

# Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits



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Reflections on the  
Mental Health of Jesuits

*Charles M. Shelton, S. J.*

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# THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

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

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

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence the Studies, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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# Reflections on the Mental Health of Jesuits



**Charles M. Shelton, S.J.**

**Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits**

**23/4: September 1991**



### ***For your information . . .***

Among the many gatherings, formal and informal, that have taken place in these Jesuit anniversary years of 1990-91, two meetings, one held in June and the other in September, in many ways epitomize the spirit in which the birth of St. Ignatius and the founding of the Society of Jesus have been celebrated. In September a large and impressive international historical congress took place in Bilbao, Spain, on the theme "Ignatius of Loyola and His Times." In June a much smaller but perhaps similarly important meeting was held in Rome on computer-assisted research in all of the works of St. Ignatius.

The September meeting of scholars from almost a dozen countries considered the social, political, religious, educational, legal, artistic, and psychological circumstances of the age in which Ignatius lived and worked. It portrayed vividly the world and the times in which God's providence placed him. If ever there was a man of his times, it was Ignatius.

The June meeting, which included experts in history, theology, linguistics, computer science, and mathematics, was held to plan the details for making available all of the works of St. Ignatius in a computerized database that would immensely assist research not only in the history and spirituality of the Society of Jesus but in many other fields as well. If ever there was a man who worked to influence the future, it was Ignatius.

The anniversaries we have been celebrating have their origins, obviously, in the past, in the 1491 birth of Ignatius of Loyola and in the 1540 founding of the Society of Jesus. But a common and happy characteristic of the celebrations has regularly been a look at our present circumstances with eyes open on how we might best employ them in the service of the Lord in the future. As the celebrations draw to a close, the future continues to open out before us; and we will best preserve and continue the heritage of Ignatius by knowing its past as a resource in the present to plan for that future.

The previous issue of *Studies*, the bibliography of works in English on St. Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises, collected material from the past ninety years as a resource for the present and the future. The current

issue, reflecting on the mental health of Jesuits, deals with a topic of ever-present interest and of great importance for our future. The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality and *Studies* have regularly tried to present a diversity of material from past and present that affects the life and work and future of contemporary Jesuits. Your comments, as always, will be warmly welcomed!

Such comments have continued to arrive in response to Fr. Frank Houdek's January 1991 *Studies* article, "The Road Too Often Traveled." You will, I think, find very interesting the three most recent letters on the subjects he dealt with, formation and tertianship. And subjects treated in an even much earlier *Studies* continue to bring responses. The last of our letters deals with an article by William Harmless which appeared in the May 1987 issue of *Studies*, "Priesthood Today and the Jesuit Vocation."

Just recently, in June, the Institute of Jesuit Sources published its newest book. *The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Spiritual Exercises*, edited by the English Jesuit Philip Sheldrake, is a collection of twenty essays by some of the world's leading Ignatian experts. The five sections of the book are entitled "Introducing the Text," "The Experience of the Exercises," "Prayer and Discernment," "The Spiritual Direction Relationship," and "Interpretation and History." In the near future, within two to three months, we shall publish both a new printing of Jules Toner's *Commentary on St. Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits* and his eagerly awaited new book, *Discerning God's Will*. And lastly, returning to the most distant past of the Society of Jesus, to its origins, the IJS has also published in this anniversary year a commentary on the document that expresses the fundamental, original inspiration of the Jesuits, the "Formula of the Institute." *Notes for a Commentary on the Formula* by Antonio de Aldama, S.J., is one of the results of his more than forty years of research and publication on the history, life, and structure of the Society of Jesus. If you would like to know more about these books or to order them, the address of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, the same as that of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, is at the bottom of the inside front cover of this issue of *Studies*.

**John W. Padberg, S.J.**

**Editor**

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# Reflections on the Mental Health of Jesuits

## Introduction

**W**hile completing doctoral studies I had the opportunity to give a number of workshops and papers around the country on the topics of adolescence and young adulthood. During these travels I was usually fortunate enough to find a Jesuit residence to stay in. In the communities I visited, Jesuits in the recreation room would often ask me what my field of study was. When I answered "clinical psychology," the response in every community was always the same—some variation of the following: "Good, when you finish you can come and work on this community," or, "You can always come and practice in this house and get all the patients you want." Humor often masks a certain truth, and humor that we consistently encounter often points to an irrefutable one.

The same "truth" appears in a former provincial's remark that he devoted ninety percent of his personnel time to around fifteen percent of his men. Again, a member of a provincial staff once mentioned that he would be hard-pressed to find forty per-

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cent of the men in his province whom he could truly label "available for missioning." More recently, a rector told me that one of the greatest "poverties" of being a superior in the Society was realizing how little power one really has. This man noted that, no matter how much he asked, cajoled, or challenged some men in his community, they simply refused to respond.

Jesuits with emotional difficulties, of course, are only mirroring their culture. Commentators note that mental health is America's most significant social problem. For example, in September 1984 the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) published the results of a large nationwide survey indicating that nearly nineteen percent of American adults, nearly one out of five Americans (which translates into roughly fifty million people), were suffering from a mental disorder that warranted professional attention. Applying this figure to the United States Assistancy as a whole, we could infer that nearly one thousand Jesuits in this country require professional assistance.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of this article is to reflect on our mental health. Unfortunately, not enough research exists to allow us to speak in a rigorously scientific way about our mental health; thus, I intentionally use the word "reflect." I base my reflections on several sources: (a) my personal living of and observations on Jesuit life, (b) informal discussions I have had on this topic with Jesuits from various provinces, including provincial staff members of several provinces, and (c) workshops on the regency years that I have conducted over the past six years with younger Jesuits from six different provinces. These "Jesuit data," plus my own training in clinical psychology, form the basis for the discussion that follows. When research evidence exists I try to cite it; when no research is available, I offer speculation and observations that I hope are prudent and instructive. I ask the reader to bear with me in this difficult venture. At the same time, I take full responsibility for

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief discussion of this survey, see George W. Albee, "The Answer Is Prevention," *Psychology Today* 19 (February 1985): 60-64.

inadequate expression of the issues and any misunderstandings that may arise.

Taking as evidence the magnitude of mental-health problems in America, I believe I can argue in these pages the following hypothesis: **The single greatest challenge facing the United States Assistancy today is the prevalence of mental-health issues (in all their degrees) in the lives of individual Jesuits.**<sup>2</sup> These "mental-health issues" ranging from behavioral quirks to severe mental disorders, compromise a Jesuit's apostolic effectiveness. Emotional problems sap apostolic vigor. They create difficult and at times almost intolerable living conditions in community. These problems can restrict a Jesuit's freedom, thereby limiting if not eclipsing the possibility of true availability, the hallmark of the Jesuit vocation. As Brian Daley suggests,

It only takes a quick look through the foundational documents of the Society—the Formula of the Institute, the General Examen, or the Constitutions—to remind us that the central image of the Jesuit St. Ignatius seems to have had in his own mind, right up to his death, was that of a kind of apostolic vagabond.<sup>3</sup>

Availability must, of course, be understood within today's cultural context. Thus, modern-day realities (for example, tenure in educational institutions, the need for some men in certain apostolates) condition the meaning of availability. Nonetheless, the crippling effects of psychological problems inhibit a free response to Ignatius's "central image" of a Jesuit and represent a major roadblock to the Society's mission of service to the Church.

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<sup>2</sup> In referring to mental-health problems in general, I use terms such as "mental-health issues" or "emotional problems." I call severe psychopathology "mental disorders" or "mental illness." On the other hand, I designate as "psychological vulnerabilities" lesser impairments and the numerous manifestations of idiosyncratic behaviors that are emotionally and behaviorally problematic.

<sup>3</sup> Brian E. Daley, S.J., "In Ten Thousand Places': Christian Universality and the Jesuit Mission," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 17, no. 2 (March 1985): 3.

## A. A Picture of Mental Health in the Society of Jesus

### 1. Mental Health among American Jesuits Today

Just how serious are mental-health issues in the contemporary Society? Consider any normal-sized Jesuit community in any city. That community will include Jesuits who experience the tensions of living with other Jesuits whose personalities and behavior adversely influence the emotional and apostolic lives of their brothers. The variations are endless. Jesuit *A* is hard to live with because he is always cynical and incessantly criticizes the rector without ever giving thought to his own faultfinding manner. Jesuit *B* is hard to live with because he is addicted to alcohol, withdrawing to the bottle and finding his home through substance abuse. However, addictions are not limited to chemicals. The obese Jesuit, the Jesuit hooked on television, and the Jesuit who is always working suffer addiction in any loose definition of the term—compulsive behaviors that impair normal, everyday functioning. Such Jesuits often experience the problems associated with addiction—the fears, the rage, the unmet needs that may accompany addictive behaviors. Other examples include Jesuits overly burdened by dependency and intimacy needs, men caught in relationships that often take on a demeaning and compulsive nature. One Jesuit is so filled with anxiety and fear that he rarely ventures out of the community. Another has been wrapped in gloom for years. Still another uses his position of authority within the apostolate as a source of gratification through his need for control, thereby alienating co-workers and brother Jesuits. Still other Jesuits vent their anger indirectly through cruel jokes or biting cynicism. The behavioral manifestations are endless.<sup>4</sup> To be

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<sup>4</sup> When writing this section I succumbed to the temptation to say to myself, I know Jesuits who fit these descriptions. Being all too human, I fell into a “we/they” mentality, failing to look at my own self. I strongly suggest that any Jesuit reading this issue of *Studies* do so with a **humble**

(continued...)

sure, we all manifest at times one or another of these symptoms; we all have problems. Healthy emotional functioning exists as an ideal more or less approximated and never totally or consistently achieved. In fact, Albert Ellis, a well-known psychologist, writes of the impossibility of obtaining consistently good mental health. He notes:

I am still haunted by the reality, however, that humans—and I mean practically all humans—have a strong biological tendency to needlessly and severely disturb themselves and that, to make matters worse, they also are powerfully predisposed to unconsciously and habitually prolong their mental dysfunctioning and to fight like hell against giving it up.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, mental health is not an all-or-nothing affair. Rather, healthy emotional functioning is best viewed in degrees, with inevitable limitations experienced by everyone. No Jesuit has it “all together.” Every Jesuit experiences psychological limitations that adversely affect his emotional and apostolic functioning.

In short, we might view mental health as a continuum. A certain number of Jesuits cluster towards one end of the continuum. These men would be similar to the people singled out by the NIMH study cited above—individuals with significant mental disorders. Interspersed along the rest of the continuum are Jesuits who are more or less well functioning. To some degree all of these men experience some emotional limitations. Under significant stress, of course, even the most well-functioning Jesuit will manifest loss of effectiveness. For each of these Jesuits there exist

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<sup>4</sup> (...continued)

stance. The reader should continually ask himself, What are my psychological vulnerabilities, and how might my personality be a hindrance to my own growth as well as to the growth of the Jesuits with whom I live? Stated simply, when discussing mental health in the Society, **we have to start with ourselves**. We are **all** part of the problem. Any reader who is unwilling to entertain the above question or who resists the notion that **his own behavior** is part of the problem may have already hit upon some issues he might need to explore: defensiveness, fear, and perhaps pride.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Ellis, “The Impossibility of Achieving Consistently Good Mental Health,” *American Psychologist* 42 (April 1987): 365.

