

# STUDIES

## in the Spirituality of Jesuits

Jesuit Commitment — Fraternal Covenant?

Thomas E. Clarke, S.J.



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Another Perspective on Religious Commitment

John C. Haughey, S.J.

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





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## THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

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

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

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by

John C. Haughey, S.J.

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## Editor's Foreword

The topic of religious commitment has had a prominent place on the agenda for the meetings of the American Assistancy Seminar during the academic year just closed. Two position papers were prepared, discussed, and revised: Father Vincent J. O'Flaherty's which was published in our last issue, "Some Reflections on the Jesuit Commitment," and Father Thomas E. Clarke's which is published in the present number, "Religious Commitment--Fraternal Covenant ?" The discussions on these papers as well as the finished products have made it clear that the members of this Seminar think that perpetual commitment to Christ by means of the vows of religion is possible and desirable.

However, this position is manifestly being questioned in thought or deed by many throughout the Church today. Hence it seemed that the reasons for this querying ought to be brought into the open and explored, even if much more time will have to elapse before satisfying solutions to the many related problems can be found. In this atmosphere Father John C. Haughey presented to the members of the Seminar a tentative draft which he entitled "A Minority View of Commitment: Prenotes to a Different Idea of Commitment." This paper stimulated fruitful discussion, during which the members decided that after revision the paper should be published within one cover along with that of Father Clarke.

Accordingly, both papers are published in this present issue. And our readers are reminded of the statement made already on page vii of our first issue (Volume I, number 1): Discussions and comments are welcome.



## JESUIT COMMITMENT -- FRATERNAL COVENANT ?

by

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The purpose of this essay is to explore the nature of Jesuit commitment and to comment on a few of the problems connected with it. Initially I understand Jesuit commitment as the freely accepted Christian responsibility assumed through profession, particularly final profession, in the Society of Jesus. The focus of interest will be more on our responsibility to one another than on our responsibility toward God or toward other men outside the Society in virtue of our final vows.

I shall be seeking light on such questions as: (1) Does religious profession in the Society of Jesus carry with it, at least implicitly, a pledge by the members of fidelity to one another? (2) If so, what are the mutual responsibilities undertaken in such a pledge? (3) Is there a special value for community and apostolate, especially in our contemporary world, in such a commitment? (4) What are some of the problems and difficulties which we must encounter today in fulfilling Jesuit commitment? (5) What are some of the ways in which this commitment can be better understood and strengthened?

There is a twofold motivation behind the present reflection. First, there are good reasons for thinking that the current crisis in religious life stems in large part from a number of cultural factors which are making commitment and fidelity especially hard also in every other sphere of contemporary life.<sup>1</sup> Second, there is a historical fact, to which we shall return briefly in a moment: In regard to commitment and fidelity, conceptualization of the meaning of the religious vows, and reflection on them as sacred and binding promises, have tended to concentrate exclusively on the Godward or "vertical" aspect, and given insufficient attention to the manward or "horizontal" aspect. Theological analysis of the vows from the viewpoint of mutual commitment is relatively rare, almost to the point of



non-existence. If the present crisis of commitment is to be adequately faced, we need a better understanding of this fraternal engagement to one another. In keeping with the purpose of these Studies, my hope in this exploratory essay is to stimulate others not only to a critical response but to further investigations on this question in its historical, theoretical, and pastoral aspects. The essay will proceed as follows:

- I. Some brief historical background.
- II. Analysis of some pertinent aspects of fidelity.
- III. Analysis of religious profession from the viewpoint of fidelity or commitment.
- IV. Some characteristics of Jesuit commitment.
- V. Some particular problems regarding Jesuit commitment.
- VI. Toward a strengthening of Jesuit commitment.

I. Some brief historical background:

To my knowledge no serious study has been made of the religious life from the viewpoint of its being a mutual covenant or commitment among the members of a particular order or congregation. The remarks which follow are not even a rudimentary beginning of such a needed study. Rather, they are impressions gleaned from a cursory glance at some of the traditional sources about the religious life in general and about the Society of Jesus in particular. It may be that these impressions would be qualified or corrected by a serious historical treatment.

Early conceptions of the religious life, it seems, viewed the dedication contained therein almost exclusively in terms of commitment to God. The monk and the virgin consecrated themselves to God, were seeking God alone. What the community or the monastery provided, through a strict discipline and particularly through the relationship of all the monks to the abbot, their father in God, and of the younger monks in general to the older ones, was a school of prayer and holiness. Particularly in the Rule of Saint Benedict and in the Regula Magistri, one notices the crucial role of the abbot; docile obedience to him was the open sesame to growth. Yet, though one vowed to obey him, the commitment itself involved fidelity to God, not to man. The notion that, in undertaking the monastic profession,



one pledged one's presence to the other monks, seems to have been absent.

This does not mean, of course, that no attention was paid to fraternal charity. The famous letter 211 of Augustine to a monastery of virgins, echoed in the Rule of St. Augustine which had such influence in the Middle Ages and subsequently, is typical evidence of this: "These are the rules . . . . In the first place, as you are gathered into one community, see that you dwell together in unity in the house, and have one heart and one mind toward God."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, certain specifications of this basic command of mutual love, such as the duty of fraternal correction, contain implicitly the idea that by his vows a monk has undertaken a responsibility to his fellow monks to help them in the way of holiness. Nevertheless, in the rules of Basil, Augustine, Benedict and others, one looks in vain for a thematic expression of religious life as a fraternal covenant. Great and sometimes harsh emphasis is placed on the once-for-all character of profession. But that irrevocable commitment through the vows is, when taken in the sense of pledged fidelity, a consecration to live with others but for God alone.

When one narrows the focus abruptly to the origins and primary documents of the Society of Jesus, the picture is not very much different. That the original band of Ignatius and his disciples were a closely knit fraternal group who lived in fidelity to one another is beyond question. The degree and intensity of this lived mutual commitment may be gathered, for example, from a letter of Francis Xavier to Ignatius, written many years after their original encounter and intimately shared life at Paris and across Europe:

My true father . . . . God our Lord knows what a comfort it was to have news of the health and life of one so dear to me. Among many other holy words and consolations of your letter I read the concluding ones, "Entirely yours, without power or possibility of ever forgetting you, Ignatio." I read them with tears, and with tears now write them, remembering the past and the great love which you always bore towards me and still bear . . . . In your letter you tell me how greatly you desire to see me before this life closes. God knows the profound impression that these words of great love made on my soul and the many tears they cost me every time I thought of them.<sup>3</sup>

It is also true that the first Jesuits, after a period of intense



discernment, decided that they would bind themselves in obedience to one of their members for the sake of a more effective service and praise of God. Other evidences could probably be added to show that the notion of fraternal union and charity was central to the original Jesuit vision, and that a lived fidelity to one another informed the relationships of the first Jesuits.

The same is true when one examines the Society's Constitutions. Much is made of the union of all members by charity. This union is to be sought particularly through obedience, through frequent communication of brothers separated from one another in space, and through an effort to be united in doctrine. The traditional help of fraternal correction, expressed in Examen, [63], calls for a willingness of each Jesuit to share in this special way in helping his brothers to grow spiritually. Here too is an implicit pledge of fidelity.

Nevertheless, neither in the utterances of the first Jesuits nor in the finished Constitutions does one seem to find any explicit awareness that the vows of the Society represent a mutual commitment to one another on the part of all the members. The vows are viewed in the Constitutions simply as instrumental for the achievement of the salvation and perfection of the individual Jesuit and of other men.

The gist of these historical gleanings, then, points toward this conclusion: So far as commitment, fidelity, covenant, or vow, are concerned, both in general and within the Society of Jesus, the traditional conceptualization pays little or no attention to a vowed commitment to one another by the members of our Society.

Can it be that the reason for this silence is the fact that such a mutual fraternal commitment is not really inherent in the religious profession? We grant the commitment to God carries with it a commitment to live within a certain community and according to its basic spirit and law. But can it be shown further that the religious vows are a sacred pledge not only about the community and its members but to them? Before seeking light on this question we need to say something about the human value of fidelity.



## II. Some Aspects of Fidelity

There can be no question here of a thorough analysis of the human virtue and value of fidelity.<sup>4</sup> We shall be selecting for comment a few of those aspects which bear more or less directly on what we wish to say later regarding mutual commitment through the religious profession.

It needs no special demonstration to show that, as a matter of fact, fidelity has been considered a major value in most ethical and religious systems, and is so regarded by most men. Though both popular conceptions and philosophical or theological reflections on fidelity can vary greatly, there would seem to be universal agreement among men of good will that human life and progress depend upon men's ability to trust one another, and particularly to trust the pledged word.

It would seem that not all human fidelity (or to use Royce's preferred term, "loyalty") is contingent on a formal promise. If fidelity is conceived broadly as the responsibility to be with another in a supporting way, it would seem to be an essential characteristic of human love itself, and is in fact almost identical with love. There is a basic loyalty to one another, a standing with, a standing ready to help, which is inherent in the possession of a common humanity. To stand by in idleness while a fellow human being whom one could easily help is seriously threatened or endangered would seem to be not only heartless but unfaithful, even though the obligation here stems from no explicit promise of help. The point is important, if fidelity to formal promise is to be properly situated within our basic responsibility to love one another as fellow human beings and children of God. This responsibility which is prior to formal promise admits of various degrees and relationships. It is perhaps most clearly manifest in the relationship of children to parents. No one of us asked to be born of the parents whose mutual love gave us life. But, once born, we have a sacred responsibility to love them and stand with them which it is not in our moral power to renounce. And it seems appropriate in this case to speak of fidelity.

But fidelity is more commonly associated with a free acceptance of responsibility for a relationship which we need not have entered. Here



it should first be noted that such a responsibility can be accepted even without an explicit promise. The total context of a commitment will sometimes reveal a mutual giving and receiving of responsibility for one another even when this has not been verbally expressed. Intimate friendship is one example. A friend can betray his friend by not being present when he is needed, even though he has never formally said that he would be present. This point is of considerable importance for our purposes, since, as we have seen, the mutual promise of fidelity among members of the same religious community seems to have remained unexplicitated.

