

The deliberation that started the Jesuits

Testo inglese della *Deliberazione dei primi padri della Compagnia di Gesù*.

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1. Lent was drawing to a close. The time was approaching for us to be scattered and parted from one another. We ere eagerly anticipating this time so that we could the sooner achieve our appointed goal on which we had set our minds and hearts. We therefore resolved to get together for a good long time before our dispersal and to discuss our vocation and covenanted way of life.

Some of us were French, others Spanish, Savoyards, or Portuguese. After meeting for many sessions, there was a cleavage of sentiments and opinions about our situation. While we all had one mind and heart in seeking God's gracious and perfect will according to the scope of our vocation; nevertheless, regarding the more readily effective and more fruitful ways of achieving God's will for ourselves and others, we held diverse views.

No one ought to wonder that this diversity of views should be found among us, spiritually infirm and feeble men; even the apostles themselves, princes and pillars of the most holy Church, sometimes thought in opposing ways and handed down in writing their conflicting judgments. So also did many other very perfect men with whom we cannot be remotely compared.

Since we did hold different judgments, we ere eagerly on the watch to discover some unobstructed way along which we might advance together and all of us offer ourselves as a holocaust to our God, in whose praise, honour, and glory we would yield our all. At last we made a decision. In full agreement we settled on this that we would give ourselves to prayer, Masses, and meditations more fervently than usual and, after doing our very best we would for the rest cast all our concerns on the Lord, hoping in him. He is so kind and generous that he never denies his good Spirit to anyone who petitions him in humility and simplicity of heart; rather, he gives to all extravagantly, not holding back from anyone. In no way, then, would he who is kindness itself desert us; rather, he would be with us more generously than we asked or imagined.

2. We began, therefore, to expend every human effort. We proposed to ourselves some questions worthy of careful consideration and forethought at this opportune time. Throughout the day, we were accustomed to ponder and meditate on these and to prayerfully search into them. At night each one shared with the group what he judged to be more appropriate and helpful, with the intention that all with one mind would embrace the truer way of thinking, tested and commended by the more powerful reasons and by majority vote.

3. At the meeting on the first night, the following question was opened up: given that we had offered and dedicated ourselves and our lives to Christ our Lord and to his true and legitimate vicar on earth so that he might dispose of us and send us wherever he judged it to be more fruitful, whether to the Turks or to the Indies or to heretics or to others of the faithful or pagans given that, would it or would it not be more advantageous for our purpose to be so joined and bound together in one body that no physical distance, no matter how great, would separate us?

The issue can be made clear by a case. The pope is sending two of us to the city of Siena. Ought we to be [especially] concerned about those who are going to that place or they about us? And ought we to have a mutual understanding of this concern? Or should we have no more concern for them than we have for those who are not in this Company?

In the end we established the affirmative side of the question, that is, that in as much as our most kind and affectionate Lord had deigned to gather us together and unite us, men so spiritually weak and from such diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, we ought no split apart what God has gathered and united; on the contrary, we ought day by day to strengthen and stabilize our union, rendering ourselves one body with special concern for each other, in order to effect the

greater spiritual good of our fellow men. For united spiritual strength is more robust and braver in any arduous enterprise than it would be if segmented.

We want it understood that nothing at all that has been or will be spoken of originated from our own spirit or our own thought; rather, whatever it was, it was solely what our Lord inspired and the Apostolic See then confirmed and approved.

4. The first question now answered and a decision made, we came to another question more difficult and no less worthy of consideration and forethought. All of us had already pronounced a vow of perpetual chastity and a vow of poverty before the most revered legate of the pope when we were working among the Venetians. The question now was this: would it be advantageous to pronounce a third vow, namely, of obedience to someone from among us, in order that we might more sincerely and with greater praise and merit be able to fulfil the will of God in all details of our lives as well as in carrying out the authoritative decision of the pope, to whom we have most willingly offered our all, will, intellect, strength, and the like?

5. When we had persisted in prayer and thought for many days without hitting upon any satisfactory resolution of our uncertainty, we put our hope in the Lord and started to cast about for better ways of working out such a resolution. Our first line of thought went this way. Would it expedite our discernment if we all went away to some hermitage for thirty or forty days, giving ourselves over to meditation, fasting and penance, so that God might listen to our desires and mercifully impress on our minds the answer to our question? Or should three or four undertake this enterprise in the name of all with the same intent? Or would it be better if none of us went to the hermitage but all remained in the city, devoting half of every day to this our one principal occupation and the rest of the day to our customary work of preaching and hearing confessions? The half devoted to our principal concern would be the time less crowded with other concerns, more suitable for meditation, reflection, and prayer.

6. After examining and discussing these possible courses of action, we decided that we would all stay in the city. We had two main reasons for this decision. The first reason (based on the characteristic tendency of men to make rash judgments) was this: We wanted to forestall rumour and scandal in the city and among the people, who would make judgments and think that we had fled or undertaken something new or were unstable and inconstant in carrying out what we had begun. The second reason was this: We did not want by our absence to lose the great results we saw from confessions, teaching, and other spiritual works. So great was the need that even if our number were quadrupled we could not have satisfied all who needed our service any more than we can do so now.