**psychological vulnerabilities.** I define “psychological vulnerabilities” as emotional limitations on optimal emotional functioning and full vocational commitment.

A Jesuit may suffer from tendencies towards dependency, impulsivity, passivity, low self-esteem, or a myriad other psychological vulnerabilities.<sup>6</sup> Every Jesuit possesses some degree of one or another of these vulnerabilities. In a sense, our psychological vulnerabilities might be viewed as the psyche’s contribution to the “human condition.” We are psychologically flawed, and no one totally rids himself of all vulnerabilities because they are the inevitable by-products of the developmental process of human growth. Within the context of normal maturation, we adapt to and compromise with an environment (most adequately represented by parents and significant others) which ideally is experienced as supportive and nurturing, but at times may be unsympathetic or even hostile. Within this pattern of growth, every person sculpts a unique figuration of attitudes, dispositions, and coping strategies that, taken together, become one’s “personality.” In short, our flaws as well as our virtues are the result of a unique life history.

It is through our personality that we are invited to hear and respond to God’s grace. Most Jesuits respond to the Lord’s offer of grace by admitting to some degree their psychological vulnerabilities and continuing in their desire to grow. By contrast, a Jesuit weighed down with a greater-than-usual number of psychological vulnerabilities will be more impaired in his response to God’s offer of grace. He will conceal these vulnerabilities even from himself, constructing defenses in order to deny or cope with them. On an interpersonal level these irritants fester, creating isolation and interpersonal disharmony within the community.

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<sup>6</sup> The author of this article most certainly wants to declare that he has his share of these psychological vulnerabilities and that he is firmly ensconced in the middle section of the continuum!

On the other hand, a Jesuit might be well aware of some of his vulnerabilities, yet still be unable to modify them significantly. For example, a Jesuit with compulsive tendencies might always be somewhat "intense" and "driven," but he can seek a corrective environment which keeps them in check (for example, a supportive community, activities which break his compulsivity). In addition, emotional problems themselves can lead to encounters with the Lord when they are experienced as a form of redemptive suffering, and result in a surrender to God's grace (for example, admitting one's powerlessness over alcohol). In short, the emotional suffering we each experience need not be only an experience of frustration; it can also be a potential source of growth.<sup>7</sup> I want to reject in this paper notions both of psychological Pelagianism ("I can change everything") and psychological Quietism ("I can change nothing"). The point to be made, though, is this: To the degree that these problems are operative in each Jesuit, they reflect roadblocks that render him disposed to a less-than-total response to God's offer of grace. Concretely, they can hinder a Jesuit's desire and capacity for productive apostolic work and availability for missioning.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I have been impressed by many Jesuits who, despite their life histories and personalities, remained loving and caring men. I want to endorse this view while focusing in this paper on the **problematic** nature of emotional limitations and suffering. Certainly, I want to challenge the misguided thinking that all suffering is something we should just accept. I recall an extreme example of this mentality. One Jesuit, objecting to my stress on the need for health, said to me, "Some of the holiest men in the Society's history have been sick." I am quite certain that this statement is factually correct. Nonetheless, their "sickness" no doubt created many problems for these men as well as their communities. And most likely, if some interventions had been attempted, some of these men could have been just as holy, yet somewhat healthier (able at last to experience a more human life); and the end result would have been beneficial for both them and the men with whom they lived!

<sup>8</sup> For a well-developed theory of the interplay among grace, human personality, and vocational commitment, see Luigi M. Rulla, S.J., Franco Imoda, S.J., and Joyce Ridick, S.S.C., *Psychological Structure and Vocation* (Dublin: Villa Books, 1978).

It is clear what damage unexamined problems can cause; but what does health look like? What goals can the Jesuit who is trying to become healthier aim for?

## **2. A Positive Statement on Jesuit Mental Health**

Any definition of mental health demands that we give attention to a large number of factors, including biological factors such as temperament, cognitive and affective variables, and the life history of the person, as well as cultural and environmental influences. Moreover, definitions of mental health are to some degree culturally determined. But within a particular context we can create an appropriate model. In short, mental health is best expressed as a **biopsychosocial** model that incorporates numerous influences.

As a foundation for our discussion, I want to suggest a definition of Jesuit mental health. For the sake of brevity, I define Jesuit mental health as a Jesuit's **progressive integration of his life-history, leading to increased self-awareness and optimal apostolic effectiveness and availability.**

To take an example that fits the above description, a Jesuit might be the product of an alcoholic home environment. No doubt such an experience might adversely affect his life, creating problems of self-esteem as well as a variety of characteristics commonly observed in Adult Children of Alcoholics. Yet this Jesuit desires to commit himself to understanding the reality of his father's alcoholism. He seeks help through joining a well-functioning Adult Children of Alcoholics group and invests in personal therapy. He maintains several close friendships in order to develop self-knowledge and meet his intimacy needs. At the same time, he enjoys his work or comes to enjoy it more, while maintaining healthy boundaries for it. He continues to develop his professional life as a teacher or pastoral minister, takes an active involvement in his community by showing genuine concern for his brothers, and remains actively involved in meaningful personal pursuits (for instance, a hobby), as well as in the contemporary



concerns of the Church and his province. This Jesuit manages to integrate his life history and function in an adaptive way; in other words, he could be called emotionally healthy or, at least, a person on the road to gaining greater emotional health. While different definitions of healthy functioning exist, they all have common features. Examples of these attributes include self-competence, adequate coping skills, autonomy/responsibility, self-awareness, adequate interpersonal functioning, capacity for commitment, and a developed philosophy of life.<sup>9</sup>

Let us look more closely at the traits of an emotionally healthy Jesuit.

### 3. Some Characteristics of Jesuit Mental Health

From the standpoint of mental health, we might ask what characterizes the well-functioning Jesuit. When asked what was the essence of emotionally healthy functioning, Freud responded simply, "Lieben und arbeiten" (to love and to work). Freud's response is instructive because it points to fundamental requirements for mature living: **bonded attachment and meaningful commitment**. What would this look like in a healthy Jesuit? Below are ten characteristics I would suggest as a way of fleshing out the notion of healthy Jesuit living.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jay P. Jensen and Allen E. Bergin, "Mental Health Values of Professional Therapists: A Nationwide Interdisciplinary Survey," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 19 (June 1988): 290-97.

<sup>10</sup> The **temptation** here is to go over these characteristics and come to the conclusion, I do pretty well with these, so I must be OK. A more instructive approach is to critically reflect on these (or other) characteristics and honestly try to look at how one might improve in some of these areas. Moreover, even if one does well with these characteristics, it is no guarantee of healthy emotional functioning. One might have a life history, temperament, or personality characteristics that lead him to experience problems in community living, without being aware that any problems exist. Stated simply, one could still be self-deluded. In this regard spiritual direction and relationships that are honest and challenging are invaluable and necessary.

### *Prayer*

Prayer provides spiritual benefits; it also plays a vital role in a Jesuit's psychological health. Prayer is the gateway to the Jesuit's commitment to the ideals of religious life and the apostolic work of the Society; this commitment has psychological overtones. A Jesuit who neither desires prayer nor makes reasonable efforts to pray divorces himself from his very **self-identity** as a man called to be available for apostolic service, the root of Jesuit life. A prayerless life saps commitment, because it directs the Jesuit away from his apostolic centeredness, from the ability to find God in his labors and to direct his work according to God's will rather than his own. In short, the Jesuit who does not even desire to pray flirts with losing touch with his basic identity, because he lacks a vital means for understanding his own self as an apostolic man.<sup>11</sup>

### *Jesuit friends*

The language of the past few general congregations is strongly communitarian in its approach to Jesuit living, and one aspect of this union is the experience of friendship. "Friends" minimally means that a Jesuit has at least a few brothers with whom he can share the spiritual hungers, apostolic desires, and the emotional joys and hurts of his life. When I spend time with a close Jesuit friend, I find myself sustained and nourished. When I reflect upon our time together, my experience with him seldom fails to leave me inspired. No matter what I might be going through or what situation I might be encountering, the felt experience of this friendship leads me to conclude that the ideals of the Society do exist, because I have experienced them with this brother. Jesuit friends provide a grounding, an anchor, for my vocation.

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of prayer and the apostolic life, see E. Edward Kinerk, S.J., "When Jesuits Pray: A Perspective on the Prayer of Apostolic Persons," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 17, no. 5 (November 1985).

### *Relationships outside the Society*

Healthy emotional living is also sustained by bonds outside the Society. Friendships with individual non-Jesuits serve to foster insight and maturity. By its very nature friendship is nonpossessive, because it wills the genuine good of the other. In this respect, healthy friendships with men and women outside the Society inevitably enrich one's friendships within the order and vice versa.

From another perspective, friendships with non-Jesuits provide a needed counterweight to some of our misperceptions. Religious life is challenging, yet in many ways secure. Unencumbered by the routine daily tasks with which many lay people struggle (meeting bills, paying taxes, finding a job, sacrificing in a marriage, lacking privacy, feeding a baby), religious can be tremendously isolated and succumb to a distorted idealization of life outside the community. (Not that Jesuits really believe that these idealizations of married life adequately reflect reality, but subconsciously they are influenced by these perceptions.) Any close relationship a Jesuit has with a married couple will serve as a healthy corrective to this limited perspective.

### *A sense of humor*

Ignatius's style was affectionate and playful. His conversations with his Jesuit brothers included a healthy dose of pleasant bantering and playful teasing, through which he channeled his fondness for the men the Lord had given him to lead.<sup>12</sup> Ignatius's attitude provides a healthy model of psychological integration, where humor serves not only as a source of affection (we like people we can laugh with), but also as an invaluable aid in

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<sup>12</sup> See Thomas H. Clancy, S.J., *The Conversational Word of God* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 41-44.

defusing naturally occurring sexual and aggressive impulses; it is a very valuable defense mechanism.<sup>13</sup>

### *Meaningful work*

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud remarked that work is man's strongest tie to reality. Given the apostolic focus of the Society, the apostolate has a special place in a Jesuit's life. At the same time, work can easily become the "disguised good" if it fosters workaholic tendencies or prevents the Jesuit from attending to other areas of his life. A subtle but destructive tendency for many well-intentioned men is, simply, "to do more." This is especially tempting as the needs of the Church become more pressing and manpower shortages more critical. At some point a Jesuit must examine his ministerial efforts in order to establish healthy boundaries. A Jesuit's apostolic life must balance play, rest, work, and prayer.