Explicitly formulated as promise or not, the freely undertaken responsibility of fidelity admits of many forms and degrees, ranging, for example, from a pragmatic commercial contract to the covenant of love in marriage or religious profession. If one recalls what was said previously about the responsibility of fidelity consequent upon human existence itself, he will not contemn the importance of commercial contracts and the like. One can, to some degree at least, betray his humanity and his fellow man by being a scofflaw, by tax evasion, by not promptly meeting his bills. Yet relatively, such contracts are qualitatively on a lower plane than other kinds of engagements and the fidelity which they call for. For some of these last we should reserve the term covenant. By what norm should one situate particular engagements and evaluate their worth? I would suggest that the primary norm is how deeply the engagement touches, not merely the functional and pragmatic aspect of human life but even personhood itself, the future of persons as persons, and the mutual risk involved in the engagement. This calls for some explanation.

There is a paradox present in the human person's reaching out for community. Since no man is an island, each of us needs community in order to be fully a person. Yet, especially in a fallen and not fully redeemed world, entry into community involves taking a chance, letting down one's guard, willingness to share life's decisions and hence to relinquish the completely autonomous direction of one's own life. Whenever human beings exchange the pledge of fidelity, in friendship, patriotic enterprise,



marriage, or religious community, they are entrusting their personhood to one another in a very serious way. It is not unreasonable for them to do so, provided the values to be achieved in the common cause are proportionate to the risk. But normally the reasonableness of what they are doing also requires that they have an assurance that the other is committing himself to stand with them in fair weather and foul. This is the rationale of promise and vow and of the patriots' "We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." The partners to the covenant can share a common hope because the word has been mutually given, fidelity has been mutually pledged.

But if the covenant requires assurance of fidelity, it cannot and must not, at the price of no longer being covenant but contract, demand insurance. And so covenant calls much more for a mystique than for a rationale. Here is where the pragmatic contract and the covenant of persons as such are basically different. To the degree to which the mystery of hope and human personhood is involved, one must cease to look for the carefully delineated safeguards and escape clauses characteristic of the commercial contract. There will be a verbal and conceptual indefinability in the covenant which contrasts with the dynamics of a contract, in which the ideal is to provide for all contingencies in advance. Because covenant touches deeply the person as such, and not merely his functioning or the services he can render, it cannot be conceived as a quid pro quo. One might say that it is rather a quisque pro altero. It is not one thing for another thing, but one person for another person (for him because he is totally with him). Fidelity and infidelity remain, within limits, identifiable, but they escape definition. God alone knows the hearts of men.

It is important to note that the assurance which is here in question is not merely the assurance that there will be someone around to share the work or the danger, to help in the struggle against adversity, to assist in planning, and so forth. It is rather the assurance of a personal presence of one to another as sharing the same values and the same dedication to them. The partners to a covenant are asked to give nothing



less than themselves, and the whole of themselves. From this point of view, fidelity, which is a sharing of freedom, is also a sharing of faith, of vision. To be assured, by the evidence of mutual promise, that others share the same vision of life as I do -- it is this, and not any merely pragmatic guarantee of physical presence and help, which bestows on fidelity its distinctive value in human life.

From this brief and partial analysis of human fidelity, we can conclude to its role in human life. By love, through community, human individuals are called to share a future destiny with other human beings. The degree of intimacy of such relationships varies greatly. When there is question of a major human value being pursued by two or more individuals, the pledge of fidelity gives to the common quest of the value an element of seriousness, depth, stability, that it would not otherwise have. By the exchange of promises, the partners to the endeavor have assured each other that they are available for the enterprise, even to the point of limiting their personal freedom not to engage in it. The natural result of such a mutual pledge is to give to the actual pursuit of the mutually shared values an élan, a stability, a ruggedness in the face of hardship and the attritions of time, which would otherwise not be present. We have only to reflect on our experience of the strength and joy that comes into our struggle for achievement when this takes place with a consciousness of being supported by others. In a word, then, the rule of promise and of fidelity to promise in human life, especially when it reaches the level of covenant, is to give to human shared existence and to the shared pursuit of values both a dynamism and a stability which they would otherwise lack.

The preceding analysis has not touched on what is, even from a philosophical point of view, the heart of the matter, namely, the fact that all human fidelity is rooted in the divine. It would be quite possible, perhaps, to argue to the reality of God from the almost universal cherishing of this human value, which would seem to be one of the major ways in which the absolute is enshrined in the contingent. We have preferred, however, to leave the Godward dimension of fidelity to the specifically



Christian and religious part of this essay.

### III. Religious Profession as Christian Covenant or Commitment

Religious profession is a covenant event. It takes place within the Church, the community of covenant, in the presence of the people. Its meaning is adequately grasped only when the entry of a man or woman into a particular Christian community of the counsels is situated within the entire history of God's covenant with his people. This entry was foreshadowed and prepared from the beginning of the history of salvation, was fulfilled in Christ and his foundation of the Church as covenant community, and is new on the road to consummation in the perfected kingdom of God.

As a covenant event religious profession shares the characteristics of all Christian covenant. It may be well to recall here a few of those characteristics, and to indicate how they are distinctively verified in the commitment of religious:

1) "God is faithful. By him you have been called into the fellowship (koinonia) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). The cardinal principle in any discussion of commitment is here. No justification of the lifetime commitment of religious men and women is possible except in terms of the promises of God and his utter fidelity to those promises. Both the assurance and the risk inherent in the mystery of a vowed existence have their model and their ground in the mystery of God's vow to be with and for man. The problem of reconciling human freedom with lifetime vows finds no satisfactory solution unless one remembers that God's own freedom shines forth nowhere more splendidly than in his committing himself irrevocably to man.

It is always God who initiates covenant and who invites to it. This cardinal principle from the theology of grace, articulated particularly by Augustine in controversy with Pelagianism and with the monks of southern Gaul and Africa, has an important bearing on any discussion of religious profession. Because the life of the counsels lacks the roots in nature which marriage possesses, and because the renunciation of marriage is in itself an ambiguous gesture, there is a special exigency that the signs



of a divine invitation to covenant of this special kind should be clearly present. When mere cultural attraction or psychological escapism are substituted for the genuine call to this extraordinary way of Christian covenant (which, of course, can make use of cultural attraction and even of psychological shortcomings), a false problem of permanent commitment arises. The divine initiative is also important in connection with the question of someone leaving religious life after final vows. On this we will comment later.

2) Religious profession is an event of Christian covenant. "This is the new covenant in my blood." Celibate Christian community of vow contrasts with the Old Testament community of family, tribe, and nation. In its character of irrevocable covenant response it is aptly symbolic of that which makes the new covenant new, the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ viewed as the infallible and irrevocable sign of God's covenant with mankind. As Karl Rahner has pointed out, with Jesus Christ, and only with him, do we have the unambiguous sign of God's committedness, beyond all recall, to humanity. Once God himself, in his Son, is not only the Lord of history but a subject of history, a human pilgrim, a fellow passenger on this ship of fools which is humanity's journey, it becomes fully manifest (but only to the eyes of faith) that human infidelity cannot thwart or diminish God's eternal decision and pledge to give himself in absolute intimacy to man. This consideration is important in connection with the so called "sign" or "witness" value of the commitment of religious profession: The human fidelity involved in a lifetime of living according to the counsels is a special presence in the world of God's once-for-all pledge to mankind in Jesus Christ. Religious life is a very special form of the Church as a rainbow of God's mercy to the world.

3) Mention of the Church leads to a third characteristic of Christian covenant, its communal or corporate character. It is always with a people, never with isolated individuals, that God enters into covenant. The individual person exchanges the pledge of fidelity with God only as part of a community of covenant. And as a community is neither



the mere accumulation of individual persons nor a mere instrument for servicing persons, but rather itself a reality and value of the order and dignity or personhood, so too the community as such, and not merely the individuals who are its members, is the covenant partner of God. One might discuss at length and from different points of view the question of priority of individual person and community in the covenant relationship with God. One partial but important aspect lies in the fact that it is precisely by relating himself to the Church as community of covenant that the Christian individual relates to God in covenant. This is actuated notably in baptism, where it is impossible for the believer to exchange the pledge of fidelity with God except in the process of becoming a member of the covenant community. The specific way in which the Eucharist, penance and other sacraments verify this mediational role of the Church as covenant community could also be studied. It is also true that the Church's own corporate covenant with God finds its highest realizations precisely in the sacramental gestures through which she mediates the life of the covenant to her individual members. And so there is an interweaving of individual and corporate covenants throughout the total life of the Church; the two can never be adequately distinguished.

4) A final and closely related aspect of Christian covenant is mutuality. One can conceive of a human fidelity in which only one person pledges his word. Covenant fidelity is, however, necessarily mutual, and for this reason verifies the full notion of human hope, which demands mutuality. This characteristic affects, first of all, the God-man aspect of covenant. In inviting man to receive the gift of himself, God pledges himself to stand with man in the latter's struggle to respond in love; and the loving response itself contains fidelity not as an added quality but as belonging to the inner dynamism of love itself. But mutuality also is characteristic of covenant fidelity in its "horizontal" aspect. It is at this point that our analysis of Christian fidelity rejoins our previous remarks about the religious profession as commitment to one another. What we are offering here is not a demonstration that the covenant of Christians and particularly of religious with God in baptism or in reli-



gious profession is, at least implicitly, a covenant with other men and with the community which one is entering or has entered. It is rather the congruity or harmony of such an assertion, especially when it is viewed within the totality of the Christian mystery and as a supreme instance of the fidelity which, we have seen, is inherent in all truly human love.

One approach to exhibiting the congruity of this basic assertion is from the inseparability and mutual inclusion of love of God and love of neighbor. This may be conceived, as traditionally, in terms of an identical formal object for the theological virtue of charity as directed toward God and toward man. Or one may prefer the more contemporary transcendental analysis of Karl Rahner. According to it, a thematic or categorical love for God is, by absolute necessity, always also a transcendental love of man; and further still, such a love for man is also a transcendental love of God. If one conceives, as we have in this essay, that fidelity is an intrinsic dimension of love, then it would seem to follow that it is never purely Godward or purely manward in character. This does not yet establish that the covenant of the Christian and the covenant of the religious with God respectively represented in the vows of baptism and in the vows of religion, are at least implicitly a covenant with the Church and with the particular religious community. But it provides some kind of antecedent probability that such is indeed the case.