There was a second line of thought which we set in motion for the sake of resolving the impasse regarding obedience. This was to propose the following spiritual preparations for each and every member of the whole group.

The first preparation: Each would ready himself beforehand, would take time for prayer, Masses, and meditation in order to strive for joy and peace in the Holy Spirit regarding obedience, labouring as much as he could to have a predilection for obeying rather than commanding, when the consequent glory of God and the praise of his majesty would be equal.

The second preparation: None of the companions would communicate with other about this matter at issue or inquire about his reasoning on it. The point of his preparation was to prevent anyone from being persuaded by another and, therefore, biased more toward obedience [by vow to one of their own number] or the contrary. This way each would desire as more advantageous only what he derived from his own prayer and meditation.

The third preparation: Each one would think of himself as a stranger to our group who would have no expectation of joining it. Thinking this way he would escape being carried by his emotions more to one opinion and judgment; rather, as if a stranger, he would speak his thought to the group about having or not having obedience, would by his judgment confirm and recommend what he be-

lieved would be for God's grater service and would more secure the Company's lasting preservation.

7. With the foregoing spiritual dispositions, we arranged to assemble all prepared on the following day. Each one was to declare all those disadvantages which could be brought against obedience [by vow, to one of our group], all the reasons which presented themselves and which anyone of us had found in his own private reflection, meditation, and prayer. What he had gathered, each in his turn as to make known.

For example, one said: It seems that, on account of our failures and sins, the words "religious", or "obedience" have unseemly connotations among the Christian people.

Another remarked: If we wish to live under obedience, we will perhaps be forced by the supreme pontiff to live under some Rule already drawn up and officially established. So it will eventuate that all our desires which we have judged to be from Our Lord will be frustrated; for there will be no opportunity and freedom to work for the salvation of our fellow men, the one very thing, after concern for our own salvation, which we have had in mind.

Another observed: If we promise obedience to someone, not so many men will enter our company to labour faithfully in the Lord's vineyard, where the harvest is very great but few true labourers are found. For men in general have so little strength to labour or endure without breaking under it that many look out more for themselves and their own wishes than they do for the wishes of Jesus Christ and the complete denial of self for his sake.

So also others spoke to the point in other ways, a fourth, and a fifth, and so on, explaining the disadvantages which occurred to them as reasons against obedience.

On the next day we argued for the opposite side of the question, each one putting before the group all the advantages and good consequences of such obedience which he had drawn from prayer and meditation; each one took his own turn to present his reflections, sometimes showing the positive values of obedience, sometimes reducing the alternative to an impossibility.

Here are some examples. One man's argument took this form of a reduction *ad absurdam et impossibile*. If without the agreeable yoke of obedience, this Company of ours had to carry on practical undertakings, no one would have any precise charge, since one would pass off the burden onto the other, as we have many times experienced.

Again, if this Company were without obedience, it could not long endure and persevere a turn of events in conflict with our basic intent of keeping our Company alive in perpetuity. Now, any group is kept alive by obedience more than by anything else. This is especially true for us who have vowed perpetual poverty and are perennially preoccupied with unremitting labours, both spiritual and temporal; for these make it difficult to preserve fellowship.

In a positive vein, another spoke this way: Obedience issues in an uninterrupted life of heroic deeds and in heroic virtues. For one who truly lives under obedience is fully disposed to execute instantly and unhesitatingly whatever is enjoined him, no matter to him whether it be very hard to do or engenders embarrassment and ridicule or public humiliation. Such would be the case, for example, if I were bidden to walk through the streets and avenues unclothed or in a strange attire. Although such an order may never be given, nevertheless, so long as any one is readied for such acts by denial of his own will and judgment, he is always acting heroically and growing in merit.

A like line of reasoning is: Nothing so casts down all pride and arrogance as does obedience; for pride makes a big thing of following one's own judgment and will, giving way to no one, pursuing grand and extraordinary projects beyond one's reach. Obedience diametrically opposes this attitude: For it always follows the judgment of another and the will of the other, gives way to all, and as much as possible is joined with humility, the enemy of pride.

A further argument is: Although we have committed ourselves to obey the supreme pontiff and shepherd in general and in particular, nevertheless, he could not possibly take time for the innumerable details and contingencies of our affairs; nor would it be right for him to do so even if he could.

8. During many days, from this side and that, we worked over a mass of data related to the resolution of our problem; we examined and weighed the more forceful and important reasons and took time as usual for prayer, mediation, and reflection. By the Lord's help, we did at last, not [just] with a majority judgment but without a single dissenting voice, come to this conclusion: Obedience to someone among us is highly advantageous and highly necessary in order to actualize more effectively and exactly our primary desire of fulfilling God's will in all details of life [per omnia], in order to preserve the Society more assuredly, and, finally, in order to provide properly for all the detailed matters of spiritual and temporal business which arise.

9. In all our deliberations over the questions just spoken of and others, we followed the order of discussion and the procedure described above, always giving attention to both sides of every question. Our efforts lasted for almost three months, from the middle of Lent until the feast of John the Baptist. On the day, but not without long vigils, much prayer, and labour of mind and body preceding deliberation and decision, all our business was completed and terminated in a spirit of gladness and harmony.