### *Apostolic flexibility*

Who could have predicted three decades ago the focus of the Society's apostolates and the questions that Jesuits are now asking themselves? Even more interesting, who can predict what Jesuits will be saying or doing in 2010? The very heart of Jesuit availability demands passionate commitment, but also healthy distance, which allows for necessary examination of apostolic energies and desires. Whether a Jesuit is in formation or currently engaged in an apostolate, he should reflect on his continuing response to his own growth and to the needs of the Society and the Church by considering his talents, his interests, and his personal goals in light of those needs.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, humor is a double-edged sword and can be a sign of lack of charity as well as a loving response. Examples of the former include biting sarcasm, passive-aggressive responses, and sexual innuendos.

### *Presence to one's ideals*

By ideals I mean the presence of a life project or theme that guides my conduct. Such themes and projects become moral reference points for the authentic living of my core values. As Jesuits we need continually to be challenged to be in touch with our "deepest desires."<sup>14</sup> Careful attention to these deeply felt interior movements provides, psychologically, a coherent and particularly useful purpose in moments of crisis or stress. For example, in the midst of a pressing high-school-regency assignment on a cold February day, a young Jesuit could draw enormous strength, even in the midst of his tiredness, from reflection on key Jesuit words like "mission," "service," "care of souls," and the "needs" of the adolescents to whom he is ministering. In sum, reflecting on one's ideals engenders self-awareness as to "who one is" at the most fundamental level. Such awareness forges one's integrity and links that integrity to one's everyday attitudes and behavior.

### *Increasing self-knowledge*

An underlying premise of Ignatian governance is the development of self-knowledge within the Jesuit and between the man and his superior. The examen and the account of conscience provide the means for such deepening knowledge of our desires. Ignatius placed great emphasis on the examen, to such an extent that if time pressed he wished the Jesuit to shorten total prayer time rather than omit the examen. Through self-knowledge a man plunges more deeply into his own darkness and psychological vulnerabilities; when he confronts these vulnerabilities, they can lead him to greater interior freedom. At the same time mature friendships, openness with superiors, supportive community environments (for example, faith-sharing groups), healthy investment in apostolic work, experiments with possible new ministries,

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of desires, see E. Edward Kinerk, S.J., "Eliciting Great Desires: Their Place in the Spirituality of the Society of Jesus," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 16, no. 5 (November 1984).

and, if needed or desired, psychotherapy can also help to increase self-knowledge.

### *A humble stance*

Probably no attitudes are more vital to a healthy living of Jesuit life in this last decade of the twentieth century than humility, understanding, forgiveness, and patience. From a historical perspective the changes initiated by Vatican II have yet to reach final form. No one can clearly predict how our apostolates are going to evolve or how community structures are going to be defined. Given this reality, some Jesuits experience fundamental uncertainty and ambiguity about Jesuit life, as well as about basic theological issues which might need redefinition, such as the nature of the priesthood or ministry. On an interpersonal level, a psychological correlate to this humble stance is the recognition of another's complexity. Every human being is infinitely more complex than we might imagine. In our dealings within the community, we need to take this simple truth more to heart. Personally, I have found that the more I am cognizant of another's life history, the less judgmental I am; in sum, "to know all is to forgive all."<sup>15</sup>

### *Solitude*

My own impression is that individuals who find moments of solitude difficult also experience their relationships as problematic. In order to engage others in meaningful ways, we require time alone with ourselves. In a culture that overvalues relationships, solitude is undervalued. Yet solitude performs a critical role in healthy functioning. In times of stress, solitude can be a welcome respite. It also serves a healing function when one is con-

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<sup>15</sup> Even so, showing loving care to a brother Jesuit because of his troubled life history does not mean that he cannot be compassionately challenged regarding his maladaptive behaviors.

fronting loss. Moreover, solitude is vital for the nourishment of our imaginative capacities and creative endeavors.<sup>16</sup>

Solitude requires effort and the development of healthy boundaries between us, our work, and our social intercourse. I suspect that solitude is subject to a developmental process; it takes on greater meaning with age. As a twenty-two-year-old novice, I at times found solitude difficult. However, typing this paper at the age of forty, I find I have come to relish more and more the solitary time so necessary for personal reflection and creation.

These elements are one way to characterize the mentally healthy Jesuit. At the same time, we may ask what conditions have contributed to the lack of psychological health in the lives of many Jesuits today.

#### 4. Indications That Psychological Problems Exist Within the Society

While I was giving a workshop to regents in the New Orleans Province several years ago, a third-year regent asked me this question: "Do you think there are more emotional problems in the Society than in the general population?" I have often pondered this question; knowing of no epidemiological studies that shed light on this question, however, I have no way to answer it conclusively. Still, my "hunch" is that the reality of emotional suffering burdens the Society as much as, if not more than, it does the general population. There are several reasons which lead me to this conclusion.

First, the required psychological testing of candidates seeking entrance to the Society is praiseworthy but still fallible. Testing can identify candidates whose psychological makeup ill suits

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<sup>16</sup> These points are eloquently made by the psychiatrist Anthony Storr in his fascinating work *Solitude: A Return to the Self* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

them for Jesuit life; but at times we admit people with developmental issues because we assume these issues can be “worked through” during formation, even though they may mask more profound psychological problems. Furthermore, testing is only as good as the interpretive skills of the clinical psychologist, who may be more or less adept at spotting problematic candidates. Besides, certain candidates probably have quite sophisticated defenses which might allow them to elude scrutiny. Finally, a decision might be made to allow entrance despite a clinical psychologist’s observations. In short, entrance testing cannot be foolproof.

Second, there is a generation of men in our provinces who entered before the advent of psychological testing. Would certain of them have been screened out by such testing? We have no way of knowing, of course; but we do know about the variety of psychological motives that lead people to join a religious order, not all of them healthy. On balance, then, it seems plausible that more men likely to be seriously troubled were admitted in the days before screening than now. These brothers may have lacked the psychological freedom needed to make a mature and free choice. Unfortunately, some of these men are unhappy as Jesuits and they make others unhappy as well. Untreated emotional suffering is bad, not just because it is hard to live with, but because it thwarts the development of God’s gifts and talents.<sup>17</sup>

Third, it may be that some men remain Jesuits who are psychologically ill suited for Jesuit life. Why? Perhaps their level of psychological functioning precludes their even considering the possibility of leaving. (I recall one Jesuit telling me that a peer of his had remarked with some intensity that even if God directly told him to leave the Society and he knew it was God’s will, he

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<sup>17</sup> By “psychological freedom” I mean the capacity for self-awareness that allows one to more fully respond to God’s self-communicating presence. Experiences that reflect this freedom include deepening self-knowledge and increasing capacity to consider alternatives and opposing points of view.



would refuse.) Other Jesuits might not have the psychological freedom to examine their own lives, and so they unconsciously remain out of some fear, perhaps of their inability to function even marginally in non-Jesuit life. I remember one Jesuit who once remarked, "I have never in my life been lonely!" (Where does one even begin to discuss psychological health with such a heavily defended person?) Each of us employs a wide variety of defenses which protect self-interest and an enhanced view of ourself. Thus, in some instances a man might defend against considering life outside the Society, because he would violate some psychological "need" he has to remain a Jesuit.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, religious life is a countercultural phenomenon in American society. Living the vows in an integrated and emotionally mature way takes an enormous amount of psychic energy and mature integration. Unfortunately, the number of men in the general population who have such energy and integration is bound to be limited. In particular, authentically lived-out Ignatian obedience demands a high degree of psychological maturity. For instance, a Jesuit might be assigned to an apostolate which he would not have chosen if left to his own discernment. He might "behaviorally" accept such an assignment, yet lack the psychological integration (for example, inability to deal with negative feelings) to accept and fulfill it adequately. Thus, he is in danger of developing a variety of unhealthy coping strategies that sabotage his growth and limit his capacity for accepting future apostolic missioning.

Such a Jesuit would be particularly vulnerable to the environmental pressures affecting his life and work, such as the manpower squeeze and the less-than-ideal state of many communities. In sum, both the Jesuit's internal state and the accompanying outside pressures would drain his psychological resources and trigger a variety of unhealthy defenses and coping strategies, such

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of defenses in the living of the Christian moral life, see Charles M. Shelton, S.J., *Morality of the Heart: A Psychology for the Christian Moral Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

as workaholism, substance abuse, compulsive behaviors, denial of feelings. As the years go by, his situation would become even more problematic, both for himself and for his community.

Fifth, the Society appears to attract men notably focused on the apostolate. A Franciscan formation head once mentioned to me his impression that men entered the Society because of apostolic desires, whereas they entered the Franciscans to build community. Certainly, both motives affect both groups of applicants. Still, as a Jesuit I find some truth in his observation. Despite the obvious merit in this apostolic focus, perhaps some of us focus so exclusively on our work that we downplay the essential realities of community life and healthy interpersonal functioning. An unfortunate result of this attitude becomes evident in what I term the "inverse popularity principle," which sometimes comes to light when a Jesuit dies. The further one goes from the community, the more loudly many externs praise the deceased, whereas closer to home—in the Jesuit community itself—few Jesuits express positive feelings for or fond memories of the man. Probably one of the greatest crosses of any rector is to pacify both groups in his homily at the funeral liturgy!

Finally, by and large it is most likely that personality disorders are more common in religious life than in the general population. A personality disorder is a maladaptive pattern of behavior evolved from a longstanding group of traits deeply ingrained in one's personality. These disorders are best understood as styles of relating to the world. They stand in sharp contrast to other types of mental disorders which take the form of marked emotional experiences that disrupt a person's life. For example, a Jesuit is sad and apathetic and can be diagnosed as depressed. In most instances he is aware that something is not right; or, at least, when the rector or a concerned brother brings it to his attention, the man can usually acknowledge that something is wrong. In contrast, those suffering from a personality disorder usually lack any real awareness that they are suffering. For example, the passive-aggressive person simply channels his anger in passive ways without realizing that his behavior is problematic for his brothers

in community. It is simply his "style" of relating to others, one to which he has grown accustomed. But his brother Jesuits are fully aware of his irritating and disturbing behaviors! Certain Jesuits seem crippled by personality disorders, but I suspect a much larger number of us manifest to a lesser degree certain symptoms of these disorders which prove both debilitating to ourselves and significantly irritating to others in the community.<sup>19</sup> What is it about religious life that fosters the development of such personality-disorder traits? Within the Society a man is more capable than his contemporaries outside the order of controlling and limiting his interaction with other people. He can avoid deep friendships and the community experiences that offer healthy psychological challenges to his personality traits. Given some men's temperament and life history, the stage is then set for the development of a style that isolates a man from his brothers. In turn, the aggravating nature of the style leads his fellow Jesuits to avoid him. Over time the man's style is simply reinforced through lack of questioning and challenge.<sup>20</sup> Passive, dependent, compulsive,

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the personality disorders or traits which a man might experience include antisocial, histrionic, narcissistic, avoidant, dependent, obsessive-compulsive, and passive-aggressive tendencies. A person can also display a mixture of these traits and can have other disorders as well (e.g., substance abuse). For a brief overview of these disorders, read any college-level text on abnormal psychology. See, for example, Richard R. Bootzin and Joan Ross Acocella, *Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives* (New York: Random House, 1988). For a more thorough (and technical) discussion of these disorders, I recommend George E. Vaillant and J. Christopher Perry, "Personality Disorders," in *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, ed. Harold I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1980) 4:958-86.