Therefore, the familiar parallel and inner connection of baptism and religious profession finds here a development, in terms of mutual covenant and fidelity of God to man, man to God, man to man. In Christian baptism, an individual who has heard the promise of God in Christ announced by the Church, and who is willing to stake his life, his future, on God's fidelity in fulfilling that promise, responds by entering into the community through which the promise has been mediated to him, and within which, again relying on the divine promise, he hopes to experience both the fulfillment of the promise and the necessary helps to his own fidelity. In his triple renunciation of Satan and in his profession of faith in Christ, he is implicitly pledging a faithful response to God, a persevering



struggle to keep the commandments. Hence we have a mutual covenant between God and the individual mediated through the Church. But in this very action we also have, implicitly, a mutual covenant between the individual Christian and the Church, the community of covenant. The individual, in saying something to God, is also saying something to his fellow Christians, to the entire community. The fulfillment of his commitment to keep the commandments, to live in faith and hope and love, is a powerful support to the others who have made the same commitment. They have need of his example, his support. He, too, has need of theirs; and, in Christian baptism, in receiving him lovingly into the flock of Christ, it would seem that they are implicitly pledging themselves to give this support. This is one way of looking upon the institution of sponsors or witnesses in Christian baptism. In Christian marriage, something similar might be said of the best man and bridesmaid and particularly of the priest as ecclesiastical witness.

5) Christian covenant, finally, is inconceivable except as a process of conversion (metanoia). This follows necessarily from the radical sinfulness of man and from the essentially redemptive character of the Christian mystery. There is a sense in which the Christian, from the moment of his baptism, pledges himself not so much to fidelity as to growth toward fidelity. What he pledges is a daily effort to engage in a process, to respond to an ongoing invitation of God through the Church to engage in a gradual purification from idolatry. This same quality is characteristic of the Church as a covenant community. She is, expressly, a community of continuing conversion: Ecclesia semper reformanda. Her fidelity, too, is to be conceived as a growth toward fidelity rather than as a fully achieved possession.

This note of ongoing conversion will specify the mutuality of covenant of which we have spoken. The individual pledges to the Church not that he will be perfectly holy but that he will seek to grow in holiness, that the Church can depend on his daily effort to shoulder his cross and follow Christ. Likewise, the Church's acceptance of each new member binds her, not to be a bride without spot or wrinkle, always inspiring, always



authentic, always perfectly faithful to her Lord, but rather to be a Church on the way, especially in the acknowledgment of her failure to be fully what she is called to be. The Church could be guilty of no greater infidelity to her members than by pretending to be the Church of the perfect.

Entry into a particular religious community is a special way in which some individual Christians are called to live out the covenant of Christian baptism. To accent the continuity of baptismal and religious professions one might be so bold as to compare it with the continuity of Calvary and the Eucharistic celebration as the one sacrifice. While one should not press the comparison too far, some such strong assertion is appropriate in order to bring out that the religious profession is not a distinct sacrament such as the sacrament of orders, and does not represent a consecration or covenant which is more than a specification and incarnation of the baptismal consecration or covenant. The same intertwining of Godward and manward mutuality of covenant which we saw in baptism is verified in religious profession. An individual who, in the development of his baptismal vocation, has heard a special promise directed to him, personally by God, and who is willing to stake his life, his future, on God's fidelity in fulfilling that promise, responds to it by entering into a particular community within which, always relying on the divine promise, he hopes to experience both the fulfillment of God's promise and the necessary helps to his own fidelity. Through his vows of celibacy, poverty, and obedience (or however else his response may be formulated) he is explicitly pledging to God a faithful response, a persevering struggle to follow the way of the counsels. So we have, parallel to baptism, a mutual covenant between God and an individual Christian mediated through a particular Christian community. But, also parallel to baptism, in this very action we also have, implicitly, a mutual covenant between the individual religious and the particular community of covenant which he is entering. In saying something to God, the individual is saying something to his fellow Christians, to the entire Church, and more particularly to the other members of the community which he has chosen and which is accepting him as



member. The other members and the community as a whole have a stake in his fidelity to his vows. Their future as individuals and as a community, depends on that fidelity. They will be powerfully supported by it if it is present, and threatened in their own fidelity if he is unfaithful. He, too, has need of their support, and in the very act of admitting him into the community, it would seem, they are solemnly pledging him this support.<sup>5</sup>

Though we are more concerned, so far as the "horizontal" aspect of the mutual covenant of religious profession is concerned, with the relationship between the individual and his particular community, it is important not to neglect the inherently ecclesial character of religious profession. Implicit, at least, in every profession (and here we find the appropriateness of the presence and participation of the bishop or priest) is a pledge on the part of the individual vovendus and of his entire community to be present to the entire Church in the distinctive way indicated by the vows and by the Constitutions of the particular community. The entire Church and all her members have a deep stake in the consecration, witness and service rendered by religious.<sup>6</sup>

Having dealt with the covenant of religious profession in its total context of Christian covenant, and having discussed to whom the pledge of fidelity is being made, we now wish briefly to ask: To what do the members of a religious community and the community as such commit themselves on the day of profession? There are a number of ways of responding to this question. Our response will be developed under five headings, according to the following formulation: The commitment of religious profession is (1) to faith, hope and love, (2) mediated through poverty, celibacy, and obedience, (3) as entailing "total community" i.e. a totally shared existence, (4) within a distinctive life-situation, (5) which is to be progressively identified through the process of corporate discernment.

1) Faith, hope and love are the primary elements in any Christian covenant. As the most radical dimensions of the Christian response to God revealing himself through his Word and giving himself through his Spirit, they represent the perfection of human life, and all other elements, in-



cluding the three counsels, are secondary to them and are to be evaluated on the basis of their actually mediating faith, hope and love. It goes without saying, in the light of what we have said above about conversion as intrinsic to Christian commitment, that the faith, hope and love which are mutually pledged in religious profession are stamped with the spirit of ongoing conversion. The religious community has no right to perfect members; what it has is a title, based on the members' promises, to a daily struggle on their part to grow in faith, hope and love. Similarly, no religious community has ever pledged its members that it will be an ideal and always inspiring milieu for promoting their personal growth. What it does promise is that it will not succumb to ossification, and, more positively, that it will be a striving, struggling community, open to the possibility of reform, renewal, and adaptation, always, of course, according to the measure of grace bestowed by the Spirit.

2) What distinguishes the faith, hope, and love of religious (not, of course, in themselves, but in their existential situation) is that they are mediated through a special complexus of relationships (attitudes, situations, etc.) which have come to be conceived and formulated in this precise triadic way. As a matter of fact neither in the past nor at present has the formulation been uniform. It must also be said that the conceptualization and rationale of the three traditional counsels can vary greatly, as can their concrete expression, considered both singly and in their relationship to one another and to the total covenant relationship. Still, what we designate today by the term "religious life," while not strictly definable, has achieved a concrete historical identity which is sufficiently clear. Theologically, whatever may be said canonically, religious are those Christians who fulfill their baptismal covenant of faith, hope, and charity by entering a life-situation in which the traditional counsels, as verified in a community of members living in them, mediate the life of faith, hope, and love. The counsels are both an expression and a support of that life.

3) The conception of the religious life as "total community," which is not to be confused with "total institution," and as a totally



shared existence has been developed elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> In summary it may be said here that the vows of religion, like the vows of marriage, represent a covenant commitment in which there is a radical renunciation of a certain autonomy for the sake of a more profound communion with other human beings. Just as husband and wife commit themselves to an integral sharing of life in depth, so religious enter upon a special sharing of life's experience that, in principle, is without reservation. Of the three traditional counsels, poverty points to the total sharing of material goods, in their use, privation and contemplation. Celibacy indicates the total sharing of affection (not in the sense, of course, that no one outside the community is loved, or even in the sense that one's most intimate friends are necessarily within the community, but in the sense that availability for the community and its apostolate is primary and normative for other particular loves). Obedience points to the total sharing of decision by which one disposes of himself in the presence of God, man and the world. Though it is necessary to distinguish the three aspects of the one totally shared existence, it is important that we not simply juxtapose poverty, celibacy, and obedience. There is among them an organic unity, interaction, and complementarity, so that, for example, a fully shared decision regarding material things can be both an act of obedience and an act of poverty.

In this conception of total community or totally shared existence, we would seem to have a way of distinguishing the religious community as a community of strict covenant from other looser associations of Christians formed for purposes of prayer and good works. Just as poverty, celibacy, and obedience are to be evaluated in their efficacy by the degree to which they mediate a life of faith, hope, and love, so are they to be judged by the degree to which they facilitate that deep and enduring intertwining of destiny among the members of a community which we have designated by the term of "total community."

