diverse ways, the Society is preparing for an apostolic future whose shapes were foreseen and sketched out by Vatican II and the recent General Congregations.

Whatever is not integrated into this movement of the Spirit will disappear. Apostolic works that are integrated into it through apostolic discernment, thus prolonging the election of the Spiritual Exercises, will incorporate the Society into the paschal action of the Lord, who died to live again. By means of community prayer and deliberation, apostolic vision and action, consultation and decision-making in accord with Ignatian governance, "we have to keep steadily assimilating the apostolic pedagogy of the Exercises ... so that we abandon our custom of viewing our own manner of thinking and acting [as absolute]" ... and "recognize the Word of God" (Decree 1.13,41). We must incarnate the paschal mystery in our own history, so that it penetrates into everything that is called to live in truth and to produce fruit in abundance.

(Kolvenbach, "On the Reception of General Congregation 33" [3 May 1985], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 48)

35. To continue this universal mission of the Society and to remedy the apostolic impasses that might entrap us, most of the Provinces have in recent years made an effort of apostolic planning. Through *discernment in common*, done in various

ways, the Provinces attempt to set their apostolic priorities in communion with the Church; they seek to respond to apostolic needs with the actual resources they have. In virtue of this planning, some works are created or reinforced, while others are suppressed or entrusted to others. All this apostolic planning, which is far from being concluded, seeks above all to express our availability to carry out God's will for us. In perfect accord with the Spiritual Exercises, we consider the concrete situation of the Church and the world to which the Lord sends us, and feeling impelled by the Society's specific mission, we seek and we find new or renewed missions that the Lord commends to us.

Thus, apostolic planning functions as a prolongation of the election. It is a grace to be able to perceive the signs of the times, which will lead us to create new types of apostolate, not letting ourselves be restrained by old schemes or by ideologies that are new but still outdated. It is a grace to be able to prepare in this way for a future that does not condemn new generations to bear an insupportable weight, but rather opens up the space that is indispensable for all apostolic renewal. It is a grace, finally, to be able to hand over some of our works in this process of apostolic planning, so that we can preserve for others the invested experience and better fulfill the moral responsibilities we have contracted with our collaborators and with all who have trusted in us.

(Kolvenbach, "To the Procurators' Congregation on the State of the Society" [3 September 1987], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 192)

36. Finally, it is important that we listen to what the Spirit of the Lord is telling us through the new generations: their numerical disproportion in some places should not obscure the qualitative contribution they can and should contribute to the apostolic renewal that the Lord of the vineyard continually offers us.

(Kolvenbach, "To the Procurators' Congregation on the State of the Society" [3 September 1987], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 193)

37. If the Society has been able to undertake more or less precise projects at this time, it is not only because many Provinces have made decisions about opening or closing works, depending on the decrease or increase of available personnel. Slowly but surely, the Society is learning to discern in common and to study together the signs of the times.

(Kolvenbach, "To the Procurators' Congregation on the State of the Society" [20 September 1990], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 193)

38. Everywhere there has been a felt need to put into practice the Ignatian criteria of election, as proposed in the Spiritual Exercises and the Constitutions, as well

as by the last three General Congregations. There is thus evidence of a general concern—one based on the cultural, ecclesiastical, and sociopolitical realities—to learn the tasks required for making a commitment in accord with the Society’s apostolic priorities, given the specific means available to us today and tomorrow. Certainly, that commitment takes very diverse forms because of the variety of situations in which we strive to serve the faith and promote justice. Even when an apostolic project is perforce concerned almost exclusively with the problems of the Province and with internal matters of the Society, it does not cease to promote the “missionary” activity of the Province and its commitment to the international Society.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Procurators’ Congregation on the State of the Society” [20 September 1990], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 273)

39. All these relationships, in view of the apostolic discernment that has been done, testify to people’s great confidence in the Ignatian charism and the living patrimony of the Society. However, while the desire to collaborate with the laity in our works has in general made undeniable progress, we must recognize that the Society rarely assumes a new apostolate jointly with members of the diocesan clergy, with other religious families, or with the ecclesial movements. There is a real tension between concentrating all our forces in common works and encouraging more personal vocations and particular ministries that are much more dispersed. Apostolic planning, despite its weaknesses and faults, represents a positive step that should be followed up, if possible, with broad participation of all the Jesuits involved.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Procurators’ Congregation on the State of the Society” [20 September 1990], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, p. 238)

40. While planning has fostered in the Society a sense of being an apostolic body, it has also given rise to a certain “provincialization.” In order to be concretely inculturated, an apostolic project must consider the living conditions of the people and the situations of the Church, which are quite diverse from one region to another. What first appears to be a universal problem of great importance may quickly, after contact is established with other “worlds,” reveal itself to be a problem peculiar to the first world.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Procurators’ Congregation on the State of the Society” [20 September 1990], in: *Escritos 1983-1990*, pp. 238-9)

41. All too frequently we limit our vision, such as when we do discernment for our apostolic priorities but forget about the needs of the diocese in which we work, thinking only of our own needs and problems.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Procurators’ Congregation on the State of the Society” [17 September 1999], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, pp. 119-20)

42. Some of you may be expecting me to give solutions and directives. ... You can surmise my solution from what I have already said: Ignatian discernment *in loco*. Each country, each social or political entity, and—in our rapidly changing world—each time period has its own problems and characteristics. And since these are quite specific, they require special solutions and special discernment.