<sup>20</sup> This behavioral pattern is more likely to assert itself in older rather than younger Jesuits, since formation for younger Jesuits today allows for more challenge and accountability. One of the most valid arguments against larger Jesuit communities today is that they easily allow for such a vertical existence, i.e., isolation from interaction and challenge and, consequently in the case of some men, less opportunity for mature human growth.

and narcissistic styles (to name just a few) become ready substitutes for healthy functioning.

## B. Some Issues for Jesuit Life

**A**n investigation into the psychological health of Jesuits must look to more than the mental health of individuals. Without any guarantee that adequate answers exist for the many questions raised by this investigation, we must still try to delineate the personal, communal, and province levels of the problem.

1. From private discussions I have the impression that many young Jesuits are availing themselves of psychotherapy (as are, of course, some older Jesuits). The formation years are properly devoted to introspection. Study and reflection on his various ministerial experiences lead a young Jesuit to questions about his very self and prompt him to seek therapy in order to resolve lingering developmental issues, to deal with maladaptive personality functioning and behaviors, or simply to seek more guided reflection about basic questions of self-identity, as he attempts to respond more freely to God's grace. Or, as is often the case, several of these motives may spark a man's desire to seek therapy. But the temptation may also exist to become somewhat too focused on developmental growth during the formation years. A man might come to believe, for example, that his growth is the main or only criterion for future missioning. It is possible, too, that some environments in which the training of Jesuits takes place encourage an inordinate focus on self. This focus may unintentionally render secondary to a man other legitimate needs that his province must consider.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> I am thinking here specifically of theological centers. It is understandable that a theological center should be an environment for deep reflection and introspection. For one thing, the centers themselves exist within environments conducive to this end (e.g., intellectual atmosphere,  
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At the other extreme, certain Jesuits in formation may be so heavily defended that they resist serious self-examination. Evaluating Jesuits within the formation process means seriously assessing not only qualifications for entrance but also the Jesuit's growing capacity to live authentically and maturely the vowed life in a poor, obedient, and chaste way, as expressed in the contemporary documents of the Society. Given the need for a minister of the Church to be adaptive and flexible, capable of dealing with ambiguity not only in his own life but also in the context of ministry, it is reasonable to conclude that interventions may need to be employed with some Jesuits, eventuating in commitment to therapy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> (...continued)

involved community life). Second, most men enter theology in their late twenties or their thirties; this period of life is bound to be a time when a man reflects on his life and asks where he has been and is going. Third, during theology a man must decide whether he is to make a commitment to sacramental orders; such a serious step requires, indeed demands, serious reflection. On the other hand, a theological center and its lifestyle is **not** the everyday life of the vast majority of Jesuits from a man's province. Obviously, a tension might exist or develop between what a man discovers about himself, how he views his future ministerial work within the Society, and the needs of his province. Continued dialogue and openness is required of all parties.

<sup>22</sup> Because we live in a culture that is so weighted with a psychological mind-set, it is easy to fall victim to the erroneous assumption that if we just get someone into therapy everything will resolve itself in a satisfactory manner. This is simply not true. The data on which therapy works with which type of clients in which type of situations are highly complex, and there exist only limited conclusions that can be drawn from this research. Furthermore, some disorders are highly resistant to therapeutic intervention. (I am thinking here of the personality disorders.) Finally, if the man lacks motivation, then therapeutic contact will in all likelihood be a waste of time and money. Painful as it is to say this, it simply is true that a number of men will remain on the apostolic and communal "fringe" of the Society. It is not easy to know how to deal with such men. Superiors must consider dismissal from the Society as an option in some instances. At a minimum, they should expect such highly defended men to contribute valued and needed apostolic work and maintain to the extent possible ongoing relationships with at least some Jesuits on a regular basis.

2. Moral theology today speaks not just of the need to understand the dimension of personal sin, but of the reality of social sin. A parallel development has taken place within the study of mental illness. Mental-health experts speak not just of individual psychopathology but also of the presence of "family pathology" or, to use a term made popular in the study of chemically addicted families, "family dysfunction." In the light of these developments, it is important that we as Jesuits address not only the dysfunctional nature of the individual but also "dysfunctional communities" or "community pathology" and its influence on Jesuit life.<sup>23</sup> Such communities demonstrate a variety of unhealthy characteristics, including the enabling and tolerance of serious problematic behaviors, the exclusion of certain issues for discussion, a lack of hospitality to non-Jesuits, a failure even to attempt to apply the document "Union of Minds and Hearts," a

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<sup>23</sup> Any adequate discussion of mental health must include social (or environmental) influences. Recall that mental health must be viewed within a biopsychosocial framework. In terms of religious life, this would include scrutiny of community interactions. In the 1980s one word that has become increasingly popular is "dysfunctional." Personally, I do believe that this focus on dysfunctional behavior, particularly as applied to substance abuse, is a valued insight. Nonetheless, caution is warranted. Such terms are increasingly thrown around with no common agreement as to their meaning. In addition, the facile use of this term to label others can lead to deep hurt. We must be aware that dysfunctional is a faddish term and that a great industry has grown up in the past few years; some have great self-interest in keeping such jargon in the public mind. (Witness the wide variety of books on dysfunctional behavior available in bookstores.) Finally, we must avoid using dysfunctional as a way to deny the "human condition." To some degree we are all dysfunctional. The key issue is to focus on those aspects of our lives that are emotionally problematic and that cripple to a significant degree our personal growth and sound apostolic endeavors. As one might expect, use of the term dysfunctional has outstripped the scientific evidence. For a rigorous scientific summary of what we do know of the effects of dysfunctional behavior on children of alcoholic parents, see Michael Windle and John S. Searles, *Children of Alcoholics: Critical Perspectives* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990).

limited apostolic vision; and over-identification with the apostolate.<sup>24</sup>

There is need to speak more openly and honestly about the dysfunctional natures of many of our communities, both large and small. My personal belief is that, just as no Jesuit is without his psychic flaws, so too every community has shortcomings. Positive ways to deal with these shortcomings include changes in leadership within the community, physical relocation of the community, the forming of alternative living structures, the removal of certain men from the community, and the establishment of groups to foster spiritual and emotional support within the community itself (for instance, a faith-sharing group).

3. The role of the superior impinges directly on the question of community health. If, as a former provincial claimed in the mid seventies, the manpower pool had become a puddle, then today the "superior pool" is fast becoming a dribble. Increasingly, lists of men qualified to be superiors are woefully short. I do not think this fact can be overemphasized, given the serious consequences it has for the Society's governance. Since the very essence of the Society's functioning resides in the openness, trust, and respect that a Jesuit superior shares with his brothers, the shortage of first-rate superiors threatens an essential element of Jesuit life. Indeed, no factor so characterizes the crisis the Society now experiences as this lack of available leadership.

This shortage has in turn led to three additional problems. First, the recycling of certain men as superiors over and over again. Though in some cases it can be done successfully, it can also lead to burnout and damage the apostolic development of some gifted men. Further, it has the potential to deprive a province of the new ideas and visions that younger superiors might contribute.

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<sup>24</sup> This listing of characteristics of a dysfunctional community is my own view. I do not mean to imply that there is a scientific basis for this description.

A second problem is that now and then men are appointed to be superiors and rectors before they have really achieved a sense of their own apostolic identity as Jesuit priests. This can create what might be termed an "apostolic identity crisis." In other words, a man has never had adequate developmental time to integrate his ministerial role with his own human growth. One needs to master developmental tasks at appropriate times, and so higher superiors must think seriously before allowing well-intentioned men to take on jobs and responsibilities which might limit their experience of the everyday apostolic life of the Society and thus postpone their own legitimate growth as fully integrated Jesuits.

Third, appointing talented Jesuits as superiors risks reducing the already limited Jesuit presence within the apostolate. Rectors, of course, can enhance Jesuit presence through their governance, but they can also be tempted to take on too many tasks in order to compensate for the reduced number of Jesuits working within the apostolate.

However, the biggest problem is that at times men who lack the necessary qualities to be superior are selected from the dwindling pool of available candidates and appointed to that office. Naturally, no Jesuit superior or rector possesses perfectly the qualities which Ignatius considered prerequisites for appointment to office. But we must face the fact that shrinking numbers lead to the appointment of men who have interests and personality dynamics that may make them ineffective choices. The consequences, particularly for a community which is already quite dysfunctional, can be severe. Such a superior/rector through no fault of his own might be unable either to "hear" his men or call them to account. As a consequence, community interactions can suffer and dysfunctional patterns are reinforced. Furthermore, individual dysfunctional Jesuits within the community are apt to make the situation worse by continuing in their dysfunctional behavior patterns or by adopting a less-than-tolerant attitude towards the superior who is trying to do his best.



There is no panacea for this problem, which the United States Assistancy is currently experiencing and will experience even more in the future. Workshops on a national level and support groups of rectors and superiors meeting on an intraprovince level have proven helpful and should certainly be encouraged. Ideally, provincial staffs and house consultants provide some measure of support. Another help would be for superiors and rectors to have contact on a fairly regular basis with a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. Such meetings should help the rector to gain insight into the problematic behaviors of his brothers in the community; but they should also give him personal support, as he explores his attitudes and responses to men and situations he may find perplexing, if not intimidating.

4. On the province level, the issue of mental health appears in a more broad-based way in the mutual expectations of individual Jesuits and the provincial and his staff and the relationships between them. This tension is best expressed by the sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, who distinguished between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). "Community" refers to the expression of relational intimacies and bonded attachments; this term implies affective, interpersonal, and intimate relationships among people in families and small, tightly knit social groups. "Society," on the other hand, reflects the impersonal, functional nature of business settings, bureaucratic systems, and work environments. The tension arises because the Society of Jesus is both community and society, though we Jesuits naturally think of the Society primarily as a community. The "Union of Minds and Hearts" and other Society documents that discuss the way Jesuits relate to and live with one another use community language. Besides, American culture is radically psychological, with a stress on intimacy and interpersonal relationships. Thus, an American Jesuit is naturally inclined to view the administrative workings of the Society in community terms and to expect a good deal of interpersonal communication with and care from province officials. At the same time, despite increased efforts over the past two decades to provide better *cura personalis* reflecting more this

sense of community, there simply has to be a lot of "society" within any organization of several hundred men. Letters have to be written, but they can be misunderstood; meetings and conferences need to be conducted, but they can seem impersonal; staff decisions must be acted upon, but they can suffer from the inevitable limitations of bureaucratic systems, for example, "passing the buck," "failure to gather all the necessary information." Provincial staffs can be overworked in trying to accommodate the numerous needs of men within the province; if those needs are coupled to unrealistic expectations, the psychological results are apt to be (depending on the man and the issue) at times disappointing. Alienation and hurt can occur, with cynicism taking root within a man.