4) Religious community as a totally shared existence is a distinctive life-situation in a twofold sense. First, within the basic covenant community, the Church, into which all Christians enter by baptism,



the religious community represents, together with the community of Christian marriage, a basic option for those who are called to specify their Christian covenant by entering a particular community of totally shared existence. Religious community both compares and contrasts with marriage as a distinctive life-situation. Both situations prolong and specify the baptismal covenant. Both mediate faith, hope, and love through identifiable structures and processes. Both are ways to holiness, and neither in itself or simply is better than the other (though one can find various particular aspects in which one or other is more excellent). The major contrast would seem to be that, whereas the divine call to the community of marriage and family comes to persons already orientated toward that community by a basic dynamism of nature, the call to the religious community finds no such prior orientation inscribed on nature. In this sense the religious community is distinguished by being a community of the Kingdom, namely, only the Kingdom explains and justifies entry into it by men and women whose natural orientation is to marriage and family. There is a real sense, therefore, in which the religious life, while not being a better life in the sense of a call to a higher holiness or to a higher way to holiness than that addressed to other Christians, represents a distinctive and striking presence of the Kingdom among men.<sup>8</sup>

There is another sense, however, in which the life of a religious community is a distinctive life-situation. Religious communities, like persons, come one by one, not in bunches. Each had its unique beginnings in history, often through a truly charismatic founder or foundress; its particular history, in which successive metamorphoses were the medium of transmission of a basic identity; its present moment (today a moment of major crisis and opportunity for practically all such communities); and, presumably, its future. This fact has significance for the question of commitment. Just as the individual person entering a community cannot be dealt with as a mere instrument for the advancement of the community, so the community itself is not to be regarded as a mere tool for the development of its members. And just as each individual person coming to the community has a personal life-history, a partially realized identi-



ty, and unique endowments of nature and grace to contribute to the life of the community, so the community has its corporate history, its unique contribution to make to the life of its members and of the entire Church. Communities, like individual persons, can grow old and die. But while they exist, they have an irreplaceable role. The mutuality which we have seen to be characteristic of religious profession connotes mutuality of acceptance of the historical identity of person by community and vice versa, not in the sense that either individual or community pledge themselves to be content with the status quo, but in the sense that each accepts the life-history and identity of the other for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, as material for the work of the Spirit within the life of total community.

5) Neither the religious life in general nor the uniqueness of a particular community admit of proper definition. The result of the Spirit's work in human hearts, they share the mysterious character of the Church herself. There is, indeed, a lived identity, and the concrete possibility of identification of what it means to be a religious and what it means to be a Jesuit. This identification, however, is existential in character, and the many formulations which seek to express it, however legitimate and necessary, will always fall short of adequacy. We are never fully in possession of the meaning of religious or of Jesuit life.<sup>9</sup> Precisely for this reason, each community and its members must be constantly involved in a process of corporate discernment, in which the effort will be to discover the particular forms which, especially in times of radical cultural change, will mediate the identical vision from which the community lives.<sup>10</sup>

This brief sketch of the meaning of religious community enables us, finally, to articulate an equally brief statement of the distinctive characteristics of covenant and fidelity as they are verified in the lives of religious. Religious profession represents a solemn commitment on the part of baptized Christians to share life in a total way, analogous with but also contrasting with the total sharing of marriage. The total sharing is realized in a life of faith, hope, and love, mediated (expressed



and supported) by poverty, celibacy, and obedience. The distinctive style of a particular community of the counsels will be determined by the progressive development of the human and Christian identity both of the individual members in their uniqueness and of the historical community in its uniqueness, and the major instrument of this development is corporate discernment of spirits. The partners to this distinctive Christian covenant are, (1) God himself, who has invited these individuals and this community to a fulfillment of the baptismal covenant within a special life-situation pointing to the Kingdom; (2) the community as such, whose fidelity to God's call to it finds expression in a fidelity to its identity constantly reaffirmed and re-created despite and through constant change; (3) the individual members, whose decision to enter this community and whose acceptance by the community are a flowing together of two divinely given vocations, individual and corporate; and (4) the rest of the Church, which has both a stake and a responsibility in the covenant commitment of religious. Mutuality touches every dimension of this special form of Christian commitment. Promise and fidelity to promise bestow on the commitment both a risk and a strength which would otherwise be absent. And because the ground of the entire mystery is the promise and the fidelity of God himself, expressed once for all in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this human and Christian covenant gives expression to the mystery of God himself.

#### IV. Some Characteristics of Jesuit Commitment

In the light of the previous understanding of the place in human life of promise and fidelity, and of the nature of the commitment of religious as such, it is possible now to ask about the character and value of mutual commitment and mutual fidelity precisely for the Jesuit way of life. Here, too, our treatment will be a partial one, with the hope that, if the basic insight is valid, others may develop its many possible ramifications.

The principle presiding over the following remarks can be put rather briefly and also, in reliance on the Thirty-First General Congregation, quite confidently: Since the Jesuit vocation is inherently apostolic,



Jesuit commitment (understanding this always here as commitment to one another) has its distinctive character and value from its contribution to Jesuit apostolate.

Though the theme is a familiar one, it may be well to recall the recent General Congregation's decided accent on the apostolic character of our vocation:<sup>11</sup>

"This history has its beginnings in the Spiritual Exercises which our holy father Ignatius and his companions went through. Led by this spiritual experience, they formed a group that was apostolic in its charity" (Decree 1, no. 2).

"Since apostolic activity belongs to the very nature of the religious life in Institutes devoted to the apostolate, the whole life of a brother must be called apostolic by reason of the specific consecration which they [sic] make to God through vows in the body of the Society" (7,2).

"The Society's apostolic objective is to be considered the principle which regulates the entire formation of our members" (8,4).

"The training of the scholastics should be apostolic in its orientation" (9,1).

"The purpose of studies in the Society is apostolic, as is the purpose of the entire training" (9,13).

"The purpose of our studies is to train Jesuits to proclaim and transmit the truth revealed in Christ and entrusted to the Church" (9,41).

"In our Society, not only poverty and obedience but chastity also is essentially apostolic" (16,4).

"Through the vow of obedience our Society becomes a more fit instrument of Christ in his Church, unto the assistance of souls for God's greater glory" (17,2).

"Our poverty in the Society is apostolic: our Lord has sent us to preach in poverty. Therefore our poverty is measured by our apostolic end, so that our entire apostolate is informed with the spirit of poverty" (18,4).

Since the community to which the Jesuit pledges his fidelity is this Ignatian apostolic community of the counsels, we are now finally able to



say something directly about Jesuit commitment. It is a freely undertaken covenant to spend one's life as a member of a particular historically identifiable Christian community stemming from Ignatius of Loyola and characterized by dedication to apostolic action for the greater glory of God and the help of souls. This word of promise spoken in final profession has as its primary intent the dynamism, stability, and ruggedness of the communion in shared apostolic action, individual and corporate, carried on by members of the Society of Jesus. What is pledged is apostolic presence. Each Jesuit, on the day of his profession, says in effect to all the other members of the Society: "I will be there, for the work of the Kingdom, for the common enterprise. You can count on my being there. I give you my word on it. As individuals and as Jesuit communities of various scope (such as local houses, province, assistancy, worldwide Society), you can plan your future, individual and corporate, in dependence on my abiding presence, not just for the fulfilling of this or that particular function, domestic or apostolic, but for sharing with you, in fair weather and foul, that common vision of our life which we all learned through the Ignatian Exercises and through the other means of our formation as Jesuits."

Since, as we have seen, mutuality is characteristic of the covenant commitment of religious profession, Jesuit commitment must be viewed also as the commitment of the Society of Jesus to its individual members. At each profession, therefore, the Society implicitly, through its representative who accepts the vows, commits itself to the one who vows. This commitment of the Society as such is likewise apostolic in character. It says, in effect, to the individual Jesuit: "In your effort to fulfill faithfully God's call to you to labor in the Kingdom in this Ignatian community, we, your fellow Jesuits, promise to be with you. You can count on this. You can plan your future as a Jesuit apostle with the assurance of this support, of this apostolic presence of all your fellow Jesuits, and of the Society of Jesus as such."

It would be possible to trace the many implications of this basic thesis that Jesuit commitment is a mutual covenant of lifelong apostolic presence. No aspect of Jesuit life, prayer, corporate discernment of



spirits, formation, life-style, and so on, will remain unaffected by it. All the elements which make up our life in the Society in the concrete may be viewed as a total context within which this mutual pledge of apostolic presence is to find support and expression. In our later suggestions about strengthening Jesuit commitment we will touch on some of these things. We limit ourselves here, however, to a brief indication of how the living of the counsels as such contributes to Jesuit commitment viewed as pledged fidelity to apostolic presence.

One cannot adequately identify the life of a religious or of a Jesuit without including the counsels. Poverty, celibacy, and obedience are not ends in themselves, or at least they are no more than proximate ends. Yet they are, in this way of life, necessary mediations of the faith, hope, and love which are the bond of apostolic community. The Ignatian vision, if it is to be incarnate, must be embodied in a concrete life-form. It is poverty, celibacy, obedience which specify this life-form.

It follows from what has already been said that the counsels as lived in the Society of Jesus have a primarily apostolic orientation. They are a powerful way of human self-fulfillment, but they are this precisely by being a powerful way of living for others, being at the disposal of the Kingdom. "In our Society, not only poverty and obedience but chastity also is essentially apostolic."

From this we can conclude further to the relationship between the matter of the vows and Jesuit commitment. The matter of the vows represents the concrete embodiment of Jesuit commitment. The "I will be there - you can depend on me" which, we have seen, is the meaning of the word spoken in Jesuit commitment, is to be understood principally in terms of apostolic poverty, apostolic celibacy, apostolic obedience, as vehicles of a totally shared existence. The commitment to live poorly, as this is envisaged in the Institute of the Society of Jesus, pledges the individual Jesuit to embody the Christian and Ignatian vision of life in a material existence characterized in a certain way. When this commitment is truly lived, then the individual Jesuit is faithful to his pledge to be present to his fellow Jesuits in their effort to live as poor men. The vow of



poverty is a solemn assurance given by each Jesuit to his fellows and to the Society as such that the corporate effort to embody the spirit of gospel poverty in an apostolic life will be supported by his individual efforts to do the same. It tells them that they can depend on this effort of his. And, because mutuality is characteristic of the covenant, in accepting the vow of poverty of each new member the Society commits itself to him, and promises that, by its own vigilant and creative search for ever new ways of being poor with the poor Christ, it will guide and support him in his life of poverty.

Likewise, the vow of celibacy of an individual Jesuit says to other Jesuits that they can depend on his apostolic presence to them as embodied precisely in his singleness. No woman, no family, no children, including the family which gave him to the Society, will diminish his apostolic availability to his brethren. What is very legitimate for other men and even a vehicle of their apostolic presence to the work of the Church, is excluded from this way of life. This presence, let us say again, is not to be conceived primarily in terms of work-hours and physical presence, but in terms of a love that is available in a distinctive way because of the vow of celibacy. It also follows from our previous analysis that, in accepting the individual Jesuit's vow of celibacy, the Society as such is pledging him that it will strive to be an environment which will foster, and not impede, his effort to grow in the apostolic presence of celibacy. Here it is appropriate to recall the perceptive observation of Perfectae caritatis (no. 12): "Above all, everyone should remember - superiors especially - that chastity has stronger safeguards in a community when true fraternal love thrives among its members."