(Kolvenbach, “To the Participants in the JESCOM Conference” [12 September 1991], in: *Escritos 1991-2007*, pp. 119-20)

43. There are three challenges that the Society must face today in its mission and apostolate:

- a) The first and perhaps the most important is the challenge of *improving our discernment*. Our service must reach more deeply, and it must be in complete harmony with our vocation, our spirit, and the professional work that today’s world demands. This is impossible without sensitive but resolute discernment that is aimed at determining what we can achieve reasonably well with the resources and the personnel we have available right now. Our credibility and the impact of our service on the Church and the world depend on such discernment. We cannot simply load onto the backs of young Jesuits discernment that was done by past generations.
- b) The second challenge is that of *formation for leadership*.
- c) And the third challenge continues to be that of *enabling and intensifying collaboration among Jesuits and between Jesuits and lay collaborators*.

(Nicolás, *De Statu S. J.* [9-15 July 2012], *A.R.* XXV, II, p. 558)

GLOBAL QUESTIONS

1. Do I see the need for *apostolic discernment in common*? Why or why not?
2. Am I motivated to do *apostolic discernment in common*? What motivates me? What difficulties or resistances do I feel?
3. What are the essential aspects of *apostolic discernment in common*?
4. How can we make progress in *apostolic discernment in common*? What is required of individuals, communities, and directors of works?
5. How would I describe the qualities of a group or a community that is involved in *apostolic discernment in common*?
6. What is the conversion that is needed? Describe concretely what it means for individuals, communities, and directors of works.
7. Have I practiced some type of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises? What relation do I see between them and *apostolic discernment in common*? Mention some specific points.
8. What do I understand by “spiritual conversation”? How can I make progress in it?
9. Do I see any risks in practicing *apostolic discernment in common*? What are they and why?
10. Elaborate a practical proposal for doing *apostolic discernment in common* in your community or group, focusing on a current situation that in your opinion requires such discernment.

CLARIFICATION OF SOME WORDS

Account of conscience. The intimate personal communication of each Jesuit with the Provincial—or in some cases with another Superior—to guarantee good apostolic governance and the spiritual welfare of the individual.

A.R. (Acta Romana). Annual publication of all the official documents relating to the Society that are issued either by the Holy See or by the Society itself.

Assistancy. A group of Provinces in a particular geographical area. For example, the Assistancy of Southern Europe.

CIS (Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis). The Center of Ignatian Spirituality in Rome, which used to edit the journal, *CIS*.

Complementary Norms. Statements that explain or amplify certain points of the Constitutions or that suppress obsolete points. They were elaborated in response to Vatican II's request to religious institutes to update their rules. They form one body with the Constitutions and enjoy the same authority.

Congregations

- **General Congregation.** The supreme organ of “legislative and executive” governance of the Society of Jesus. It meets only when it is necessary to elect the General, whose term is for life (with the possibility of resignation or destitution, according to law), or when it is convoked by the General, after prior consultation with the Society.
- **Procurators' Congregation.** The meeting of “procurators” from all the Provinces of the Society, convoked periodically to deliberate on the state of the Society and to decide whether a General Congregation should be called.
- **Provincial Congregation.** The meeting of the elected delegates of a Province, with authority to choose delegates for a General Congregation or a Proc-

urators' Congregation, and to make proposals or "postulates" to such Congregations.

- **Provincials' Congregation.** The meeting of all the Provincials of the Society, as recommended by General Congregation 31. Such a meeting was held only once; the measure was suppressed by General Congregation 34.

Constitutions. The development of the Rule or the Formula of the Society of Jesus, with the authority conceded by the Holy See.

Deliberation. Decision taken in common, using discernment.

Director of a work. The person who runs an apostolic institution, which may be strictly Jesuit—that is, fully dependent on the Society of Jesus—or inspired by a sense of Ignatian mission without being fully dependent on the Society.

Discernment. The ability to recognize the action of God in persons, based on personal identification with the criteria and attitudes of Jesus.

Election. A decision about some important aspect of one's personal life, made with the help of discernment. When the election is made in a group or community, it is ordinarily called *deliberation*.

Examen. A faith-inspired look at one's own life to discover in it the presence of God and his constant calls for us to follow Jesus.

Ex officio annual letters. Letters that different Superiors, Directors, Consultors, or other solicited persons must write to the General periodically about the state of the Society or some part of it, for the sake of better governance.

Formula of the Institute. The foundational rule of the Society of Jesus. There are two texts; one is from 1540, and the other, which is from 1550, reaffirms and somewhat amplifies the Formula of 1540.

MHSI (*Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*). Publication of the most important historical sources related to the Society of Jesus.

M.I. (*Monumenta Ignatiana*), or MonIgnat. Volumes of the MHSI that relate to Saint Ignatius.

Province, Region (Mission). The Society is divided into Provinces or Regions (Missions). The Regions depend on a Province or else directly on the General.

Reform of Life. A review of the different aspects of one's whole personal life, with the help of discernment, for the sake of making appropriate changes and "reforming" the whole of one's life in accord with the Gospel.

SpEx. *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola.

Superiors

- **General Superior, or General.** The ordinary Superior of the whole Society, the "secondary and participatory" subject of governance with respect to the General Congregation.
- **Major Superior, or Superior of a Province or a Region (Mission).** The person who governs a Province or Region (Mission).
- **Superior, or Local Superior.** The person who governs a Jesuit community.

“Guides”, with this verb Ignatius Loyola modestly expresses his great desire to help others. It is under this motto connoting service and simplicity that the Ignatian School of Spirituality (*Escuela Ignaciana de Espiritualidad - EIDES*) offers these series of materials.

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