Most Jesuits have at some point felt misunderstood by a provincial or his staff; conversely, provincials and their staffs have felt unappreciated by the men they serve. To prevent more devastating conflicts, we need to become clear on the nature of the Society as "society." But we also need to keep looking for sensitive men for governance within the Society. In some cases, changes in personnel can markedly alter a situation. Some Jesuits are more interpersonally sensitive to others, can handle stress better, and are by nature better leaders. But even the most sensitive major superior will not be able to eliminate all disappointment and hurt. Ignatius's injunction to assume the best about another's motives is relevant here. An enormous amount of patience, understanding, and forgiveness is needed to live Jesuit life today.

Here are some key questions which might prove helpful in this connection for all Jesuits:

- ▶ What part do I play in the hurt, disappointment, or misunderstanding that is taking place?
- ▶ Do I really see and understand the other's point of view?
- ▶ Can I pray for this person?
- ▶ If necessary, can I pray for the grace to forgive this person or apologize to him?

- ▶ Even if most of the misunderstanding is not mine, can I still desire the graces of the Jesuit vocation and not succumb to cynicism and bitterness?
- ▶ Can I express my anger in an appropriate fashion—not denying it, yet not letting it take root and then choke my affective life and compromise my apostolic and communal commitments?<sup>25</sup>

The issue of forgiveness is of particular importance, given the bonded nature of community life and the need to sustain and nourish our Jesuit brotherhood. Unless we learn to forgive, we will sunder the very life we desire to live and create instead a frail and brittle communal experience that sabotages our own love.

5. Finally, we Jesuits corporately need to address how communities and provinces are to deal with emotionally damaged Jesuits who demonstrate severe behavioral symptoms that are personally destructive and/or detrimental to community life. In severe cases, of course, a Jesuit suffering from delusional thinking or hallucinations can usually be provided with proper treatment. It is more difficult to deal with those Jesuits suffering from significant per-

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<sup>25</sup> A personal reflection is warranted here. I am amazed at how much hurt could be dissipated within the Society if brother Jesuits were more capable of going to one another, expressing sorrow for misunderstandings, and offering an apology for their actions. Jesuits occupying administrative positions within the Society—provincials, province staffs, rectors/superiors—have a special need of this capability. From a psychological viewpoint, a Jesuit must feel bonded to the Society. What does this mean? On a “gut level” it means he experiences a certain amount of *felt* care and respect. Though any Jesuit’s relationship with the Society is complex, it is actualized and made real on a visceral level through the man’s relationship with his superior (feeling cared-for and respected). If a Jesuit lacks this positive experience, he will inevitably encounter problems in his spiritual and psychological functioning. A superior’s capacity to **initiate** an offer of apology (assuming that a wrong has occurred or administrative behaviors have been less than expected) has great healing potential. Obviously, such continual reaching out to men can tax the resources of any superior. This reflection does not, of course, exempt the man from offering apologies to brother Jesuits and superiors when appropriate and from scrutinizing the degree to which he himself is at fault.

sonality disorders (an embedded and habitual personality style of maladaptive behavior) or manifesting traits associated with such disorders. Often such Jesuits tend to be older rather than younger, partly because of the availability of psychotherapy and the current use of different training procedures during the formation process, but also because age leads to a reinforcement of such destructive patterns and to a settled resistance to any kind of psychological intervention.

Obviously, there is no easy solution to the problem of helping these brethren of ours. Some of us are more open to healing, given appropriate interventions and a corrective environment. But what of men whose personality functioning is destructive for themselves as well as for communal and apostolic life? In certain cases all must recognize that little can be done. Some men because of age or severity of disturbance might simply be unable to respond freely and flexibly to a more healthy living of Jesuit life. The best medicine is simply patience and what I term a "principle of limited tolerance." By "limited tolerance" I mean that such men, though welcomed and tolerated in the community, are not allowed to dominate community planning or direction. In order to respect the legitimate rights and feelings of other men who are struggling to live credibly their vocational commitments, communities should limit the influence of such men. Superiors should exert every effort to offer them whatever therapeutic interventions are most likely to prove effective, whether these are residential-treatment programs or intensive psychotherapy.<sup>26</sup>

Above all, the example of Ignatius in his extraordinary care and tolerance of the behavior of Simão Rodrigues might prove instructive. Most likely Rodrigues has the dubious distinction of being the Society's first recorded case of mid-life crisis and, perhaps, personality disorder! This Jesuit's actions in Portugal and his penchant for chronic complaining most certainly taxed Igna-

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<sup>26</sup> As we already pointed out, there is no guarantee that psychotherapeutic intervention will necessarily prove beneficial.

tius, who nonetheless received him with affection and fraternal charity upon his return to Rome.

At the same time, Ignatius clearly set forth the limits of such tolerance. If a man's behavior is such that it harms other individual community members or is destructive of the community, then he offers directives on how to deal with him.

One who is seen to be a cause of division among those who live together, estranging them either among themselves or from their head, ought with great diligence to be separated from that community, as a pestilence which can infect it seriously if a remedy is not quickly applied.<sup>27</sup>

Writing a decade ago, Michael Buckley noted that the problem of the recalcitrant, vindictive, or deeply cynical Jesuit was one with which the contemporary Society had yet to come to grips; but he correctly noted that "it will not go away."<sup>28</sup> Though we've improved on this score, much remains to be done. If such men cannot be dismissed, then the Society must give thought to isolating them either by firmly limiting their role within the house and neutralizing their behaviors, or else by transferring them to a designated treatment center, whether under the Society's governance or outside it. In some cases, we should consider allowing such a man to live outside the community, either by himself or in a non-Jesuit institutional setting.<sup>29</sup> There are no easy answers to this problem, but we need to intervene in a constructive manner that preserves both a man's dignity and the integrity and legitimate needs of the apostolate and community.

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<sup>27</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, Saint, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. with introduction and commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), [664].

<sup>28</sup> Michael J. Buckley, S.J., "Mission in Companionship: Of Jesuit Community and Communion," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 11, no. 4 (September 1979): 34.

<sup>29</sup> In some cases and with certain men, ethical issues arise in allowing them to engage in traditional ministerial practice. Creative solutions for some men might include simply having them do everyday volunteer work or even get a part-time job not related to ministry.

But there is a further issue as well, what I term the “vocational integrity” of the Society itself. Ignatius’s desire was for a true union of minds and hearts within the community, allowing the law of charity to prevail. If we permit individual Jesuits to act inappropriately, particularly when their behavior is destructive of the communion set forth in general-congregation documents, then the very vocation of every Jesuit suffers and is made less authentic. The ideal of the Society is that of a bonded community of brothers whose union reflects a deep commitment to apostolic availability and service to the Church. It is this fraternal communion which ensures that the Jesuit in the most fundamental sense is never alone, even when he is without physical companionship. He is always bonded intimately to the ideals and mission of the Society through the love of the Society for him and his love for the Society. In essence, then, if one hurts we all hurt; and allowing men to engage in gross acts of uncharity (to themselves or others) or even to manifest certain dysfunctional personality or behavioral problems, while not even attempting appropriate interventions, is a slap at the very vocational commitment of every Jesuit. I suspect that far too often as Jesuits we have engaged in a sort of “benign neglect” wherein we have failed to intervene in the lives of brothers who are hurting. A necessary task communities and provinces will face in this decade will be focusing on compassionate and effective approaches to intervention for such troubled men.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A good example of what I mean by the challenge to “vocational integrity” is the problem of the formation process of the late sixties and early seventies. It is probably safe to say that after Vatican II many formation heads simply did not know how to handle many difficult and troubling personalities. With the advent of change and the breaking down of a uniform pattern of religious observance and structures, the ensuing freedom, combined with the anti-institutional bent of the culture and of certain personalities, led to what must have been a bewildering variety of complex and difficult problems. Though I did not enter the Society until 1972, I heard many horror stories about men who, as they were described, most likely suffered from significant psychopathology, yet in  
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## C. The Ignatian Theme of Gratitude and Mental Health

### 1. An Experience of Gratitude

Since we are discussing our healthy everyday functioning, it is helpful to consider what Ignatian spirituality can contribute to a healthy emotional life. I would like to focus on the experience of gratitude, particularly as it emerges through the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises. And I want to reflect how the psychological consequences of this experience contribute to mental health.

Let me begin with a recent experience of my own. Several months ago I was going through a personal crisis, during which I kept in regular contact with several Jesuit friends. At the end of one conversation, a Jesuit friend said to me, "Remember, Charlie, no matter what happens, God loves you." I thanked him for this comment, though at the moment I did not consider his words further. Later that evening, however, those three words "God loves you" became pivotal in my prayer. Repeating those words

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<sup>30</sup> (...continued)

some cases were "passed on" to the next level of Jesuit training (e.g., from regency to theology). This must have led to a complex and most extraordinarily taxing time for communities and, most of all, for the rectors of theologates. The point I wish to make, though, is the effect that this "passing on" had on Jesuits who were more stable and credibly trying to live the vowed life. What did it mean to be a committed Jesuit and vowed person if others who were clearly, from a behavioral standpoint, living questionable lives, not to say lives grossly at odds with their religious commitment, were never challenged and called to be accountable? What were the effects of such an unauthentic witness on these more healthy men? Could one help becoming cynical, perhaps? In one respect, how could one not feel cheapened in one's own vocation, seeing such indiscretion and open flouting of the ideals of Jesuit life, even if the dysfunctional Jesuit could not help his behavior? Would not this truly be a case for "tough love" and for calling such men to account, providing them with needed help, and, above all, refusing to allow such serious challenges to Jesuit life to continue unanswered? Of course, one must also have deep sympathy with provincial staffs and rectors who may simply not have known what to do, given the culture and the times.

several times, I experienced an overwhelming sense of God's love. For a brief period the anger and hurt I felt began to recede. I experienced a "new way of seeing." A stream of feelings and memories soon poured into my mind. I felt a great sense of the "consolation of my life history" as I reflected on and felt again the numerous times God had cared for me and shown me his love.<sup>31</sup> For this brief period I was no longer a prisoner of my negativity; gratefulness and a freeing sense of God's peace became the filters through which I began to interpret the recent events of my life. I was led to the Exercises, going once again through those of the First Week. I confronted my own sin and my own psychological vulnerabilities, and noted how they both conspired to prevent me from freely responding to the Lord's generosity.

What transpired over many subsequent months was an intense struggle. My own darkness, manifested through wounded self-esteem and self-pity, led me to interpret my life history and my immediate situation in a self-aggrandizing way, which led further to a narrowing attitude, hardened feelings, and emotional upset. Fortunately, after months of intense struggle, gratitude slowly prevailed. Though still able to recognize my legitimate hurt and anger, I found that with time my "eyes were opened"; the darkness which for months had clouded my life gradually evaporated. I felt truly loved—indeed, I felt I was someone "special" in God's eyes. God had radically touched my life. Paradoxically, my own sin and vulnerabilities showed me what I truly meant to God; in essence, through my sin and vulnerabilities I found reconciliation. I find myself relishing the words of Paul:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, that he has made me his servant and judged me faithful. I was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man filled with arrogance; but because I did not know what I was doing in my unbelief, I have been treated mercifully, and the grace of our Lord has been granted me in overflowing measure, along with the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 1:12-15)

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of "consolation" in one's life history, see John English, *Choosing Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).