The commitment of Jesuit obedience touches precisely the area of freedom, decision, responsibility, shared discernment. In the vow of obedience the individual Jesuit tells his brothers that they can count on his participation in apostolic discernment, that they will not have to contend with completely autonomous decisions on his part, that he entrusts and risks his own apostolic future to the processes of a corporate discernment. And, in this mutual covenant, the Society as such tells him



that it will share decision with him, support him in his own apostolic decisions, challenge him when this is called for, and in general be apostolically present to him as he seeks, by apostolic decision, the greater glory of God and the greater help of souls.

#### V. Some particular problems regarding Jesuit commitment

In this part we wish to signalize, without attempting any solution, some of the problems connected with the realization of Jesuit commitment as we have just described it.

1) A first problem, or complexus of problems, stems from the cultural factors mentioned at the beginning of this essay. It would seem clear that commitment and fidelity to commitment are facing very severe pressures today. While this is undoubtedly due in part to a real malaise in contemporary society, it is due also, undoubtedly, to the fact that the conceptualization and rhetoric of commitment and fidelity have not yet been sufficiently renewed in contact with the genuine insights and developments of modern and contemporary culture. The reflections of Marcel and others are a help in this regard, but even in the past decade the experience of mankind has changed so profoundly that even these relatively recent studies need to be continued.

2) A second problem is really a difficulty against the human validity and value of perpetual vows. It is not an entirely new difficulty, and one can read something very much like it in Martin Luther's De votis monasticis. Two of its principal forms are heard today generally from some older and from some younger religious, respectively. A good many older religious, shaken and dismayed by the degree and rapidity of change which they have seen within their communities, are apt to say, "This is no longer the community which I joined. Whether or not I leave it, I do not feel I am bound to share in the 'renewal' of a community in which I can no longer recognize the community to which I committed myself by vow." Without seeking to refute this difficulty we would simply point to the importance, in dealing with it, of the distinction of contract and covenant which we have made. It is of the nature of covenant to be a commitment to the unknown; it is precisely this which gives to the mutual trust



and fidelity expressed in the vows of marriage or religious community their special value. This does not imply that it is impossible for a community to be radically unfaithful to its call from God. But care must be taken, in seeking to appraise whether it has been faithful or unfaithful, not to take a merely phenomenal or quantitative measure (which would be precisely the Pharisaism which is the enemy of Christian commitment), but rather to attend to the fidelity with which a community has given itself to the process of discerning God's call to it here and now, in basic continuity with its historical identity. Whether or not a community is being faithful to its charism is not to be easily deduced with the help of a handy check-list of essentials, but rather by examining whether it is being faithful to the conditions of a true discernment of spirits.

The second form of the difficulty against the validity and value of life-time commitment is much more difficult to deal with, and usually comes from those with more progressive ideas about what religious life can possibly be. It insists that the only absolute commitment is to the Absolute, and hence that no commitment to a particular human community can have a simply irrevocable character; that the Absolute addresses its call to men within history and with divine freedom, so that one cannot be certain that tomorrow's call may not be out of the community that one enters today. It also makes much of the fact that some or many of those who leave the religious life after final vows are more truly committed persons than some or many of those who stay. And finally, a truly binding commitment would seem to compromise the freedom and responsibility of every person to direct his own life and shape his own future as it seems best to him in the changing circumstances of life on earth.

Still less than with the first form of the difficulty against life-time commitment is any adequate response here possible. We would refer the interested reader to the literature, particularly to DeFinance's observations. On the level of fact, it seems inescapable that departure from the religious life, even after final vows, can be a legitimate and even imperious call from the Spirit, and that among these so called not all fit into the category of these who should never have embraced this



life in the first place. Hence, however one may conceive the fidelity asked of religious, it cannot in principle be so conceived as to exclude universally the possibility of departure from the religious community. What would seem to follow, however, from what we have said about mutual commitment, is that when the question of leaving arises in the life of a religious, he is bound in fidelity to his brothers not only to deal with the question in prayerful openness to the Spirit, but to consult, in appropriate fashion, the community itself, which, as it was a partner to the original corporate discernment which led to the commitment of the vows, now has a stake and a title in the discernment of whether God is now calling one of its members elsewhere. The term, "in appropriate fashion," admits of rather broad interpretation, as circumstances will suggest just who should be consulted, and how the dialogue should be conducted.

The more theoretical aspect of the difficulty is in need of fresh reflection. As a casual comment I would be inclined to say the following: (1) If the divine freedom is uncompromised by God's promise to man in Christ Jesus, perhaps we should be hesitant to affirm that man's freedom, by which he shares mysteriously in God's freedom, is compromised by a similar commitment; (2) within an economy of sin and redemption, the basic law of life is that man must lose his life in order to find it. One can readily acknowledge that a kind of death (respecting precisely human autonomy) is involved in the word of fidelity, especially when the partner in covenant is not God but sinful creatures like oneself. What gives the Christian the courage and hope to commit himself so "foolishly" is that, as we have seen, God's fidelity and God's promise are inextricably bound up with man's; (3) more philosophically, one must choose between a conception of human freedom which finds expression in Sartre's "Hell is the other," and one expressed in Marcel's "I hope in thee for us." According to the latter conception, human freedom is not fully constituted as freedom except as related, in hope as well as in fidelity, to other freedoms.

3) A third problem concerning Jesuit commitment is one raised by the Society's distinctive institution of perpetual vows at the end of the



novitiate period, which may be as little as two years. If one takes seriously the understanding of Jesuit commitment which has been outlined in this essay, one must be open to the task of justifying the Society's first vows as being in fact truly perpetual vows, a serious life-time commitment. The general trend of psychological studies in recent years has been to postpone any definitive commitment to celibate community to the middle or late twenties. In addition, the record of frequent departures from the Society, together with widespread attitudes toward the departure of scholastics and brothers after first vows, would seem to indicate that many no longer commonly look upon what happens at the end of the novitiate as truly perpetual vows. Truth alone would seem to call for a serious reconsideration of this apparent gap between what is professed and what is intended. In this regard, the interpretation of first vows given by the first Santa Clara Conference in 1967, while it is a valiant attempt to make sense of the present situation, only accentuates the problem. One must, on the other hand, take seriously the experience of our directors of novices when they maintain that some young men, at least, are ready for a lifetime commitment at twenty or twenty-two.

4) A fourth difficulty, or perhaps complexus of difficulties, regarding Jesuit commitment stems from the large number of departures from the Society in recent years, even after final vows. Even when one allows that a number (how large?) of such departures are of men who should never have been admitted to the Society, or at least to final profession, or of those who, for whatever reason, are presently unsuited to the religious life and incapable of leading it, several problems remain. The large number of departures in itself represents a psychological pressure against retaining conception of commitment and fidelity to commitment such as has been exposed in this essay. This pressure would seem to be augmented by the manner in which some are inclined to speak of those who depart and about the Society in connection with their departure. My experience is that, by and large, there is a great care of charity toward those who leave the Society. This is at times coupled with a critical or pessimistic attitude toward the Society itself, frequently expressed in such random



statements as "The best are leaving." But what may be in danger of seriously compromising the seriousness of Jesuit commitment is an oversimplified or one-sided accent on the absoluteness of the baptismal commitment, together with a playing down of the responsibility assumed by the pledged word of the vows, especially so far as commitment to one another is concerned. I am not suggesting that, among those who leave, little or no thought is given to this aspect of the Jesuit commitment; I would suspect that, for some at least, much thought and no little anguish are spent on it. But a general silence regarding this aspect of our lives, even when it is motivated by a genuine charity toward those who leave, may contribute to a blunting of sensibilities on the part of those who remain toward the fidelity to one another implicit in the vows.

A factor which augments the difficulty connected with departures from the Society is the lack of appropriate communications in the process of decision about leaving and of actual departure. Obviously respect for the privacy of conscience is a very legitimate and necessary factor in limiting the information generally available regarding particular departures. Still, there would seem to be indications that, at least in some cases, the decision to leave is taken in greater isolation than is appropriate, given the seriousness of the commitment to one's fellow Jesuits. Or, if these indications are not to be trusted, the least that may be said is that "the system" governing departures often leaves the individual's fellow Jesuits distressingly in the dark about the departure of one with whom they were bound by intimate ties.

I am not suggesting that these four problems regarding Jesuit commitment are the only or even the most serious ones. A fuller treatment would have to give attention to the infidelity to Jesuit commitment which is possible for communities and individuals without the dramatic qualities of departure from the Society.

## VI. Toward a Strengthening of Jesuit Commitment

This final section of the present essay will simply set forth, without extensive development, some of the ways in which Jesuit commitment may be strengthened.



1) We are in need of more serious studies than the present relatively brief essay on the general theme of commitment and fidelity to commitment, as well as on the principal thesis of the present essay, namely, that religious profession represents a mutual covenant in fidelity among members of the same religious community.

2) Secondly, the present renewal of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, where there is question of an annual retreat, could contribute to a deeper understanding of and fidelity to Jesuit commitment. More particularly, the meditation on the Kingdom of Christ, so pivotal for the commitment of Jesuits, could very appropriately be developed in the direction of a call to deep mutual fidelity on the part of all Jesuits. The same might be said of the direction of Better World Movement retreats when made by communities of Jesuits.

3) Thirdly, given the widespread departures of Jesuits, even after final vows, the question might be raised of the advisability of some general guidelines governing departure, worked out on provincial or inter-provincial levels, and touching on attitudes and procedures regarding departure from the Society. The value of such guidelines would not be exclusively in the statement itself. The process of dialogue and discernment involved in drawing up such a statement would be precisely the kind of clarification of the meaning of Jesuit commitment which is needed today.