The fruit of my gratitude was a greater freedom and availability, a deepening desire for service.

Why focus on the experience of gratitude? In my experience, gratitude serves as a graced encounter. In addition, from a psychological perspective, gratitude can be pivotal for adult Christian faith. The psychologist Dan McAdams, in his empirical study of identity/intimacy development, discovered that the quest for identity is characterized by what he terms "nuclear episodes."<sup>32</sup> Briefly, nuclear episodes are significant events that transform our lives, leading us to increased self-understanding and renewal of our life goals. I would suggest that experiences of gratitude serve as nuclear episodes in our quest for adult Christian faith.

When we experience gratitude we come to know ourselves as valued and accepted. The kindness and sacrifice of another inform us of our own intrinsic worth.

This is especially the case where any measure of sacrifice or concession or consideration is shown; [someone] has been willing to incur a sacrifice of his own convenience or welfare to assist me. This shows that my welfare is valued by him in addition to his own. I am an object of his concern.<sup>33</sup>

These experiences (episodes) of gratitude provide substance for the fundamental orientation (life theme) of the Christian which is contained in the inescapable fact of God's love (1 John 4:10). God's love for me, in sum, is the pervasive and foundational life theme that orients, sustains, and nourishes my life. Moments of gratitude make the reality of God's love a conscious experience that in turn beckons one to service and discipleship.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dan P. McAdams, *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity* (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1985), 153-75.

<sup>33</sup> Fred R. Berger, "Gratitude," in *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*, ed. Christina Hoff Sommers (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 198f.

<sup>34</sup> I have attempted to work out a pastoral theology that incorporates life-theme and human-identity formation. See Charles M. Shelton, S.J., *Morality and the Adolescent: A Pastoral Psychology Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 139-46.

## 2. Gratitude and Mental Health

How does such a felt sense of gratitude relate to mental health? I would like to address this issue through a discussion of a "psychology of gratitude."<sup>35</sup>

From the perspective of mental health, what is significant is the emotions associated with gratitude. Experiencing the immensity and gratuity of God's grace evokes thankfulness as well as other positive feelings. Research shows that positive emotions are associated with a self-evaluation of good mental health.<sup>36</sup> A similar psychological process occurs in Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises when in the First Principle and Foundation you are led to be united with others in human solidarity and helped to see the specialness of your life. You come to see that God has gifted you with everything in this life; indeed, the only thing more special than your own life is God. There is a felt presence of being uniquely gifted which leads to a marked degree of psychological contentment. One can relish and "be with" this positive feeling of giftedness and the joy it brings.

Moreover, the dynamic is reciprocal; the realization of your giftedness and the consequent ability to accept your darkness and sinfulness lead in turn to an overwhelming sense of gratitude. By accepting all of your nature, you come to a perspective of profound well-being, which leads to a desire for service.

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<sup>35</sup> The reader should be cautioned regarding my phrase "psychology of gratitude." I do not mean to imply there exists in the psychological literature a body of research that supports this concept. The usage of this phrase is my own and results simply from my own clinical and pastoral work. For instance, I am continually fascinated by how clients in therapy can reframe their thinking and thereby alter their affect by focusing on other features of their lives (focusing, for example, on gratitude rather than their hurt and pain). Second, in pastoral work I continually observe that when one feels grateful one is more inclined to offer oneself in service to others.

<sup>36</sup> Fred B. Bryant and Joseph Veroff, "Dimensions of Subjective Mental Health in American Men and Women," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 25 (June 1984): 116-35.

But these feelings also have less desirable features. For example, a "first fervor" experience or an instance of deepening conversion has a distorting tendency that minimizes the hard reality of your personal situation or the hardship you face. Yet even this development of somewhat biased perceptions can be a vital component in healthy emotional living and in developing an altruistic attitude. Summarizing a large body of psychological research, several psychologists have observed that

the mentally healthy person may not be fully cognizant of the day-to-day flotsam and jetsam of life. Rather, the mentally healthy person appears to have the enviable capacity to distort reality in a direction that enhances self-esteem, maintains beliefs in personal efficacy and promotes an optimistic view of the future. These three illusions, as we have called them, appear to foster traditional criteria of mental health, including the ability to care about the self and others, the ability to be happy or contented, and the ability to engage in productive and creative work.<sup>37</sup>

A final benefit derived from the psychology of gratitude is its power to reframe the history of one's life. Often individuals come to the Exercises tired, stressed, or grappling with negative feelings (for instance, anger, hurt). At times these feelings can be extraordinarily painful, absorbing the retreatant's psychic energies. The retreatant often has to struggle very hard to "let go" of such feelings, for the Exercises are just that, exercises; they take effort and work and require a degree of motivation, good will, and focus in the one making them. Fortunately, the graces of the First Week, sorrow for one's sin and the accompanying gratitude

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<sup>37</sup> Shelley E. Taylor and Jonathan D. Brown, "Illusion and Well-Being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health," *Psychological Bulletin* 103 (March, 1988): 204. One must distinguish, of course, between the positive illusions each of us develops and the more serious denial that is symptomatic of mental illness. The former is best described as simply the way in which each of us puts a positive light on a situation, whereas the latter is a disregard for reality or a refusal to address the serious nature of a situation which must be faced. For the scientific evidence in support of the human capacity to form illusions, see Shelley E. Taylor, *Positive Illusion: Creative Self-Deception and the Healthy Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

towards the Lord who offered his life, free one from a blindness or narrowing vision that is often enslaving.

Usually, when we are able to develop a proper perspective, getting the necessary distance from our hurts, angers, and frustrations, we wonder why such emotional negativity happened and how we allowed ourselves to become so blind. Some psychologists say that there is a natural tendency for our emotions to reflect the dark side of our experiences.<sup>38</sup> The joys of life are all too often fleeting memories, whereas the hurts of life linger. For example, you might be complimented or helped by a close, trusted friend; yet, if this same friend violates your confidence over an important matter or hurts you deeply, which experience are you apt to remember more intensely a year from now? Another example: We rejoice over the memory of the good times with a deceased family member or good friend, yet can the intensity of that joy match the shock at receiving the phone call announcing the loved one's death or the visual memory of watching him or her slowly die?

Nevertheless, though we are all held captive at times by negative emotions, they need not imprison us. We actively counter this human tendency through effort. We channel our energies into recalling positive experiences, moments of satisfaction and joy, and instances of serenity and peace.

Adaptation to satisfaction can be counteracted by constantly being aware of how fortunate one's condition is and of how it could have been otherwise, or actually was otherwise before—by rekindling impact through recollection and imagination. Enduring happiness seems possible, and it can be understood theoretically. However, note that it does not come naturally, by itself. It takes effort.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Nico H. Frijda, "The Laws of Emotion," *American Psychologist* 43 (May 1988): 354. Frijda's "law" is a speculative account of his overall research on the emotions.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

From a psychological perspective, this statement summarizes the beneficial role of the First Week of the Exercises. Retreatants sense their giftedness, their recalling of and sorrow for their sins; by imaginatively experiencing the Lord's presence on the cross, they gain the serenity spoken of above. The focus, the imagination, and the gratitude lead one to a profound gratefulness for the love the Lord has shown. In such a dynamic, one moves beyond the negative and reframes one's life in the context of gratitude and the desire to offer oneself in service. Such effortful attempts provide the foundation for other positive feelings and an enhanced sense of purpose for one's life.

In sum, the gratitude one experiences in the First Week of the Exercises appears to have a number of effects that are closely allied with healthy emotional functioning. The realization of one's gifts, the confronting of one's darkness, the response of gratitude at experiencing the gratuitous love of the Lord who offers himself for one's sins, all lead to subjective states which are consonant with what is usually considered to be healthy emotional functioning—positive affect, relishing one's giftedness, a healthy sense of distortion which evokes a desire for service, and effortful attempts at reframing the history of one's life. In turn, such healthy emotional functioning induces a deepening freedom for missioning and availability.

#### **D. Conclusion: Some Proposals for Facing the Future**

**G**iven my topic and my approach, I expect my readers to have strong and varied reactions. One clear shortcoming is the critical stance I take without giving sufficient space to the many positive steps currently bringing about greater mental health. I do not wish to downplay such developments and I am hopeful that the quality of our lives as brothers will keep improving. Attempts at self-evaluation and province planning as well as efforts toward better dialogue within communities are encourag-

ing. In some instances communities are rethinking their physical structures to foster a more authentic form of Jesuit living.

Nonetheless, I believe that Jesuit mental health is an unacknowledged problem of such magnitude that it has already undercut, and has the potential to undercut even more if we do not openly acknowledge it, many of the desired changes we are struggling to achieve. Unless we address this "denial" and speak openly about the fragile nature of our mental health and the increasingly destabilizing effect it has on our personal and apostolic functioning, I am afraid much of what we desire will remain only a desire.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, I would like to conclude our discussion with several proposals. First comes a personal, individual proposal, followed by three more general proposals. To begin with, I would invite every Jesuit to pray over and reflect privately on his own psychological vulnerabilities. When each has given sufficient time to this process and has attained clarity as to his own understanding and interpretation of what these might be, I would invite the Jesuit to share such reflections with spiritual directors and trusted Jesuit friends. Ideally, even some groups of Jesuits might address this issue together and, we may hope, go on to comment on each man's reflections. In this way a dialogic encounter is set up whereby Jesuits struggle together to be more free and open to who they are. A critical component of such conversation is for

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<sup>40</sup> One might speculate that mental-health issues loom as such an overwhelming problem in the Society that provincials and provincial staffs to some degree are so bewildered that they live in a sort of unintended denial. That is, though they see problems, they are overwhelmed by the number of men experiencing pain and thus rendered unable to view certain problems on an individual or communal level; or else they are led to interpret certain situations too benignly. One unintended consequence, to some degree, of this "denial" is evident in the formulation of province planning and in the agendas for province gatherings. Far too often these occasions concentrate excessively upon our apostolic achievements and glories, without focusing on the hurt and pain that is around us. This unintended focus on achievements as a way to deny our pain or actual situation, I term "Jesuit narcissism."

brothers to suggest ways they might constructively deal with such vulnerabilities in order to provide growth for themselves as well as their communities. Such quality conversation most certainly resonates with Ignatius's idea that spiritual conversation should be used as a means to invite more free and open responses to God's graced presence within our lives.

Then, more generally and corporately, we must begin a public dialogue as to how we as an organization (society) as well as a family (community) can address this pressing issue. In sum, we must take a proactive stance corporately as well as individually.