4) Whether or not the conception of Jesuit commitment and fidelity outlined in the present essay is acceptable, even with qualifications, it would seem imperative that, during the process of gradual incorporation of new members into the Society, more explicit attention be paid to this question of mutual commitment.

5) Finally, it is quite possible that a considerable number of qualified and generous young men in the future will want to give themselves to participation in the Jesuit apostolic life in deeper and relatively more stable fashion than is possible through present Sodality groups, and the like, without, however, feeling called to a lifetime commitment to the Society. This suggests that the time may have arrived when we are in need of some small scale experiences with associate members, who would share in



the total life of the Society, even to the point of living under the same roof with Jesuits under perpetual vows, but who themselves would not commit themselves in this way. Though undoubtedly many problems would arise with such relationships, it is quite possible that such a development will both strengthen the seriousness of Jesuit commitment and provide a way of life, at least temporarily, for qualified men not called to such commitment.

A final word of caution: Because the present essay has focused more or less exclusively on Jesuit commitment in its aspect of commitment to one another, it is not in the least being suggested that this is the only or the most important aspect of Jesuit commitment, or that it can be sustained without being nourished by the Godward commitment (understood especially in terms of the Kingdom of Christ), or without leading into a commitment of comparable depth to the entire Church and to the whole of humanity. The reasons for choosing to accent the mutual covenant binding Jesuits among themselves is that this aspect of religious and Jesuit profession has not received its due attention, and that it is a crucial point for the renewal of the Society today. A very useful further essay, if one grants the validity of the thesis sustained here, would be able to relate the three aspects of mutual commitment of which we have just spoken.



## FOOTNOTES

- 1 See, for example, Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted (New York, 1965); Alvin Tofler, Future Shock (New York, 1970).
- 2 On p. 41 of no. 32 in the series Fathers of the Church (New York, 1956).
- 3 Cited by James Brodrick, St. Francis Xavier (London, 1952), p. 459
- 4 For a brief bibliography, particularly of material in French, see the article of P. Adnès, "Fidelité" in Dictionnaire de spiritualité, V, 307-332. See also the article on "Fidelité" by M. Nedoncelle, in Catholicisme, IV, 1264-1269. This article is a summary of Nedoncelle's work, La fidelité. Most authors who deal with the question refer to Gabriel Marcel's reflections on fidelity (see the references in Nedoncelle's article). In his youth Marcel had been influenced by the American philosopher, Josiah Royce, whose developed thought centered on the notion of loyalty and the "beloved community." See his The Philosophy of Loyalty (New York, 1908) and especially his The Problem of Christianity (Hamden, 1913).  
A particularly impressive treatment of fidelity is that of J. de Finance, "Liberté et fidelité," Gregorianum, XLIII (1962), 12-38.
- 5 This aspect of profession as a covenant event characterized by mutuality is happily finding new expressions in some communities, especially of women. The religious superior will, for example, ask the other members present, "Will we, as a community, be a support to these Sisters, accepting them as they are now and as they will be, upholding them on good days as well as bad, and through failure as well as in success?", and the community responds, "Yes, we will love and support them." The newly professed Sisters make the same pledge regarding the community and its other members.
- 6 One can only rejoice to see that this ecclesial dimension of profession is also finding new expression e.g. by having the ceremony of profession in the parish Church where the new member was baptized and educated, or where he is presently serving. It would also be a good thing if new forms for the participation of the people of the parish or diocese in the ceremony of profession could be found, which would signalize the



participation of all members of the Church both in the blessings and in the responsibilities of the vocation of religious.

- 7 T. E. Clarke, S.J., "Religious Community," The Way, X (April, 1970), 103-112.
- 8 For a development of the comparison and contrast of the two Christian communities, see T. E. Clarke, S.J., "Celibacy: Challenge to Tribalism," America, CXX (April 19, 1969), 464-467.
- 9 Here I would suggest that recent reflections concerning the identification of Christian faith despite (and partly on the condition of) the mutability of dogmatic formulas have analogous application to the identity of a religious community. See Avery Dulles, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem," Theological Studies, XXIX (1968), 397-416.
- 10 See John Futrell, S.J., "Ignatian Discernment," Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, II, no. 2 (April, 1970), 47-88.
- 11 The references in parentheses are to the decrees and paragraphs in Documents of the Thirty-first General Congregation (Woodstock, Md., 1967).







## ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

by

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The priesthood of many Jesuits -- perhaps even most of them in the United States -- seems to be more concerned with the mediation of Christian intelligibility than with the administration of sacraments and preaching. It seems that our peculiar kind of mediatorship has been concerned with hearing that which is of God in the world, speaking this word to the Church, hearing Christ speak through the Church, and playing this back to the world. This paper will be concerned with one of the most pervasive problems bedeviling both Church and world alike, a problem which cries for mediators who can give it some semblance of intelligibility.

Today's mediator lives in a no-man's land and must mediate between two different cultures: one of transiency and one of permanence. As moderns, we are faced with a culture of transiency, and as Christians, we have inherited a culture of permanence. The most agonizing aspect of the permanency-transiency conflict concerns commitment. It is with this question that the paper will deal.

The magnitude of the question about commitment can be sensed when a philosopher of no less stature than Hannah Arendt describes the whole of western civilization as having been built on the faculty to make and keep promises. From Abraham to the Roman legal order, till relatively modern times, the complex web of human relationships was held together by the fact that a promise made could only be broken if a person, or a state, or a group was willing to undergo the consequences of what would be construed by all of us as a sinful or a criminal act. One of the disconcerting factors in our present culture is that the opposite obtains and we take it for granted that men will break promises, disregard trea-



ties, violate contracts, and break vows.

Does commitment mean anything? Is there any change necessary in the way we have come to think about commitment as Christians? Do we Christians have anything to teach or give to a world coming apart at the seams from the impermanency of commitments within it? We in religious life should be particularly concerned about this question since we are presently faced with the peculiar situation of having a rapidly sagging morale problem at the same time as we have evidence of having in our ranks a greater degree of quality in personnel than ever before in religious life. One reason why we have the morale problem is that we have unreflectively dealt with the question of permanency of vocation and, consequently a departure is taken as a loss of vocation. Then, again, so few of the young will join our ranks, in part because they feel a repugnance about committing themselves "for life" to anything. We have inherited one understanding and are being pushed into a new understanding which is still very confused. To leave the question of permanency or perpetual commitment unexamined allows a continual erosion of morale within religious life, the priesthood and the Church -- which might after all be useless grief.

The roots of the present situation, a situation describable as a culture of transiency and superficiality in commitment, should not be oversimplified. Suffice it to say here that present malaise comes in part from ideas, not a few of which stem from the existentialist philosophical tradition. For example, Sartre would feel that it is quite wrong for a man to conform to formulations about human nature which were formulated anterior to the existing person, and that since each of us is totally unique the only essence we can be said to have is our freedom. To be free to choose, according to Sartre, is the precondition for being human. To choose freely is to grow, whereas to commit oneself to something or to someone is to make growth impossible. To guarantee one's love forever makes loving impossible and freedom inaccessible; and it puts human fulfillment out of reach.

But, few men are touched immediately by philosophies, whereas all



are directly affected by home, job and friends. So perhaps a better description of the culture of transiency can be gotten from the recent book by Alvin Toffler, Future Shock. Toffler describes in a fascinating way the rapidation to which we are all subjected as moderns. The rate of change is so swift that man is in a state of shock and is unable to respond appropriately.

Toffler shows that the three factors which stabilised man's life in the past and gave a permanency to his commitments, namely place, relationship, and career, have all become undone. Rootedness to place was a main source for our feeling of stability in the past, and a major factor in our being able to be consistent in commitments. By simply citing the statistics of travel, the number of new apartments, and the changes in the telephone directories of the major cities in our country as examples, Toffler indicates how passé a source of stability place has become. He goes on to cite the bewildering job turnover that modern Americans are faced with. Serial careerism is rapidly becoming an apt description for employment, with the Department of Labor estimating that persons in their mid-twenties should expect six to seven major job changes in the course of their lifetimes. Since career or occupation was a major source of the stability of one's personality in the past, the removal of this second stanchion bodes ill for the future.

The third source of stability, namely one's relationships, increasing rapidly by the fact of job change and place change, are part of the shock picture. All things being equal, low transiency made for long lasting relationships, high transiency makes for wholly new kinds of relationship. Perhaps the place where the new transiency is being felt most poignantly is in the area of marriage. One out of every four brides that appeared at the altar last year had been there before as a bride. Appearing at the altar, of course, is a pretty "straight" thing to do now that serial monogamy is so prevalent.

Before we begin the body of the paper, several points might well be made. We must first of all accept the fact that ours is a new culture and that it is not one of permanency. That alone might be good insofar



as it calls forth a more self-actualizing personality. We see something evil in the past if the individual was so inextricably interwoven into clan that his responses were fully programmed for him. But also, in the present it takes little reflection to know how easily exploitative and opportunistic relationships can be and how superficial and unstable many moderns have become. Permanent commitment is not only a desirable thing but it is central to our faith and to personal salvation. But commitments should not be institutionally engineered or extrinsically determined. Nor can the question of commitment be reduced to the problem of staying or leaving the forms of Christian life within which a commitment was first made.

There will be four steps in this study. The first will attempt to elucidate the meaning that any human commitment can be expected to have in any culture whatever. The second will ask what Christianity can add to this understanding: What is the meaning of commitment in Christian terms? The third will try to apply what has been discovered about individuals' commitment to religious life as it is institutionalized. And fourthly, the paper will make concrete recommendations for consideration by Jesuits in view of a new understanding of commitment.

### I. Human Commitments

It seems that a commitment is a formal indication communicated to someone, or to a community, of a person's steady intention to be or to do something. It can have "doing" as its primary focus. For example, a governor's commitment to his people expresses his steady intention to work for the common good. Or it can have "being" as its primary focus. For example, the commitment of a wife to her husband is primarily an announcement to be someone to him, and only secondarily involves tasks. It would seem that every commitment entails three essential components: it involves a motive force; underneath the motive force there is a self-conception; and looking out from the self and the motive there is a perception of the context within which the commitment is made.

With regard to the motive, it should be evident by now to anyone that men are not motivated by a single driving force. Man's motives



are not always conscious either; and therefore, only post factum are we capable of discovering fully why we made a commitment. The unconscious part of our motivation, and the many sides of it, are glimpsed with time. Then we can either more truly recommit ourselves to that to which we had initially committed ourselves, or in some infrequent cases, the commitment will be annulled and cancelled out if the distortion from the subconscious was seen to be so all consuming.

It should be evident that one over-arching choice in a life, when that choice is not followed up by a rechoosing of the same, is not likely to last or be healthy. Choice and commitment, to be meaningful, must be continuous; and so the motivating force underlying choice and commitment must grow apace. One's view of "the good" grows, and as it grows, the commitment and the choosing must grow too. A frequent fallacy in the process of choice is for the person to recommit himself to his commitment, rather than to that which was once seen as good for him and must be seen as good now.

The two further dimensions of commitment, self conception and one's perspective or perception of the context, are very closely linked. What is assumed, of course, is that the identity of the person making the commitment remains somewhat steady. When profound changes in one's self conception or identity take place, all former commitments become difficult to maintain if they are not renewed on the basis of the new conception of self. Furthermore, when a change takes place in one's perception of the context within which the commitment was made, the commitment once again must either be made anew or it will cancel itself out.

Some examples can easily be given. Someone who has assigned a new place to feelings, as many who have undergone the sensitivity programs and "growth sessions" find themselves doing, has the need to make his commitments anew on the basis of the new accession given feelings. The Buddhist monk who finds himself in a situation in which his previous understanding of compassion cannot be sustained in view of the atrocities he is witnessing, is forced to make a complete reassessment of the nature of his initial commitment, which was to live a life of compassion toward



all living things. So also a person in the last five years in the Church, who had committed himself to a particular vocation within the Church, will probably have to renew his commitment on the basis of one of the new understandings of Church that he finds in such bewildering diversity at the present time. So also a woman who has indulged herself in recent Women's Liberation literature, might come up with a totally different idea of the meaning of marriage than that which had led her to her initial commitment; and in this case she would either have to commit herself for new reasons to the marriage that she had undertaken, or cancel out perhaps the initial commitment. Many commitments to marriage, priesthood, and religious life were made at a time when the Church and the individual had a more fixed view of human nature than is presently held by many Christians. Process thought, developmental psychology, physical longevity, and a sophistication about history are merely four of many factors undoing the fixity in man's view of himself.

The whole point here is that the context within which any commitment is made can no longer be relied upon to remain unchanging. When the context changes, as it will increasingly in a pluralistic world, then those whose commitment relied on the strength of the context to carry them along will no longer be able to be sustained by it, and only the self-actualizing will be able to remain constant.

Notwithstanding these three variables, any real human commitment worthy of the name in any culture still has certain determinate characteristics. Six of these characteristics would seem to be the following. First, every commitment is one choice, which excludes several possibilities. One thing of many is willed, and this commitment to one determination negates the possibility of others. Second, every commitment involves duration, and therefore requires perseverance. Third, every commitment involves something unseen and, therefore, a certain risk. The hallowed marriage formula puts it well: "For better or for worse." The cost is unknown at the outset and the commitment cannot be made on the basis of a known cost. Fourth, every commitment grows strong on regular exercise, whether we are talking about the act of marrying or the act of



faith. Every expression of the commitment is a renewal of it. Fifth, although every commitment needs a supportive context, since no one should be asked to live so heroically that he continually reconstitutes his commitment without any confirmation or feedback or response, nevertheless, the context cannot be the inspiration for the commitment, nor can the context be so leaned upon that the commitment is merely automatic. And sixth, every commitment has an inner and an outer aspect to it; or, as Gabriel Marcel would have it, every commitment involves constancy whereby I carry out the terms of the promise that I made, and fidelity which is the internal unction whereby I do with relish that which I had committed myself to do. If the commitment has merely constancy as its characteristic so that I am going through the motions either because a public scandal would arise from my not going through them, or for the sake of the children, or for my own reputation, or for whatever reason, the commitment is seriously deficient. A healthy commitment would seem to require both the inner disposition and continuing desire to do what was promised and the doing of it.

## II. Commitment in the Light of Revelation

As Christians we cannot take the culture of transiency and the widespread fragility of commitment as that which we are to be shaped by but as that which we must shape. It is for us to judge the present order of things with the light which faith can shed on them. What light can our faith shed on the meaning of commitment in our culture? The answer cannot be expected immediately from Scripture, of course, since the human authors of Scripture have known only a cultural situation which is the complete opposite of our own, one that was highly static and immobile. Nevertheless Scripture has much to say on the subject of commitment.

The first corrective we find is that from the Old Testament: that the effort and the emphasis is not on human input but on divine largesse. The believer's commitment is not self-goaded but a yielding to His importuning. It is not something we make, but something God does. He commits Himself to his people and asks them to accept and acknowledge this commitment. Therefore, the first thing we learn about a commitment



is that it is primarily our acceptance of God's initiative toward us. Secondly, His commitment is to a people, and as a people, they are to express their steady intention to be His and to do what is written in the law of Moses. Commitment, therefore, is a response within a community to Jahweh. For His part, it involves a promise of special protection and benevolence; for their part, it involves first of all the unconditional intention to believe that He is their God, unseen yet perceivable in the revealing events which manifested His on-going commitment. His great concern was that his people not give in to the temptation to materialize Him and their responses to Him by images and laws whereby they could encase and thereby control their relationship to Him.

Torah spelled out and specified what the response of the people was to be. We see in the entire Old Testament the historical process whereby a people went from responding to Jahweh to gradually creating an exhaustive context on which they could repose their commitment. The temptation which the People of Israel frequently succumbed to was to become so oriented to religious practices and immersed in the context of religiosity that what had begun as a response to God became a conformity to a way whereby they achieved religious rectitude in their own eyes and became authors of their own commitment.

Just as the Old Testament understanding of commitment requires that one understand covenant, so in the New Testament the controlling idea of the meaning of commitment is contained in the action of baptism. According to the New Testament, baptism effects such a total change that it is described as a new birth, as a dying to one's former self. The moment of baptism, although also a rite and a sacrament, is incorrectly reduced to either of these. It is a once and for all moment in the life of the person. It introduces one into a new stage and quality of existence which is life in Christ. The moment of transformation is irrevocable. What preceded being baptized into Christ was formation, and what followed were merely degrees of union. After the initial commitment to God in Christ through baptism, any differentiation or subsequent form of response could only be a way of specifying this primordial and unchanging



commitment.

The call to be a Christian and one's response in baptism was seldom left without further specification. There were at least three fundamental ways in which this further specification could take place. One could choose (or be elected) to undertake certain functions in a Christian community, for example diaconal tasks. Or one could discern within himself and decide to exercise special charismata like that of teacher, ecstatic utterance, and the like. Thirdly, the specification might also involve a choice of a life style like marriage or virginity, both of which vocations were to be special signs to the Christian community -- the one a sign of unity and love that Christ had for His Church; the other, a sign of the life to come in a manner that all would eventually be living. In all three cases, whether one performed a formal function or was a sign or exercised one's charism, the Christian announced, as it were publicly, a steady intention to assume some responsibility within the Christian community as if one were a stone in the temple of living stones which is the Church, the temple of God. Just as one relied upon others to help him be situated within that position, so in turn he was relied upon to be about what he said he was going to be or do. Only the crass would fail to see that an irresponsible removal of one's person from his specific commitment weakens the walls of the temple built up on Christ the cornerstone.

Just as each stone undertakes special responsibilities vis-à-vis the community, so each is subject to special pressures. Since men are living stones it cannot be assumed that the pressures will be felt evenly or that similar vocations will be undertaken by those of a single psychic shape. Even the perpetually vowed will not or should not resist development in their vocational commitment. Since we are not speaking of inert substances it is obvious that some in the course of time will become sturdier and increasingly a source of strength for all around, while others find the pressures of such a magnitude that they threaten to pulverize them.

When, in the past, there has arisen a real question of whether certain ones should **persevere** or not in their specific vocational commitment,



they have found the presumption of the Catholic tradition and the overwhelming sentiment of the Catholic community weighted heavily in favor of perseverance. Not without reason, of course, because of the value to the community of the individual's constancy. But this presumption has been too preponderant, and fashioned without faith either in persons ("he must have been unfaithful to the duties of his state of life") or in God's unique providence over individuals.

Perpetuity accurately describes one of the qualities of God's specific vocational call to the large majority of His children and their response. But it has also been used to supplant the process of discernment that is necessary for all persons in their respective callings. When the community allows itself to succumb to an a priori judgment about all vocational callings, a faithless extrinsicism takes over and grows unchecked. What makes blanket perpetuity suspect is the evident disintegrating effect both on individuals and the immediate community of many who "persevere (in ruthless despite of reason and faith).

Undoubtedly, sin or irresponsibility can be operating in some instances and can be at the bottom of the "defection" or divorce. There is also the likelihood that the conditions of the particular vocation have been ineptly spelled out by authority or made impossible by the partner. Or God may simply have meant a particular responsibility to be a temporary one.

In general, we have been too facile in Roman Catholicism in transposing vocational calls and grace attractions into states of life with programmed contents. But the heart of the problem has been the transfer of the meaning and significance of one's irrevocable Christian vocation to a rhetorical irrevocability applied to one's specific vocational responsibility.

The only conclusion one can draw, therefore, is that fidelity to one's specific vocation can only be described to a limited degree for a person, and ultimately can be determined only by the person. To confine the meaning of fidelity to the a priori, or to external perseverance, or to conformity to a role description of one's state in life, does a disservice to



men and limits God's unique dealings with them.