1. *We must ensure that men are very closely scrutinized before they are admitted to the Society.*

I say this despite our elaborate and sophisticated screening process which is more stringent than those adopted by many other religious orders. The fact remains that we must take seriously the nature (personality) of the candidate through which God's grace is mediated. Conversely, we must avoid the temptation to spiritualize human nature by believing that grace will overcome personality dynamics if a man is given a chance to work through his emotional life history and personal idiosyncracies during the course of formation. We are who we are and grace must work through who we are. Some personalities will remain remarkably resistant to the type of growth and openness that is needed for the healthy living of Jesuit life, and these men's personalities may become the source of much irritation, draining other community members and violating their legitimate rights within the community. Along the same lines, we must also carefully scrutinize candidates in order to avoid the temptation to ensure an influx of novices despite declining numbers of applicants by giving an

individual candidate more than a prudent "benefit of the doubt."<sup>41</sup>

Another reason to screen applicants carefully is that the next two decades are apt to be even more stressful than the past two, as the Society feels the full brunt of aging, declining numbers, and the restructuring of communities. Under such strained circumstances we simply cannot afford to absorb more problematic men. Whereas several decades ago such men could in some ways be neutralized, given the large size of communities (though admittedly at "great cost" to everyone in the house), the makeup of future communities will not allow such a luxury, and the influence of these men will be felt more than ever.<sup>42</sup>

One problem of maintaining high standards of mental health for entrants is the declining mental health of the American family. The population from which vocations now come includes more than ever before many problematic home backgrounds. Given this reality, are we simply to accept men whose mental health might, with many exceptions, be more fragile? Perhaps a prudent middle course is indicated. On the one hand, the graced call to Jesuit life can well arise within the sufferings and pain of a man's life. But, realistically, we must face the fact that certain men's personalities may be so damaged by their earlier experiences that they cannot successfully live in the community no matter how well-intentioned they may be. Two procedures should guide

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<sup>41</sup> I am not saying that this is in fact done. I am saying, however, that because of declining numbers it remains a temptation that must be resisted.

<sup>42</sup> I want to emphasize again I am not trying to downplay the significance of emotional suffering and its potential for growth within each of our lives or the need to treat compassionately those crippled by mental illness or unduly burdened by emotional suffering. I am merely maintaining that to some degree by prudent selection processes we have some control over the maintenance of our emotional health, and we must do everything possible to ensure this end. This "close scrutiny" must also be applied to other formation end points (first vows, acceptance to theology, ordination, and final vows).



admissions boards. First, they must ask serious questions about a man's capacity for growth and challenge. Second, they must conjecture what influence some men might have on the community as a whole. Again, given the fragile nature of Jesuit community life today, we must do all we can to safeguard the quality of the community; its flourishing must be given greater consideration than ever before in the question of admitting certain applicants.

2. *We must invite among ourselves a detailed discussion of the behavioral meaning of healthy living of the vowed life.*

Since Vatican II, volumes have been written on the meaning of the vowed life. This discussion, when coupled with more sophisticated understandings of the human person and greater awareness of cultural changes, has naturally led to some confusion as to the meaning of being a poor, chaste, and obedient man. Recent publicity regarding the sexual behavior of certain religious illustrates some of this confusion.

I am not a spiritual theologian and do not pretend to offer in these pages a "theology of the vows." Rather, I want to speak of the linkage of spirituality and psychology that centers on the word "health." In short, I believe that living the vows cannot be interpreted as meaning living an unhealthy life. This is not to say that Jesuits come together because of health, nor can it be the motivating factor of our lives. We Jesuits live and labor together to serve the Kingdom through the Church, a service that at times requires enormous personal sacrifice and suffering. The quality of that service, however, is mediated by the degree of our health. Thus health remains a valued means for available and effective service.

It is of critical importance to link behavioral health with the vows. We can talk or write all we want about the spirituality of the vows, but spirituality alone will not alter personal behavior or the problematic nature of our communities. It is behavior that day in and day out does damage to a man and the brothers he lives

with. Thus we must offer corrective behaviors for sound psychological health.

Second, it is behavior contrary to the vows that creates scandal within the Jesuit community as well as the wider believing and secular community: inordinate attachment to material possessions (poverty), genital sexual expression (chastity), and cynicism and public criticism of the Society (obedience).

Third, when we can form consensus on a behavioral description of the vows, then we can better relate to one another as loving and caring men, while at the same time calling one another to that accountability which is vital for human growth. Only an agreement on healthy vowed behaviors will ensure that we will indeed be accountable to one another.

Fourth, only by linking behavior and health with the vows can we to a greater extent own our future. Only such linkage will ensure growing future humane ways of living in which we can all love and work together.

I offer below some behavioral examples of what living the vowed life means in the context of a healthy life within contemporary culture.<sup>43</sup>

### *Poverty*

- An attitude of simplicity and the desire to live more simply
- A "poverty of time" which allows and invites intrusions by others into our lives, even at the cost of giving up at times some personal interests and desires

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<sup>43</sup> This list is not meant to be exhaustive. The reader most likely will have additional examples. Nor do I mean that living the vowed life can be reduced to observable behavior. On the contrary, one must foster deepening self-knowledge and critically examine one's interior disposition. I would invite groups of Jesuits and communities to discuss publicly and attempt to reach agreement on behaviors that mirror a healthy living of the vowed life.

- Experiences with those who are oppressed
- Adequate financial resources to allow rest and reduction of stress from apostolic work
- Acceptance of restraint on one's financial resources
- Attempting to conform as much as possible one's life-style with the life-style of those whose means are limited<sup>44</sup>
- Critical reflection on one's motivations for embracing social-justice concerns
- The avoidance of self-righteous attitudes regarding one's own or a brother Jesuit's living of the vows

### *Chastity*

- Growing self-knowledge and integration of one's sexual self
- A growing capacity for accepting and loving oneself as a sexual person
- Openness to and sustaining of mature adult relationships with members of both sexes while refraining from genital sexual expression
- Nurturing one's creative side through a hobby or some creative endeavor
- Maintaining close Jesuit friendships and an openness to develop new friendships with other Jesuits
- A conscious effort to relate to brother Jesuits in mature adult ways (for example, honesty and compassionate challenge) and to avoid immature behaviors (for instance, gossiping)
- Fostering an attitude of non-possessiveness in relationships

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<sup>44</sup> Given the wide-ranging works of men within the Society, these can only be offered as very general guidelines. One's living of the vow is subject to one's understanding of the Lord's call as well as of one's apostolic situation and its demands.

- Growing desire for the gift of solitude
- The development of one's affective life in community as shown by (a) an overall interest in the lives of the brother Jesuits one lives with, (b) awareness of important events in a brother Jesuit's life (for example, facing important exams, death in a family), (c) a willingness to reach out to brothers when they hurt, (d) a willingness to go to brothers when one is hurting, (e) a desire to go more than half way in trying to resolve interpersonal conflicts, (f) taking the initiative in forgiving and asking forgiveness of brother Jesuits, (g) realizing one's unrealistic expectations of community (for instance, believing the community will meet all one's needs), (h) fostering genuine care for brothers in everyday community living (for example, welcoming a brother Jesuit's guests), (i) being available within the community and present at significant community events

### *Obedience*

- Growing self-knowledge of one's interests, talents, and limits
- Initiating and maintaining dialogue with superiors about the link between one's training and the needs of the province and the Society
- Probing one's feelings towards authority and being able to admit the presence of authority problems when they exist
- If asked to do a difficult assignment, willingness to attempt the assignment with a corresponding avoidance of backbiting and of fostering discord within the community
- Willingness to subordinate to some degree to the needs of the province and the wider Society one's own interests and desires regarding assignment
- Willingness to endure hardship and sacrifice when missioned

- The ability to represent oneself regarding missioning
- Having the legitimate expectation that one's missioning will take place within the context of a dialogical encounter with the provincial
- The development of activities and interests that make one's assignment, whatever it might be, a maturing and healthy endeavor
- Continual updating of one's skills to enable one to be more available for missioning
- An understanding of one's own sense of integrity and the pursuit of one's training, missioning, and apostolic labors as a reflection of this integrity

3. *A principle of health must be allowed significant weight in decisions about missioning.*

As numbers decrease there is going to be a growing tension between the psychological needs of Jesuits and the apostolic needs of the Church. A careful balance will have to be maintained that honors the superior's obligation to respond to legitimate apostolic demands by assigning men to difficult jobs and equally difficult community settings, without subjecting Jesuits to unbearable psychological strain. This is a particularly acute issue for men in their thirties and forties, who are so few in number that they experience isolation and less-than-adequate community living situations within an increasingly aging Society. We must face this question: Is an apostolate worth the cost of injuring the psychological health of the small number of younger and available men we do have? Obviously, many factors come into play. A man must be willing to endure hardship, but at what cost? and for how long? This question will become only more serious in the years ahead, as we confront diminishing numbers and increasing apostolic demands. We can ill afford a mentality where younger priests and scholastics are expected to adopt a "grin and bear it" mentality. Psychologically damaging environments will sooner or

later damage our younger members, the very future of the Society. We must do everything possible to avoid such quasi-suicidal thinking and approaches, which will only cripple us further and which are, ultimately, self-defeating. Obviously, patience is demanded among healthy men, whether older or younger. At the same time, province officials must undertake significant steps, even if certain groups within the province misunderstand such actions or greet them with hostility.

Traditionally, the principle for Jesuit missioning has been the *magis*, the greater good. Manpower problems are growing so acute, however, that every apostolate can make a cogent case that it represents the greater good. In this situation the principle of health must be given a very significant hearing. I define a principle of health as the extent to which, when missioning a man, superiors give to the quality of life of the community/apostolic environment major consideration as a factor in supporting and sustaining a Jesuit's growing maturity both spiritually and psychologically. It cannot be the sole determinant, obviously; but it must be recognized, discussed, and given very significant weight. Ideally, provincials and their men will be able to balance these concerns in their honest conversations with each other, though this balance might not always be possible. The harsh reality may be that in the next few decades certain apostolates will lose Jesuit presence, not because they are bad apostolic ventures, but because the environments in which Jesuits are forced to live are not conducive to spiritual and psychological health. Though the loss of such apostolates is sad, it is understandable and perhaps necessary.

Finally, a principle of health can not only serve as a means for fostering health for the individual, but can also challenge a community to adopt an increasingly Ignatian vision. If communities were more aware that receiving men is contingent on a principle of health, we may hope that this might stimulate them to become accountable to the ideals of the Society by fostering changes toward a more authentic living of the union of minds and

hearts. Making assignments in part contingent on such reforms would, we may hope, speed them along.

Nor should employing a principle of health always be limited to one's own province. With growing manpower shortages it is understandable that provinces guard their own. Yet in specific cases more assistancy cooperation is needed, and the ultimate "abnegation" of a province could be to allow some men to cross province boundaries more freely.