The fact that a Christian embraces a specific vocational calling does not mean that fidelity for him now is to a state of life. Christian fidelity is always radically personal and ordered to the Persons of Father, Son, and Spirit. One's commitment is always to become more fully a Christ-person in and through the Spirit-gift. Descriptions of the responsibilities of one's state in life are helpful up to a point as abstracted illustrations of the shape one may expect his or her calling to assume. But they cannot be used as a substitute for discerning the peculiar shape of one's becoming. The only valid measure of one's fidelity is in terms of how fully he has yielded to the empowerments the Spirit would give him.

### III. Commitment and Religious Life

It remains for us to apply the aforesaid to religious life and suggest what a particular religious order might do to implement this reconception of commitment in religious life.

There would seem to be three different populations that are making it mandatory for religious orders to re-examine the way in which the religious life is presently conceived and institutionalized. The one is made up of those who joined the order and departed. The other is of those who find the idea of making a perpetual commitment repugnant and therefore avoid joining a religious community. The third is of those who hunger spiritually for more than the regular ministrations of parish and school can provide them with. It is quite possible that we should read these three populations as signs pointing to a deficiency, not in themselves, but in the way in which religious life is presently constituted.

Roman Catholics imagine that they suffer from a plethora of institutions whereas, in fact, they suffer from a dearth of them. The dearth is precisely in the area of religious growth and spiritual development. The system of parishes and Catholic schools has succeeded by and large in creating and satisfying too many contextual Catholics.

By contextual Catholicism I mean the system wherein the membership rides along on the services provided for them whether sacramental, intellectual, or whatever. Rather than being religiously self-actualizing or



personally appropriating the meaning of the faith for themselves, they are content to give the responses (doctrinal, moral, liturgical, etc.) they are programmed to give. The contextual Catholic tries thereby to arrive at a feeling of religious rectitude, a feeling that he is being pleasing to God by his compliant responses. He is usually left unsuspecting of the depths of the faith which has been plumbed for him rather than by him. His children in turn need the same system since his "training" has left him incapable of transmitting to even his own family an internalized meaning of faith.

Those who suspect that there is more and hunger for it can always be understood to have a religious vocation. How often has the desire for an intensive Christian life been interpreted to indicate the presence of a religious vocation? How easily this initial misreading is compounded when, by means of the rhetoric of fidelity, carelessly co-opted from the theology of baptism to encourage perseverance in religious life, one is programmed to make a perpetual commitment to one specification of the Christian vocation and pronounce vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. There is good reason to believe that many who have responded in this manner were never called to this specification.

When they have not been, the results are too well known to dwell on here. When a "religious" finds himself or herself "lapsing," guilt about one's fidelity to the religious life, now too closely identified with the Christian life, engulfs the person. It would not be too dramatic to describe the degree of conflict too often experienced at this moment as feeling that what is at stake is a matter of damnation or salvation. Superiors and those in charge of formation must distinguish and clarify the relationship between specifications of one's vocation and one's elemental Christian vocation with, in, and through Christ. Even an implied identification wreaks havoc eventually with those who were misguided or misconstrued the initial signs.

But the problem goes deeper than misguided individuals. The religious purposes for which religious life exists are not reaching and affecting the Church at large in the manner in which they could or should.



Furthermore, having stylized and formalized the religious vocation as the living of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the rest of the Church does not seem adequately concerned with the fact that the spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience are endemic to the vocation of all Christians. Having consigned these three evangelical emphases to a special group within the Church, the rest of Christians can get on with the job of saving their souls in the "lay state," now diluted of any real Christian grit and Gospel meaning.

A radical reconception of religious life is, therefore, necessary to respond to the needs of the above mentioned particular populations and to affect more profoundly the general level of spirituality within the whole Catholic community.

My own reconception of religious life assumes that the analysis of the meaning of commitment made earlier in the paper is a correct one. It also assumes that the reader will accept as self-evident the following five contentions.

First, that God's call creates its own shape in the soul and that these shapes are infinitely more rich and diverse than the present defined forms of priestly, religious, and lay vocations that tradition has bequeathed to us. Second, that religious orders have been overly concerned with acquiring members rather than creating the circumstances that are conducive to a total yielding to God's reign. Third, that having put aside their need to get vocations, religious orders should place themselves, their formation personnel, and their physical resources at the immediate disposal of all Christians whose desire is for a more authentic Christian life and who are willing to "leave all" for some period of time to achieve a total conversion. Fourth, that which has gone under the name of religious formation has been misnamed since it has been for the most part formation for the evoking of adult commitments to live fully the Christian vocation. This formation, therefore, should not be confined to those whose desire is for religious life. Fifth, that the spiritualities of special charismatic figures in the history of the Church were meant immediately for Christians, not mediately through the



religious orders formed as a result of their special gifts.

More concretely I would make this proposal, that novitiates become spiritual growth centers, or catechumenates, if you will. These centers would provide an atmosphere within which an intensive religious experience of the person and meaning of Christ would be possible. These centers would be open to those whose sole desire is that God's reign over them be total. These centers would not be programmed to evoke a particular response, that is, perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but would be geared to expect different specific vocations. Some, upon entrance or in view of their experience there, will find that one of the unmistakable components in their response to Christ is an inner attraction to the life of the evangelical counsels. The religious of the order will come from this group. Others will have a relationship to these and to the order that will vary considerably. Some will return again and again to this spiritual center to have their initial vision deepened. Relationship to an order's spirituality will replace anxiety about membership in it.

The result will be religious orders that are consumer oriented with their product primarily their own spirituality. The consumer is potentially all Christians who are craving for a fuller meaning than the Church has been able to convey through her presently constituted institutions. If a particular religious order cannot generate enough consumers or interest in its fare (meaning-producing spirituality) then it should cease to exist.

This proposal is not as radical as it might appear. In fact, I think it accurately describes a process which has been going on for some time within the personal judgments of a number of those who have left religious life, not without gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity, though the institution itself has not always had the same feelings about their exodus. I'm making explicit what has been implicit, making a theory that will fit the facts as I see them.

Several questions remain, the first of which is: What happens to permanent commitment in this scheme? I have no doubt that a call to re-



religious life is a call to a permanent commitment in this specific vocation. This is the ideal however, and as such deserves an important place in teaching the full meaning of religious life. But I do not think it is of such a value that it should crowd out the other valuable contributions that the religious communities could be making to the Christian community and are not.

Furthermore, I think that at present the value of permanence is structured in religious communities independently of persons. Individuals come at permanent commitment in such uneven ways and according to their own peculiar pace. If we really believe that perpetuity is one of the qualities that belong to the religious life commitment, then why not nurture it rather than structure it? Why not let persons come to it rather than induce it by preordained scheduling? We have presumptuously used the time continuum to prove the quality of the religious commitment, rather than allowed the quality of the commitment to be proven by time. This way of proceeding is institutionally convenient but it can be hurtful to persons.

The second question is: Would sufficient identity be left to the religious order if such an arrangement were to be set in motion? It would certainly be a less visible and tangible identity than that which most communities enjoy at present with their unmistakable membership prerequisites and their network of external undertakings. The social identity would have to be more in terms of the basic vision of the historical figure whose inspiration gave the order existence. The socialization process whereby the core members internalize the purposes of the order and spell out its developing spirituality would be done in part in the course of their formation. Those who were not core members would be no less a part of the community, as far as the sharing of ideals and needs and experiences was concerned. But their intention to take the vehicle of the community only part of the route would be understood as a valid and important response to the spirituality of the order.

#### IV. How the Foregoing Might Apply to the Jesuit Order

The foregoing reappraisal of religious life, based on the premise



that the meaning of Christian commitment should undergo considerable development, claims that permanent commitment has been accorded too high a priority in the institutional conduct of religious life. If this proves to be theoretically acceptable, specific applications could be made by particular religious orders depending on the circumstances and opportunities in which they find themselves.

The American Assistancy of the Society of Jesus, for example, if given proper clearance for such an experiment, might consider its posture vis-à-vis the American priesthood when and if the Church's discipline with respect to celibacy changes. We could, of course, simply feel relieved in the light of such a change that our future candidates will make a more enlightened, formal choice of religious life by entering the Society of Jesus, rather than because of their attraction to the Jesuit way of exercising their priesthood, or for any other mixtures of motivation that many probably had for choosing to be Jesuits.

Several other responses could be made. A kind of second order has been suggested by some or a new kind of affiliation for those who desire a more intimate relationship of their married priesthood with the Jesuit order. This provision has been reportedly prepared for by the new constitutions of the Paulist Fathers.

A third possibility is worth considering if we find ourselves in a changed situation with regard to the priesthood. In the Spiritual Exercises, [169], Ignatius remarks in his "Introduction to Making a Choice of a Way of Life" that "Many first choose marriage, which is a means, and secondarily the service of God our Lord in marriage, though the service of God is the end. Such persons do not go directly to God, but want God to conform wholly to their inordinate attachments. Consequently, they make of the end a means and of the means an end. As a result, what they ought to seek first they seek last."

Given a new degree of freedom, the temptation of future priests will be to use it for themselves rather than for the service of God. What will be needed is a broad opportunity for discernment of God's particular will for the individual who either already is a priest, or who is certain



of his calling to the priesthood but who is uncertain of the questions of marriage, particular priestly apostolate, diocese, and so on. Decisions will ideally be made on the basis of an apostolic vision nurtured in an atmosphere conducive to the flowering of a rich interior life.

Several Jesuit novitiates, therefore, might be opened up in this country to those whose vocation is to the priestly ministry and whose desire is for a particular spirituality whereby they can root their ministry and make their decisions, not out of disordered affections but on the basis of their union with God and His will for them. The candidates who would enter the novitiates would not necessarily be seeking entrance into the Society of Jesus. Some will, of course, and will eventually pronounce their vows. Some will not. But all will have undergone the experience of the Ignatian vision of man, Christ, and the world and will have much in common as a result. Their communality will create many degrees of relationship to the same spirituality and the same spiritual center. Whether and how to formalize these different kinds of "membership" can be answered only after a corps of such relationships have been formed over the years. In brief: We would be putting Ignatian spirituality at the immediate service of a large portion of priests who became a new market of consumers we would do well to consider serving in this way.



## THE TITLES SO FAR PUBLISHED IN THIS SERIES

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