I raise this issue to highlight the fact that a Jesuit's mental health is not simply an individual's responsibility. It is also a task for the Society which demands serious rethinking along community, province, and assistancy lines. The demand for healthy community environments should not be discounted as a way for Jesuits to "write their own ticket." Instead, it should spur us on in the next decades to preserve and enhance our apostolic effectiveness across the assistancy. Communities in which Jesuits care for one another, forgive one another, and live humbly together will be not only healthy communities but the most fruitfully apostolic ones as well.<sup>45</sup>

In sum, as we dialogue together concerning how ministries will evolve, as we discuss the roles we will assume in our apostolic labors, as well as struggle to relate personally to one another, we may disagree and misunderstand one another. The Society will always have members who are prophetic and those who are hesitant. Yet, even as Jesuits continue to discuss, challenge, get angry, and wonder about who we are and where we are going,

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<sup>45</sup> We should point out that psychological influences often weigh on the dialogue taking place between a man and his provincial. A man cannot simply "write his own ticket," because the provincial's role is to see the wider good, which a man, though well-intentioned, might not be able to see. Also, a man might desire a certain missioning because of unconscious factors or needs (e.g., dependency, narcissism). On the other hand, a provincial might find it hard to resist pressures from certain communities in his province to obtain men, and experience difficulty in handling stress. These influences might compromise his own decision making.

none of us can deny that the desire for caring sensitivity, a humble stance, and a forgiving attitude are vital. Only these desires will allow us really to engage one another. Only these ensure that the necessary dialogue will occur about the mission of the Society which occupies a unique place in each of our hearts.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

In his highly personal reflections on formation (Jan. '91), Frank Houdek refers to a letter written by Fr. Paolo Dezza as papal delegate to a certain provincial refusing permission for an individuated tertianship. That letter was sent to me and appeared in *Acta Romana* as a letter to a "certain provincial." After I received the letter, I asked the advice of my consultors and then wrote to Fr. Dezza in good Jesuit fashion representing his decision. He must have done his own consulting after receiving my letter. At any rate, I received the permission to grant the individuated tertianship to the Jesuit involved. I write this letter because I believe that the whole sequence of events was an instance of Society governance at its best. Moreover, I do not believe that Fr. Dezza illustrated a retrograde mentality about tertianship.

Sincerely,

A certain former provincial

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Editor:

I wish to commend Father Frank Houdek for a very challenging essay on a constantly controversial topic ("The Road Too Often Traveled," January 1991). I think it contained valuable insights encouraging flexibility. I would like to take him up on two problem

areas, at the risk in one instance of seeming to defend my own turf as a theology professor. I refer to his sections on theology and on tertianship.

I agree quite strongly that our theologate curriculum is still lacking in imagination, and that it could employ much more interaction with one's work "in the field." In some cases, it seems to me to be especially insensitive to cross-cultural experience. I would also say that tertianship should be responsive to individual needs. I speak as one who looks back gratefully on tertianship (a year of my own work sandwiched between two *somewhat* monastic summers, with supervision in directing retreats). I salute Vince O'Flaherty for a most creative and flexible experience, which I believe all eight of us appreciated.

However, here comes my word of caution. I have the sense that Father Houdek's concern, even verging on anxiety when it comes to tertianship, risks falling prey to the kind of workaholicism decried by so many cultural critics today. After all, not all monastic features are bad even for active communities! I too was hesitant on beginning tertianship (after a six-year delay), and I needed encouragement to stop a bit and be still. I am at least a borderline workaholic, and I suspect that there are a lot of

others out there putting off tertianship.

As to theology, I would certainly favor some changes, for example an initial year early in the training, and far fewer required courses. But—if I interpret Father Houdek correctly—let us take great care to avoid the kind of utilitarianism about theology that we might risk if we were to “distribute it throughout the program.” If we were to do this, I would hope that theology would still be considered worthy of a temporary priority over full-time active work. If we could take the idea of “praxis theology” seriously, and not as jargon, I believe this would meet many of Father Houdek’s complaints.

But thank you for tackling the problem!

Carl F. Starkloff, S.J.

Regis College

Toronto, Canada

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Editor:

My interest in Frank Houdek’s article on Jesuit formation is piqued by my lack of information, I suppose. There is a wonder amongst us all, those long out of formation, like me, who do not really know what is going on, and those in formation to whom I sometimes speak, who listen to the stories of political and theological stresses that are to come when they face theology. I speak as one

who was trained in houses of formation every one of which is now closed. That is not just a sea change; it is a change of oceans.

I wish really to make only two comments. The first relates to the issue of philosophy. Our vocation and the Spiritual Exercises are founded on a notion that the universe is coherent, that there is a connectedness of things which demands that we see God in all things. That vision is countercultural at every level of consciousness. Arthur Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being*, written at the seeming inception of the history of ideas, may have portended the inability to have such a history because the links of the chain have been broken by the ruling intellectual climate. Fr. Houdek’s questions and suggestions on page 15 seem simply to leave those in formation in the modern intellectual’s world of denial and schizophrenic splits. (I know those are loaded, and perhaps fighting, words.)

My other comment relates to tertianship. I keep hearing about the changes in tertianship and the need to make it apostolically effective and flexible. The delays in tertianship are notorious. And I wonder what has happened to the flexibility that I knew. I took tertianship in 1967–68, immediately after finishing theology. I was in the physical confines of Pomfret Center for no more than three out of nine months and was allowed to go for tertian experience where my

interests led, into pastoral ministry, most of which was spent as an associate chaplain in St. Raphael's Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut.

Fr. Kolvenbach was in that tertian class with me, a conspicuous example of delayed tertianship if ever there was one. (As I recall, he had been in Lebanon in ministry for close to a decade before coming to tertianship.) I would be curious to know his mind about all the newer, so-called experimental flexibility, which sounds less flexible than what Jimmy Coleran, our tertian master, came up with in the wisdom he struggled for in a long Jesuit life.

My prayers are for Fr. Houdek and his work, to which he is obviously committed, and for all the hidden others who are involved in formation.

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Editor:

I write belatedly to comment on one of the two articles which appeared in the May 1987 issue of *Studies*, "Priesthood Today and the Jesuit Vocation," the article written by William Harmless and entitled "Jesuits as Priests: Crisis and Charism." A few months later, in the September-October issue of the *Review for Religious*, its editor, Daniel F. X. Meenan, published an

article entitled "To Be Priest" as a response to Harmless's article. In his article Father Meenan lamented the fact that Harmless's understanding of the priesthood, which he considered to be impoverished, skeletal, and reductionist, was the view now prevailing in the American Jesuit theologates, and presented what he considered to be a fuller and more orthodox understanding of the priesthood. Sometime after writing this response and before it actually appeared in print, Meenan died after having edited the *Review for Religious* long and successfully. The sadness of the situation, as well as the fact that I thought I could see room for agreement between their two positions on the priesthood, has prompted me to do a little bridge-building. Here are the results.

Meenan considered Harmless's view of the priesthood inadequate in three respects. First, he believed that Harmless understood the priesthood to be a task which a person chooses on his own initiative rather than a response to a divine call. Second, he held that Harmless reduced the priesthood to a function rather than seeing it as a reality which encompasses the entire person. Third, he saw Harmless's position as denying that the priesthood is a unique form of mediatorship, considering it instead as simply one of many kinds of mediatorship present in the community.

From my reading of Harmless, I would say that with respect to the first objection Meenan did not do justice to Harmless's position, for Harmless states very clearly in his article that his own acceptance of the priesthood was "a response to a call that came from beyond me" (page 5); and it is clear from the context that the "beyond" in this case is not the community but God.

I believe that Meenan was also wrong in claiming that Harmless considers the priesthood to be simply functional in nature. Harmless in fact agrees with Meenan in seeing the priesthood as being more than functional. However, his reasons for holding this position are very different from Meenan's.

Meenan gave his reasons for seeing the priesthood as being more than functional in two articles he wrote in the early seventies. In the second of these, published in 1972, he rejected the notion of the hyphenated priest precisely because it was based on a functional understanding of priesthood. He argued that the priesthood requires a permanent commitment and therefore takes in the whole personality of the one embracing it. Thus he shied away from calling the priesthood a profession, because a profession is something one does, while priesthood is something one is. Given this understanding of the priestly reality, it is also clear why he saw

departure from it as a tragedy, for it meant that the departing priest had called him to be.

Harmless's reason for considering the priesthood, at least in its Jesuit expression, as more than functional in nature is grounded in what he calls its instrumental rather than constitutive character in Jesuit life. As proof of this character, he offers three arguments: the paucity of talk about priesthood in three foundational documents of the Society (Ignatius's *Autobiography*, the *Formula of the Institute*, and the *Constitutions*); Ignatius's insistence that his men not assume ordinary parochial duties but choose other kinds of work not traditionally associated with the priesthood; the experience of young Jesuits before their ordination to the priesthood. According to Harmless, the fact that the Society of Jesus' foundational documents scarcely mention the priesthood can only mean that this reality was not seen as essential to its life. Similarly, Ignatius's insistence that the members of this new order were not to be parish priests meant that their priesthood would be shaped by their choice of ministries rather than the other way around. Hence its instrumental rather than constitutive nature in the Jesuit vocation. Third, the fact that non-ordained Jesuits, whether brothers or those not yet ordained, experience themselves as being fully Jesuit without being priests also points to the latter's instru-

mental rather than constitutive character in Jesuit life. But such an instrumental understanding of priesthood means that the priesthood cannot be defined in terms of function but is instead open-ended. In other words, Ignatius and his companions believed that whatever work the ordained members of the community did would become priestly precisely because it was done by them, the ordained; and this means that he and they viewed the priesthood as not identifiable with any particular function and, therefore, as being more than functional in nature.

Clearly, then, both Jesuits see the priesthood, at least in its Jesuit expression, as more than functional, but for different reasons. Harmless's reason is especially interesting because of its paradoxical character, for it is the priesthood's position on the purely instrumental level in Jesuit life which reveals its more-than-functional nature.

The third point of disagreement between the two authors was perhaps the most painful for Meenan. It was Harmless's rejection of the pre-Vatican II "received view" of the priest as the "alter Christus," as the one singled out in the community to represent the Lord himself, a notion which Harmless called an exaggeration and embarrassment to Catholics today. But even here, I believe, there is room for agreement because, despite the harshness of Harmless's language with respect to the "received

view," he does not deny a role of mediatorship proper to the priest, indeed a unique kind of mediatorship exercised by him as the president of the community's Eucharistic worship. His only reservation is with respect to the restriction of mediatorship to the priest. There are, Harmless insists, many mediators of Christ in the community. If Meenan could accept this extension of mediatorship to other members of the community, then I think he and Harmless could be in agreement here as well. And since this extension, as Harmless presents it, leaves the unique mediatorship of the priest untouched, there is no reason to think that Meenan could not have accepted it.

Meenan's death has eliminated the possibility of further dialogue between him and Harmless on these three areas of disagreement. In his own response to Harmless's article, he stated that he felt that his understanding of the priesthood was "an alternative world view" to that of Harmless, and he worried about the unity of the Jesuit order when such different views of the priesthood were held by its members. He wrote too of his own experience of feeling patronized by young Jesuits who, though patient with him and others like him who held such antiquated views of the priesthood, charitably awaited his and their permanent exile in "Dinosaur Park." From his present position

with the Lord, I am sure that Meehan can see the unification of his and Harmless's views on the priesthood. But for us still in exile, I offer my own attempt at such a unification in the hope that it will serve that other cause dear to him,

the unity of the Society here and now.

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